PREFACE

This publication was prepared by the Trade and Investment Division of ESCAP. Its principal aim is to analyse the current status of paperless trade implementation in the region and assess a practical approach to the facilitation of cross-border paperless trade in the Asia-Pacific region, as this will contribute to regional connectivity.

With world-leading paperless trade systems already in place in several countries of Asia and the Pacific, including a few cases of successful cross-border paperless trade data exchange, the region is fast moving towards a paperless trade environment. The intrinsic cross-border nature of international trade has resulted in increasing demand for facilitation of cross-border paperless trade, as more and more countries in the region implement this approach.

However, facilitating cross-border paperless trade poses more challenges than those involved in implementing paperless trade at the national level, mainly because it requires the coordination and harmonization of different legal, regulatory and technical requirements in two or more countries. While the private sector can also facilitate cross-border paperless trade through innovations in business practices, the procedure for coordinating and harmonizing the legal, regulatory and technical requirements ultimately has to rely on an intergovernmental mechanism.

This increasing demand for facilitation of cross-border paperless trade and the necessity for an intergovernmental mechanism resulted in the adoption of ESCAP Resolution 68/3, entitled "Enabling paperless trade and the cross-border recognition of electronic data and documents for inclusive and sustainable intraregional trade facilitation", by the sixty-eighth session of the ESCAP Commission in May 2012. ESCAP Resolution 68/3 is aimed at developing regional arrangements for the facilitation of cross-border paperless trade.

Despite the strong commitment to, and willingness of the region to develop cross-border paperless trade, limited references and studies exist on how to facilitate its implementation in the region and beyond. Given the current circumstances, the in-depth analysis of existing practices and thorough assessment of regional requirements detailed in this publication will help to lay the foundation for conducting further studies on designing implementation measures. In particular, it supports the development and implementation of practical regional arrangement(s) in the Asia-Pacific region, as mandated by ESCAP Resolution 68/3.