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This background document[1] has been prepared by the secretariat to facilitate discussions on Standing Committee Agenda item 3.b. It has been compiled by the secretariat of ESCAP using secondary data, aiming to assist in evaluating the progress made by selected countries across Asia and the Pacific – including the Parties to the Framework Agreement and other selected ESCAP member states - in advancing cross-border paperless trade.

The Standing Committee is encouraged to provide comments and feedback to ensure the accuracy of the information presented. Furthermore, the Standing Committee is invited to consider whether the document could serve as a baseline for monitoring the progress of cross-border paperless trade in the region over time.

[1] This document is prepared by the secretariat of ESCAP including Tengfei Wang, Kayan Lee and Elliot Carpenter based on publicly available information.

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1. Azerbaijan

1.1 Azerbaijan - Georgia, Ukraine, Turkey, Azerbaijan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation

1.1.1 Exchanges export and transit declarations data

The Republic of Azerbaijan exchanges export and transit declarations data available in UAMS with selected trade partner countries, based on the bilateral agreements. The Republic of Azerbaijan has already established such data exchanges with Georgia, Ukraine, Turkey, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the Russian Federation.

UAMS is a nationwide system that is operational at all ports and for all methods of transportation and Single Window functions such as the national Single Window, which acts as the national single point of connectivity for the private sector for any cross-border operations.

It is also the central point through which the required import-export and transit declarations are processed electronically. Shipment data are processed immediately, and errors are detected and corrected at the time of filing. The system in addition, relevant communication channels for pre-arrival data exchange have been established between the Customs Administration of Belarus and SCC of the Republic of Azerbaijan[2].

1.2 Azerbaijan – EU

1.2.1 Electronic exchange of documents related to customs processes and e-invoices

Azerbaijan and the EU have implemented the electronic circulation of invoices between their respective enterprises.

In B2G aspect, Azerbaijan and the EU also exchange documents related to customs processes. These include:

- Exchange of e-documents and/or information between the customs authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the EU while controlling the transportation of goods in accordance with customs transit procedures;
- Exchange of electronic goods declarations between the databases of Azerbaijani and EU customs authorities;

[2] https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/AZE%20readiness%20assessment%20report-FINAL_1.pdf

- Shipping documents, whether they refer to maritime, rail, road, air or land transport;
- Exchange of electronic copies of customs receipt orders between the customs authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the EU, as well as:
- Standardization certificates
    - Medical and veterinary certificates
    - Quality certificates
    - Evidence of circumstances that may lead to exemption from liability under a contract (force majeure)
    - Phytopathological certificates
    - Certificates of origin of animals
    - Qualification certificates

In G2G aspect, Azerbaijan and the EU also exchange documents related to customs processes, documents including:

- Exchange of e-documents and/or information between the customs authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the EU while controlling the transportation of goods in accordance with customs transit procedures;
- Exchange of electronic goods declarations between the databases of Azerbaijani and the EU customs authorities;
- Shipping documents, whether they refer to maritime, rail, road, air or land transport;
- Exchange of electronic copies of customs receipt orders between the customs authorities of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the EU, as well as:
    - Standardization certificates
    - Medical and veterinary certificates
    - Quality certificates
    - Evidence of circumstances that may lead to exemption from liability under a contract (force majeure)
    - Phytopathological certificates
    - Certificates of origin of animals

Qualification certificates related to the information exchange in accordance with international agreements with third parties

- Ensuring the implementation of electronic information exchange interaction between the authorized bodies of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the EU within the electronic certification and verification system of the origin of goods.

2. Bangladesh

2.1 Bangladesh – China

2.1.1 Exchange Certificate of Origin between Bangladesh and China

Certificates of Origin have been exchanged electronically from April to December 2020[3].

China has signed the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement with Bangladesh (effective since September 2006).Therefore, certain Chinese goods exported to Bangladesh enjoy certain preferential tariffs.

3. China

3.1 China – Indonesia

3.1.1 Electronic Certificate of Origin System

The China-Indonesia Electronic Certificate of Origin System has been in operation since October 2020[4].

The General Administration of Customs (GAC) announced new guidelines on the electronic certificate of origin's data integration between China and Indonesia, effective from October 15, 2020. For import declarations, importers or their agents must use the code "Y" on relevant documents to apply for preferential tax rates under the China-ASEAN Framework Agreement. For export declarations, exporters or their agents must provide necessary country of origin information on the appropriate forms.

3.2. China – Singapore

3.2.1 Exchange Preferential Certificate of Origin and the Certificate of Non-Manipulation between China and Singapore

China and Singapore exchange Preferential Certificate of Origin and the Certificate of Non-Manipulation through the Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (EODES).

[3] https://www.investgo.cn/article/gb/yshj/202010/508280.html
[4] https://research.hktdc.com/en/article/NTM0MDI3MjQ5

The transmission of the electronic Preferential Certificate of Origin (PCO) / electronic Certificate of Non-Manipulation (CNM) to China was established on 1 November 2019, which has been facilitated by the Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (EODES). Since 1 May 2020, China has implemented full electronic transmission of PCO eliminating the need for hardcopy Preferential Certificate of Origin (PCO) to be dispatched overseas. To benefit from the seamless clearance of the goods that exporters and their appointed declaring agents/freight forwarders will enjoy, it would be best to leverage on the International Connectivity PCO (IC PCO) service on Networked Trade Platform (NTP).

Apart from exporters, importers who wish to claim preferential treatment for import of goods from China to Singapore or to apply for a back-to-back PCO would be able to retrieve the electronic PCO issued by China via the ICPCO service.

Under the auspice of the upgraded China-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, Singapore Customs and China had agreed to establish an EODES to allow the electronic exchange of PCO and CNM between Singapore and China. This eliminates the need for hardcopy PCO or CNM to be dispatched overseas, enabling companies to enjoy savings in cost and time[5].

3.3 China – Georgia

3.3.1 Exchange electronic Certificate of Origin between China and Georgia

The electronic information network of origin of the China-Georgia Free Trade Agreement[6]

In order to further facilitate the compliant customs clearance of goods under the "Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of Georgia" (hereinafter referred to as the "Agreement"), starting from January 1, 2020 (inclusive of the same day, the same below), the "Origin Electronic Information Exchange System" is officially operational, transmitting electronic data on certificates of origin under the Agreement in real time.

[5] https://www.digitalizetrade.org/projects/singapores-electronic-origin-data-exchange-system-eodes-china

[6] http://gdfs.customs.gov.cn/lanzhou_customs/553138/fdzdgknr76/lzyj76/553125/2807071/index.html

3.4 China – Chile

3.4.1 Exchange electronic Certificate of Origin between China and Chile

China and Chile have established an electronic data exchange system for electronic certificates of origin under the China-Chile Free Trade Agreement. Both sides have agreed to establish a working group to develop electronic data exchange system, and the details will be communicated through the contact points of both sides. Both Parties confirmed the HS Code used in the Certificate of Origin Form F is based on HS 2012[7].

China will find importing fresh products from Chile more convenient as an electronic information exchange system for the Sino-Chile Free Trade Agreement will be launched on Jan 1, 2019.

The system, for exchanging the electronic certificate of origin of goods traded under the agreement, will be the first one of its kind established between China and a Latin American country.

Ningbo, a city with thriving foreign trade, will also benefit from the system.

Statistics from Ningbo, a costal Chinese city,show that their foreign trade with Chile totalled 19.37 billion yuan ($2.81 billion) in the first 11 months of 2018, up 14.4 percent year-on-year and 35.5 times more than that in 2006 when the Sino-Chile Free Trade Agreement was implemented[8].

3.4.2 Exchange electronic Phytosanitary and veterinary certificates between China and Chile

China and Chile exchange ePhyto in real-time through China Inspection and Quarantine E-cert System (E-cert). China has signed MoU for E-certs with Chile, and both sides have signed cooperative agreements on real-time exchange. According to Chile, after one year of ePhyto operation with China, one Chilean company reported savings of approximately $1,000,000[9].

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[7] https://www.subrei.gob.cl/docs/default-source/acuerdos/comisiones-administradoras/vi-comision-de-libre-comercio.pdf?sfvrsn=13cb811a_2

[8] http://ningbo.chinadaily.com.cn/2018-12/28/c_311866.htm

[9] https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Yd09tyTEH_0yEsTDZI4jBh5QOBvLaOuSBinsaW79dds/edit

China is willing to cooperate with all countries in e-cert and set up mechanisms for e-cert verification. China states that they welcomes all countries to use its E-cert system, so as to carry out e-cert verification, facilitate trade, promote paperless certification and ensure quality and safety of import and export commodities traded between China and other countries.

3.5 China – Pakistan

3.5.1 Exchange electronic Certificate of Origin

The Certificate of Origin of China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (FTA). has Statistics from China's Ministry of Commerce indicated that during the first half of 2021, Pakistan's exports to China hit $1.73 billion, up 83 percent year-on-year. During the same period, bilateral trade increased to $12.6 billion, up 63 percent year-on-year. China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement was reached in November 2006. The second phase of the China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement came into effect in 2019, which greatly improved the trade liberalization between the two countries. China is currently Pakistan's largest single trading partner; while Pakistan is China's second largest trading partner in South Asia[10].

4. Iran (Islamic Republic of)

4.1 Iran (Islamic Republic of) – Azerbaijan

4.1.1 eTIR

Iran and Azerbaijan customs offices launched joint online service known as eTIR project to speed up customs formalities between the two countries.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) administers the TIR Convention, which was established in 1959 and extensively revised in 1975. The TIR Convention has68 current contracting parties.

The TIR Convention provides for an internationally recognized procedure to facilitate the cross-border transportation of goods in transit through the use of a standard,

[10] https://www.app.com.pk/global/e-certificate-of-origin-to-facilitate-china-pakistan-free-trade/

internationally recognized Customs document, the TIR Carnet, which also serves as proof of existence of an internationally valid guarantee.

The Contracting Parties to the TIR Convention launched in 2003 the so-called "eTIR Project", aimed at providing an exchange platform for all actors (Customs authorities, holders2, guarantee chains) involved in the TIR system, known as the "eTIR international system"[11].

5. Mongolia

5.1 Mongolia - China

5.1.1 Exchange electronic manifest data between Mongolia and China

The electronic manifest data contains 18 data items covering all information on relevant vehicles and goods, more comprehensive than the data of corresponding paper manifests.

The first electronic transmission of manifest data between Chinese and Mongolian Customs authorities occurred on December 1 2018. A freight forwarder declared to Erenhot Customs House (subordinate to Hohhot Customs District) for exporting one liquid-gas storage tank, weighing 20,200 kilograms, to Mongolia. When the loaded lorry passed the smart checkpoint for exit, electronic manifest data transmission system automatically extracted data from Customs manifest system, transport facility system and H2010 system and transmitted the data to Mongolia Customs. This marked major progress in bilateral cooperation regarding the mutual exchange of information, mutual recognition of controls, and mutual assistance of enforcement.

Reportedly, electronic manifest data transmission has been promoted since January 2019 to 10 Mongolia-oriented ports located in Inner Mongolia and Xinjiang Regions; meanwhile, China Customs and Mongolia Customs are jointly advancing the second-phase work of their joint control in order to launch the "sharing safe smart lock" project as soon as possible[12].

5.1.2 Exchange cargo manifest data between China and Mongolia

Chinese and Mongolian ports started to exchange electronic cargo manifest data on January 1, 2019; The paper "Cargo Manifest" would be discontinued from April 1, 2019.

[11] https://en.irna.ir/news/83360562/Iran-Azerbaijan-customs-offices-launch-joint-online-service
[12] http://english.customs.gov.cn/Statics/fa6341a0-4999-4998-9b6e-7a8b7b473ee9.html

China and Mongolia agreed to start the mutual recognition of NII images and weighing results for particular types of container goods by sharing smart locks[13].

The implementation of the electronic cargo manifest exchange system is part of the China-Mongolia Joint Customs Control (JCC) project. The project uses electronic data interchange (EDI) systems for the secure and efficient transmission of cargo manifest data. This includes information about the goods being transported, their quantity, origin, destination, and other relevant customs details[14].

This exchange of cargo manifest allows both China and Mongolia to promote the customs related document harmonization. However, the manifests haven't been harmonized in all border ports[15].

How the cargo manifest data exchange electronically between China and Mongolia?

C2C electronic data exchange through APIs[16]

- Before starting data exchange, exchange encryption key between two countries, and each country register registers this key to their system
- Application generates XML instance of cargo manifest
- Then, request MQ to send this message to the China Customs system by API
- MQ encrypts this message and envelops with the MQ environment
- Then, MQ sends this encrypted message to the China Customs MQ system
- If failed, Mongolian Customs MQ retry to send it to the China Customs MQ system
- Else, the China Customs MQ system sends an Acknowledgement to the Mongolian Customs MQ system

[13] https://rksi.adb.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/session-3-carec-progress-report-jcc.pdf
[14] https://docs.google.com/document/d/1nF76Dl5N2aK23z0Tjxidc6JuD7yEWylb8QuBWOS4K9E/edit
[15] https://www.carecprogram.org/uploads/004_103_209_PRC-Mongolia-Joint-Custom-Control-PRC.pdf
[16] https://www.digitalizetrade.org/projects/gacc-and-mongolia-customs-administration-emanifest-electronic-data-exchange-1

6. Philippines

6.1 Philippines - Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam

6.1.1 Exchange electronic Certificate of Origin between Philippines and Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam

The Philippines exchanges electronic Certificates of Origin with nine other members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) through the ASEAN Single Window. These members include Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

The live exchanges of electronic certificates of origin between the Philippines and the other members of ASEAN has averaged around 8,712 transactions per month since January 2020.

A report by Finance Undersecretary Gil Beltran showed that from January to August 2020, about 78,000 transactions were processed through the Philippines' National Single Window (NSW) or TradeNet. TradeNet.gov.ph, which performs the functions of the government's National Single Window (NSW), has been integrated to the ASW, which is a regional initiative that aims to speed up cargo clearances and promote economic integration by enabling the electronic exchange of border documents among the 10 ASEAN member-states. Once TradeNet is fully operational, traders may apply online for import and export permits for commodities such as rice, sugar, used motor vehicles, chemicals (toluene), frozen meat, medicines (for humans, animals, or fish) and cured tobacco. The Duterte administration's goal is to have all 75 trade regulatory government agencies across 18 government departments fully interconnected via TradeNet. TradeNet will simplify import and export documentary processes covering an initial 7,400 regulated products[17].

TradeNet.gov.ph is the online portal where the automated licensing, permit, clearance and certification systems of Trade Regulatory Government Agencies are integrated. It was designed as the official government system for electronic exchange of data on trade between and among various Philippine government agencies, as well as between the Philippines and other countries. It was developed and established by the Department of Finance's Inter-Agency Business Process Interoperability (DOF-IABPI)

[17] https://www.dof.gov.ph/live-exchanges-of-e-certificates-of-origin-via-asean-single-window-reach-over-8700-transactions-per-month/

and Department of Information and Communication Technology (DICT). As reported in 2019, the portal will be tested live in certain major ports of the Bureau and will be reviewed per stage. The testing will happen at the Port of Manila, the Manila International Container Terminal and the Ninoy Aquino International Airport. The objective of implementing this measure is to facilitate the transmission of e-CO for export products and the receipt of e-CO for imported products using available technologies and international best practices, in compliance with the Customs Modernisation and Tariff Act (CMTA)[18].

6.2 Operating Electronic Certificate of Origin through the National Single Window (NSW) and the ASEAN Single Window (ASW)

The Electronic Certificate of Origin (e-CO) was implemented in line with the efforts of the Bureau of Customs to facilitate trade through the National Single Window (NSW) and the ASEAN Single Window (ASW) regional platform in 2020. The Bureau of Customs has partnered with the USAID ASEAN Policy Implementation (API) Project to present the features and benefits of the e-CO, and a step-by-step process for its application and approval process.

Philippines Shifts to Live Electronic Exchange of Customs Declaration Document with ASEAN[19]:

Optimizing the management of trade facilitation activities advances another step for the Bureau of Customs (BOC) in achieving full visibility and cross-border cooperation with ASEAN. After months of focused strategies, in 2021 the Philippines has started exchanging the ASEAN Customs Declaration Document (ACDD) using the live environment of the ASEAN Single Window (ASW) regional platform, with the intent of supporting Customs risk targeting and profiling activities.

The ASW regional platform is an environment that connects and integrates the National Single Windows (NSWs) of ASEAN Member States. It allows the electronic exchange of trade documents such as the electronic Certificate of Origin (e-CO) Form D under the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement and the ACDD, including the electronic phyto-sanitary and animal health certificates that are planned to be exchanged soon.

By 2023, 9 ASEAN member states, including the Philippines, had exchanged ACDD with each other.

[18] https://opengovasia.com/2019/03/27/philippine-issues-guidelines-on-electronic-certificates-of-origin/
[19] https://customs.gov.ph/philippines-shifts-to-live-electronic-exchange-of-customs-declaration-document-with-asean/

6.3 Philippines – Indonesia, Thailand

6.3.1 Exchange of e-Phyto

The Philippines joined the pilot cross-border exchange of electronic Phytosanitary (e-Phyto) certificates with ASEAN peers Indonesia in May and Thailand in June of 2023[20].

Bureau of Customs and Bureau of Plant Industry had taken part in the initiative promoting the adoption of digital systems for issuing and verifying Phytosanitary certificates, which helped ensure efficient, reliable, and secure trade in agricultural products.

The Philippines is expected to exchange e-Phyto certificates with other ASEAN member states using the BOC e-Phyto Management Portal, which can access BPI e-Phyto certificates.

In October 2022, BPI relaunched its e-Phyto system that allows exporters to apply for phytosanitary certificates online and enable the Philippines to exchange e-Phyto certificates with other trading countries and eventually do away with paper versions.

7. Republic of Korea

7.1 Republic of Korea – Chile

7.1.1 Exchange Electronic Phytosanitary Certification

Chile has become the first South American country to implement electronic phytosanitary certificates for fruit shipments to South Korea. The ePhyto system came into effect on the 1st of January 2024, facilitating trade between the two countries and improving the management of plant health. [21]

7.2 Republic of Korea's Steel Imports Approved for the Electronic Certification System (eCERT)

The export certification requirement for imports of steel products of the Republic of Korea that are subject to an absolute quota will be collected through the Electronic Certification System (eCERT). As a result, all imports of steel of the Republic of Korea

[20] https://www.portcalls.com/ph-to-join-pilot-exchange-of-e-phyto-certificates-in-asean/
[21] https://www.fruitnet.com/asiafruit/chile-implements-ephytos-for-fruit-exports-to-south-korea/257861.article

that are subject to an absolute quota must have a valid export certificate with a corresponding eCERT transmission at the time of entry for consumption or withdrawal from warehouse for consumption. The transition to eCERT will not change the quota filing process or requirements. The use of the eCERT process for Korean steel importations that are subject to an absolute quota will be required for steel entered, or withdrawn from a warehouse, for consumption on or after April 22, 2024. CBP will automatically reject filings without correct eCERT information starting May 20, 2024.

The United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is set to revolutionize the import process for steel products from the Republic of Korea through the adoption of the Electronic Certification System (eCERT). Beginning April 22, 2024, all imports of Korean steel subject to absolute quotas must be accompanied by a valid export certificate transmitted via eCERT at the time of entry or warehouse withdrawal for consumption.

7.3 India – Korea

7.3.1 India-Korea Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (EODES)

The launch of the India-Korea Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (IK-EODES) in 2023 marks a significant advancement in the Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) initiatives of Indian Customs.

This move, as outlined in the press release following its launch, is expected to expedite the clearance of imported goods under the India-Korea Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). The data fields in a Certificate of Origin (CoO) will be electronically shared by the exporting customs administration with the importing customs, as soon as the certificate is issued.

The Customs authority of the importing country are empowered to carry out verification retroactively. It is in this background that IK-EODES has to be seen. In terms of the EDI arrangement the certificates of origin will be shared electronically ensuring speedier verification and most importantly speedier clearance. Incidentally, it may be recalled that India and Korea also have an Authorised Economic Operator Mutual Recognition Agreement (AEO-MRA).

Therefore, the IK-EODES is the latest in the series of proactive steps being taken to facilitate and increase trade.

7.4 Republic of Korea - Viet Nam

7.4.1 The e-Origin Data Exchange System

The Korea Customs Service (KCS) ran an Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (EODES) with Viet Nam and India from 2023.

The EODES allows certificates of origin to be processed through electronic platforms. As of mid-June 2022, 13 ministries and agencies had joined the Viet Nam National Single Window (NSW) which provided 249 administrative procedures and digitalized 4.92 million applications from over 54,800 enterprises, according to the Viet Nam Customs.

Viet Nam continued to effectively implement the ASEAN Single Window with all nine bloc's member states to exchange information of certificates of origin (Form D).

The testing of connection techniques and the exchange of test messages on export customs declarations was completed with the Eurasian Economic Union.

Viet Nam is negotiating technical requirements for building an exchange of certificates of origin system with the Eurasian Economic Union.

The nation signed an "Agreement on facilitation of clearance of agricultural, forestry and fishery products through the use of electronic certificates" with New Zealand[22].

8. Russian Federation

8.1 Russian Federation - Azerbaijan

8.1.1 Exchange customs related documents

As of 2024, the process of exchanging Transit Declarations is now in operation.

As of 2024, Azerbaijan and Russia have implemented a system for exchanging various customs-related electronic documents and information to streamline and control cross-border activities. This includes:

1. **Customs Processes:** Exchange of e-documents for customs transit, goods declarations, receipt orders, and preliminary decisions.

[22] https://en.baochinhphu.vn/rok-to-run-e-origin-data-exchange-system-with-viet-nam-by-2023-111220716085601938.htm

2. **Veterinary and Sanitary Measures:** Exchange of e-veterinary certificates and information on sanitary measures and health-related registrations.
3. **Transport Control:** Exchange of cross-border transport control data and information on taxes and fees.
4. **Quarantine and Phytosanitary Measures:** Exchange of quarantine and phytosanitary certificates and related information.
5. **Competition Policy and Procurement:** Exchange of documents for monitoring competition and state procurement, including e-signatures.
6. **Customs, Tariff, and Regulation:** Exchange of data on the transportation of weapons, drugs, hazardous substances, and ozone-depleting agents.

9. Timor-Leste

9.1 Timor-Leste Electronic Single Window

Timor-Leste has increased the capabilities of its electronic single window (TileSW), connecting eight government agencies responsible for approving the release of goods from customs. TileSW was developed in partnership with UNCTAD using its Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) technologies, thanks to a project that started in September 2020. Customs and partner government agencies were previously not electronically connected, delaying customs clearance paperwork, as this would only start once goods were in the country. To prevent these delays, the Government of Timor-Leste adopted the environmentally friendly electronic single window system, which facilitates trade by reducing the cost and time of trading internationally, enables paperless trade and enhances clearance controls.

10. Tuvalu

10.1 National Single Window

Tuvalu recognizes the importance of paperless trade, both domestically and across borders, and has made significant progress in many areas towards the digitalization of trade procedures. Tuvalu has already implemented the main enabler for a national Single Window, which is the Customs Department's ASYCUDA World system. The system is currently connected to about 50 users that are not customs staff. These users are divided into four categories with each having separate access functions in the system – shipping agent, freight forwarder, customs broker, and declarant.

ASYCUDA World serves as the single gateway and covers 100 per cent of trade, while some of its functions, such as electronic payment still need to be fully implemented. The system could accommodate cross-border data exchange. However, the main constraints are the lack of information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure and information security in place as well as a form of online payment in the country.

There are no cross-border data exchange initiatives with selected partner countries and the Department of Customs via the ASYCUDA World. However, ASYCUDA World being an UNCTAD system is capable of all cross-border data exchange needs. The Customs Department is planning implementation or enabling of cross-border data exchange functions in their existing ASYCUDA World, and to fully utilize them shortly with adequate policies and procedures in place. The main challenge for the department is the lack of support from the Government in financing such initiatives or actions in its annual budgets in the past.

Re-engineering and streamlining business processes of several agencies has led to automation and simplification, and therefore has enabled these agencies to engage in initiatives and pilot projects supporting cross-border data exchange, like the ASYCUDA World that was introduced in early 2022.

Tuvalu is a State that is party to only one international agreement relevant to paperless trade facilitation, and that is the Revised Kyoto Convention on the Harmonization of Customs Procedures (RKCHCP), which provides standards for the optimal use of information technology with specific reference to an electronic document, declarations, payments and information exchange.

In Tuvalu, Internet service is available at all border posts, and the ASYCUDA World is accessible throughout Tuvalu via the Internet. There are several actions that need to be taken in the ICT infrastructure in Tuvalu to achieve a fully paperless trade environment. These include: the implementation of a policy for disaster recovery plan at the national level; the establishment of a business recovery plan for paperless trade systems; and the establishment of an information technology security policy such as cybersecurity. Most importantly, there is a need to significantly increase the speed and bandwidth of the Internet service available across the country, to seamlessly achieve a successful cross-border paperless trade and data exchange in Tuvalu[23].

[23] https://repository.unescap.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.12870/6151/ESCAP-2023-RP-Readiness-Assessment-Cross-Border-%20Paperless-Trade-TUVALU.pdf

11. Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)

11.1 Exchange Preferential Certificate of Origin (PCO) and electronic Declaration of Origin through Electronic Origin Data Exchange System (EODES)

The EODES enables the electronic submission of Preferential Certificate of Origin (PCO) and electronic Declaration of Origin, between the Eurasian Economic Union and partner countries. EODES shortens the transmission lead time and issues PCO authenticity, thus reducing the goods' time-to-market through faster Customs clearance.

This project started from January 2015, aiming at the elimination of hardcopy PCO enabling companies to enjoy savings in cost and time. Once companies have submitted a PCO online, customs will issue a certificate of origin electronically, and the company can print out its own certificate of origin[24].

12. Singapore

12.1 Singapore – ASEAN Member States

12.1.1 Exchange Electronic Form D through ASEAN Single Window

ASEAN Single Window (ASW) is an environment that connects and integrates the National Single Windows (NSWs) of ASEAN Member States (AMS), thereby allowing the electronic exchange of data between the AMS. With effect from 1 January 2024, all AMS has implemented full transmission of electronic Form D. As such, the importing customs administration in AMS may reject hardcopy Form D presented for preferential tariff claims[25].

Applicants must apply for e-Form under ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) if they are exporting to: Brunei Darussalam Cambodia; Indonesia; Lao PDR; Malaysia; Myanmar; The Philippines Thailand; or Vietnam.

Under the live operation of the ASW, a Form D which is issued under ATIGA and is electronically transmitted (therein called ATIGA e-Form D) from Singapore to any of the above-mentioned AMS for an import will also enjoy preferential tariff treatment. No other Certificates of Origin can currently be transmitted via the ASW.

[24] https://www.digitalizetrade.org/projects/electronic-origin-data-exchange-system-eodes-eurasian-economic-union-eaeu
[25] https://www.customs.gov.sg/businesses/certificates-of-origin/asw/

Regarding to application procedures, applicants can follow the instruction the Form D application procedures in TradeNet.

For transmission of an ATIGA e-Form D:

- The exporter must first be registered with Singapore Customs to access Networked Trade Platform (NTP).
- Once the Form D is approved, the applicant must access the approved Form D via a log in to www.ntp.gov.sg >Government Services > International Connectivity > ATIGA e-Form D.
- At the ATIGA Form D (SG to AMS) Enquiry screen, select "Importing Country / Region" and input the approved Form D reference number to locate it.
- After locating the approved Form D, the exporter or the authorised Declaring Agent can proceed to make adjustments and trigger the transmission of the ATIGA e-Form D to the importing country via the ASW.

Live Operation of the ASEAN Single Window (ASW)[26]:

Under the live operation of the ASW, participating companies of the ASW have the option to electronically transmit via the ASW Gateway, any of their Form Ds intended for an exchange-ready AMS. It is the common goal of all ASEAN Member States to cease the printing of hard copy Form D and for businesses to more towards full transmission of Form D in ASW by end 2023. The transmitted Form D, referred to as ATIGA e-Form D, will be recognised by the importing customs authority for preferential tariff treatment. Only in the event when the ASW is down due to technical glitches, will hard copy Form D be printed and made available for collection at the usual Preferential Certificate of Origin Printing Centres.

As of 24 Apr 2023, the following AMS have commenced the live operation of the ASW:

• Brunei Darussalam

• Cambodia

• Indonesia

• Laos

• Malaysia

• Myanmar

• Singapore

[26] https://www.customs.gov.sg/files/businesses/ttsb-roo/Submitting_and_Retrieving_a_Form_D_via_the_ASEAN_Single_Window__ICS____updated_on_20_Mar_2024.pdf

• The Philippines

• Thailand

• Viet Nam

12.2 Singapore - Thailand

12.2.1 Electronic Bill of Lading Pilot

Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA) partnered industry stakeholders and successfully executed a live shipment from Singapore to Thailand during the first quarter of 2023. This involved exchanging an electronically Electronic Transferable Record (ETR), which is functionally equivalent to a Bill of Lading.

The shipment was conducted through the following steps:

- ExxonMobil Asia Pacific shipped liquid chemicals from Singapore to Thailand
- VLK issued an electronic Bill of Lading (eBL) using Bunkerchain, a TradeTrust enabled digital platform.
- The use of Marine Vessel Pass, a joint project between S&P Global Market Intelligence and Bunkerchain, created a Digital Passports for Ships on the eBL ensured that digital identity used in the signing, was onboarded, and verified by S&P Global Market Intelligence. This was tied to their International maritime organization number.
- The eBL was subsequently surrendered on the TradeTrust Reference Implementation, demonstrating interoperability across different systems without the need to develop inter-system connectivity protocols such as APIs. It also established the interoperability between digital and paper-based processes.
- VLK was supported by their Protection and Indemnity (P&I) Club, on the basis that the P&I liabilities arising from the use of a TradeTrust-issued eBL is equivalent to the liabilities that could have arisen under the use of a paper-based Bill of Lading.
- The eBL was legally supported solely by statutory law without the use of any contract law or rulebook. This shipment showed that an eBL issued using the TradeTrust framework can be used in a non-MLETR jurisdiction, such as Thailand.

12.3 Singapore – Australia

12.3.1 Electronic Certificate of Origin Exchange Pilot[27]

In August 2021, Singapore engaged in its first cross-border digital trade documentation transaction between multiple governmental agencies from two countries - Australian

[27] https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/australia-singapore-digital-economy-agreement-summary-key-outcomes.pdf

Border Force (ABF), the Infocomm Media Development Authority of Singapore (IMDA), and Singapore Customs (SC), a regulatory authority, along with other industry participants. The transaction accepted the verifiable digital Certification of Origins (COOs), which led to the instant authentication and efficient processing of the trade documents during the trial.

The trial successfully tested the interoperability of two digital verification systems – the ABF's Intergovernmental Ledger (IGL) and IMDA's TradeTrust reference implementation.

A key success of the trial is the acceptance of verifiable COOs by a regulatory authority, Singapore Customs. Trial participants from industry, including the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Australian Industry Group, ANZ Bank, DBS Bank, Standard Chartered and Rio Tinto, noted the benefits of improved efficiency through time and cost savings by using verifiable COOs.

Both IGL and the TradeTrust reference implementation use the TradeTrust framework as the key underlying technology to allow interoperability, so the document can be

verified by both systems. TradeTrust's approach to verification provides flexibility to allow documents to be verified not only in digital format but also when the documents are converted into a paper document at any point of the transaction.

12.4 Singapore – UK

12.4.1 Quantum-secure electronic Bill of Lading exchange pilot[28]

In 2023, Singapore and the United Kingdom successfully exchanged several trade documents for a shipment, including an electronic Bill of Lading that has been described as highly encrypted. This level of encryption is designed to protect the transfer of digital trade documents against contemporary and future threats, including those posed by quantum computers.

The pilot program was based on a pre-existing shipment dispatched by Permavoid Limited, a water management systems component manufacturer and a subsidiary of the Genuit Group, to Singapore. AG Midgley Ltd, a specialist consultancy, played a pivotal role in leading and overseeing the consortium from inception to completion.

Throughout the journey, the shipment was meticulously tracked in real-time, and the condition of its contents was continuously monitored using secure and cost-effective Internet of Things (IoT) technology developed at Imperial College London's AESE Laboratory, led by Professor Julie McCann. The project received support from the

[28] https://www.tradefinanceglobal.com/posts/consortium-successfully-executes-first-cross-border-quantum-secure-digital-trade-transaction/

PETRAS National Centre of Excellence for IoT Systems Cyber Security and the UKRI Impact Initiative Account (UKRI-IAA).

12.5 Singapore – India

12.5.1 electronic Bill of Lading exchange[29]

In August 2023, Singapore and India engaged in the successful exchange of an electronic Bill of Lading (eBL) for the first time. This pilot was implemented in close partnership between government agencies (Ministry of Trade and Industry, the National Institute for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog, Enterprise Singapore, and Infocomm Media Development Authority (IMDA)) and industry partners (DBS, ICICI Bank, Maptrasco, Jindal Stainless, and A.P. Moller-Maersk).

Singapore's TradeTrust framework facilitated this exchange through the following steps:

- Maptrasco shipped a container of scrap metal from Miami to Gujarat.
- Maersk issued an electronic Bill of Lading (eBL) using the TradeTrust portal, a reference implementation of the TradeTrust framework, to Maptrasco.
- Simultaneously, Jindal Stainless applied for a Letter of Credit (L/C) from ICICI Bank as the Issuing Bank of the LC.
- Maptrasco, which utilised DBS as the Presenting Bank, transferred the title ownership of the eBL via the TradeTrust portal.
- DBS checks and confirms the supporting documents as per the terms of the L/C, including the TradeTrust eBL. Once the documentary checks are completed, DBS uses SGTraDex platform to transfer the title ownership of the eBL to ICICI Bank.
- ICICI Bank receives the eBL, alongside the other trade finance documents as per the terms of the L/C from DBS and uses its own proprietary platform, TradeChain powered by EdgeVerve which is TradeTrust-enabled by GUUD to transfer the title ownership of the eBL to Jindal Stainless.
- Jindal Stainless, as ICICI Bank's customer, utilises the TradeChain platform to surrender the eBL to Maersk and complete the shipment.
- Maersk then issues an electronic Delivery Order (DO) for Jindal Stainless to collect the cargo at the port of discharge.

[29] https://www.tradetrust.io/news/singapore-and-india-kick-off-an-era-of-interoperable-electronic-bills-of-lading-for-trade-finance

13. Japan

13.1 Japan – Indonesia

13.1.1 Certificate of Origin Data Exchange

First Ever the Certificate of Origin Data Exchange Under the Japan-Indonesia EPA to Be Implemented in Japan[30]:

. An agreement between Japan and Indonesia was reached in 2022 to begin implementing The Certificate of Origin Data Exchange under the Japan-Indonesia EPA. Simplifying and speeding up origin certification procedures will increase use of the EPA, which is also expected to promote agricultural exports.

Aiming to enhance convenience for traders, METI plans to switch the way of issuance of COs by introducing the CO data exchange for the Japan-Indonesia EPA in June 2023. In the CO data exchange, the issuing body of the exporting country sends the electronic data of CO directly to the customs authority of the importing country. By implementing the CO data exchange, exporters only need to submit an online application to the JCCI and have it certified, and they neither need to receive a CO on paper from the JCCI in person nor mail it to the importer, as was the case before.

13.2 Japan - Viet Nam, ASEAN, Thailand, RCEP, India, Malaysia, AJCEP, Indonesia

13.2.1 Electronic Certificates of Origin in PDF format

Certificates of Origin will be Shifted to Issuance in PDF Format Files under EPA for Viet Nam[31]:

Certificates of origin (CO) will be shifted to issuance in PDF format for Viet Nam under the Japan-Viet Nam Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) and the Japan-ASEAN Comprehensive Economic Partnership (AJCEP) Agreement. Simplifying and speeding up origin certification procedures will increase the use of the EPA, which is also expected to promote agricultural exports.

Procedures for issuing COs under the EPA: When exporting a product from Japan using the third-party certification system under the EPA, an exporter must apply for the issuance of a CO, after submitting documents to the Japan Chamber of Commerce and

[30] https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2022/1227_002.html
[31] https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2023/0614_001.html

Industry (JCCI)—the designated issuing body—to prove that the exporting product is of Japanese origin under the EPA and receiving JCCI's certification.

Shifting to issuance of COs in PDF files: Aiming to enhance convenience for businesses, the Government of Japan has been promoting digitalization of COs.* As part of this, from September 19, 2023, it will shift the issuance of COs to PDF files for Viet Nam under the Japan-Viet Nam EPA and under the AJCEP Agreement.

From September 19, 2023, when an importer submits any import declarations at customs in Viet Nam with the number and the issuance date of its CO, the Viet Nam Customs will be able to confirm the information on the CO. Accordingly, such importer will not be required to submit CO in a PDF file or on paper. For details, please make sure of the procedures of Viet Nam Customs.

*Note: Japan started issuing COs in PDF format under the Japan-Thailand EPA and under the RCEP Agreement in January 2022. It is scheduled to shift the issuance of COs to PDF files for India under the Japan-India EPA, and for Malaysia under the Japan-Malaysia EPA and the AJCEP Agreement from July 18, 2023. Moreover, it is scheduled to introduce the CO data exchange under the Japan-Indonesia EPA from June 26, 2023.

13.3 Japan – Viet Nam

13.3.1 Electronic import Letter of Credit Pilot[32]

FPI IS, FPT Japan Holdings, and TradeWaltz (Japan) conducted a proof-of-concept integrating TradeFlat as the first digital finance ecosystem in Viet Nam and TradeWaltz - Japan's leading trade information platform.

The chosen document for this pilot was an import Letter of Credit (L/C). As a result, the total cross-border transaction time decreased from 7-10 days for traditional L/C flow down to 171 minutes in the first test and to 76 minutes and 91 minutes for Deferred L/C and L/C at sight and in the last test (3rd time) correspondingly. This result also exceeded the expectations of PoC stakeholders, since the initial goal was to optimize the time for the L/C process down to 120 minutes.

The L/C issuance process includes following steps:

- The importer in Viet Nam creates a Purchase Order (PO) on TradeFlat and sends it to TradeWaltz for submission of the exporter in Japan;
- The sales contract (COS) signed by both the importer and exporter is uploaded on TradeFlat and TradeWaltz, while the impoter in Viet Nam digitally signs on TradeFlat;

[32] https://paa.net/news-72

- An import Letter of Credit (L/C) requested by the importer is issued by the issuing bank in Viet Nam on TradeFlat, and is sent digitally to the advising bank in Japan;
- When the L/C is issued, the exporter in Japan presents a set of shipping documents, including Commercial Invoice, Packing List, and Bill of Lading on TradeFlat and for the presenting bank;
- The presenting bank presents said documents to the issuing bank to carry out the process of document validation and for accepting payment according to the document set;
- The issuing bank and presenting bank update the payment status of the L/C on TradeFlat.

The PoC trial run received positive feedback from participating enterprises and banks. The system highly simplifies L/C issuance, optimizes the presentation of electronic documents, enables it to be performed entirely on a digital platform, and shortens processing time as well as controls information of the transaction compared to the traditional L/C flow. From there, the parties aim for the common goal of promoting trade not only between Viet Nam and Japan but also internationally.

14. India

14.1 Common Digital Platform for Issuance of Certificate of Origin

India operates a common digital platform as a single point access for certificates of origin for all FTAs/PTAs for all agencies and all products. The stated goal of this platform is to facilitate exports through a secure, electronic, paperless CoO issuance process. All designated CoO issuing agencies are required to work through this portal[33].

15. Australia

15.1 Australian National eCert Systems

The eCert allows importing and exporting government agencies to exchange government certificates electronically. It works via a secure and encrypted data exchange[34].

Australia use eCert to exchange:

[33] https://coo.dgft.gov.in/
[34] https://www.agriculture.gov.au/biosecurity-trade/market-access-trade/ecert

- phytosanitary certificates for plant and plant-related products
- sanitary certificates (also known as health and/or veterinary certificates) for animal and animal-related products.

The paper certificate process takes 6 to 15 days and 6 steps to complete. The eCert process can be completed in 1 minute to 4 hours.

Australia eCert import trading partners:

This table shows trading partners and certificate types Australia has established an eCert import exchange with.

Trading partner	**Government certificate type**	**AQIS Document Type**	**Status of exchange**
New Zealand	Phytosanitary	NZPHYTO	Paperless
	Sanitary	NZSANITARY	Paperless

Australia eCert export trading partners:

Paperless eCert:

This table shows the trading partners and commodities where Australia has established a paperless eCert export exchange.

Trading Partner	Phytosanitary	Edible Meat	Dairy	Fish	Skins & hides	Wool	Honey
Canada		Paperless					
European Union (EU)[35]		Paperless	Paperless	Paperless			Paperless
Japan		Paperless	Paperless		Paperless	Paperless	
New Zealand	Paperless	Paperless	Paperless	Paperless			
Philippines	Paperless	Paperless	Paperless				

[35] Australia paperless eCert exchange with the EU includes: EU member states: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Republic of Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden; Countries in the EU single market: Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway, Switzerland

United States of America		Paperless					

Parallel eCert

This table highlights the trading partners and commodities where Australia has established a parallel eCert export exchange.

Trading partner	Phytosanitary	Edible Meat	Dairy	Fish	Skins & Hides	Wool	Inedible meat
China	Parallel	Parallel	Parallel	Parallel	Parallel	Parallel	Parallel
Hong Kong		Parallel	Parallel	Parallel			
Indonesia	Parallel	Parallel	Parallel				
Korea, Republic of[36]		Parallel					
New Zealand					Parallel	Parallel	
Singapore		Parallel					

16. Thailand

16.1 ePhyto System

Thailand, officially launched its ePhyto system in May 2022 which is an important milestone for the Department of Agriculture (DOA), as well as the National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards (ACFS), Thai Customs Department (TCD), and National Telecom Public Company Limited (NT) as the collaborative agencies. To certify that plants and plant products are fit for export, Thai exporters can now apply for phytosanitary certificate via the electronic system. The certificate validates that the exported plants and plant products are free from plant pests and diseases and in line with the import requirement of destination countries[37].

[36] Australia have a paperless exchange with Ministry of Food and Drug Safety only. However, paper certification is still provided for Animal and Plant Quarantine Agency.

[37] https://www.asean-agrifood.org/thailand-successfully-establishes-inter-ministry-cooperation-on-ephyto-certificates/

16.2 e-Customs

Computer techniques are increasingly used by Thai Customs to support a wide range of Customs operations. “e-Customs” was implemented on 1 January 2007, comprising of e-Import, e-Export, e-Manifest, e-Payment, and e-Warehouse. It provides business operators such as exporters, importers, Customs brokers and shipping companies with a paperless environment and a one stop service.

The “e-Customs” system is the comprehensive system developed by Thai Customs to facilitate and process all commercial goods imported into Thailand.

17. Sri Lanka

17.1 E-Phyto Solution

The coorporation of Sri Lanka in ePhyto solution

Sri Lanka is one of three pilot countries testing the GeNS under the global GeNS implementation project initiated by IPPC and made a remark as the first Asian country to “go live with GeNS”. Sri Lanka has joined the ePhyto since 2016 under the Cabinet Approval of 14.02.2018 Cabinet paper No.18/0146/728/008 on Entering into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for issuing Electronic Phytosanitary Certificates in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka has since exchanged ePhytos with New Zealand, USA, Chile and Argentina.

18. Fiji

18.1 IPPC ePhyto Solution through GeNS[38]

In Fiji, the Biosecurity Authority of Fiji (BAF) holds the mandate to ensure phytosanitary safety of agricultural products.

[38] https://www.ephytoexchange.org/landing/assets/docs/2021-05_Fiji_ePhyto_Implementation_CaseStory.pdf

In 2020, BAF started to digitalise its phytosanitary process with the implementation of the IPPC ePhyto Solution through the Generic ePhyto National System (GeNS) but gaps remained.

In a move designed to boost its economy and enhance the island's food security, the government of Fiji reached out to the Alliance to work with BAF and the private sector in finalising the transition to GeNS.

Lami Kava was the first company to register with GeNS in Fiji and began using the new solution immediately, freeing up three employees who had previously been tied up in the process of obtaining the necessary paperwork. This represented a massive saving for a company with only 30 employees.

The transition to ePhyto is projected to cut phytosanitary processing time for Fijian traders by 56% and save them $US 6 per certificate. Beyond those quantitative benefits, electronic phytosanitary certificates[39]:

- allow quick, accurate, low-cost exchange
- alleviate administrative burden on border agencies and traders
- improve data quality (for example, GeNS allows traders to align with reporting requirements)
- enhance competitiveness by introducing a seamless, transparent system that generates greater confidence in quality and origin
- help in levelling the playing field for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by supporting their integration into global supply chains
- provide greater transparency, making it easier to communicate with international buyers, which in turn makes it more attractive for importers to do business with Fijian exporters
- increase food security through quicker border clearance, lessening spoilage and waste

19. Uzbekistan

19.1IPPC ePhyto Solution[40]

Uzbekistan's issues electronic phytosanitary certificates through its own national system, the Automated Information System E-phyto.uz. Throughout 2020, Uzbekistan

[39] https://www.tradefacilitation.org/article/full-transition-to-electronic-phytosanitary-certification-in-fiji/
[40] https://www.ephytoexchange.org/landing/assets/docs/2021-04_Uzbekistan_ePhyto_Implementation_CaseStory.pdf

worked to integrate its own national system into the international ePhyto system of the IPPC.

Based on a case study release in March 2021, Uzbekistan mostly issued ePhyto certificates for export, totalling 4000 on average from January to March 2021. During this timeframe, only 10 certificates were issued for import, and solely for testing. Uzbekistan primarily exchanged ePhyto certificates with The Republic of Korea, Italy, the US, Germany, and Russia. Since joining the IPPC Hub, Uzbekistan had not started exchanging with any new countries to a significant extent.

With regard to integrating their own national system with the IPPC Hub, Uzbek officials stated the process was faster and cheaper than their original estimations. It took 3 months to progress from initial discussions about using ePhytos, to successfully conducting an exchange of certificates on the Hub.

20. United States

20.1 IPPC ePhyto Solution[41]

The US national system, the Phytosanitary Certificate Issuance & Tracking system, is integrated with the IPPC ePhyto Hub. Between January and March 2021 the US exchanged approximately 14,450 import certificates, and 22,000 export certificates using the IPPC Hub. Importantly, integrating with the Hub lead the US to begin exchanging ePhyto certificates with approximately 43 additional countries.

In terms of implementation, the US spent approximately 8 years transitioning from discussion about ePhytos to successfully conducting an exchange of certificates on the Hub. Officials noted that conducting exchanges with countries that were GeNs/Hub compatible took very little time, which contrasts to the longer period of time it took them to implement bilateral ePhyto exchanges.

[41] https://www.ephytoexchange.org/landing/assets/docs/2021-05_USA_ePhyto_Implementation_CaseStory.pdf

21. Kazakstan

21.1 Kazakstan - Uzbekistan

21.1.1 eTIR Project

The new legal framework for the full digitalization of the TIR system (the so-called eTIR) entered into force on 25 May 2021, opening eTIR to 77 countries across five continents.

The TIR system is administered by its Contracting Parties under the auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), and is governed by the provisions of the TIR Convention. It constitutes a public-private partnership between the Contracting Parties and the international guarantee chain, which is managed by the International Road Transport Union (IRU) – the world's road transport organization – and national associations. It is currently in operation in 58 countries, covering the whole of Europe and extending to North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. In July 2016, China became the 70th Contracting Party to the TIR Convention, marking an important new milestone for its ongoing global expansion.