

TACKLING THE INVISIBLE BARRIERS TO TRADE

Company perspectives on non-tariff measures (NTMs) in Asia-Pacific

The International Trade Centre's Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) Programme and the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) have joined forces to analyse the business challenges to exporting.

The ITC business surveys on NTMs document the experiences of companies that are involved in international trade. Their analyses allow countries to identify the practical bottlenecks and reforms to facilitate trade. The main findings for the Asia-Pacific region were:

- NTMs have a significant impact on exporters in the Asia-Pacific, with 56% of all interviewed firms reporting burdensome NTMs.
- Businesses perceive that difficult NTMs are typically applied by export partners (80%) rather than domestic governments (20%). However, it is primarily the domestic procedural challenges that represent the obstacle.
- NTMs related to technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures and rules of origin dominate exporter's complaints.

Therefore, our main recommendations are:

Market access begins at home

ESCAP members should keep in mind that streamlining trade procedures at home is key to enabling exporters to take better advantage of export markets abroad.

Regional integration is key for intra –regional and international trade

Regional trade agreements can serve as an effective vehicle for addressing conformity assessment-related compliance issues, for instance through Mutual Recognition Agreements and the adoption of international standards as best practice.

Institutional streamlining is needed

Establishing a consultation mechanism on NTMs can foster continuous dialogue between government and private sector stakeholders.

Facilitate trade by investing in infrastructure

Enhancing soft infrastructure such as through the digitalization of NTM procedures and cross-border paperless trade can also eliminate the administrative layers that foster rent-seeking activities in trade-regulating agencies. Likewise, improving hard infrastructure through upgrading laboratories and testing facilities, among other institutional resources, can create long-term investments in national capacity.

MAKING REGIONAL INTEGRATION WORK

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