

Regional Organizations Cooperation Mechanism for Trade Facilitation (ROC-TF) NEWSLETTER

IN FOCUS

The Seventh Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Week, held in January 2021, brought together over 50 countries in the region to discuss the way forward on trade facilitation and paperless trade. The importance of accelerating progress in trade digitalization was highlighted and the entry into force of the UN treaty dedicated to cross-border paperless trade facilitation was welcomed.

Twenty four countries participated in the 6th Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation held during the Week, to develop an implementation roadmap for the UN treaty. The treaty has since entered into force on 20 February 2021 - after Bangladesh and China ratified the Framework Agreement on Cross-Border Paperless Trade Facilitation in Asia and the Pacific at the end of last year.



UPCOMING

WCO and ESCAP will organize the 5th UNNExT capacity building Masterclass on trade facilitation and Single Windows virtually in June 2021.

ITD and ESCAP, in collaboration with UNCTAD and ITC, will organize another online course on Trade Facilitation and Sustainable Development in July 2021.

For more upcoming events, see the events calendar on [page 18](#).

UN Global Trade Facilitation Survey 2021 now on-going

The fourth UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, was initiated by five United Nations Regional Commissions in January 2021. It includes a new section on trade facilitation in times of crisis and pandemic. Data collection is currently being conducted - for more information and participation, available [here](#).

UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation



PUBLICATIONS & RESOURCES

ADB and ESCAP issued a joint report on enhancing trade and transport connectivity in Asia and the Pacific, an outcome of a high-level regional online forum organized in December last year. **See the Analysis section on [page 10](#).**

ESCAP, UNCITRAL and EIF launched an online interactive Readiness Assessment Guide for Cross-border Paperless Trade, to facilitate self-assessments of legal and technical readiness for cross-border paperless trade. It is available [here](#).

ITD together with ESCAP, in collaboration with UNCTAD, UNECE and others have issued a new guide and e-learning course on Enhancing Trade Information Portals (TIPs). The self-paced online course is freely accessible to everyone. It is designed to help officials assess and improve TIPs on the basis of a governance framework and a TIP maturity roadmap model. **See [page 13](#) for more resources and publications.**

The ROC-TF newsletter is a biannual publication, which features updates, publications and forthcoming activities of regional and international organizations working on trade facilitation in the Asia-Pacific region.

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PROJECT/ACTIVITY UPDATE

Selected project/activity updates from ROC-TF organizations on Trade Facilitation [Since February 2020]

JOINT ACTIVITIES and PARTNERSHIPS

ADB and ESCAP

High-Level Meeting on Regional Cooperation for Trade and Transport Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics in Asia and the Pacific, 2 December 2020, Virtual, Thailand

ADB and ESCAP held a high-level meeting on various activities and initiatives to promote e-commerce in Asia and the Pacific. With trade and transport connectivity becoming a central consideration in efforts to build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic, the meeting explored how trade and transport facilitation measures can be implemented for a more effective recovery. Building up on the initial regional discussions on supply chains and connectivity, and the Asia and the Pacific Transport Forum 2020, it focused on proven and emerging best practices, including digitalization reforms, and on establishing concrete ways to foster greater regional cooperation towards ensuring the resilience and efficiency of trade and transport connectivity in Asia and the Pacific.

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/events/high-level-meeting-regional-cooperation-trade-and-transport-connectivity-age-pandemics-asia>

ECA, ESCAP and ESCWA

Asia-Pacific Regional Integration: Measuring, Monitoring and Improving Performance for Sustainable Development, 22-23 April 2020, Virtual, Thailand

The workshop provided guidance to policy analysts from government departments or think-tanks in developing Asia-Pacific countries on monitoring regional integration for better policymaking, with a view to deepen regional integration.

The workshop provides insight into the current dynamics of regional integration and their key drivers. It introduced tools developed by ESCAP for measuring a country's progress on regional integration, and monitoring how the country has performed in regional integration when sustainable development and digital trade integration are considered. The report is available from <https://www.unescap.org/resources/DigiSRII>

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/events/asia-pacific-regional-integration-measuring-monitoring-and-improving-performance-sustainable>

EIF, ESCAP and UNCITRAL

Launch of the Online Readiness Assessment Guide for Cross-border Paperless Trade, 9 December 2020, Virtual, Thailand

A new interactive guide to help countries self-assess their legal and technical readiness for cross-border paperless trade was developed by ESCAP, in collaboration with the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) and the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF). The new tool is relevant to all countries globally, as it can support the implementation of not only the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CBFA), but also the full digital implementation of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).

The first version of the online guide, to be launched and discussed during this event, is available at [Readiness Assessment Guide for Cross-border Paperless Trade](#)

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/events/launch-online-readiness-assessment-guide-cross-border-paperless-trade>

ESCAP/ARTNeT and ITD

ESCAP-ARTNeT-ITD Online Course on Trade Facilitation for Sustainable Development, 3 August – 18 September 2020, Virtual, Thailand

The 7-week online course provided extensive practical advice to public- and private-sector stakeholders for building their capacity to implement relevant trade facilitation instruments.

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The course combined video presentations, online exercises, group work and interactive sessions with experts. It covered several key trade facilitation topics: The concept of trade facilitation and sustainable development; the state of play of trade facilitation in the region and beyond; indicators for assessing trade facilitation performance; the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA); the role of National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC); a workshop on Business Process Analysis (BPA) to simplify trade procedures; a workshop on enhancing Trade Information Portals (TIPs); implementing paperless trade and Single Windows; digital trade facilitation and emerging technologies; and other advanced topics in trade facilitation.

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/events/escap-artnet-itd-online-course-trade-facilitation-sustainable-development>

Online Course on Enhancing Trade Information Portals



A new self-directed online course providing practical advice on improving Trade information portals (TIPs) has been developed. TIPs have enormous potential for enhancing regulatory transparency and facilitating trade (especially for small and medium enterprises), but ensuring their quality and sustainability remains a challenge.

The course provides guidance on what a TIP needs in order to be effective and sustainable, including a governance framework and improvement roadmap to organize analysts' thinking when assessing, comparing and improving TIPs. The course also discusses the future of TIPs – both their challenges and new opportunities. A guide, video presentations, quizzes and supplementary material aid participants' learning.

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/our-work/trade-investment-innovation/etip>

ESCAP and ITD

Webinar on Enhancing Trade Information Portals (TIPs), 26 January 2021, Virtual

ESCAP and ITD organized a virtual webinar to launch the course and guide on Enhancing Trade Information Portals (TIPs). In addition, the webinar featured a panel, comprising experts with relevant experience in establishing and/or operating TIPs, discussing practical measures for assessing and enhancing TIPs to make them more sustainable and provide more relevant and up to date information to the trade community.

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/events/2021/webinar-enhancing-trade-information-portals-tips>

UNCTAD, ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA, FAO and WTO

Initiative on Model Provisions for Trade in Times of Crisis and Pandemic in Regional and other Trade Agreements



Following the ad-hoc trade response to COVID-19, a review of existing bilateral and regional trade agreements found that they do not feature adequate provisions for emergency or crisis situations. The on-going effort is coordinated by ESCAP, and implemented jointly by UNCTAD and the UN Regional Commissions (ECA, ECLAC, ESCAP, ESCWA and UNECE) in cooperation with WTO other organizations.

More information is available here:

<https://www.unescap.org/resources/initiative-model-provisions-trade-times-crisis-and-pandemic-regional-and-other-trade#>

Webinar Series: Towards Model Provisions for Trade in Times of Crisis and Pandemic in Regional and other Trade Agreements, 28 October - 2 November 2020, Virtual, Thailand

Following the successful conclusion of a Policy Hackathon as part of the Initiative on Model Provisions for Trade in Times of Crisis and Pandemic in Regional and other Trade Agreements, a webinar series was organized to

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discuss and build upon the top contributions received. The webinar series was organized by ESCAP, UNCTAD, WTO and SMU in collaboration with FAO and other United Nations Regional Commissions and included a webinar dedicated to trade facilitation.

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/events/webinar-series-towards-model-provisions-trade-times-crisis-and-pandemic-regional-and-other#>

UNCTAD, ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA

Expert Group meeting on Trade Facilitation in Times of Crisis and Epidemic, 29-30 July 2020, Virtual, Thailand

The COVID-19 crisis and policy responses by governments have highlighted the importance of enhancing trade and global value chain resilience to ensure access to essential goods and services - and accelerate recovery. In that context, ESCAP organized the first Expert Group Meeting on Trade Facilitation (TF) Measures in Times of Crisis and Epidemic, in order to identify good practices that countries have implemented during the crisis and develop a set of recommended measures that will help cope with future crises. This 2-part event was delivered by the UN Development Account Project on “Transport and Trade Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics”, and jointly implemented by UNCTAD and the 5 UN Regional Commissions.

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/events/expert-group-meeting-trade-facilitation-times-crisis-and-epidemic>

ESCAP and WCO

Launch of the Joint Task Force on Cross-border Electronic Data Exchange, July 2020, Virtual

Further building on the UNNExT Task Force on Cross-border Electronic Data Exchange: North-East Asia, ESCAP and WCO launched a joint task force on Cross-border Electronic Data Exchange. The joint task force works on initiating (pilot-based) electronic data exchange among participating Customs administrations based on business need. The activities of the joint task force include assessing business need for electronic data exchange, harmonizing data requirement in selected trade documents and applying emerging technologies to advance data exchange.

ORGANIZATION'S UPDATES

ADB

Stakeholder Workshop, 12-13 March 2020, Kolkata, India

This workshop discussed the outcome of the SASEC Trade Facilitation Route Initiative Study along the Kolkata-Dhaka route. Presentations were made on the infrastructure and trade facilitation scenario covering the situation along the route, gap analysis, and proposed recommendations. Country-specific recommendations were discussed in parallel session for Bangladesh and India.

Coping with Pandemics in SASEC through Trade Facilitation, 23 June 2020, Virtual

This workshop discussed the impact of the pandemic on trade, the trade facilitation agenda, and possible ways to address existing and emerging challenges. Participants agreed that there is an urgent need to put in place special measures which may be triggered during emergency situations.

Dissemination Event, 5 November 2020, Virtual

This event presented findings from the book “Borders without Barriers: Facilitating Trade in SASEC Countries”, highlighting the need for SASEC countries to adopt measures for streamlining border procedures, and reform regulatory policies and infrastructure development.

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3rd Border Level Meeting of Customs Administrations of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN), 21 December 2020, Virtual

This meeting aimed to enhance Customs-to-Customs cooperation at the field level in order to resolve operational issues. It also discussed challenges faced in facilitating trade at border crossing points and ways to improve Customs cooperation in solving operational difficulties.

More information is available here: <https://www.sasec.asia/index.php?page=event&eid=325&url=3rd-border-meeting-customs-admin-bbin>

Regional Improvement of Border Services, 14-22 January 2021, Virtual

To continue sharing knowledge in the face of pandemic-related restrictions, ADB and CAREC Institute are developing modules on the Regional Improvement of Border Services (RIBS) and national Single Window projects. Modules on 3 areas were discussed: (1) Project Development and Country Experiences; (2) Single Window Development; (3) Role of Development Partners.

First Webinar - COVID-19 Impact and Recovery Strategies, 27 January 2021, Virtual

Second Webinar - Silk-Road Air Pass: A CAREC Proposal, 10 February 2021, Virtual

These events were under CAREC Webinar Series - Aviation and Tourism.

Ports and Logistics Scoping Study in CAREC Countries, 18 February 2021, Virtual

This study provides background to ports and logistics developments in the region and identifies areas and potential activities requiring cooperation among CAREC countries.

APEC

APEC Workshop on Advance Rulings, 5 February 2020, Putrajaya, Malaysia

Article 3 (Advance Rulings) of the World Trade Organization Agreement on Trade Facilitation (WTO TFA) requires customs authorities to issue traders written, binding rulings on issues such as classification and origin – prior to the importation of goods. The workshop was attended by 36 customs authorities and finance ministry representatives from 14 economies. The workshop highlighted APEC economy-level best practices on advance ruling implementation, with the goal of making advance rulings more user-friendly across the APEC region. The workshop was consistent with past technical assistance jointly funded by the US government and the APEC Committee for Trade and Investment Supply Chain Connectivity Sub-Fund — including expanding the scope of rulings programs; modifying customs procedures to better accommodate advance rulings; and building institutional capacity to issue rulings.

More information is available here:

http://mddb.apec.org/Documents/2020/CTI/WKSP1/20_cti_wksp1_summary.pdf

Building Resilient Supply Chains in APEC: Agility in Crisis Survey Results Forum, 27 October 2020

This workshop explored the findings from the survey on digital transformation and the rise of e-commerce; supply chain disruption; trade facilitation and the role of government in digitization; and SME and women agility during the COVID-10 response. The workshop featured breakout sessions, giving participants the opportunity to delve further into the data and discuss how the private and public sector could work together to ensure that government pandemic support initiatives are appropriate and sufficient to meet the needs of businesses.

More information is available here:

<http://mddb.apec.org/Pages/search.aspx?setting=ListMeetingGroup&DateRange=2020/10/01%2C2020/10/end&Name=Workshop%20on%20Building%20Resilient%20Supply%20Chains%20in%20APEC%3A%20Agility%20in%20Crisis%202020&APECGroup=%22Committee%20on%20Trade%20and%20Investment%20%28CTI%29%22>

Eleventh Meeting of the APEC Alliance for Supply Chain Connectivity (A2C2), 29 October 2020, Putrajaya, Malaysia

The eleventh meeting of the APEC Alliance for Supply Chain Connectivity (A2C2) primarily focused on the pandemic's effects on supply chain networks. Recent experiences have stressed the importance of supply chain

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resilience and regulatory convergence. With COVID-19 impacting government, industry, and non-government stakeholders alike, the meeting served to capture the challenges, lessons learned, adaptations, and innovations taken by stakeholders in managing supply chain impacts.

It was attended by 62 public and private stakeholders from 11 economies.

More information is available here: http://mddb.apec.org/Documents/2020/CTI/A2C2-2/20_cti_a2c2_2_summary.pdf

ASEAN

ASEAN Single Window (ASW)

The ASEAN Single Window (ASW) is a regional initiative to integrate the National Single Windows (NSW) of ASEAN Member States (AMS).

By the end of 2019, all AMS had joined the ASW Live Operation, opening vast windows of opportunity for handling trade procedures such as preferential tariffs based on the efficient exchange of electronic documents. ASW already includes Electronic Certificates of Origin, and is currently testing an expansion to exchange ASEAN Customs Declaration Document with live exchange expected to begin within 2020. AMS are also preparing their national systems and regulations to allow the exchange of e-Phyto Certificates.

More information is available here: <https://asw.asean.org/>

Simplifying Trade Through Self-Certification of Origin, 20 September 2020, Jakarta, Indonesia

Continuous enhancement are being considered for the Rules of Origin (RoO) specified in the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) for goods traded among ASEAN states. Specifically improving the ATIGA Form D Certificate of Origin (CO), which is issued by a national government to exporters so that it can be used by counterpart importers for a preferential tariff rate under ATIGA. Against this background, the ASEAN-wide Self-Certification Scheme (AWSC) was recently launched to further facilitate intra-ASEAN trade. This initiative allows exporters who have demonstrated their competence to comply with ATIGA RoO requirements, known as “Certified Exporters”, to self-certify the origin status for their goods to be eligible for ATIGA tariff preferences. With this new implementation, Certified Exporters are now able to make out Origin Declaration to all ASEAN Member States.

More information is available here: <https://awsc.asean.org>

ASEAN MOU on essential goods enters into force, 13 November 2020, Jakarta, Indonesia

The MOU is part of the Hanoi Action Plan on strengthening supply chain connectivity adopted in June 2020. It commits ASEAN Member States (AMS) to refrain from imposing restrictive trade measures on essential goods and supplies except for public health emergencies.

More information is available here: <https://asean.org/asean-mou-essential-goods-enters-force/>

ASEAN, Australia, New Zealand launch e-learning modules to enhance compliance to International Sanitary and Phytosanitary Standards, 17 November 2020, Jakarta, Indonesia

The e-learning contains 16 modules as part of four ASEAN Regional Guidelines, focusing on basic principles of the SPS Agreement and risk analysis in the areas of animal health, plant health, and food safety. The modules would benefit government officials working on food safety, plant health, animal health, as well as the public at large.

More information is available here: <https://asean.org/asean-australia-new-zealand-launch-e-learning-modules-enhance-compliance-international-standards-sanitary-phytosanitary/>

ASEAN launched ASEAN Customs Transit System (ACTS), 30 November 2020, Virtual

The ASEAN Customs Transit System (ACTS), which will reduce intra-ASEAN trading challenges and enable companies to benefit fully from the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the free movement of goods across the ASEAN region.

More information is available here: <https://asean.org/joint-press-release-asean-eus-new-online-customs-transit-system-set-boost-trade-asean-region/> and <https://acts.asean.org>

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ESCAP

8th Meeting of the Legal and Technical Working Groups on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation, 14-16 October 2020, Bangkok, Thailand

The Legal and Technical Working Groups of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation held its eighth meeting virtually and continued carrying out their mandated tasks, including preparing supporting documents of the draft implementation roadmap for the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/events/8th-meeting-legal-and-technical-working-groups-cross-border-paperless-trade-facilitation>

Seventh Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Week, 25-29 January 2021, Bangkok, Thailand

The Seventh Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Week brought together government officials and other stakeholders to discuss key issues for trade and investment policy in the region. The Sixth Meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-Border Paperless Trade Facilitation was held on 25-26 January 2021 to focus on preparing a draft implementation roadmap of the agreement and related supporting documents. It also discussed how ESCAP member states could facilitate their joining the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. The ESCAP Committee on Trade and Investment — the key platform

for regional dialogue and intergovernmental collaboration on trade and investment — convened its seventh session during the Week, from 27 to 29 January 2021.

More information is available here: <https://www.unescap.org/events/seventh-asia-pacific-trade-and-investment-week>

Standards Trade and Development Facility (STDF)

Future-proofing Safe Trade during COVID-19, 26 May 2020, Virtual

The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented disruption for businesses and border crossings, with consequences felt across global supply chains. For developing countries, where health systems, infrastructure and resources face longstanding gaps, governments and the private sector, including MSMEs, now face huge challenges.

The STDF held a virtual discussion on 26 May 2020 on how STDF partners are responding to COVID-19.

More information is available here: <https://standardsfacility.org/future-proofing-safe-trade-during-covid-19>

ePhyto Webinar: Solutions on Safe Trade in Plants and Plant Products, 23 September 2020, Virtual



A virtual discussion took place on 23 September 2020 to discuss how countries are using ePhyto (exchange of electronic phytosanitary certificates) to safely facilitate trade in plants and plant products across borders. During this webinar the STDF presented the results of [ePhyto: Enhancing Safe Trade in Plants and Plant Products](#) to scale up the ePhyto solution.

This initiative is being led by IPPC as part of a STDF project, backed by international organizations, donors and industry associations.

UNCTAD

Trade Facilitation and Expedited Shipments. Lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis, 27 April 2020, Virtual

Expedited Shipments were one of the earliest, most comprehensive and desired outcomes of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. The question, however, is if the provision in the Agreement on Expedited Shipment as

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contained in Article 7.8 is enough to address the rising expectations of online traders and shoppers for speedy cross border e-commerce and emergency deliveries, especially after the COVID-19 global pandemic?

This session addressed these questions and explored how national postal services and other logistics providers involved in e-commerce are becoming essential for the facilitation of this type of cross-border trade during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

More information is available here: <https://unctad.org/meeting/trade-facilitation-and-expedited-shipments-lessons-learned-covid-19-crisis>

Online training course on Trade Facilitation, 21 September – 21 December 2020, Virtual



The main objective of this course was to empower NTFCs to successfully undertake their mandate to implement, in a coordinated manner, trade facilitation reforms, including the provisions of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Successful and efficient NTFCs will help countries streamline their international trade. The online training, tutored by an UNCTAD Trade Facilitation expert, counted 30 participants - 11 women and 19 men - from more than 20 public sector agencies, in addition to several private sector entities engaged in National Trade Facilitation Committees.

More information is available here: <https://unctad.org/meeting/online-training-course-trade-facilitation-curso-de-formacao-online-sobre-facilitacao-do>

Multi-year expert meeting on transport, trade logistics and trade facilitation, eighth session, 27-28 October 2020, Virtual

The 8th session of the multi-year expert meeting provided a timely opportunity to build on current momentum in translating ambitious trade facilitation targets into concrete policies. Special attention was given to climate change, especially for seaports, in support of the 2030 Agenda. These recommendations can serve as inputs for other intergovernmental meetings and processes that will take place in 2020.

More information is available here: <https://unctad.org/meeting/multi-year-expert-meeting-transport-trade-logistics-and-trade-facilitation-eighth-session>

Transparency in Trade Regulation and Facilitation in the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus, and Online Regional Forum (November 2020)

UNCTAD with the support of the Government of Australia and New Zealand provides assistance to the nine Pacific island countries – Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNCTAD PACER Plus team reacted quickly. All beneficiary countries were contacted to learn firsthand the reality and challenges that Pacific SIDS were facing. National counterparts were provided with background reports, studies and material that analyzed the economic impact of COVID-19 in the Pacific region. A new section was added to each country's trade information portal to better inform traders of pandemic measures. Due to the COVID-19 situation a no-cost extension of the programme until June 2021 has been granted.

More information is available here: <https://unctad.org/topic/transport-and-trade-logistics/trade-facilitation>

UNECE

Expert Consultation Workshop for National Trade Facilitation Roadmap for Kyrgyzstan, 27 October 2020, Geneva Switzerland

Experts in the workshop discussed the impact of COVID-19 on the vision, goals and priority activities of Kyrgyzstan's Trade Facilitation Roadmap. This expert consultation provided an opportunity for trade-related stakeholders to share their priorities and needs. It will be followed-up by drafting the Roadmap in consultation with the National Trade Facilitation Council of Kyrgyzstan.

More information is available here: <https://unece.org/trade/events/expert-consultation-workshop-national-trade-facilitation-roadmap-kyrgyzstan>

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Project on Enhancing Transparency and Traceability of Sustainable Value Chains in Garment and Footwear

The UNECE, with support from the European Union, is leading an international effort to provide solutions to make it easier to track, trace and label products in the garment and footwear industry. In January 2020, the project launched a blockchain pilot to enable the exchange of sustainability information from field to shelf. Subsequent work has developed guidelines for implementation and information exchange standards. The upcoming UNECE/CEFACT Plenary and sixty-ninth UNECE Session on April 19-21 in Geneva, Switzerland will invite industry actors to join a “Call to Action” for increased traceability in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda.

More information is available here: <https://unece.org/trade/traceability-sustainable-garment-and-footwear>

WCO

WCO Sub-regional Virtual Workshop on Post Clearance Audit for ASEAN, 2-6 November 2020, Bangkok Thailand



The virtual workshop was designed to enhance Members’ competencies on Post-Clearance Audit and offer assistance in identifying gaps between current capacity and practical application at 50 international standards.

It was attended by 37 promising officials nominated by 8 ASEAN Members, plus over 20 observers. The workshop was organized by ROCB A/P in collaboration with the WCO, under the sponsorship of Customs Cooperation Fund Japan (CCF/Japan).

More information is available here: http://www.rocb-ap.org/file_media/file_image/file/ENL/ilovepdf_merged.pdf

ROCB A/P attends WCO Global Free Zone Online Conference, 14 December 2020, Japan



The first WCO Global Free Zone Online Conference was convened at the WCO Headquarters with support of the Government of Japan. The Conference was welcomed by Customs administrations and external stakeholders under the theme “Meeting the Sustainable Development Goals –Ensuring Customs involvement for Free Zones’ competitiveness, safety and sustainability”.

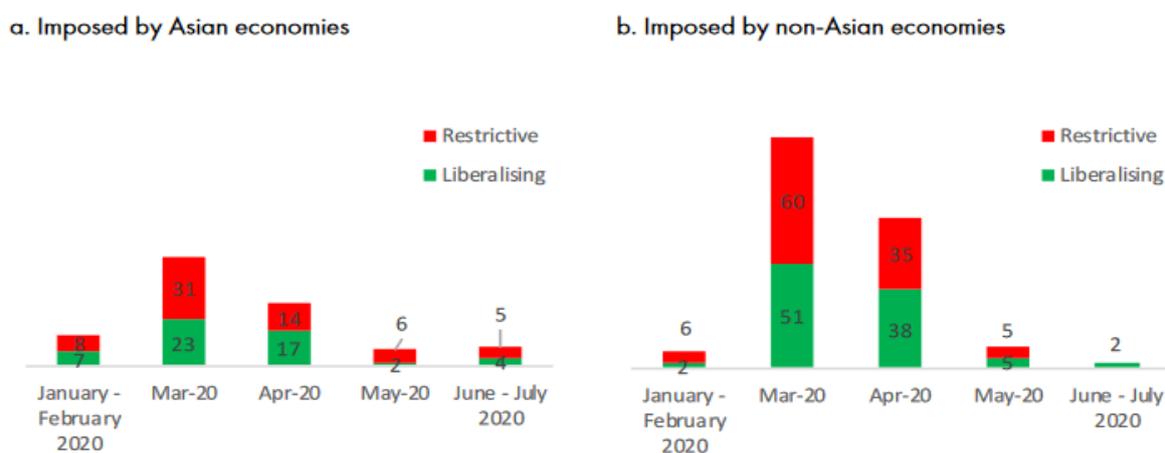
More information is available here: http://www.rocb-ap.org/file_media/file_image/file/ENL/ilovepdf_merged.pdf

Highlights from ADB-ESCAP Report on *Regional Cooperation for Trade and Transport Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics in Asia and the Pacific*

The Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has massively disrupted international trade. Trade and transport facilitation must be further leveraged, especially in digitizing trade, to keep goods moving across borders. COVID-19 hit the global economy at an unprecedented speed and scale. The policy response – designed to contain its spread – often had restrictive consequences for trade. Entry points were closed, while new sanitary procedures and quarantine requirements complicated international transport. Temporary export bans for essential medical equipment and restrictions on essential food exports were common. Trade performance suffered, while the seamless flow of goods was impeded – disrupting supply chains. Since then, governments, border agencies, logistics companies and traders have been exploring how they can strengthen existing trade and transport facilitation measures. Despite much work, as of July 2020, the balance still lent towards trade restriction, as shown in Figure 1.

By far the highest number of restrictive and liberalizing measures were applied to medical goods, with the agricultural sector coming in second.

Figure 1: Timeline of COVID-19 related trade measures, by effect on trade



Source: ADB staff calculations using data from International Trade Centre, <https://www.intracen.org> (accessed 25 August 2020).

Liberalizing efforts ranged from loosening of import regulations, to accelerated implementation of pre-existing initiatives, to regional cooperation and new innovations. They can be broadly broken down into six categories, with the most common policies summarized in Table 1. A prime focus has been placed on effort to digitize trade (with measures summarized in the table), which allows procedures to be streamlined and creates new platforms for transparency, all the while reducing physical contact. Despite countries' efforts to keep their borders open, severe bottlenecks persist. In addition, the oft-fragmented policy response prevented a more effective reaction to the pandemic. Much work remains to be done.

The existing cooperation mechanisms for trade and transport connectivity in Asia and the Pacific should be mobilized. This includes the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, and the intergovernmental agreements on the Asian Highway and the Trans-Asian Railway Networks. Complementing this, regional coordination in times of crises can also be institutionalized in future negotiations of trade agreements.

Table 1. Practices of COVID-19 Trade and Transport Facilitation Measures across the Region

Area	Selected trade and transport facilitation measures
Transparency and institutional coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating an outreach portal (single-window COVID-19 portal) to provide information on rules and recommendations, including trade facilitation measures implemented by central and local governments; • Publishing and notifying trade facilitation measures to relevant international organizations (WTO and WCO); • All-Government approach with creation of task forces/governing body comprising of Customs authorities, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Commerce etc.; • Coordination of border, domestic and cross-border border agencies; • Collaboration for expedited clearance of emergency supplies.
Simplification of customs procedures and expedited clearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 24/7 clearance system at major ports; • Reduction and waiving of taxes and duties for goods essential to combating the spread of the pandemic; • Expedited clearance through green lanes and exclusive service windows with designated officers; • Simplification of import, export and transit documentary requirements and procedures; • Risk management to prioritize clearance of imports and exports to low-risk critical supplies; • Recognition of testing reports and certificates by competent foreign authorities, as well as third parties for expedited clearance of essential medical supplies; • Allowing trusted traders/ Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) to be granted expedited clearance.
Digital trade and transport facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leveraging information technology and facilitate more streamlined customs procedures and electronic exchange of information between transport and control authorities; • Implementing Government digital platforms to facilitate remote working; • Allowing submission of electronic documents including additional digital document to be submitted via single window and other web portals; • Introducing e-registration of travel documents; • Creating web portals to inform about areas under lockdown and road closures.
Transport and transit facilitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of guidelines on the prevention and control of COVID-19 for border-crossing officials and transport crews; • Designated priority lanes and green corridors for essential goods and designated truck stop and rest area locations; • Enhancing disinfection and sanitisation regime of transport property and facilities; • Use of TIR/e-TIR system to facilitate transport and transit.
Business facilitation measures and trade finance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch of financial support package to support business by reducing tax and allowing deferral payments, with support of SMEs as a priority; • Allowing SMEs easier access to trade facilitation information and measures, improving digital capacities of SMEs and providing training assistance for SMEs resilience; • Reduction in landing/port fees to help aviation and shipping industries; • Leveraging of e-commerce and broadcasting sales to boost exports; • Provision of various export credit insurance tools with reduced administrative fees; • Introduction of online trade finance facilities and provision of digital solutions for trade finance.

Source: ESCAP compilation.

“**Coordination, digitalization, harmonization and partnership**” could remain as guiding principles of the trade and transport response during the pandemic and in its aftermath.

Coordination: improving cross-border procedures in lieu of fragmented operations

International collaboration should focus on coordinating cross-border operations in line with best practices from recent discussions organized by regional institutions : 1) Maintaining supply chains with designated “green lanes”; 2) Expedited screening and testing protocols for transport crews; 3) Mutual recognition of COVID-19 certificates; 4) Mutual exchange of relevant risk information; 5) Leveraging innovative border-crossing formalities, notably as enabled by digital technologies 6) Priority clearance and transport for essential goods, including via pre-clearance, Single Window processing, permits and registered drivers and vehicles.

Digitalization: pursuing trade and transport digitalization as a regional strategy

Digitalization has been hailed as the winning strategy for pandemic response. Robust technical infrastructures and end-to-end digital processes are key elements to safeguard productivity and connectivity during disastrous events.

The COVID-19 crisis has given a tremendous impetus to accelerate paperless trade, especially in implementing planned Single Window systems and accept digital documents. However, the lack of a holistic legal and institutional framework, either at the national or regional level, and fragmented levels of digital infrastructure development have become constraints on paperless trade. In this regard, the COVID-19 crisis underscores the role of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific in reducing trade cost and facilitating regional supply chain resilience. It will also provide opportunities to exchange and harmonize practices and develop specific technical and legal protocols needed to achieve safe and secure paperless trade. COVID-19 has also emphasized the importance of digital technologies in transport, such as integrated transport management systems, intelligent transport systems and digital logistic platforms, especially for rail freight.

Harmonization: incorporating pandemic related provisions in regional agreements

Existing treaties have failed to provide adequate guidance on how trade-related measures can be adapted during crisis while preserving the national interests. In response, ESCAP organized a “Policy Hackathon” in June 2020 to gather inputs for the development of model provisions that could plug the gaps in existing RTAs. Recommendations included: 1) Harmonizing e-CO on the regional level; 2) Developing territorial requirement chapters to guarantee cooperation among transit and landlocked developing countries in times of crises; 3) Further streamlining Customs documentation in the establishment of Simplified Trade Regimes; 4) Developing legal instruments, especially regional frameworks, for maintaining cooperation during times of crisis.

Partnership: engaging private sectors in response to COVID-19

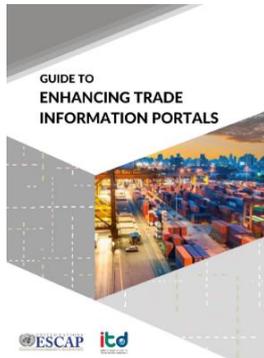
Private sector firms have responded to the pandemic with enormous dynamism, supporting the resilience of supply chains, developing tools for tracing the disease and sometimes providing smart solutions for public services. Moreover, COVID-19 has brought attention to the role of private sector firms engaged in trade and transport facilitation, such as business and trade chambers, transport associations, forwarder association and customs brokers.

These firms could play significant roles in enhancing information flows, developing and implementing business continuity plans, promoting transparency, and ensuring supply chain connectivity. Building back better requires strengthened partnership between the public and private sectors.

For more details, please refer to “**Regional Cooperation for Trade and Transport Connectivity in the Age of the Pandemic in Asia and the Pacific**”, ADB-ESCAP, 2020, available at: <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/regional-cooperation-trade-and-transport-connectivity-age-pandemics-asia-and-pacific-0>.

RESOURCES AND PUBLICATIONS

Highlighted resource



Guide to Enhancing Trade Information Portals, 15 January 2021

This guide, developed by ESCAP together with ITD and expert inputs from UNECE and UNCTAD, proposes a governance framework and guidelines for assessing and improving Trade Information Portals (TIPs). Countries benefit enormously from ensuring their TIPs provide a transparent trading environment, especially for SMEs and (as illustrated during the COVID-19 pandemic) during crises. Readers of this guide will benefit from detailed practical advice on how to assess the “as-is” condition of a TIP and learn to make improvement recommendations. The proposed framework highlights the role of a strong mandate; inter-agency collaboration; and a cyclical governance framework that emphasizes continuous improvement in ensuring a TIP becomes effective and sustainable. Learning is supported an a self-directed online course (with video presentations, quizzes and a certificate for completion), available at: <https://www.unescap.org/our-work/trade-investment-innovation/etip>

Available here: <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/guide-enhancing-trade-information-portals>

ADB



The Case for Regional Cooperation in Trade and Investment Finance for Asia, May 2020

This brief examines the role of export credit agencies (ECAs) in supporting trade and investment, and highlights how greater regional cooperation in Asia could enhance it. The brief argues that greater regional cooperation in Asia would facilitate access to trade and investment finance. Such cooperation could involve regulation to level the playing field or the creation of a regional ECA. The brief highlights lessons for the design of a new regional ECA.

Available here: <https://www.adb.org/publications/regional-cooperation-trade-investment-finance-asia>



Does Infrastructure Facilitate Trade Connectivity? Evidence from ASEAN, August 2020

The report investigates the how infrastructure interacts with the extent of regional trade interdependence of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Findings show, among others, that the regional integration in the region is strong; there are emerging trade-intensive paths among a few countries; and shipping and air transport developments have improved the trade connectivity.

Available here: <https://www.adb.org/publications/does-infrastructure-facilitate-trade-connectivity-asean>



Trade and Maritime Transport Trends in the Pacific, November 2020

The study reviews trade patterns and provides recommendations on regional approaches to help address shared constraints such as climate change and exposure to external shocks. It looks at how trade flows in the Pacific are changing, how growth will affect seaport operations and shipping services, and how trade efficiency can be improved.

Available here: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/646356/trade-maritime-transport-trends-pacific.pdf>

RESOURCES AND PUBLICATIONS



Blockchain Technology for Paperless Trade Facilitation in Maldives, December 2020

The publication outlines key blockchain use cases recommended for implementation in the Maldives to facilitate trade. A feasibility study conducted from April to July 2019 established the use cases of blockchain technology to facilitate cross-border trade and improve operational performance of domestic trade processes.

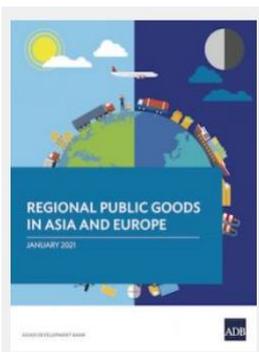
Available here: <https://www.adb.org/publications/blockchain-technology-paperless-trade-facilitation-maldives>



Infrastructure Quality, Cross-Border Connectivity, and Trade Costs, December 2020

High costs of trade make the production process slow and costly, forcing international trade to concentrate in locations with better infrastructure and lower tariffs. This process saps trade flows away from disadvantage geographically disadvantaged remote islands and landlocked countries. Such places must continue improving their infrastructure quality and regional connectivity.

Available here: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/668346/adbi-wp1208.pdf>

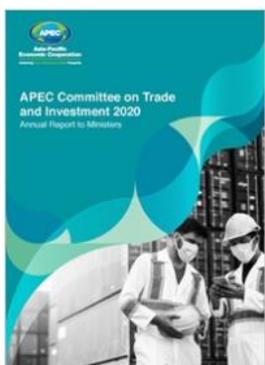


Regional Public Goods in Asia and Europe, January 2021

The report reviews the concept of Regional Public Goods (RPGs), along with the challenges and benefits of their provision in Asia and Europe. It presents case studies and a comparative analysis of the arrangements taken toward RPG provision in both regions, offering lessons for Asia.

Available here: <https://www.adb.org/publications/regional-public-goods-asia-europe>

APEC



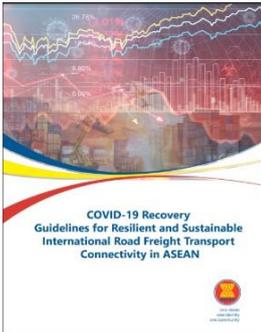
2020 CTI Annual Report to Ministers, November 2020

The 2020 CTI Annual Report to Ministers highlights the CTI and sub-fora's progress and achievements in key priority areas of APEC's Trade and Investment Liberalization and Facilitation (TILF) agenda. It intends to support Malaysia's APEC 2020 priorities: Improve the narrative of trade and investment; inclusive economic participation through digital economy and technology; and driving innovative sustainability.

Available here: <https://www.apec.org/Publications/2020/11/2020-CTI-Annual-Report-to-Ministers>

RESOURCES AND PUBLICATIONS

ASEAN

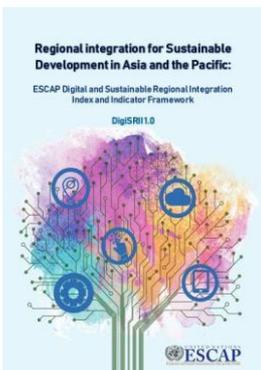


COVID-19 Recovery Guidelines for Resilient and Sustainable International Road Freight Transport Connectivity in ASEAN, February 2021

These guidelines support ASEAN Member States in establishing their regional and national transport connectivity recovery plans with a focus on resilience and sustainability, as well as developing regional COVID-19 recovery guidelines on cross-border road freight transport. They also contribute to the implementation of initiatives under the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework adopted at the 37th ASEAN Summit.

Available here: <https://asean.org/storage/asean-covid-19-guidelines.pdf>

ESCAP

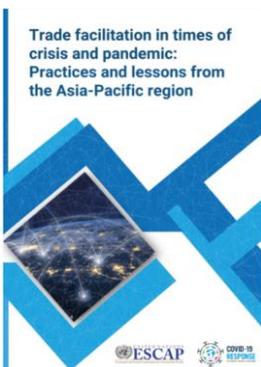


ESCAP Digital and Sustainable Regional Integration Index (DigiSRII 1.0), 16 April 2020

The ESCAP Digital and Sustainable Regional Integration Index (DigiSRII), is an attempt to bring together the various dimensions of regional integration while accounting for the growing importance of digital and sustainable development. The work focuses on developing a global indicator framework for digital and sustainable regional integration. The approach of DigiSRII recognizes that policymakers in different economies and regions may prioritize different areas of regional integration. As such, very simple aggregation techniques are adopted in building the index, making it as transparent as possible, and providing a basis for policy analysts to develop their own version as they

see fit, using the underlying data.

Available here: <https://www.unescap.org/resources/DigiSRII>

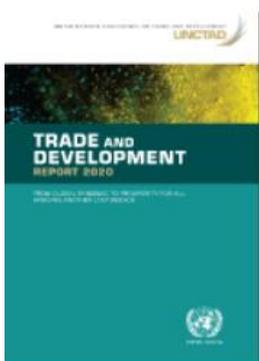


Trade Facilitation in Time of Crisis and Pandemic Practices and Lessons from the Asia-Pacific, 20 January 2021

Experience in the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of maintaining trade connectivity not only for the immediate pandemic response, but also for the subsequent recovery efforts. The report first describes the initial developments and lessons learnt in trade and transport facilitation practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. It then presents the results of the Survey on Trade Facilitation in Times of Crisis and Pandemic in the Asia and the Pacific region. Finally, it discusses the ways for trade facilitation to build back better and support a sustainable and resilient recovery in the Asia-Pacific region.

Available here: <https://www.unescap.org/kp/2021/trade-facilitation-times-crisis-and-pandemic-practices-and-lessons-asia-pacific>

UNCTAD



Trade and Development Report 2020, September 2020

This year's Trade and Development Report argues that the global economic crisis caused by COVID-19 throws up a stark choice: continue misguided policy choices or collectively chart a new path that leads from recovery to a more resilient, more equal and more environmentally sustainable world in line with the ambition of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Available here: <https://unctad.org/webflyer/trade-and-development-report-2020>

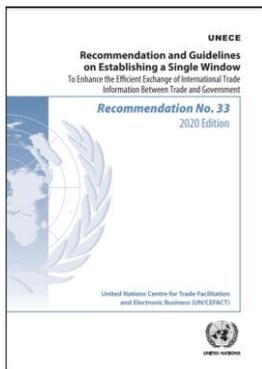
UNECE



White Paper on Blockchain in Trade Facilitation (ECE/TRADE/457), September 2020

This is a White Paper which looks at how Blockchain technology could be used to facilitate trade and related business processes. In this updated version, you find potential uses of Blockchain in different sectors in the second part of the paper. This work is also accompanied by a repository of case studies on Blockchain. A previous White Paper (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2019/8) examines Blockchain's impact on the technical standards of UN/CEFACT.

Available here: https://unece.org/DAM/trade/Publications/ECE-TRADE-457E_WPBlockchainTF.pdf

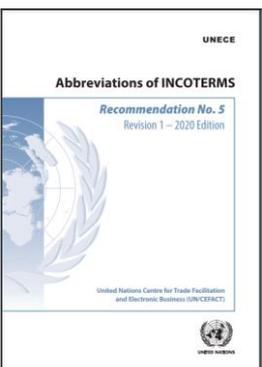


Recommendation No.33: Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a Single Window (ECE/TRADE/352/Rev.1), September 2020

This document provides recommendations for the implementation of a National Single Window (NSW) system.

In many countries, companies involved in international trade must prepare and submit large volumes of oft-overlapping information to different governmental authorities through different systems. NSWs continue to be recognized as a valuable step in unifying and simplifying the information handling process, massively facilitating trade.

Available here: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/ECE-TRADE-352_Rev.1E_Rec33_2020Edition.pdf

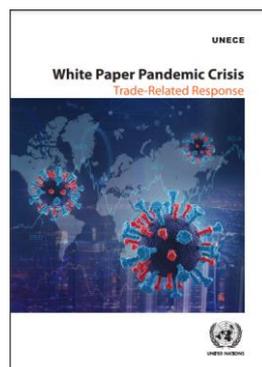


Recommendation N°.5: Abbreviations of INCOTERMS - ECE/TRADE/458 (2020 edition), November 2020

The ICC has developed a coded standard for trade terms known as "INCOTERMS." These terms provide guidance on the division of tasks, costs and risks in the delivery of goods from a seller to a buyer. They date back over a decade and were proposed as a recommendation in UNECE in 1974. The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) coordinates with the ICC the regular updates of Recommendation 5.

With the development of complex global supply chains, it is necessary to ensure a clear understanding of the responsibilities of each stakeholder. The INCOTERMS allow to define this relationship between buyer and seller and all resulting intermediaries.

Available here: <https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/ECE-TRADE-458E-CFRec5.pdf>



White Paper Pandemic Crisis Trade-Related Response (ECE/TRADE/456), January 2021

This paper aims to provide clear, accessible, and concise best practice guidelines to enable efficient control, clearance, and release facilitation measures, and outlines standard operating measures for pandemic situations. The objective is to provide a vision of what best practice looks like and does not aim to be a list of legal obligations.

This paper concentrates on the trade-related aspects of pandemic situations from both the public and private sectors' point of view. The findings of this paper can also apply to epidemics, which are confined to a country, territory, or region.

Available here: <https://unece.org/trade/uncefact/ece-trade-456E>

RESOURCES AND PUBLICATIONS

WCO



Customs fostering sustainability for People, Prosperity and the Planet, 1 February 2021

This publication is designed as a look back on the WCO theme for 2020. It aims to raise awareness of WCO initiatives and programmes and of the relevant WCO tools for building Members' capacity to achieve long-term economic, social and environmental goals at the national, regional and global levels.

Available here: <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2021/february/looking-back-on-the-wco-theme-for-2020.aspx>

WTO



World Trade Report 2020: Government policies to promote innovation in the digital age

In recent years, a growing number of governments have adopted policies aimed at supporting the transition towards a digital economy. The World Trade Report 2020 looks at these policy trends and at how trade and the WTO fit with them.

Available here: https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/wtr20_e/wtr20_e.pdf

UPCOMING EVENTS

Event	Date	Venue	Organizer
12th APEC Alliance for Supply Chain Connectivity	24 February 2021 and in August 2021	Online event	APEC
Sub-Committee on Customs Procedures	26-27 February, 2 March 2021, August 2021	Online event	APEC
Seminar on building economic resilience in small island developing States	4 March 2021	Online event	UNCTAD-Commonwealth
Aviation and Tourism: Safe Travel Applies within CAREC and CAREC Transport Webinar series	10 March 2021	Online event	ADB
Regional stakeholder webinar on Blue BioTrade and BioTrade principles and criteria including CITES requirements	22 - 23 March 2021	Online event	UNCTAD-OECS-CITTES
Investing in Safe Trade Systems to Protect Health and Market Access" at the Aid for Trade Stocktaking Event	24 March 2021	TBC	STDF
STDF's Working Group¹	30-31 March - 1 April 2021	TBC	STDF
Technical Workshop on CAREC Free Trade Agreements	March 2021	TBC	ADB
CAREC Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures Week and 2nd Meeting of the CAREC Regional Working Group on SPS	April 2021	TBC	ADB
2-day Workshop on Digital CAREC Framework: E-commerce and Fintech	April 2021	TBC	ADB
27th Session - UN/CEFACT Plenary	19-20 April 2021	Geneva Switzerland	UNECE
Sixty-ninth session of the Commission	20-21 April 2021	Geneva, Switzerland	UNECE
20th Meeting of ASEAN Trade Facilitation Joint Consultative Committee	5-6 May 2021	Online event	ASEAN
CAREC Conference on Customs Information Exchange and Digital Trade Innovations back-to-back with 20th Customs Cooperation Committee Meeting	May 2021	TBC	ADB
5th ESCAP-WCO UNNExT Masterclass	7 – 11 June 2021	Online event	ESCAP-WCO
21st Meeting of ASEAN Trade Facilitation Joint Consultative Committee	7-8 July 2021	Online event	ASEAN
ESCAP-ITD Trade Facilitation for Sustainable Development course	July 2021	Online event	ESCAP-ITD
Asia eCommerce Week: Shaping the digital economy for all	17-21 October 2021	Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates	UNCTAD
10th Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum (APTFF) 2021	October 2021	TBC	ESCAP-ADB
Fifth Meeting - UN/LOCODE Advisory Group	8-9 November 2021	Geneva Switzerland	UNECE
Advisory Group on Advanced Technologies in Trade and Logistics - Third session	10-11 November 2021	Geneva Switzerland	UNECE

¹ In case of interest in participating in any of STDF practitioner groups, pls. contact STDFSecretariat@wto.org

Highlight

Asia and the Pacific

Accelerating Trade Digitalization Amid The Pandemic

February 20th marks the entry into force of the Framework Agreement on Facilitating Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, a timely reminder of how the COVID-19 pandemic has brought digital solutions to regional development challenges into the limelight. Paperless trade across borders has proven an effective way to mitigate trade disruptions since the onset of the crisis, enabling commerce to continue while limiting physical contact. Yet, despite the increasing acceptance of electronic documents, implementation of cross-border paperless trade remains low according to the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation for Asia and the Pacific, writes Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana, UN Under-Secretary General.

[Jakarta Post](#); [Dhaka Tribune](#); [Korea Times](#); [Bangkok Post](#); [Phnom Penh Post](#); [European Sting](#); [Evening Report](#), op-ed

Global

WTO Informal Ministerial emphasizes Role of Trade in Promoting COVID-19 Recovery, 1 February 2020, 1 February 2020

An informal World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial gathering focused on trade policy challenges and priorities ahead of the 12th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12). Twenty-nine WTO members representing a wide range of trade interests discussed approaches to overcoming the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic; proposals for facilitating trade and reducing trade barriers on medical goods; and environmental aspects of trade policy, among other issues.

The virtual meeting convened on 29 January 2021 in place of the traditional informal WTO ministerial, and was chaired by Switzerland in the margins of the World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting in Davos.

<http://sdg.iisd.org/news/informal-ministerial-highlights-role-of-trade-in-promoting-covid-19-recovery/>

Asia and the Pacific

Trade and investment 'indispensable' to post-COVID recovery in Asia and the Pacific, UN meeting says, 29 January 2021

International trade, investment, and resilient supply chains are indispensable for recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, high-level delegates stressed this week at the Seventh Session of the Committee on Trade and Investment convened by the United Nations Economic

and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

With the pandemic coming on top of trade tensions among leading economies and many countries already retreating to protectionism and nationalism, the world has witnessed the worst economic performance since the Great Depression of the 1930s. ESCAP estimates that Asia and the Pacific lost \$2.2 trillion in trade in 2020, based on pre-pandemic growth forecasts, with trade in services hit the hardest. Decline in foreign investment is similarly staggering.

<https://www.unescap.org/news/trade-and-investment-indispensable-post-covid-recovery-asia-and-pacific-un-meeting-says#>

ASEAN

ASEAN hits historic milestone with signing of RCEP, 15 November 2020

It was a momentous day as Leaders of ASEAN Member States, as well as Australia, China, Japan, the Republic of Korea and New Zealand witnessed the signing of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. "The signing of the RCEP Agreement is a historic event as it underpins ASEAN's role in leading a multilateral trade agreement of this magnitude, despite global and regional challenges and eight years of negotiations," said Dato Lim Jock Hoi, Secretary-General of ASEAN.

<https://asean.org/asean-hits-historic-milestone-signing-rcep/>

Road freight in ASEAN: New COVID-19 Response and Recovery Guidelines, 18 February 2021

The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) Member States will have new tools to help them address issues related to road freight transport caused by the COVID-19 pandemic as part of the initiatives under the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework. ASEAN has approved guidelines to support the recovery of road freight transport among its Member States.

The guidelines will support Member States to develop national and regional plans that focus on resilient and sustainable road freight connectivity. They will provide recommendations for responses to the pandemic in the three priority areas, namely: (i) transport workers' safety and training; (ii) preserving connectivity for efficient and resilient supply chains; and (iii) building back better through digital, resilient and decarbonized transport connectivity. It provides a framework for immediate, medium and long-term support for the development of regional cross-border road freight transport.

<https://www.unescap.org/news/road-freight-asean-new-covid-19-response-and-recovery-guidelines?fbclid=IwAR0tkEt7Xvl->

[ZECdXvCi8bcj544zHWL5G7pSSgxKKXRtV2ndGs5isV_Odyo#](#)

Bangladesh

Bangladesh enters era of paperless trade from today, 20 February 2021

Bangladesh entered the era of paperless trade on February 20th, as member countries of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreed for it to streamline cross-border trade and to expedite customs activities.

The paperless trade facilitation -- aimed at accelerating the implementation of digital trade facilitation measures for trade and development -- will reduce time and cost of exporting and importing goods, especially in less developed countries.

<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/bangladesh-enters-era-paperless-trade-today-2047925>

India

Work focus of Indian Customs shifted to trade facilitation: FM, 27 February 2021

Indian Customs has shifted focus toward easing the difficulty of conducting business and facilitating trade, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said.

In her message on January 26th (International Customs Day), she said adoption of a people-centric approach by Customs officers would further augment the transformative process of the department's functioning. "There has been a paradigm shift in the working of Indian Customs as focus shifted to ease of doing business and trade facilitation. Adopting a people centric approach will further augment the transformative process of Customs functioning," she said.

<https://www.dailyexcelsior.com/work-focus-of-indian-customs-shifted-to-trade-facilitation-fm/>

Cambodia

South Korea FTA talks conclude, 3 February 2021

Cambodia and South Korea on February 3 concluded talks for a bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), which Minister of Commerce Pan Sorasak and his Korean counterpart Yoo Myung-hee plan to sign in mid-2021, setting zero tariffs for a broad range of goods, according to a joint press statement.

The two ministers signed the agreed minutes on the conclusion of negotiations over the Cambodia-Korea Free Trade Agreement (CKFTA) via video link.

The statement said the CKFTA aims to liberalize bilateral trade and further strengthen the economic partnership between the two economies by delivering mutual benefits and welfare for businesspeople and the general public.

<https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/south-korea-fta-talks-conclude>

China

Cross-border paperless deal to boost China's trade facilitation, 22 February 2020

The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, which entered into force on 20 February, will further enhance China's trade facilitation, the Ministry of Commerce said.

The agreement will give full play to China's advantage as an ultra-large market and provide broader market opportunities for Asia-Pacific members, said an official with the ministry's department of international trade and economic affairs.

As members of the deal are all countries along the Belt and Road, the development of cross-border paperless trade will greatly promote the interconnection of Asia-Pacific trade, the official said.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-02/21/c_139757049.htm

South-Asia

BIMSTEC members experience growing trade interconnectedness, 2 February 2021

BIMSTEC members (Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand) have experienced a considerable rise in bilateral trade over the years. A larger volume of exports was observed in the case of Thailand's exports to India (US\$ 5.5 billion in 2015); India's exports to Sri Lanka (US\$ 4.4 billion), Bangladesh (US\$ 3.4 billion), and Nepal (US\$ 2.6 billion); and Myanmar's exports to Thailand (US\$ 3.3 billion) and India (US\$ 1.3 billion). Overall, India and Thailand are two major economies - both in terms of export and import - while Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar are three major economies in terms of import.

<https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/views/views/bimstec-cooperation-on-intra-regional-trade-1611588993>