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Joint United Nations Regional Commissions  
Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade  
Implementation Survey 2015

*Sub-Regional Notes –  
South-East Asia  
[ASEAN and Timor Leste]*<sup>1</sup>

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Prepared by



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### Disclaimers:

**This note is a complement to the more elaborate Regional (Asia-Pacific) Report. It should best be read in conjunction with it, as well as the associated Country Notes, which can be found at: <http://unnex.unescap.org/UNTFSurvey2015.asp>**

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## 1. Introduction

It is well understood that reducing trade costs is essential in enabling economies to effectively participate in regional and global value chains and continue to use trade as a main engine of growth and sustainable development. Recent studies suggest that much of the trade cost reductions achieved over the past decade have been through elimination or lowering of tariffs.<sup>2</sup> Further trade cost reduction therefore, will have to come from tackling non-tariff sources of trade costs, such as inefficient transport and logistics infrastructure and services, but also cumbersome regulatory procedures and documentation. Indeed, trade facilitation – the simplification and harmonization of import, export and transit procedures –, including paperless trade – the use and exchange of electronic data and documents to support the trade transaction process –, has taken increasing importance, as evidenced by the successful conclusion of the negotiations on a WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in December 2013, and the progress made at ESCAP on developing a complementary regional arrangement for the facilitation of cross-border paperless trade since 2012.

This note is part of a new global effort by all United Nations Regional Commissions (UNRCs), in cooperation with other interested international organizations<sup>3</sup>, to provide reliable and sufficiently detailed data on the implementation of trade facilitation in general - and single window and paperless trade in particular at the global level. It features the results of the 2015 UNRCs Joint Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade implementation for the South-East Asian sub-region, covering ASEAN countries<sup>4</sup> and Timor-Leste. **This note is a complement to the more elaborate Regional (Asia-Pacific) Report. It should best be read in conjunction with it, as well as the associated Country Notes.**<sup>5</sup>

The survey was prepared taking into account the final list of provisions included in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) as well as the content of the draft text of the regional UN treaty on cross-border paperless trade facilitation under negotiation at ESCAP. It covers 38 trade facilitation measures divided into four groups, namely, *General trade facilitation measures*, *Paperless trade*, *Cross-border paperless trade* and *Transit facilitation*.<sup>6</sup> The *General trade facilitation measures* – as well as *Transit facilitation* measures – are essentially measures featured in the WTO TFA. In contrast, most paperless trade and, in particular, cross-border paperless trade measures, are not specifically featured in the WTO TFA, although their implementation in many cases would support the better implementation of many of the *General trade facilitation measures*. Survey results for the South-East Asian sub-region are presented below.

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<sup>2</sup> For example, see ESCAP (2011), Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2011, United Nations.

<sup>3</sup> The survey has been conducted in close collaboration with OECD, ITC and UNCTAD, as well as several sub-regional organizations, such as SELA in Latin America, and OCO in the South Pacific.

<sup>4</sup> The ASEAN includes Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

<sup>5</sup> More information is available in the regional, other sub-regional and national reports at:

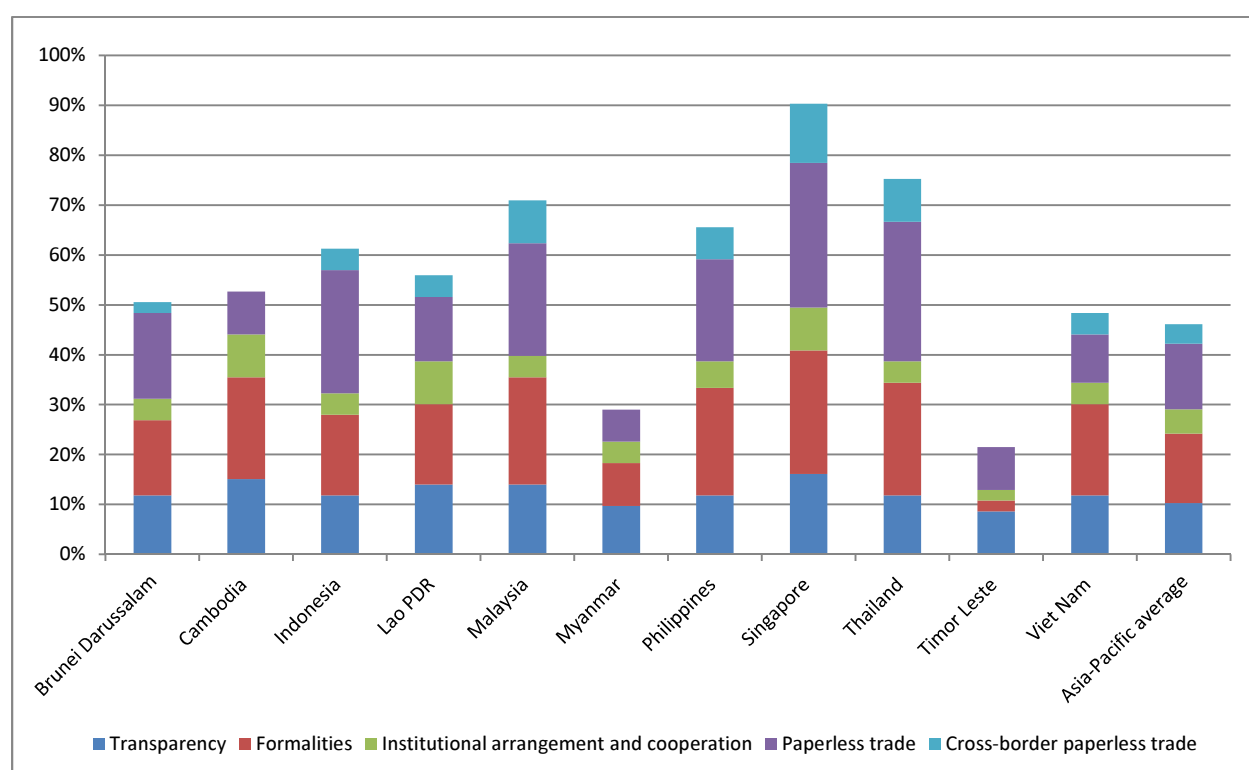
<http://unnex.unescap.org/UNTFSurvey2015.asp>

<sup>6</sup> The survey questionnaire is available in full at: <http://unnex.unescap.org/tfforum14-survey.asp>

## 2. Trade facilitation implementation in South-East Asia: Overview

Figure 1 shows the overall implementation levels of 11 South-East Asian countries based on a common set of 31 trade facilitation and paperless trade measures included in the survey<sup>7</sup>. The sub-regional average implementation of this comprehensive set of trade facilitation measures stands at 56.1%, exceeding the regional average (46.5%). However, the implementation of trade facilitation measures in the region is quite heterogeneous. Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand achieve implementation rates in excess of 70%, while implementation in Myanmar and Timor-Leste is under 30%.

**Figure 1: Overall implementation of trade facilitation measures in South-East Asian countries**



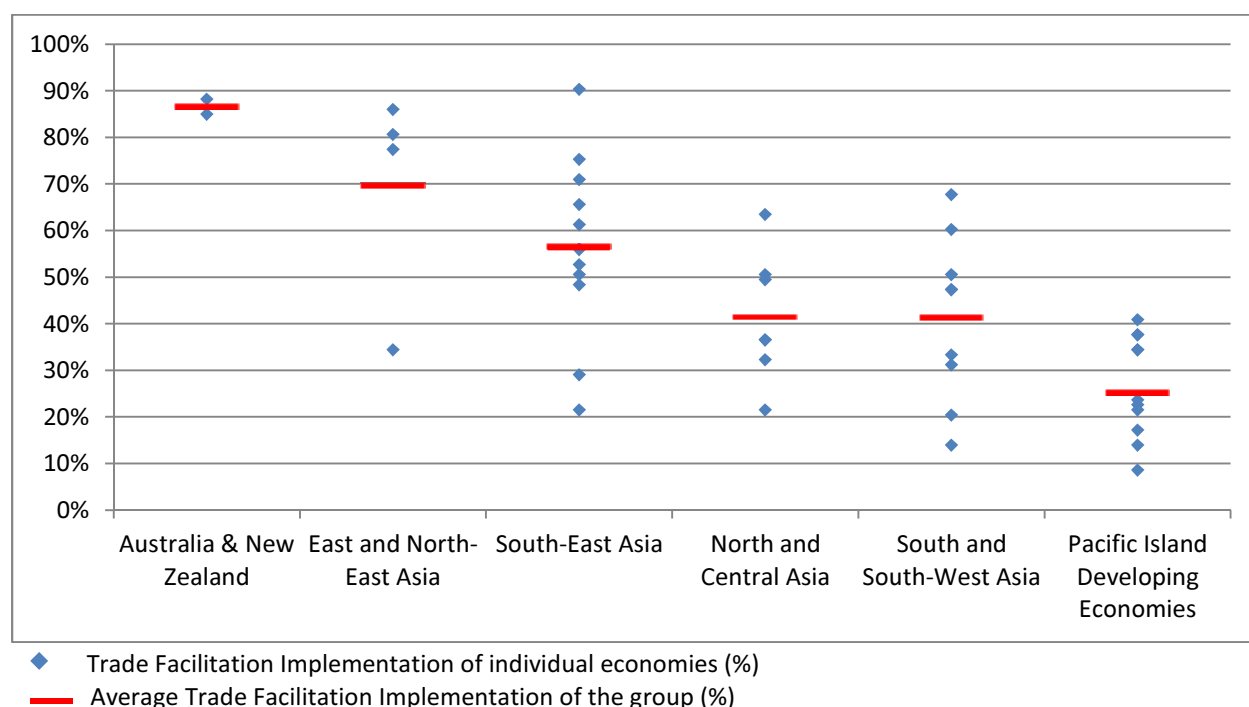
Source: ESCAP, UNRCs TF Survey 2015

Figure 2 presents an overview of the implementation of trade facilitation measures (measured by percentage) in the different Asia-Pacific sub-regions as well as the average level of implementation of

<sup>7</sup> Among 38 trade facilitation measures surveyed, three measures including 20. *Electronic Submission of Sea Cargo Manifests*, 33. *Alignment of working days and hours with neighbouring countries at border crossings*, and 34. *Alignment of formalities and procedures with neighbouring countries at border crossings* are excluded for calculating the overall score as they are not relevant to all countries surveyed. Similarly, four transit facilitation measures are also excluded. The overall score of each country is simply a summation of the scores of implementation (3,2,1 or 0) it receives for each trade facilitation measure. The maximum possible (full) score of a country is 93 and the average score across all 44 countries is 43.3 (or 46.5% in percentage term).

countries within each group. South-East Asia has the third highest average level of implementation (56.1%) after Australia & New-Zealand and East & North-East Asia.

**Figure 2: Trade facilitation implementation in Asia-Pacific sub-regions**



Source: ESCAP, UNRCs TF Survey 2015

Although trade facilitation implementation varies widely within each sub-regional grouping, differences in trade facilitation implementation levels are widest in South-East Asia. This is essentially due to Myanmar and Timor-Leste, two economies that have only recently been able to actively engage in international trade. In fact, regional integration processes appear to have played a significant and positive role in trade facilitation implementation, with several LDCs in ASEAN, where regional cooperation on trade facilitation has long been promoted, achieving higher implementation rates than LDCs in other sub-regions<sup>8</sup>.

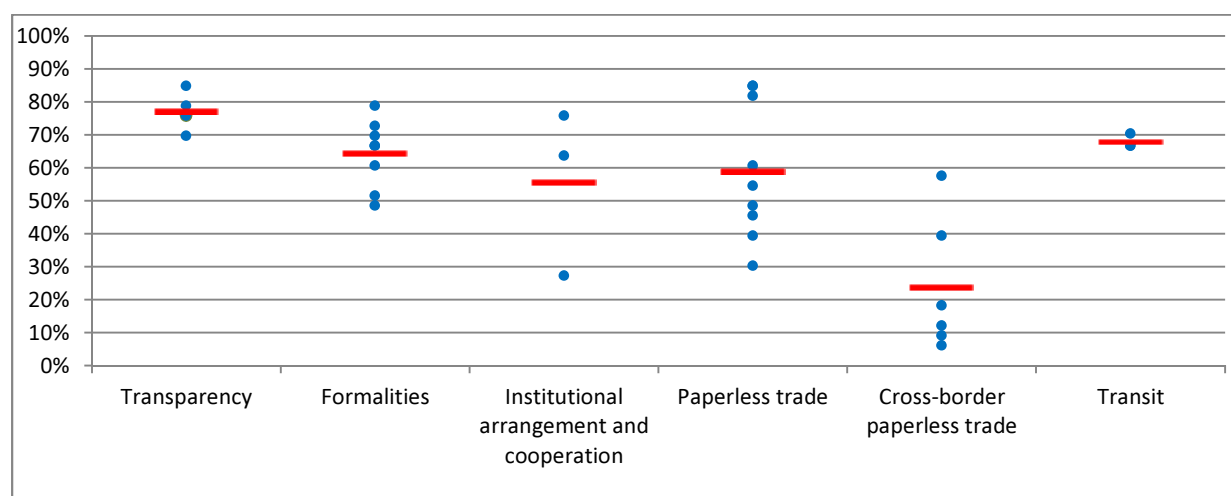
## 2.1 Most and least implemented trade facilitation measures

While implementation levels vary greatly across countries for all six (6) categories of trade facilitation measures shown in Figure 3, differences in overall implementation scores across countries in South-East Asia are exacerbated by wide differences among countries in the level of implementation of

<sup>8</sup> The Asia-Pacific region comprises 12 LDCs, 3 of which are in South-East Asia (Cambodia, Lao PDR and Myanmar).

institutional arrangement and cooperation measures and paperless trade measures. Most and least implemented measures in each category are shown in Table 2.

**Figure 3: Implementation of different groups of trade facilitation measures: South-East Asian average**



Notes: Blue dots show regional average implementation level of individual measures within each group.

— Average sub-regional implementation level by groups of measures.

Source: ESCAP, UNRCs TF Survey 2015

**Table 1: Most and least implemented measures in South-East Asia  
(within each group of trade facilitation measures)**

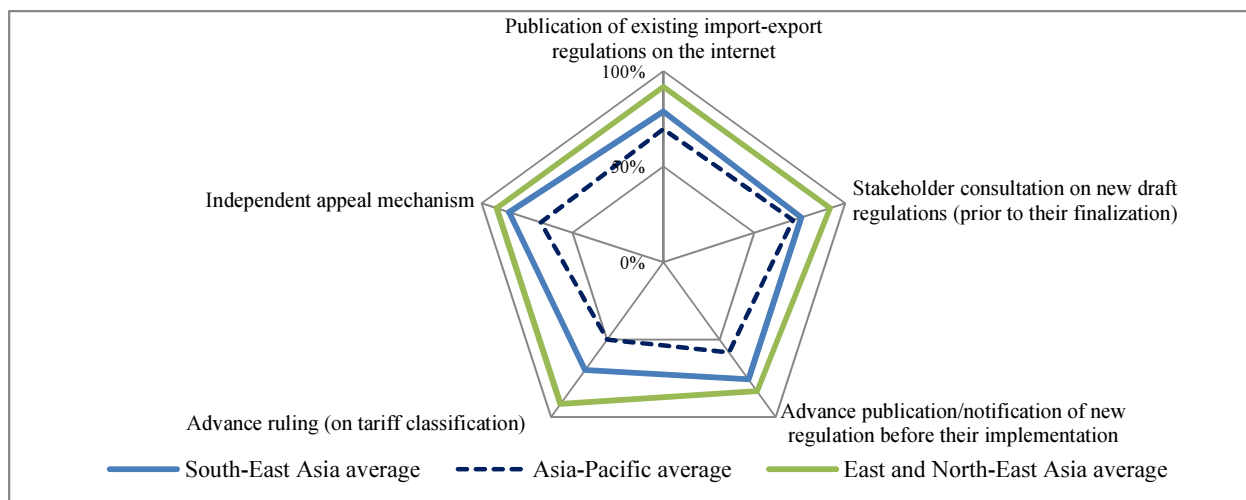
	Most implemented	Least implemented
<b>Transparency</b>	1. Independent appeal mechanism 2. Publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet	Advance ruling (on tariff classification)
<b>Formalities</b>	1. Pre-arrival processing 2. Risk management	Trade facilitation measures for authorized operators
<b>Institutional arrangement and cooperation</b>	Cooperation between agencies on the ground at the national level	Government agencies delegating controls to Customs authorities
<b>Paperless trade</b>	1. Internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies at border-crossings 2. Electronic submission of Customs declarations	1. Electronic Application for Customs Refunds 2. Electronic Application and Issuance of Preferential Certificate of Origin 3. Electronic Application and Issuance of Trade Licenses 4. Electronic Single Window System
<b>Cross-border paperless trade</b>	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	1. Electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary Certificate 2. Banks and insurers retrieving letters of credit electronically

### 3. Implementation of trade facilitation measures: A closer look

#### 3.1 “Transparency” measures

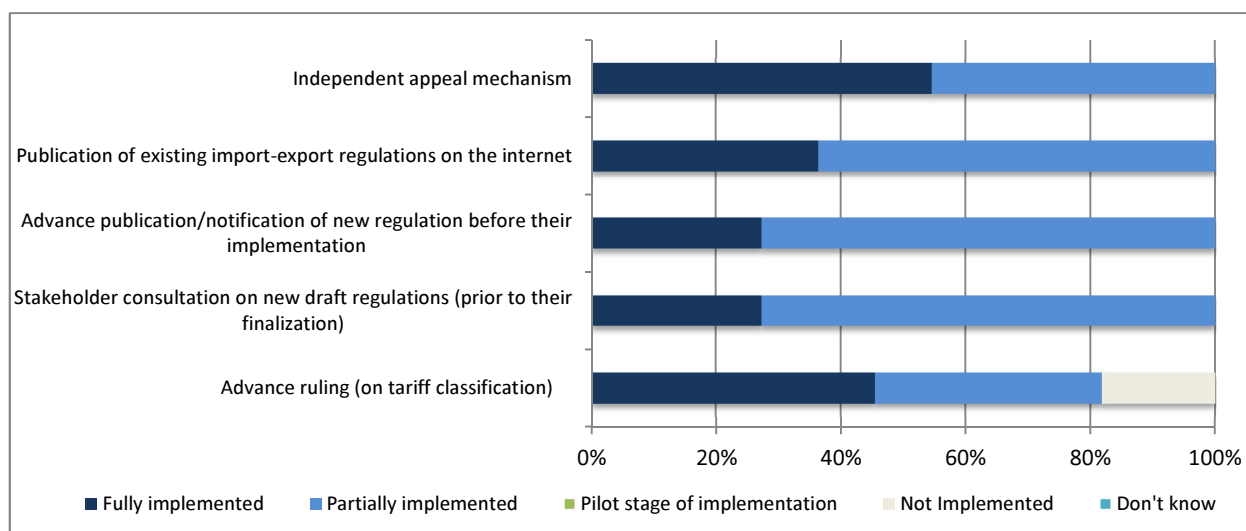
Five trade facilitation measures included in the survey can be categorized as “Transparency” measures. They relate to Articles 1-5 of the WTO TFA and GATT Article X on Publication and Administration of Trade Regulations.

**Figure 4: Implementation of “transparency” measures: South-East Asian average**



Source: ESCAP, UNRCs TF Survey 2015

**Figure 5: State of implementation of “transparency” measures for trade facilitation in South-East Asia (in %)**



Source: ESCAP, UNRCs TF Survey 2015

Figure 4 shows the average level of implementation of all five “transparency” measures across the sub-region, compared to the regional ones and taking the best performer among sub-regions, East and North-East Asia, as the benchmark. The figure shows that the average level of implementation of “transparency” measures is well in excess of 50% and in fact higher than 75%, indicating a significantly higher level of implementation as compared to other types of measures and near full implementation of these measures. It also shows that South-East Asia has achieved higher level of implementation than the region as a whole although implementation has not reached the levels achieved in East and North-East Asia.

Figure 5 shows that all “transparency” measures have been at least partially implemented by 80% of all countries. *Independent appeal mechanism* is the most implemented measure, having been fully implemented by more than 50% of the countries in this sub-region. In contrast, *Advance ruling (on tariff classification)* is the least implemented of the “transparency” measures, while *Advance publication/notification of new regulation before their implementation* and *Stakeholder consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)* have only been fully implemented in less than 30% of all countries in the sub-region.

### 3.2 “Formalities” facilitation measures

Eight of the general trade facilitation measures included in the survey are categorized as “formalities” facilitation measures, aimed at streamlining and/or expediting regulatory trade procedures. They relate to Articles 6-10 of the WTO TFA and GATT Article VIII on “Fees and Formalities connected with Importation and Exportation”.

Figure 6 shows that the level of implementation of “formalities” facilitation measures in this sub-region is generally above 50%. It is higher than the regional average but remains lower than the level in East and North-East Asia.

The implementation rates of “formalities” measures in the sub-region are presented in Figure 7. In general, all measures have reached at least partial implementation in 60% of all countries. *Pre-arrival*

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