

Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in Asia and the Pacific

Based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation **2023**



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and Sustainable Trade Facilitation



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FOREWORD

The United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation is jointly conducted by five United Nations Regional Commissions (UNRCs) for Africa (ECA), Europe (ECE), Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and West Asia (ESCWA) as well as with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Led by ESCAP, it aims to gather information from countries worldwide on the implementation of digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures. The results of this Survey, together with related reports, will foster a forward-looking approach to trade facilitation for countries and development partners; this will facilitate a deeper comprehension and monitoring of progress, supporting evidence-based public policies, sharing good practices, and identifying emerging needs for capacity-building and technical assistance.

The Survey is built on strong partnerships with international and subregional organizations including the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Trade Centre (ITC), the Asian Development Bank (ADB), International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN), Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), the Institute and Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS).

This fifth Survey builds upon the earlier work which started in 2015, as a key initiative under the Joint UNRC Approach to Trade Facilitation agreed upon in Beirut, Lebanon in 2010 by the Executive Secretaries of all five UNRCs. The Survey has expanded over time with forward-looking trade facilitation measures capable of bolstering sustainable and resilient international trade, including digital and sustainable trade facilitation, trade finance and crises related trade facilitation measures. The Survey continues to pay special attention to sectors and groups with special needs, namely the agricultural sector, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and women traders, as international trade is one of the key means of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, the fifth Survey pilot-tested measures related to trade facilitation for e-commerce and wildlife protection.

Against this background, we hope that this report further supports the economies around the region to make trade simpler, cheaper, more resilient and sustainable, especially through the digitalization in international trade procedures. This regional report could be read together with the global report as well as subregional reports. The underlying dataset, available upon request, can be used by researchers and analysts for any further analysis. More information is available at <https://untfsurvey.org/>



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The Asia-Pacific report is part of a global Survey effort on the implementation of trade facilitation and paperless trade measures, undertaken jointly by the five United Nations Regional Commissions – ECA, ESCAP, ECLAC and ESCWA as well as UNCTAD.

The report was prepared by the ESCAP Secretariat. Silvère Dernouh, Matthieu Levasseur, and Chorthip Utoktham, under the guidance of Soo Hyun Kim and the overall supervision of Yann Duval, all from the Trade, Investment, and Innovation Division (TIID) of ESCAP, provided the data analysis for Asia-Pacific countries, collected as part of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023. Tony Oliver informally edited the report. Arom Sanguanyuang formatted the report and created the cover design.

Support from the following organizations and individuals is gratefully acknowledged, especially with regard to data collection and validation for this report – Cuong Ba Tran and Garlan Ayoga Irawan from the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat; Ghulam Samad from the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Institute; Andrea Giacomelli from the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS); Julian Fraga-Campos, Marianne Dumont (ASYCUDA) and colleagues from the Trade Facilitation Section team from UNCTAD; and Jie Wei (ECE). The United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT), acknowledge community supported by ESCAP and ECE, also greatly facilitated data collection.

Comments and suggestions provided by experts and other participants at an open review meeting on the Survey as well as at a meeting of the Regional Organizations Cooperation Mechanism for Trade Facilitation (ROC-TF) – held on 1 September 2022 on the occasion of the 10th Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forum co-hosted by ADB, ESCAP and the Government of Singapore helped in further enhancing the Survey process in 2023. Particular appreciation goes to Jiangyuan Fu (Huazhong University of Science and Technology), Silvia Sorescu (OECD), and Cuong Ba Tran (ASEAN).

Preparation of the report benefited from the support of the Republic of Korea as well as from the Government of France.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reducing trade costs is imperative in order to ensure the active participation of economies in regional and global value chains, thus maintaining trade as a driver of economic growth and sustainable development. The Asia-Pacific region, as evidenced by the ESCAP-World Bank Trade Cost Database, continues to face high trade costs. The geopolitical conflicts disrupting global supply chains and heightened inflation contributing to increased trade costs and uncertainties continue to impede international trade. In this regard, trade facilitation plays a key role in advancing sustainable development by fostering more efficient and transparent trade procedures, enhancing the resilience of global supply chains and reducing overall trade costs.

Based on the 2023 United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, this report examines the progress of trade facilitation reforms across 47 countries in the Asia-Pacific region. The report offers a comprehensive analysis based on 60 trade facilitation measures, which are categorized into four groups – “General Trade Facilitation,” “Digital Trade Facilitation,” “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” and “Other Trade Facilitation.” These measures encompass both binding and non-binding measures of the World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA) as well as measures extending beyond the scope of the TFA.

The Survey shows continued progress in streamlining and digitalizing trade processes in Asia and the Pacific, with the regional average implementation rate for 31 “General” and “Digital” trade facilitation measures stood at 67% in 2023. Based on 46 common countries, an increase of 3 percentage points was observed in 2023, compared with 2021. Despite being a moderate increase compared with the 6 percentage point increase observed between 2019 and 2021, it reflects ongoing efforts by countries in the region to enhance efficiency through streamlined and digitalized trade processes. Particularly noteworthy progress is observed in North and Central Asian subregion as well as Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs), despite significant challenges and disruptions in the supply chain. However, substantial disparities exist in subregional implementation with Australia and New Zealand achieving the highest level at 97%, followed by East and North-East Asia (83%), South-East Asia (76%), North and Central Asia (74%), South and South-West Asia (65%), with the Pacific Island Developing Economies lagging behind at 42%.

“General Trade Facilitation”, which are WTO TFA-related measures, are generally well-implemented in the region, by improving transparency (83%), streamlining formalities (76%) and enhancing institutional arrangements and cooperation (68%). On the other hand, while there has been ongoing advancement in the development and improvement of national paperless systems for sharing trade-related data and documents electronically, achieving an average implementation rate of 66% for the ‘paperless trade’ sub-group, the degree of implementation across nine specific ‘paperless trade’ measures shows notable variation. This Survey finds the implementation of ‘cross-border paperless trade’ remains challenging, with the implementation rate at 42%. Still, it is noted some progresses are noted with a 4 percentage points increase compared to the previous Survey.

Despite its importance in contributing to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and modest progress made in the past years, implementation of “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” remains low. When expanding the scope, the implementation rate for 40 measures including measures for SMEs and agricultural sector show a lower level at 63%, 4 percentage points decrease compared to the 31 “General” and “Digital Trade Facilitation” measures. Moreover, measures aimed at women traders recorded average implementation rates of 42%, although significant progress has been made. Recognizing the importance of these specific groups in attaining sustainable and inclusive development, trade facilitation strategies

should be formulated more comprehensively and inclusively. Additionally, the report underscores a strong positive correlation between the digital and sustainable dimensions of trade facilitation, suggesting synergetic opportunities through concurrent enhancements in both dimensions.

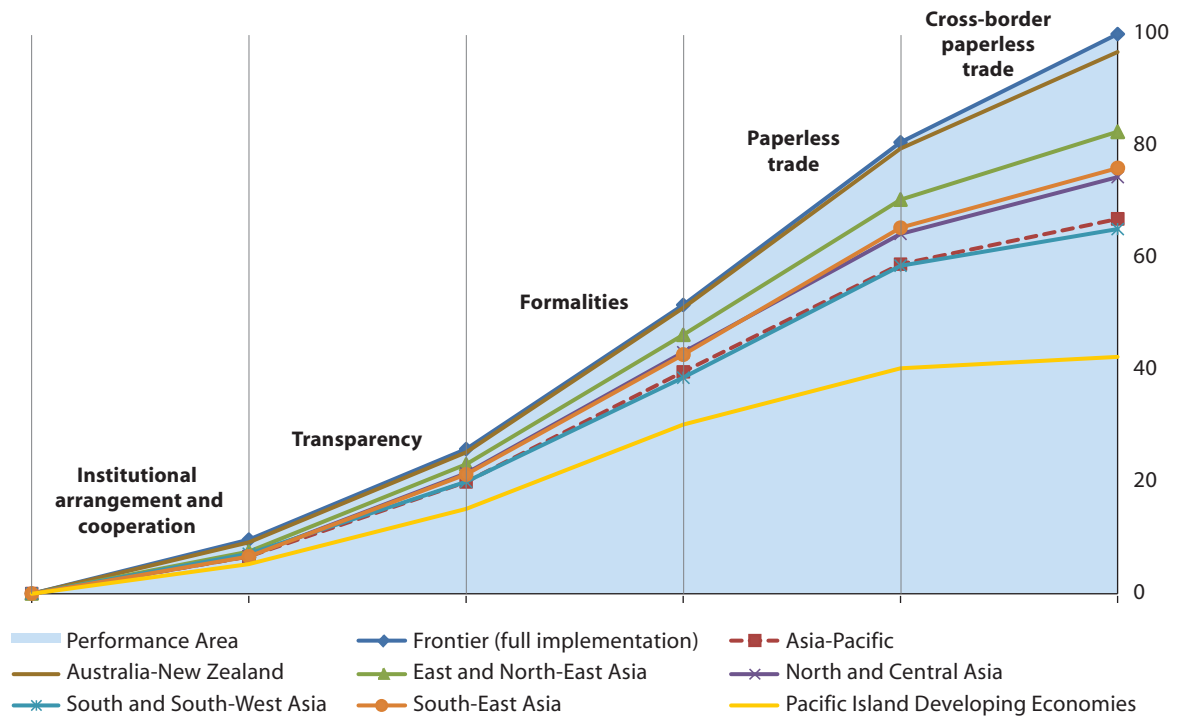
When it comes to ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ sub-group, the Asia-Pacific countries recorded an average implementation rate of 60%. Looking closer, the Survey result underscores that countries have adopted short-term measures, primarily in response to COVID-19 crisis, but also countries are beginning to recognize the importance of long-term measures to build resilience to pandemics and other crises. However, there are still rooms for further enhancement.

The report, based on the latest available data, reaffirms the substantial benefits that digital trade facilitation measures can bring to countries in the region. Empirical evidence shows that full digital trade facilitation implementation beyond the WTO TFA commitments could reduce average trade costs in the region by approximately 11%, almost 6 percentage points more than the expected reduction from compliance with both binding and non-binding requirements of the WTO TFA.

Moving forward, the implementation of trade facilitation measures should be approached as a gradual process, focusing on specific groups of measures outlined in the Survey. This includes strengthening institutional arrangements, establishing transparency, implementing efficient trade formalities, developing paperless trade systems, and enabling secure and authorized use of trade data and documents within these systems, such as national Single Windows, along the international supply chain (as illustrated in figure below). Collaboration is crucial, particularly in the case of paperless and cross-border paperless trade, where countries need to develop and implement necessary legal and technical protocols for the seamless exchange of regulatory and commercial data and documents within and between countries. The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA) can serve as a dedicated, inclusive and capacity-building intergovernmental platform to support countries in their gradual transition toward “less-paper” and, eventually, paperless and cross-border paperless trade achieving trade digitalization in the Asia-Pacific region.

This Asia-Pacific report should be read in conjunction with the Global and other related reports, based on the results of the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023, available at <https://untfsurvey.org/>

Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, available at untfsurvey.org, 2023.

Note: The figure shows global cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores for different regions in the five sub-groups of trade facilitation measures included in the Survey. Scores are based on the equally weighted implementation of 31 trade facilitation measures, but the number of measures varies in the five sub-groups. Full implementation of all measures = 100.



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ABBREVIATIONS

ACDD	ASEAN Customs Declaration Document
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEO	Authorized Economic Operator
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASW	ASEAN Single Window
ASYCUDA	Automated System for Customs Data
CPTA	Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITC	International Trade Centre
LDC	Least Developed Country
LLDC	Landlocked Developing Country
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NTMs	Non-Tariff Measures
NTFC	National Trade Facilitation Committee
OCO	Oceania Customs Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPS	Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
TIID	Trade, Investment, and Innovation Division
UN/CEFACT	United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNNExT	United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport for Asia and the Pacific
UNRC	United Nations Regional Commission
USA	United States of America
VPoA	Vienna Programme of Action
WCO	World Customs Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization



Introduction

1.1. Background and objective

Reducing trade costs is imperative for enabling economies to effectively participate in regional and global value chains, and to sustain trade as a significant driver of growth and sustainable development. According to the latest data from the ESCAP-World Bank International Trade Cost Database, the non-tariff trade costs among the three largest European economies are equivalent to an average tariff of 42% on the traded goods' value (table 1). Comparable to the low intra-European trade costs are China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (East Asia-3), with average trade costs among them approximating a tariff equivalent of 58%. In contrast, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (SAARC-3) as well as North and Central Asian (NCA) countries exhibit much higher intraregional trade costs, amounting to a tariff equivalent of almost 161% and 109%, respectively.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the potential for substantial further reductions in trade costs becomes evident when analyzing interregional trade costs, which are significantly higher than trade costs with non-regional partners. For example, the trade costs between Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand (ASEAN-4) and SAARC-3 economies (about 130%), two neighbouring subregions, are much higher than those between ASEAN-4 countries and European economies (about 105%) or between SAARC-3 and the United States of America (about 112%).



Table 1 Intra- and extra-regional comprehensive trade costs, excluding tariff, in the Asia-Pacific region

Region	ASEAN-4	East Asia-3	North and Central Asia-4	Pacific Islands Developing Economies-2	SAARC-3	AUS-NZL	Europe-3
ASEAN-4	74.9% (-0.6%)	78.6% (3.2%)	305.9% (-5.1%)	298.8% (8.0%)	129.6% (2.9%)	104.0% (4.7%)	105.3% (-0.2%)
East Asia-3	78.6% (3.2%)	58.0% (10.0%)	167.1% (-0.2%)	201.2% (-21.5%)	129.3% (5.4%)	89.6% (4.4%)	85.6% (1.0%)
North and Central Asia-4	305.9% (-5.1%)	167.1% (-0.2%)	108.8% (-6.2%)	427.5% (29.1%)	265.7% (3.8%)	310.0% (-13.3%)	146.2% (-2.8%)
Pacific Islands Developing Economies-2	298.8% (8.0%)	201.2% (-21.5%)	427.5% (29.1%)	89.6% (-19.9%)	361.4% (6.8%)	102.3% (7.1%)	312.1% (0.2%)
SAARC-3	129.6% (2.9%)	129.3% (5.4%)	265.7% (3.8%)	361.4% (6.8%)	160.7% (37.6%)	139.2% (2.3%)	117.4% (3.6%)
AUS-NZL	104.0% (4.7%)	89.6% (4.4%)	310.0% (-13.3%)	102.3% (7.1%)	139.2% (2.3%)	52.8% (0.8%)	103.0% (-3.5%)
Europe-3	105.3% (-0.2%)	85.6% (1.0%)	146.2% (-2.8%)	312.1% (0.2%)	117.4% (3.6%)	103.0% (-3.5%)	41.8% (-2.7%)
United States of America	84.4% (-2.1%)	66.3% (3.9%)	190.7% (8.0%)	183.0% (-6.4%)	111.7% (-0.2%)	97.7% (-1.6%)	65.6% (-2.0%)

Source: ESCAP-World Bank Trade Cost Database, updated July 2023. Available at <https://www.unescap.org/resources/escap-world-bank-trade-cost-database>

Note: Trade costs may be interpreted as tariff equivalents. Percentage changes in trade costs between 2010-2015 and 2016-2021 are in parentheses. ASEAN-4: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand; East Asia-3: China, Japan, the Republic of Korea; North and Central Asia: Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation; Pacific Island developing economies: Fiji, Samoa; SAARC-3: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; Europe-3: Germany, France, United Kingdom.

The geopolitical conflicts have caused further disruption to global supply chains, and high inflation is contributing to increased trade costs and uncertainty. While global merchandise trade volumes rebounded strongly after the pandemic, trade growth slowed in 2022, and is expected to continue to be at a reduced pace throughout 2023 at 0.8% according to the latest World Trade

Organization (WTO) estimate.¹ However, trade facilitation measures play a crucial role in mitigating these challenges by enhancing efficiency through streamlined and digitalized processes. By implementing effective trade facilitation strategies, unnecessary costs can be reduced, helping to counter the trend of increasing trade costs.

¹ See WTO Global Trade Outlook and Statistics (Update: October 2023) at https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/gtos_updt_oct23_e.pdf

In the recent past, a significant portion of trade cost reductions have been accomplished by the elimination or reduction of tariffs. Furthermore, studies² indicate that trade costs of non-tariff measures (NTMs) can be twice as high as that of ordinary Customs tariffs, indicating NTMs are crucial for further trade cost reductions. This is particularly true for environmental goods, which are more heavily burdened by trade barriers than carbon-intensive fossil fuels.³ Approaches to reducing trade barriers are multifaceted and can include improving transport infrastructure and services as well as simplifying regulatory procedures and documentation requirements to improve the efficiency of trade. In this regard, trade facilitation plays a critical role by enabling more efficient and transparent trade procedures, by enhancing the resilience of global supply chains and lowering overall trade costs, particularly in developing countries.

Trade facilitation, including paperless and cross-border paperless trade, has gained significant importance, as evident from the entry into force of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in February 2017. In the Asia and Pacific region, the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA),⁴ a United Nations treaty, was embraced by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) member States on 19 May 2016. Subsequently, the CPTA came into force on 20 February 2021, following the ratification or accession of the treaty by five countries. At the time of publishing, 13 countries are Parties to the treaty and several other ESCAP members are in the process of completing their domestic processes for accession. Leveraging the platform for regional intergovernmental cooperation, countries are anticipated to foster cross-border paperless trade and further mitigate trade costs amid the ongoing crisis.

Since 2012, the ESCAP Secretariat has consistently collected and analyzed data on the implementation of trade facilitation measures in

the region. The primary objectives of this Survey are: (a) to evaluate the progress made in implementing trade facilitation measures, (b) foster a forward-looking approach to trade facilitation for countries and development partners, (c) facilitate a deeper comprehension and monitoring of progress, supporting evidence-based public policies, (d) sharing good practices, and (e) identifying emerging needs for capacity-building and technical assistance. The initial regional Surveys on trade facilitation and paperless trade implementation took place in 2012 and 2013, held in conjunction with the Asia-Pacific Trade Facilitation Forums, organized by ESCAP and the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Following extensive discussions at the Global Trade Facilitation Forum 2013 and the Joint United Nations Regional Commissions (UNRCs) approach to Trade Facilitation, it was agreed that the regional Surveys should be conducted globally, jointly by all UNRCs, with the first Survey being conducted in 2015. In 2023, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) became a full partner to the Survey. This report presents the findings of the fifth United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, conducted in 2023 for the Asia-Pacific region. It encompasses 47 developed and developing economies from six distinct subregions, providing comprehensive insights into the state of trade facilitation in the area.

1.2. Survey instrument and methodology

The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation (hereafter called “the Survey”) 2023 builds upon the original instrument (formerly known as the Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation). It was prepared according to the final list of commitments included in the WTO TFA and supplemented by the CPTA as well as those supporting inclusive and sustainable trade. The 2023 Survey covers 60 trade facilitation measures

² ESCAP, 2019. The Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2019: Navigating Non-tariff Measures Towards Sustainable Development.

³ ESCAP 2021. The Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2021: Accelerating Climate-smart Trade and Investment for Sustainable Development.

⁴ For details, see <https://www.unescap.org/kp/cpta>

commonly used by five UNRCs and UNCTAD. The 60 measures are classified into four groups and 11 sub-groups (annex 1). The first group, “General Trade Facilitation”, includes many WTO TFA measures with sub-groups of ‘transparency’, ‘formalities’, ‘institutional arrangement and cooperation’, and ‘transit’. The second group, “Digital Trade Facilitation”, includes ‘paperless trade’ and ‘cross-border paperless trade’ measures. The third group of “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” measures includes ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’, ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ and ‘women in trade facilitation’ sub-groups. The fourth group, “Other Trade Facilitation” comes with four sub-groups: ‘trade finance facilitation’, ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’, ‘trade facilitation for e-commerce’ and ‘trade and wildlife protection’. The two last measures were added to the Survey on a pilot basis.

The overall scope of the Survey goes beyond the measures included in the WTO TFA. Most paperless trade measures, particularly for cross-border paperless trade, are not specifically featured in the WTO TFA. However, their inclusion in many cases would support better implementation of the TFA in digital form. Most “Sustainable Trade

Facilitation” group measures are not specifically included in the WTO TFA, except for some of the ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ measures. The “Other Trade Facilitation” group is added with considerations of trade financing’s role in facilitating trade flows, the challenges posed by crises to the global trade and supply chain, and the rising importance of cross-border e-commerce and the increasing need to combat illegal wildlife trade.

ESCAP adopted a three-step approach to developing the dataset (annex 2). Data were collected between January and July 2023. Based on the data collected, each of the trade facilitation measures included in the Survey was rated as “fully implemented”, “partially implemented”, “on a pilot basis”, “not implemented” or “don’t know”. Definitions for each stage are provided in annex 3. A score of 3, 2, 1 or zero was assigned to each of the four implementation stages to calculate implementation rates for individual measures across countries, regions or groupings. Country groupings were used in the analysis as detailed in annex 4 and shown in figures 1 and 2. Further details and examples on the calculation of implementation rates are available online.



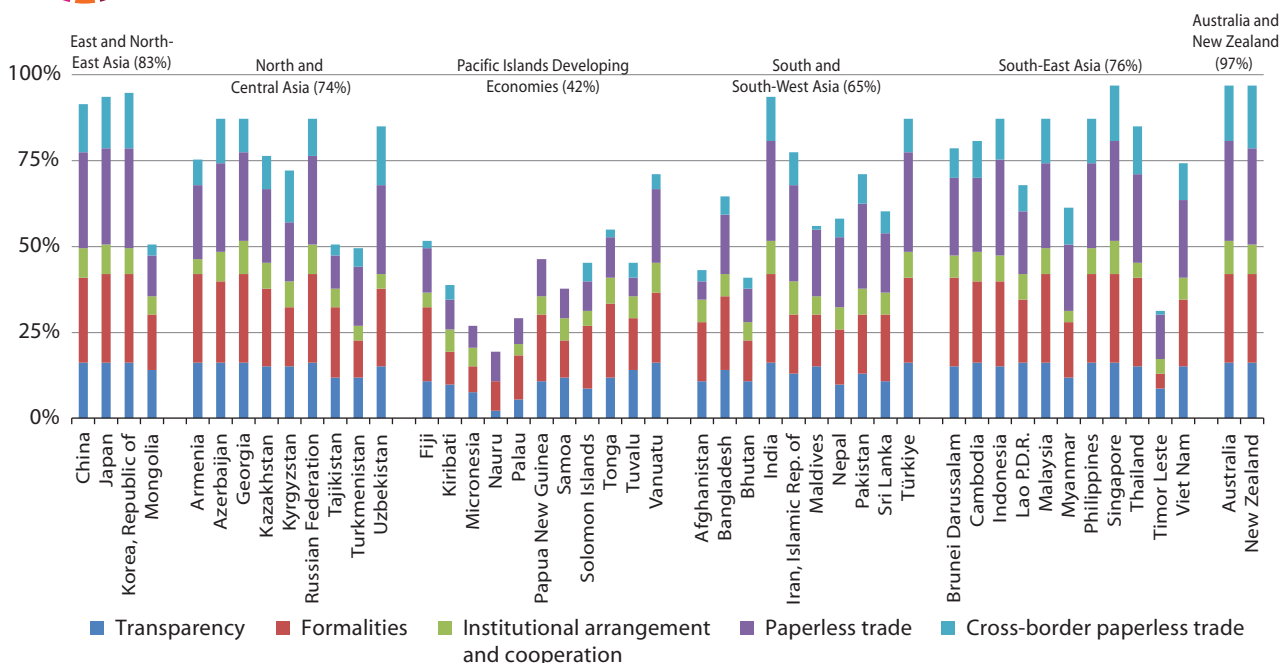
Trade facilitation implementation in Asia and the Pacific: Overview

Figure 1 shows that the average trade facilitation implementation rates of 31 measures by subregion, including five sub-groups of measures under “General” and “Digital Trade Facilitation”, stands at 67%. The implementation of trade facilitation measures in the region is diverse. Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Singapore achieve implementation rates above 90%, while implementation rates in several other Pacific countries barely reach 30%.

In general, more advanced or larger economies are at a higher level of implementation than low-income economies, including the small or less-developed nations such as Least Developed Countries (LDCs) or PIDEs. However, the advancement of the economies does not necessarily lead to higher implementation rates. Indeed, 24 out of 45 (53%) countries with a GDP per capita below US\$ 10,000 have achieved implementation rates of more than 50% (figure 2). For example, Cambodia has an implementation rate above 80%, much higher than the overall average implementation of LDCs in the region which stands at just over 52%. This high level of implementation might be explained by the joint efforts of

Figure 1

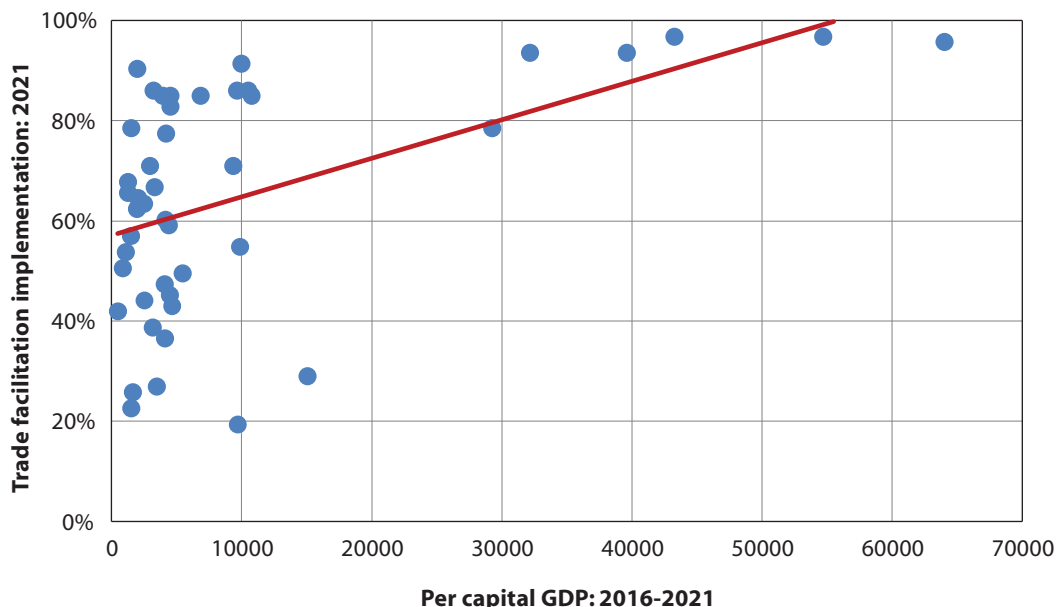
Overall implementation of trade facilitation measures in 47 Asia-Pacific countries



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 2

Trade facilitation implementation and GDP per capita of 46 Asia-Pacific countries



Sources: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org; and World Bank, World Development Indicators, accessed June 2023.

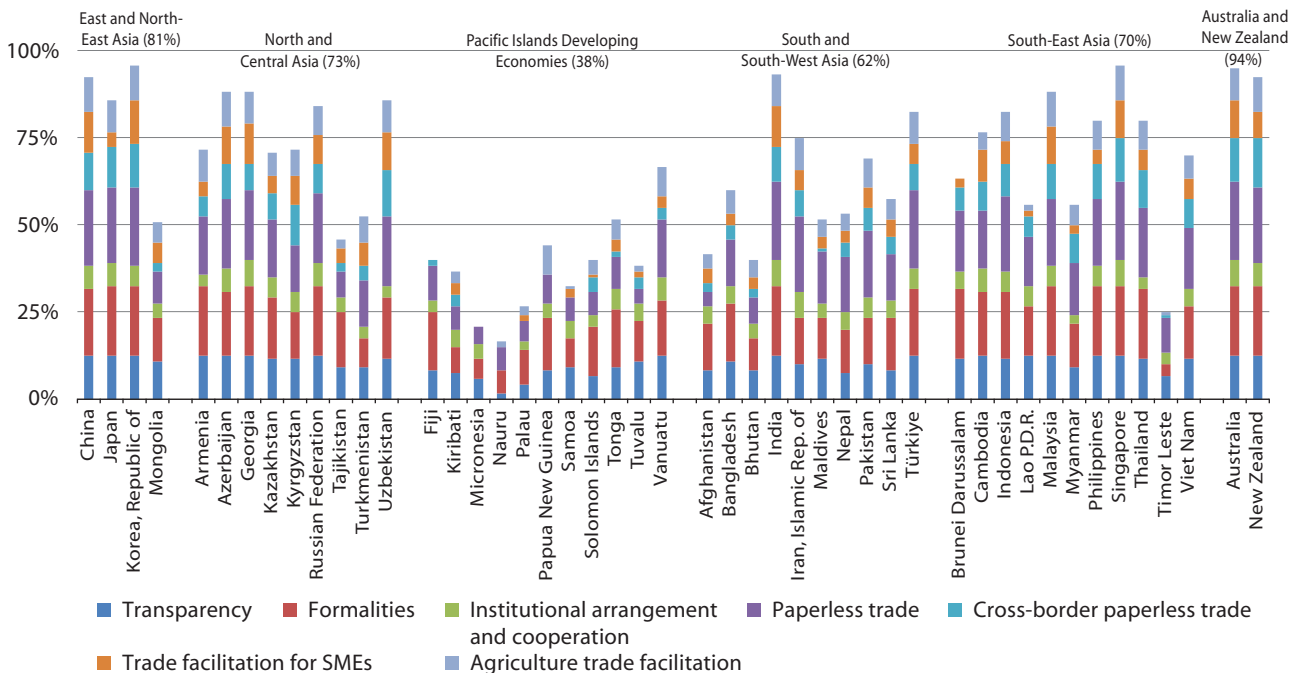
ASEAN on digital trade facilitation measures, particularly the implementation of the ASEAN Single Window, to accelerate cross-border paperless trade within the region and with non-ASEAN trade partners.

Among the developing countries in the region, South-East Asia is led by Singapore with a 97% implementation rate. The Republic of Korea leads East and North-East Asia at 95%, while India ranks first in South and South-West Asia with 94%. In North and Central Asia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Russian Federation recorded an 87% implementation rate. Among the PIDEs, Vanuatu leads with 71%, well ahead of Tonga, which comes second with 55%.

When broadening the analysis to a set of 40 measures that includes some measures from the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group, the regional average implementation rate falls to 63% (reduced by 4 percentage points) and all

subregions show lower implementation rates than when considering the 31 core measures (figure 3). Specifically, significant declines were observed in Brunei Darussalam (reduced by 15 percentage points), the Lao People’s Democratic Republic (reduced by 12 percentage points), Fiji (reduced by 12 percentage points) and Japan (reduced by 8 percentage points). This disparity can be attributed to the relatively lower implementation rates of nine “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” measures, and specifically ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ and ‘agricultural trade facilitation.’ Nevertheless, some countries have seen higher implementation rate, while including “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” measures, such as Turkmenistan, which recorded a notable increase of 3 percentage points as well as China, the Republic of Korea, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Malaysia, which saw an increase more than 1 percentage point.

Overall implementation of trade facilitation measures in 47 Asia-Pacific countries, including additional sustainable measures



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfpa.org/survey

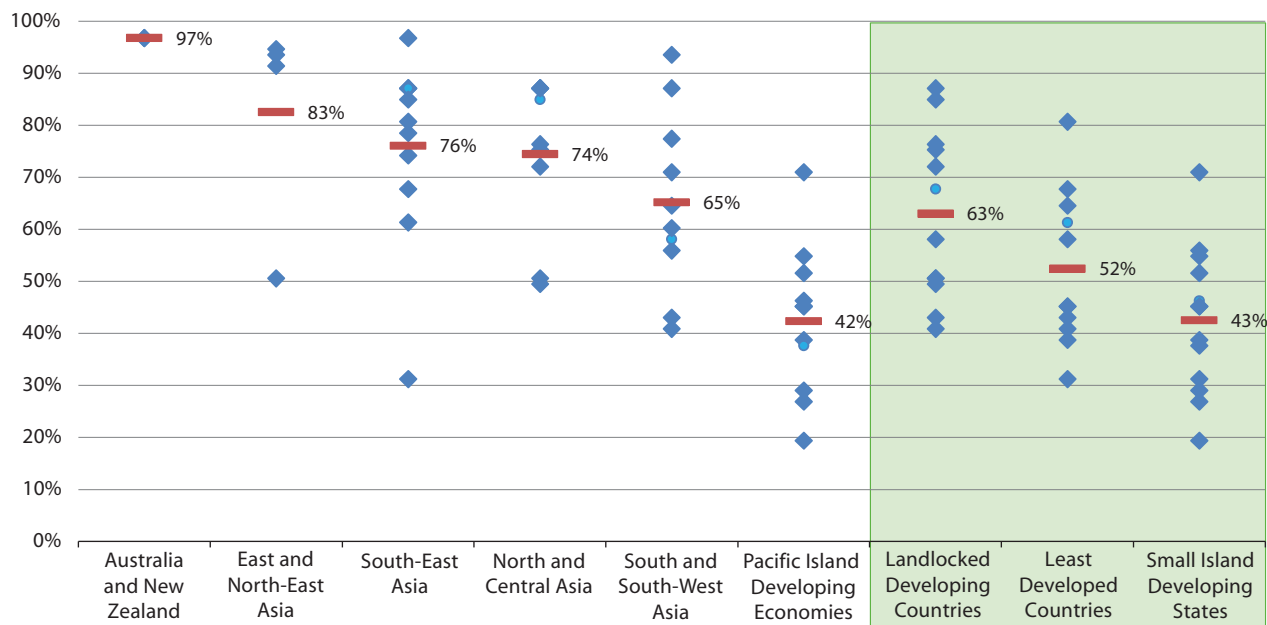
2.1. Implementation in subregions and countries with special needs

The data presented in figure 4 show the implementation rates of the 31 “General” and “Digital Trade Facilitation” measures across 47 economies in six subregions, and three groups of countries with special needs – LLDCs, LDCs and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) (see annex 4 for the list of countries in each grouping).⁵ Implementation rates vary greatly between subregions in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia and New Zealand showed the highest rates, with a 97% implementation rate. This is followed by

East and North-East Asia, South-East Asia, and North and Central Asia with implementation rates of 83%, 76% and 74%, respectively.

On the other hand, some subregions are still catching up, with the South and South-West Asia, and Pacific Island Developing Economies showing the two lowest subregional implementation scores at 65% and 42%, respectively. This may be explained by geographical constraints, as many countries in these regions face greater difficulties in facilitating trade due to factors such as their small size, geographical remoteness and limited access to maritime trade routes. Furthermore, in both subregions, the adoption of ‘cross-border paperless trade’ measures remains low. The

Average trade facilitation implementation rates in the Asia-Pacific subregions and countries with special needs



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

Note: The red bars in the figure represent the average implementation rates for each group of countries, while the blue dots show the implementation rates for individual economies within each group.

⁵ Among the 60 measures surveyed across UNRCs, three measures – Electronic Submission of Sea Cargo Manifests, Alignment of Working Days and Hours with Neighbouring Countries at Border Crossings, and Alignment of Formalities and Procedures with Neighbouring Countries at Border Crossings – are excluded when calculating the overall score as they are not relevant to all countries surveyed. Four transit facilitation measures are also excluded for the same reason.

implementation of these measures often requires a high level of collaboration between trading partners for them to be considered “fully implemented”. Therefore, the promotion of additional regional and subregional trade agreements and trade facilitation initiatives can serve as a driver for enhanced cooperation in digital trade.

Figure 4 shows that the average implementation rates for LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS are diverse, ranging from 43% to 63%, but still all lower than the regional average implementation rate of 67%. Barriers to connectivity, such as poor infrastructure, geographical factors that hinder trade facilitation, or lack of capacity due to multiple factors, put these countries at a disadvantage. LDCs, in particular, are the most vulnerable segment of the international community, with poor infrastructure, and limited capacity and resources. LLDCs have no direct ocean access, which makes trade logistics more complex and expensive. For SIDS, the high costs of communication and logistics can hamper their ability to participate in international trade. It is therefore important for the international community to support the efforts of LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS to improve trade facilitation by addressing their specific needs and providing technical assistance and capacity-building support.

Nevertheless, LLDCs have demonstrated higher average levels of trade facilitation compared to LDCs or SIDS, which can be attributed to the coordinated support provided to address the specific requirements of LLDCs. For example, the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries 2014-2024 prioritizes the unique development challenges faced by

landlocked nations. It places a strong emphasis on international trade and trade facilitation, with a particular focus on building efficient transit systems, developing transport infrastructure, enhancing competitiveness, expanding trade, structural transformation and regional cooperation, among other measures, to transform these landlocked countries into well-connected and land-linked nations.⁶ In addition, most landlocked developing countries in the Asia-Pacific region are members of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) and are implementing the CAREC Integrated Trade Agenda 2030 and Rolling Strategic Action Plan 2021-2023,⁷ which provides for a more coordinated approach to trade policy and trade facilitation issues and beyond, including technical assistance to facilitate ongoing Customs reforms and improve the flow of goods in the CAREC region.

Figure 5 introduces an additional nine measures from the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group, specifically ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ and ‘agricultural trade facilitation’, expanding the scope beyond the initial 31 measures to 40 measures. This addition of nine measures to the dataset lowers the regional average implementation rate to 63% (reduced by 4 percentage points). Notably, the impact of adding the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” measures is more pronounced for South-East Asia (reduced by 6 percentage points) and the Pacific Island Developing Economies (reduced by 5 percentage points) compared to other subregions. This finding highlights the need to pay greater attention to ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ and ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ sub-groups, and to promote more inclusive and sustainable trade practices.

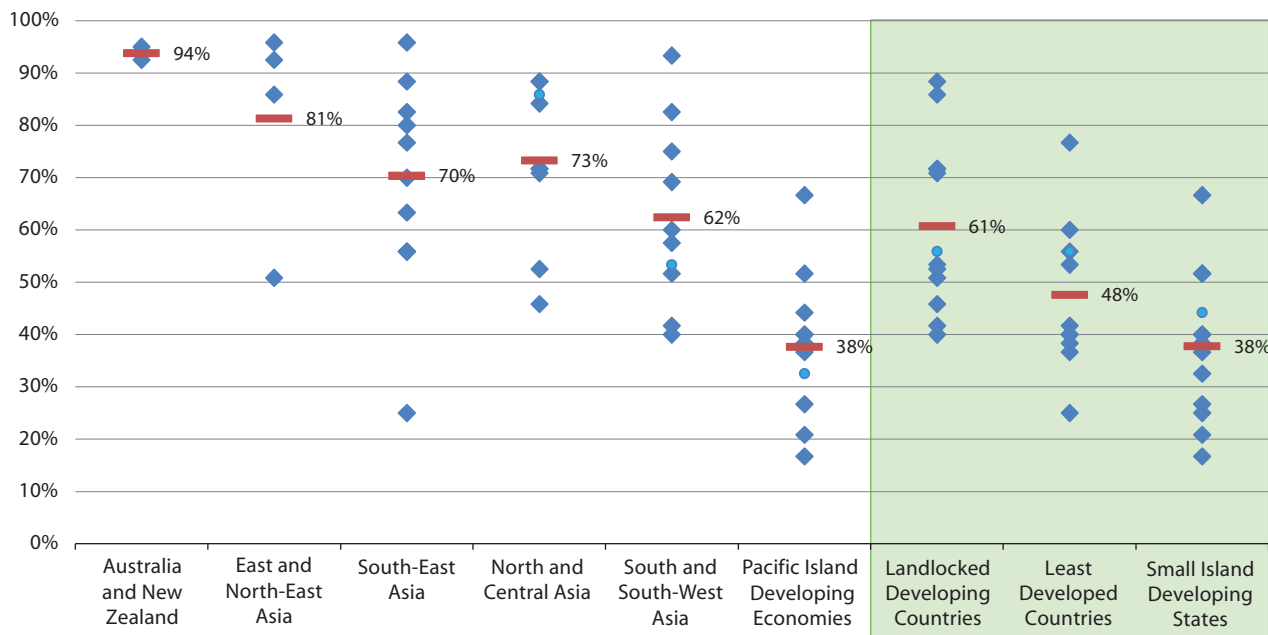
⁶ Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024, available at https://www.un.org/ohrrls/sites/www.un.org.ohrrls/files/vienna_programme_of_action.pdf

⁷ CITA Rolling Strategic Action Plan 2021-2023.

https://www.carecprogram.org/uploads/Appendix-2-CITA-2030-RSAP-2021-2023_EN.pdf

Figure 5

Average trade facilitation implementation rates in the Asia-Pacific subregions and countries with special needs, including additional sustainable measures



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unftrsurvey.org

2.2. Most and least implemented trade facilitation measures

*According to figure 6 and table 2, all countries in the region are engaged in implementing “General Trade Facilitation”, namely ‘transparency’ and ‘formalities’ measures. The ‘transparency’ sub-group stands out with the highest level of implementation, at 83%. Within this sub-group, the ‘publication of import-export regulations on the Internet’ measure takes the lead with 98% of the countries having implemented it, at least on a pilot basis. Full implementation has been achieved in 68% of the countries.

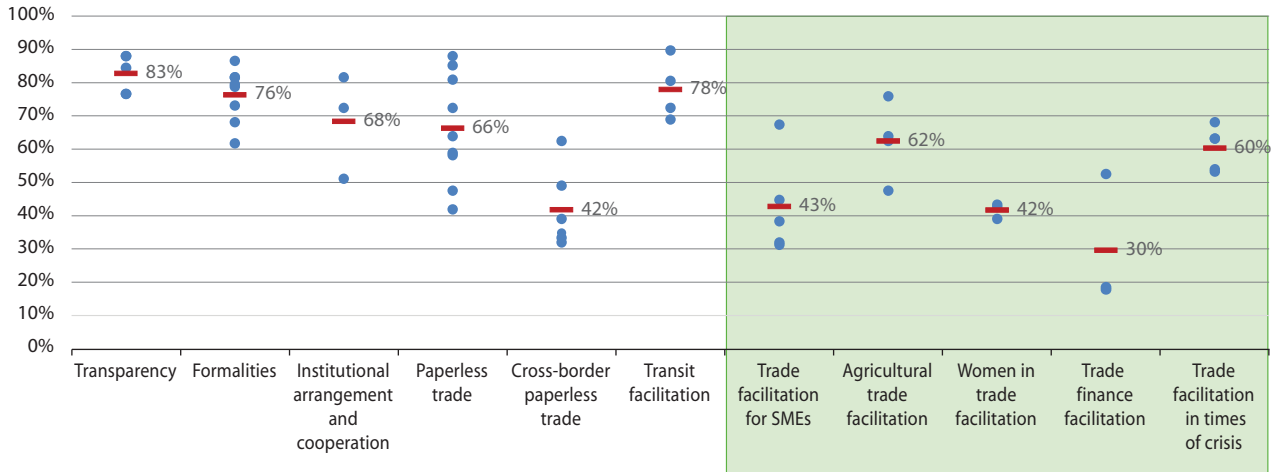
Following these, the ‘formalities’ and ‘transit’ sub-groups have the second and third highest implementation rates at 76% and 78%, respectively. In the ‘formalities’ sub-group, the most widely implemented measure is ‘acceptance

of copies of original documents required for import, export or transit formalities’ (96% of countries surveyed), while in the ‘transit’ sub-group, it is the measure ‘limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment’ that has been most widely implemented, with 62% of countries surveyed having implemented it.

The ‘institutional arrangements and cooperation’ sub-group shows an average implementation rate of 68% among the countries surveyed. The measure related to the creation of a ‘national trade facilitation committee (NTFC) or similar body’ has been implemented by 96% of countries, reflecting the strong commitment of Asia-Pacific countries to improving trade processes and cooperation at the institutional level. In contrast, the measure ‘government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities’ has been implemented by 70% of countries; only 23% have fully implemented it, showing that there is scope for greater cooperation and co-ordination between government agencies and Customs authorities.



Implementation of different sub-groups of trade facilitation measures, the Asia-Pacific regional average



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

In the “Digital Trade Facilitation” group, the implementation level of the ‘paperless trade’ sub-group is 66%. However, the implementation rates vary significantly, depending on the specific measures considered. For example, all countries have implemented, at least on a pilot basis, ‘automated Customs systems’, whereas the ‘electronic application for Customs refunds’ measure has been implemented by only 51% of the countries surveyed. On the other hand, the implementation level of the ‘cross-border paperless trade’ sub-group is significantly lower at 42%. The measure ‘laws and regulations for electronic transactions’ has been implemented by most of the countries (89%) and 26% of countries have fully implemented this measure, making it the most implemented in this sub-group. The disparity between the most and least implemented measures is quite significant, as the measure ‘paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit’ has been implemented by 49% of countries, and only 15% have achieved full implementation, making it the least implemented of this sub-group. This highlights the need for closer intergovernmental cooperation on cross-border paperless trade to build greater interoperability between national systems.

In the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group, ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ measures have been relatively well implemented, with an average of 62% implementation of these measures. As table 2 indicates, the measure ‘special treatment for perishable goods’ is the most implemented in this sub-group, with 49% of the countries surveyed having fully implemented it. Nevertheless, when it comes to ‘the electronic application and issuance of Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) certificates’, this percentage drops down to 19%, making it the least implemented measure of this sub-group. On the other hand, implementation of measures to improve opportunities for SMEs remains low, at 43%. Specifically, the measure ‘SMEs access to Single Windows’ has been fully implemented by only 13% of the countries surveyed. Similarly, the implementation rate of measures related to ‘women in trade facilitation’ stands at 42%. For the most implemented measure ‘TF measures to benefit women involved in trade’, only 15% of the countries have fully implemented it. This indicates that there is still an insufficient presence of policies and initiatives addressing inclusiveness in trade facilitation in the Asia-Pacific region.


Most and least implemented measures in the Asia-Pacific region

Category	Most implemented (% of countries)		Least implemented (% of countries)	
	Measure	Implemented fully, partially and on a pilot basis (%) / full implementation (%)	Measure	Implemented fully, partially and on a pilot basis (%) / full implementation (%)
Transparency	Publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet	97.9 / 68.1	Independent appeal mechanism and online lodging	91.5 / 51.1
Formalities	Acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export or transit formalities	95.7 / 70.2	TF measures for authorized operators	85.1 / 34.0
Institutional arrangement and cooperation	National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body	95.7 / 59.6	Government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities	70.2 / 23.4
Paperless trade	Automated Customs System	100.0 / 66.0	Electronic Application for Customs Refunds	51.1 / 27.7
Cross-border paperless trade	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	89.4 / 25.5	Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit	48.9 / 14.9
Transit facilitation	Limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment	61.7 / 42.6	Supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation	59.6 / 25.5
Trade facilitation for SMEs	Trade-related information measures for SMEs	85.1 / 38.3	SMEs access Single Window	46.8 / 12.8
Agricultural trade facilitation	Special treatment for perishable goods	91.5 / 48.9	Electronic application and issuance of certificates	72.3 / 19.1
Women in trade facilitation	TF measures to benefit women involved in trade	72.3 / 14.9	TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade	55.3 / 14.9
Trade finance facilitation	Variety of trade finance services available	76.6 / 17.0	Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance	29.8 / 2.1
Trade facilitation in times of crisis	Online publication of emergency TF measures	89.4 / 42.6	Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises	72.3 / 23.4

The average implementation rate of ‘trade finance facilitation’ measures is relatively low, standing at 30%. Not only is the measure ‘authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance’ the lowest measure implemented in this sub-group, but also the least implemented measure in the entire Survey, with only about 2% of the countries surveyed having fully implemented it. On the other hand, countries in the Asia-Pacific region have implemented the ‘variety of trade finance services available’ measure relatively well, with nearly 77% of the countries surveyed having implemented it, at least on a pilot basis.

Finally, the average implementation rate of the ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ measures stands at 60%, responding to the recent disruptions observed in global trade, due to various crises. In this context, the countries surveyed focused particularly on the ‘online publication of emergency TF measures’, the most implemented in this sub-group. In addition, the percentage of countries adopting long-term resilience measures, which is the least implemented measure, is quite significant, with 72% implementing a ‘plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises’, at least on a pilot basis. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement as only 23% of the countries have fully

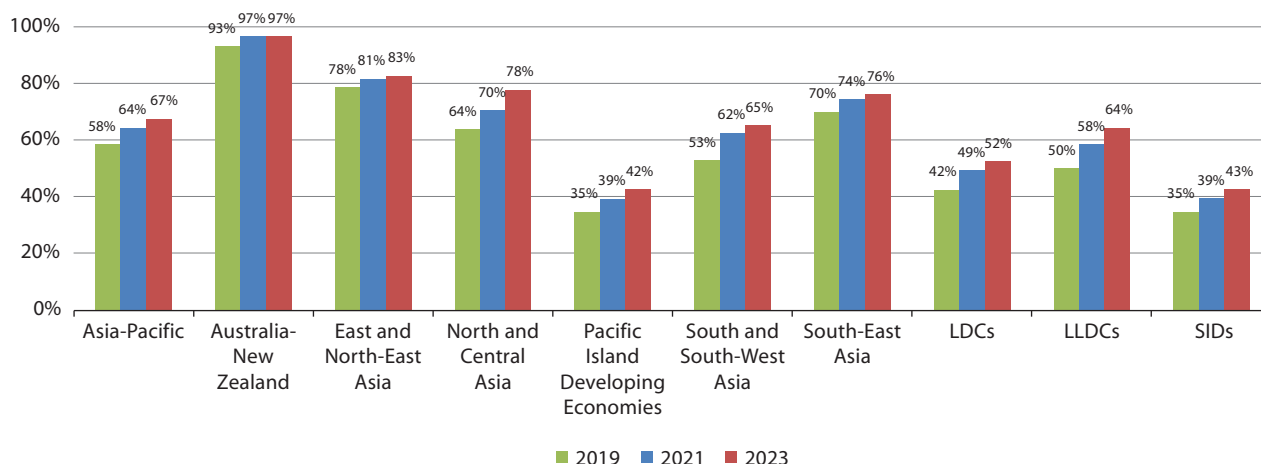
implemented this measure, making it the least implemented in this sub-group.

2.3. Progress in implementation between 2019 and 2023

Asia-Pacific has a total of 47 countries participating in the 2023 Survey, of which 46 countries also participated in the 2021 and 2019 Survey. Only countries covered in all three Surveys are analyzed to assess progress in the implementation of trade facilitation measures over the previous four years in order to make the samples comparable. Figure 7 shows trade facilitation progress based on subregional implementation rates between 2019 and 2023. Asia-Pacific possessed a significant increase of 6 percentage points between 2019 and 2021, which can be partially attributed to the acceleration of digital trade facilitation measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Building upon the progress made, countries continued their efforts to enhance efficiency through streamlined and digitalized trade processes and recorded a moderate increase of 3 percentage points in 2023 over 2021, reaching 67%.



Trade facilitation implementation by subregions in Asia and the Pacific, 2019, 2021 and 2023



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untdf.org

Note: Figure 7 is based on 31 general trade facilitation measures of 46 common countries.

This upward trend is encouraging and all subregions have experienced an increase in their trade facilitation measures implementation rate between 2019 and 2023. Specifically, the highest progress has been observed in North and Central Asia with an increase in the implementation rate of 6 percentage points between 2019 and 2021, and 8 percentage points between 2021 and 2023. Similarly, significant progress has been observed in LLDCs where the implementation rate increased by 8 percentage points between 2019 and 2021, and 6 percentage points between 2021 and 2023. This progress is particularly impressive, as LLDCs face additional challenges due to no direct access to the sea, which makes trade logistics more complex and expensive.

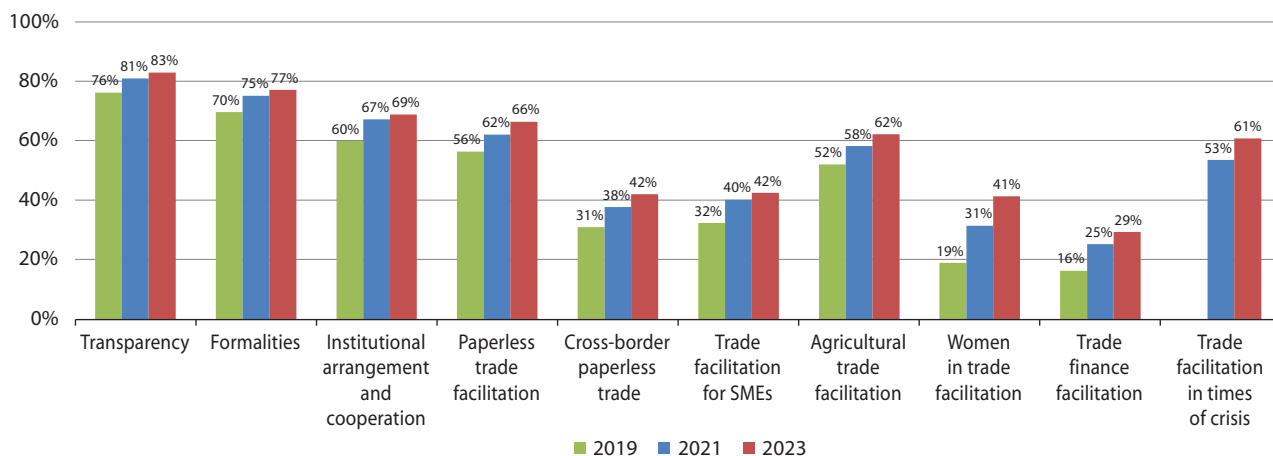
Figure 8 shows that, between 2019 and 2023, commendable progress has been made in the implementation of specific measures related to “Digital Trade Facilitation” with the ‘paperless trade’ and ‘cross-border paperless trade’ sub-groups for Asia-Pacific. Implementation rates for ‘paperless trade’ increased by 6 and 4 percentages points between 2019 and 2021, and 2021 and 2023, respectively. Implementation rates for ‘cross-border paperless trade’ increased by 7 and 4 percentages points for the same period. As

mentioned, acceleration of “Digital Trade Facilitation” measures were prominent between 2019 and 2021, in response to the COVID-19 crisis, but countries continued improving in this area between 2021 and 2023, although more moderate progress has been noted. However, the implementation rates of “Digital Trade Facilitation” are still not as high as the implementation rate recorded for “General Trade Facilitation” measures. This highlights the need to continue the progress that has been made, by continuing to develop paperless trade systems and having better coordination to ensure operability between countries.

In addition, Asia-Pacific countries have made significant progress in implementing “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” measures, with the greatest progress recorded in the implementation of ‘women in trade facilitation’. It recorded significant increases both between 2019 and 2021, and between 2021 and 2023, with 12 and 10 percentage points, respectively. This underlines the continuing and significant commitment of Asia-Pacific countries to improve information accessibility for women traders, address gender barriers, and promote gender equality in their national trade facilitation policies and organizations.



Average implementation of trade facilitation measures in Asia and the Pacific, 2019, 2021 and 2023



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Note: The comparison for 2019-2023 is based on 46 countries, including trade facilitation in times of crisis (only available for 2021 and 2023).

However, despite a notable increase of implementation of ‘women in trade facilitation’, it remains the least implemented within the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group. To a lesser extent, the measures under ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ and ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ sub-groups have made moderate progress. Implementation for ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ recorded 6 and 4 percentage points increases between 2019 and 2021, and between 2021 and 2023, respectively. Implementation for ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ recorded 8 and 2 percentage points increase between 2019 and 2021, and between 2021 and 2023, respectively.

Finally, the Survey finds that there have been some positive knock-on effects from the pandemic and crises in the past few years, mainly during the COVID-19 crisis. Indeed, it spurred countries to accelerate their efforts to accelerate trade digitalization to minimize disruptions in international trade. The measures in the sub-group ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ were surveyed from 2021, and between 2021 and 2023, and a notable increase of 8 percentage points was noted. Especially noting that the implementation of these measures continued beyond the COVID-19 crisis, it shows countries with continued efforts, which will ensure better preparedness for any future crises.



Implementation of trade facilitation measures

3.1. General Trade Facilitation

3.1.1. Transparency

The Survey includes five measures grouped in the ‘transparency’ sub-group, which relate to Articles 1 to 5 of the WTO Multilateral Trade Agreement, and Article X of the GATT on the publication and administration of trade regulations. The average level of implementation of measures in the ‘transparency’ sub-group in the region ranges from 77% to 88% (figure 9). Specifically, the measures ‘publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet’ and ‘stakeholders’ consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)’ have the highest implementation rates (88% each).

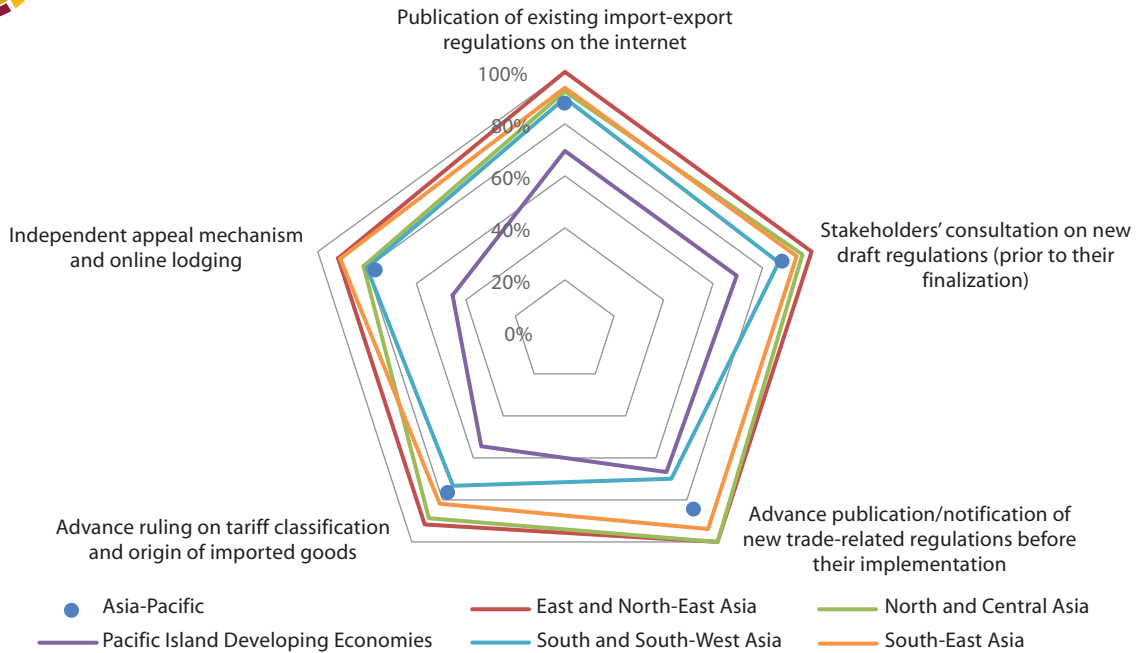
Figure 10 shows the percentage of countries that have fully, partially or on a pilot basis implemented these measures. Among the ‘transparency’ measures, the most widely implemented in the region are ‘stakeholders’ consultation on new draft regulations’, ‘publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet’, and ‘advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation’. More than 90% of the 47 economies have fully or partially implemented these measures.

On the other hand, measures related to ‘advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods’ and ‘independent appeal mechanism and online lodging’ are relatively less implemented;

however, around 83% and 87% of countries in the region have already fully or partially implemented them, respectively.

Figure 9

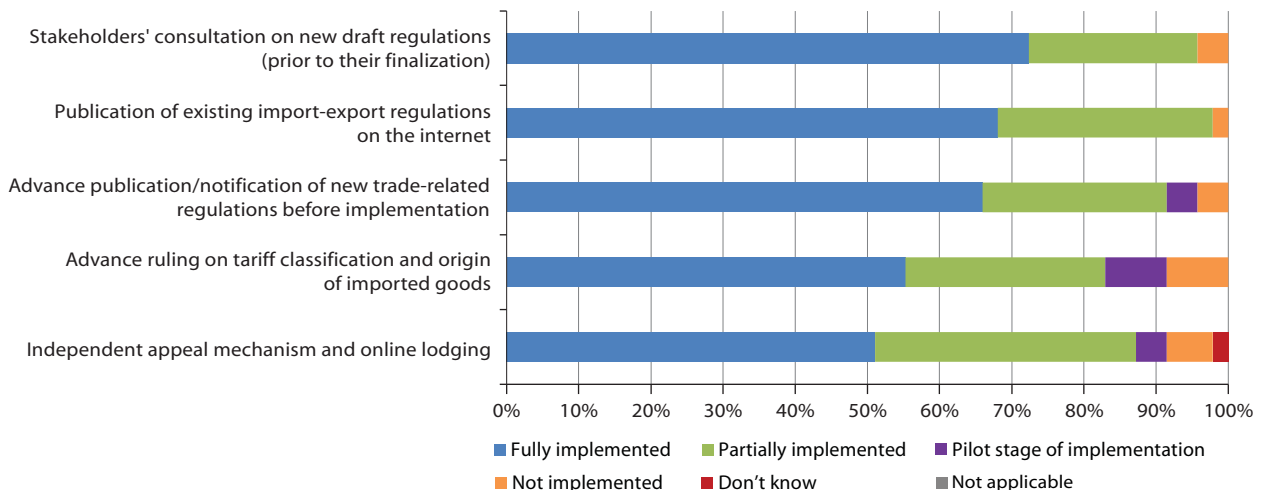
State of implementation of transparency measures by subregion



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 10

State of implementation of transparency measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

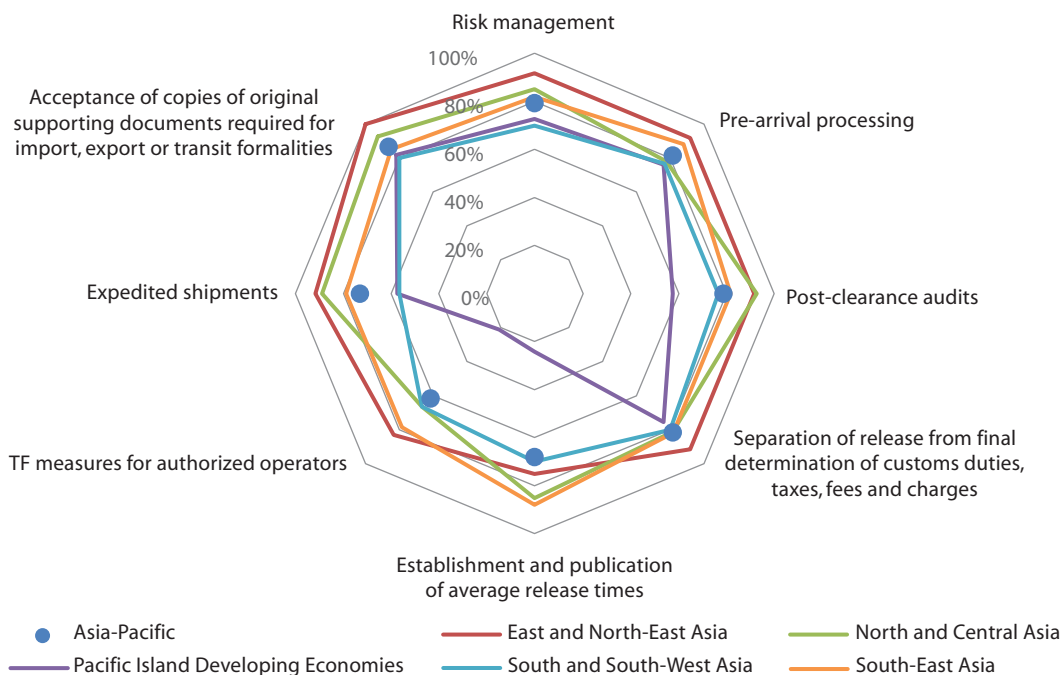
3.1.2. Formalities

The Formalities sub-group consists of eight measures related to Articles 7 and 10 of the WTO TFA as well as GATT Article VIII on Release and Clearance of Goods. At the regional level, average implementation levels for these eight measures are heterogeneous, ranging from 62% to 87% (figure 11). Especially ‘acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities’, ‘separation of release from the final determination of Customs duties, taxes, fees, and charges’, and ‘pre-arrival

processing’ have been well-implemented with implementation rates exceeding 80%. Moreover, these three measures have been implemented, at least on a pilot basis, by 96% of countries (figure 12). However, ‘establishment and publication of average release times’ – which is the only trade facilitation performance monitoring measure included in the Survey – and ‘trade facilitation measures for authorized operators’ experienced lower levels of implementation in most subregions, with average implementation rates amounting to 68% and 62% but implemented, at least on a pilot basis, by 87% and 85% respectively.



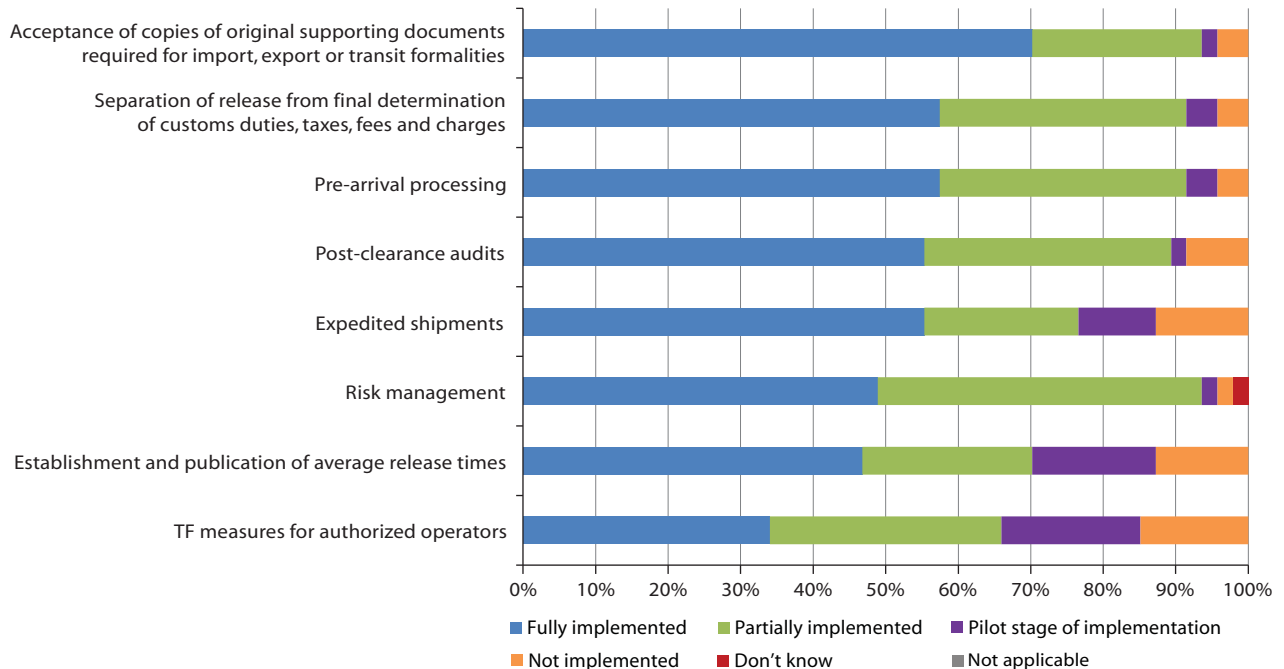
State of implementation of formalities measures by subregion



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org



State of implementation of formalities measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

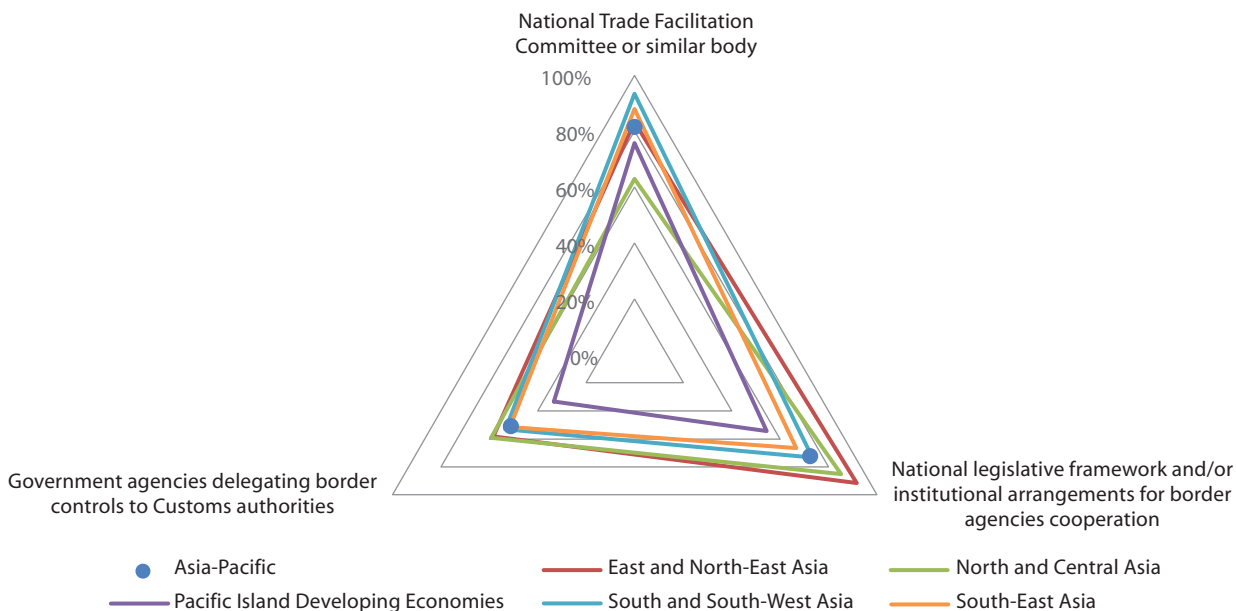
3.1.3. Institutional arrangement and cooperation

Figure 13 demonstrates that the establishment of a 'national trade facilitation committee or similar body' has been widely implemented in the region, with an average implementation rate of 82%. This is a mandatory requirement for countries that have ratified the WTO TFA, and approximately 60% of countries have fully implemented such a committee. However, figure 14 reveals that while almost all countries in the region have implemented, at least on a pilot basis, the 'national legislative framework and/or institutional

arrangements for border agencies cooperation' measure (over 95%), its implementation remains mostly partial. Only 14 countries (30%) have fully implemented this measure, highlighting the ongoing process of enhancing cooperation among agencies. Lastly, the delegation of authority by government agencies to Customs authorities represents the highest level of inter-agency collaboration. As indicated by the measure related to 'government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities', there is still a significant gap in its implementation across the region, with only 23% of countries having fully implemented it.

Figure 13

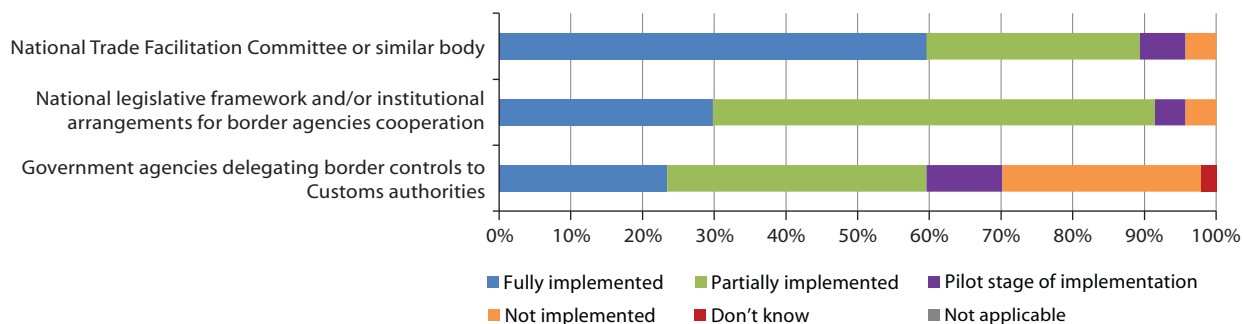
State of implementation of institutional arrangement and cooperation measures by subregion



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 14

State of implementation of institutional arrangement and cooperation measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

3.1.4. Transit

Four of the trade facilitation measures covered in the Survey specifically pertain to ‘transit’ and align with WTO TFA Article 11 on Freedom of Transit. These measures aim to streamline the formalities associated with transit trade, enabling smooth movement of goods between countries or regions. The implementation of transit systems and practices varies among countries, with particular importance for landlocked nations whose goods must pass through neighboring territories before reaching seaports for further transportation to their final destinations. Effective engagement in transit facilitation is crucial for landlocked countries to expand trade successfully. Enhancing transit efficiency will unlock the potential of landlocked nations and foster regional integration.

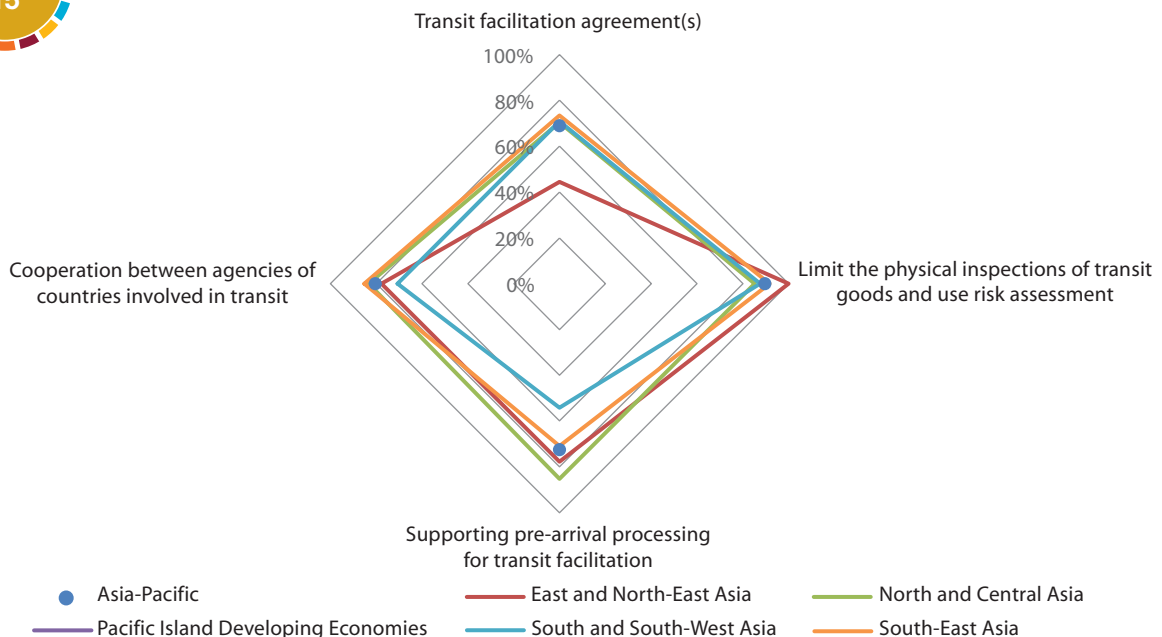
The overall implementation level of transit facilitation measures in the region stands at 78%. Figure 15 illustrates the fact that the average implementation level for transit measures surpasses 69% for each measure. Specifically, the measure ‘limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment’ has reached an implementation rate of 90%, the highest in this sub-group. The measure ‘cooperation between

agencies of countries involved in transit’ follows with an average implementation rate standing at 80%. Meanwhile, the measures ‘supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation’ and ‘transit facilitation agreement(s)’ are relatively less implemented, with average implementation rates standing at 72% and 69%, respectively.

Figure 16 shows the percentage of countries that have fully, partially or on a pilot basis implemented these measures, considering that they are not applicable to some countries, primarily island States. The measure ‘limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment’ stands out as the most implemented, with all countries having either fully or partially implemented it. It is followed by the measures ‘cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit’ and ‘supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation’, which have been fully implemented, by nearly 30% and 26% of the countries surveyed, respectively. Although the measure ‘transit facilitation agreement(s)’ has been implemented, at least on a pilot basis, by 62% of the countries surveyed, only 17% of them achieved full implementation, making it the least implemented in this sub-group.

Figure 15

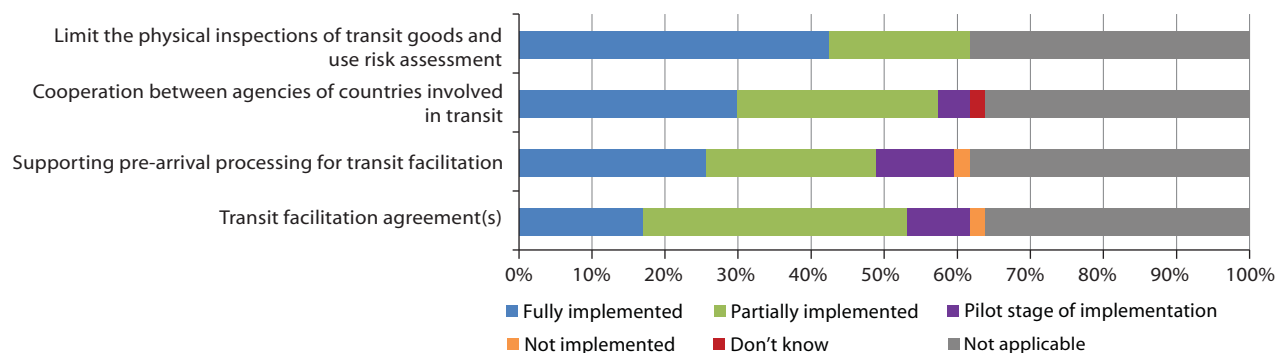
State of implementation of transit facilitation measures by subregion



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org



State of implementation of transit facilitation measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

3.2. Digital Trade Facilitation

Digital trade encompasses digitally enabled transactions and border procedures, presenting an opportunity to substantially reduce the time and costs associated with trading. While the pandemic has expedited the adoption of digital solutions and highlighted the significance of paperless trade, the journey towards achieving cross-border paperless trade across the region is anticipated to be challenging and time-consuming. Close collaboration and cooperation among countries are imperative for the successful realization of this objective.

3.2.1. Paperless trade

Paperless trade measures involve the application of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) in trade processes, ranging from basic Internet connectivity at border crossings to fully integrated electronic Single Window systems. The implementation levels of the nine measures in the 'paperless trade' sub-group vary significantly at the regional level. One of the most widely implemented measures included in the Survey is the 'automated Customs system'. The implementation rate for this measure ranges from 79% to 92% across the subregions surveyed (figure 17). Following this, the measure 'Internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies' reached an average implementation rate of 85%, the second highest rate in this sub-group. The measures 'electronic

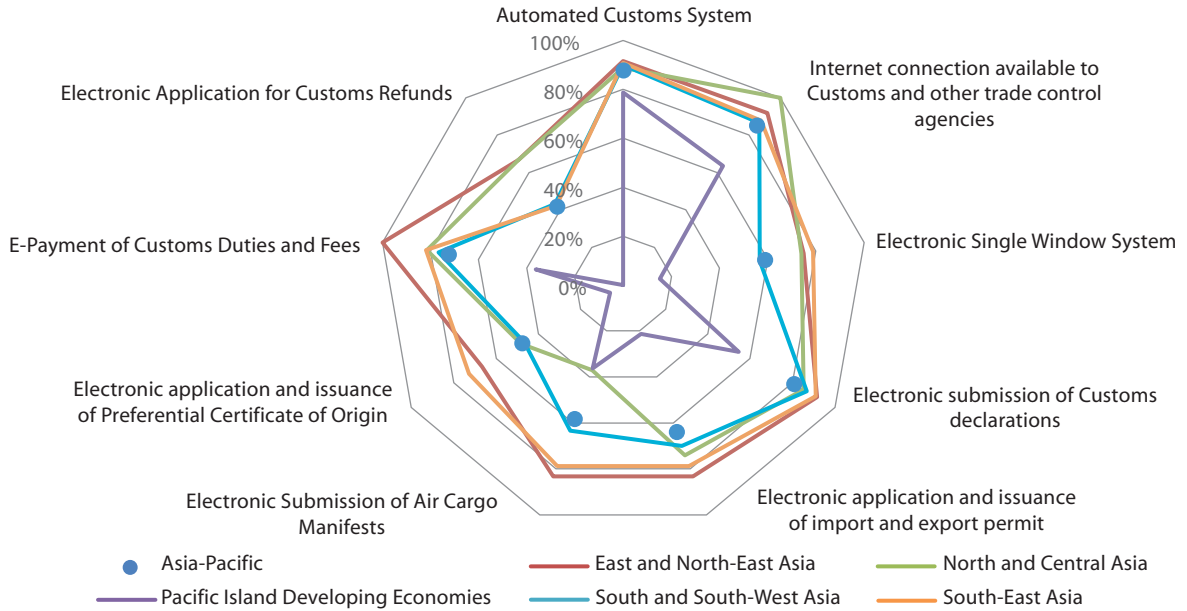
submission of Customs declarations' and 'e-payment of Customs duties and fees' have also been relatively well-implemented with average implementation rates standing at 81%, and 72%, respectively.

To further streamline and integrate trade-related processes and documents, including those mentioned above, most countries in the Asia-Pacific region have been implementing the measure 'electronic Single Window system'. Indeed, figure 18 shows that this measure has been implemented, at least on a pilot basis, by 37 countries, accounting for nearly 79% of all surveyed countries. Recently, the Lao People's Democratic Republic has achieved significant milestones in the comprehensive adoption of its Single Window system. Notably, the system has been expanded to encompass the Ministry of Health, facilitating the streamlined processing of import licenses for a wide range of products, including medicines, cosmetics and other items supervised by the Food and Drug Department.

However, certain paperless measures such as 'electronic submission of Air Cargo Manifests', 'electronic application and issuance of preferential Certificates of Origin' and 'electronic application for Customs refunds' are less implemented than the electronic Single Window system. This disparity can be attributed, in part, to the fact that Single Window systems, which are primarily developed and overseen by Customs, may not be fully integrated with the automated processes and information issued by other trade-related agencies.

Figure 17

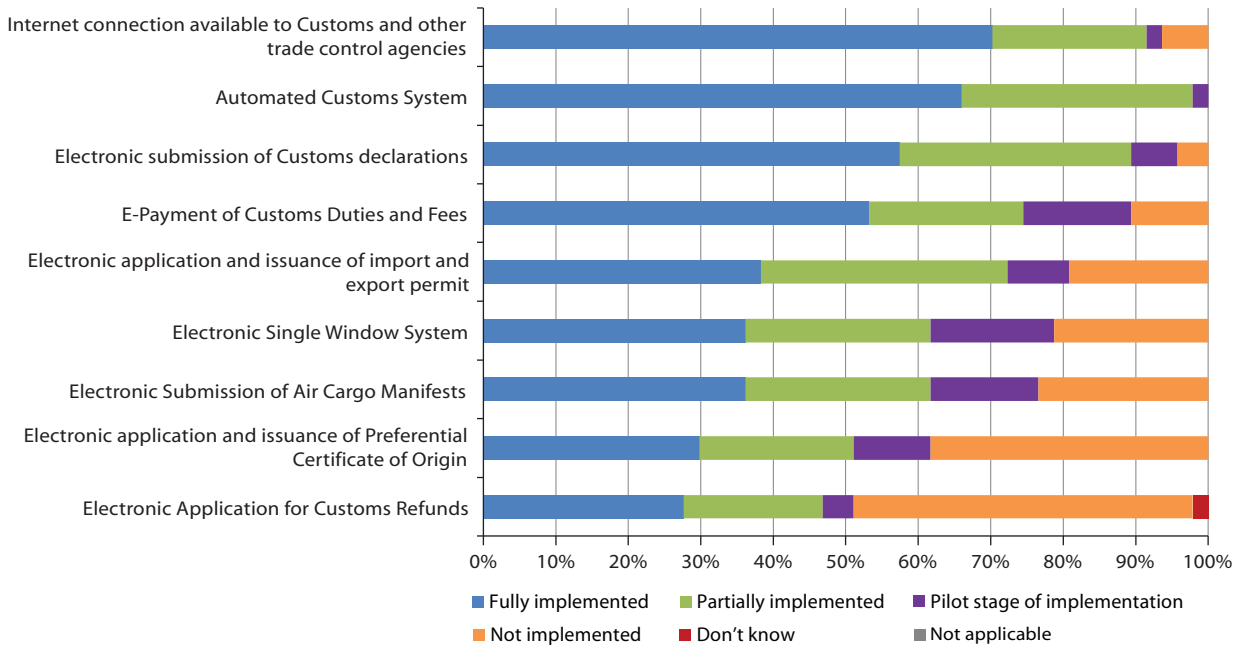
State of implementation of paperless trade measures by subregion



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 18

State of implementation of paperless trade measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

3.2.2. Cross-border paperless trade

The sub-group ‘cross-border paperless trade’ encompasses six measures aimed at facilitating the exchange and recognition of trade-related data and documents. Of these six measures depicted in figure 19, the level of implementation of the establishment of ‘laws and regulations for electronic transactions’ stands at 62%, the highest in this sub-group. Nevertheless, figure 20 shows that these legal and regulatory frameworks are mostly incomplete and may not fully facilitate the legal recognition of electronic data or documents received from stakeholders as the percentage of countries that have fully implemented the measure is less than 30%. Similarly, a ‘recognized certification authority’ responsible for issuing electronic signature certificates to facilitate electronic transactions has yet to be fully established as the measure is fully implemented by less than 40% of the countries in the region. Both measures are essential for cross-border paperless trade, as they not only facilitate communication between stakeholders in the same country, but also promote effective collaboration along the international supply chain.

The lack of institutional and legal frameworks to support cross-border paperless trade, combined with limited capacity to implement paperless systems in many developing economies, has resulted in the electronic exchange of trade-related

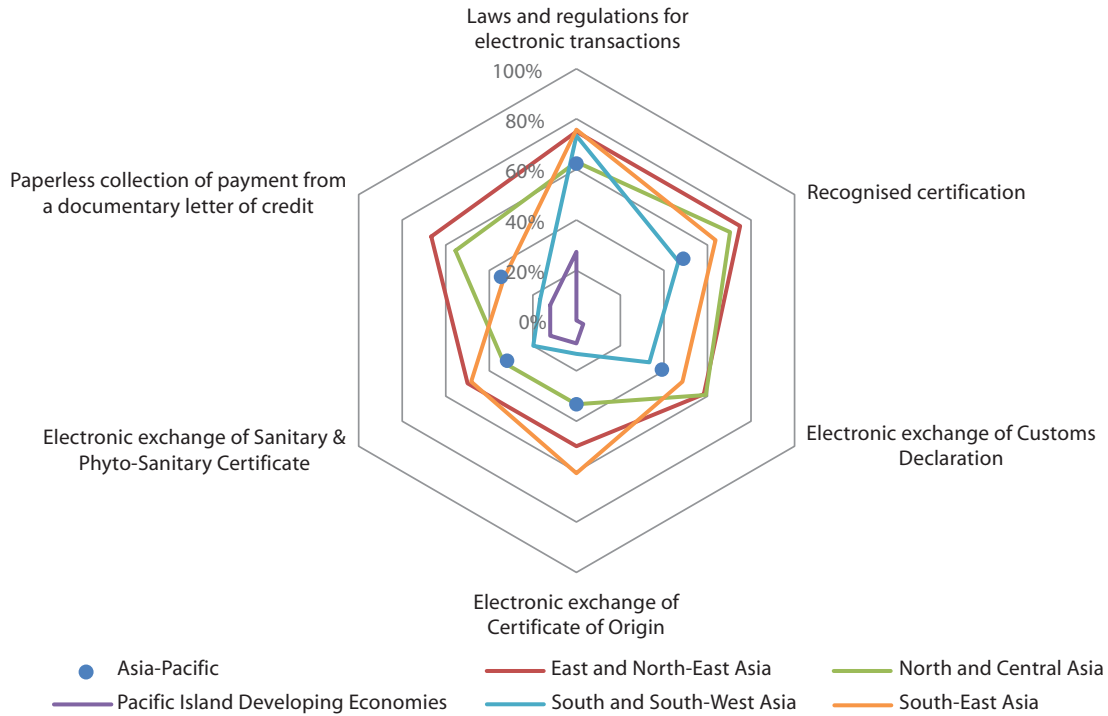
documents being conducted on a limited basis. These include Customs declarations, Certificates of Origin, and Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Certificates. Indeed, only 4% of the countries surveyed have fully implemented the measures ‘electronic exchange of Customs Declaration’, and ‘electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary Certificate’. This percentage falls to 2% for the measure ‘electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin’.

However, some initiatives such as the ASEAN Single Window (ASW), a highly advanced cross-border paperless trade initiative, demonstrated rapid progress. All ASEAN members are participating in the joint ASW Live Operation, which makes possible the granting of preferential tariff treatment based on the ATIGA (ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement) e-Form D exchanged via the ASW. In addition, the ASEAN Customs Declaration Document (ACDD) and the e-Phyto certificate have been exchanged through the ASW to a certain extent. The ACDD is exchanged between nine ASEAN Member States, with 1.7 million ACDDs exchanged in 2022. In addition, two ASEAN Member States, Indonesia, and Thailand, are exchanging e-Phyto certificates, and the Philippines is about to join them.⁸ By actively participating in this initiative, ASEAN Member States contribute to streamlining subregional trade operations and promoting efficient cross-border trade in the region.

⁸ ESCAP, 2023, Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) 2023

Figure 19

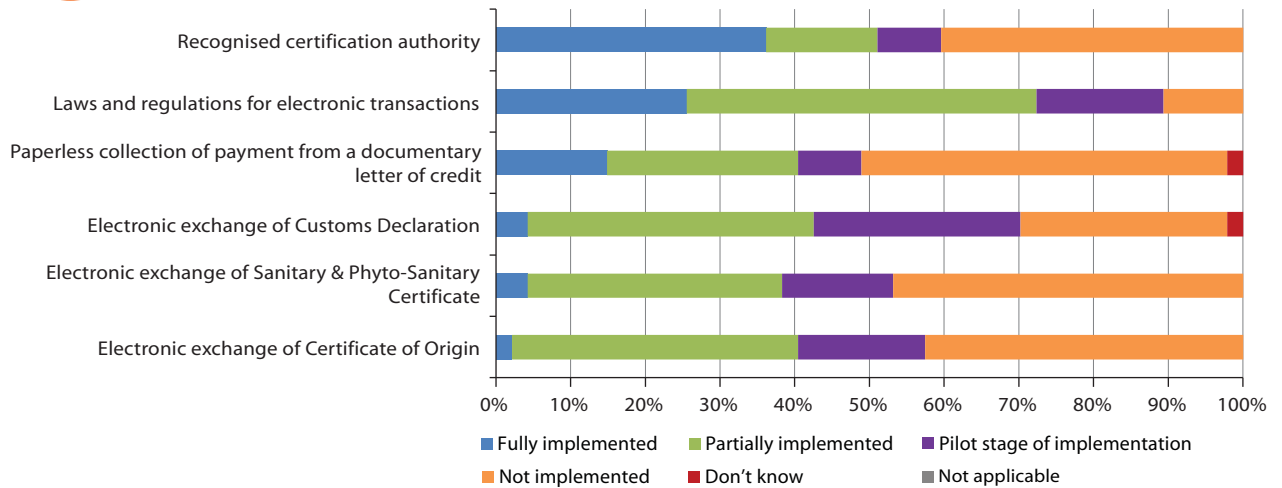
State of implementation of cross-border paperless trade measures by subregion



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

Figure 20

State of implementation of cross-border paperless trade measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

3.3. Sustainable Trade Facilitation

The integration of sustainability is considered to be a crucial driver for future trade growth. However, the slow implementation by businesses and Governments can be attributed to the lack of comprehensive solutions and global regulatory frameworks that effectively incorporate sustainability principles. Recognizing the importance of promoting trade facilitation sustainably and achieving sustainable development goals in the digital era, Sustainable Trade Facilitation has become a vital pillar of the Global Survey since 2017. The emergence of digital trade presents an opportunity for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and women to access international markets and global supply chains more effectively. However, it is essential to address the digital gaps that can exacerbate inequalities among individuals, firms, sectors and geographic locations. To address the multifaceted dimensions

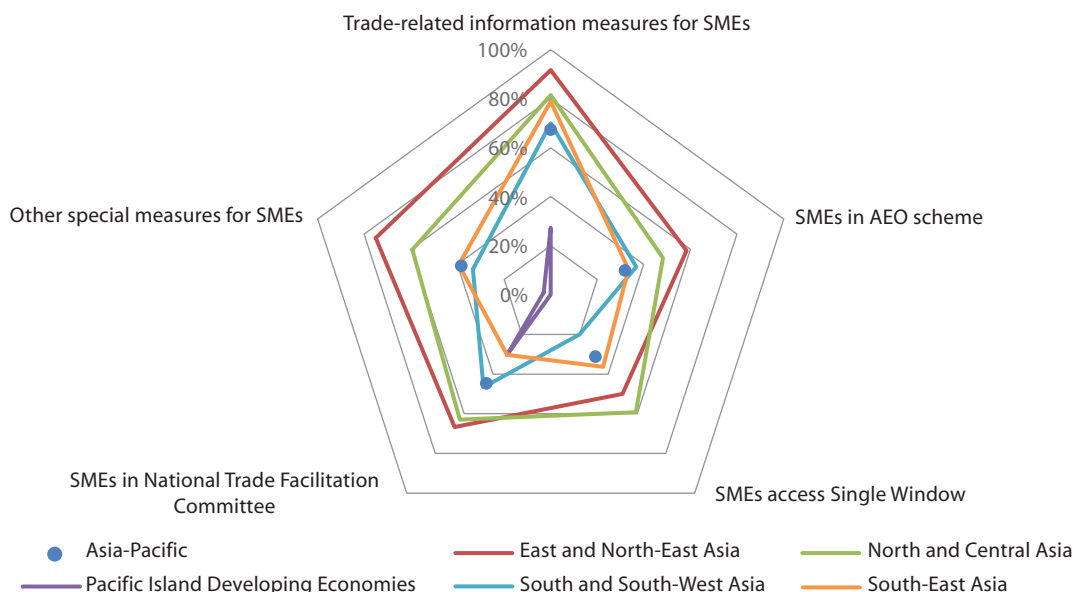
of sustainable development, the Survey includes three sub-groups: ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’, ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ and ‘women in trade facilitation’. These sub-groups aim to address the specific challenges and opportunities faced by SMEs, the agricultural sector and women in their engagement with trade facilitation, promoting inclusivity and sustainable practices.

3.3.1. Trade facilitation for SMEs

The implementation of the five measures under the ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ sub-group in the region is generally low, with a regional average of 43%. Figure 21 highlights the existing variations in implementation levels among subregions. East and North-East Asia as well as North and Central Asia demonstrate better performance in implementing trade facilitation measures for SMEs, while on the other hand the Pacific Island Developing Economies have made limited progress in including SMEs in their trade facilitation efforts.



State of implementation of trade facilitation for SMEs measures by subregion



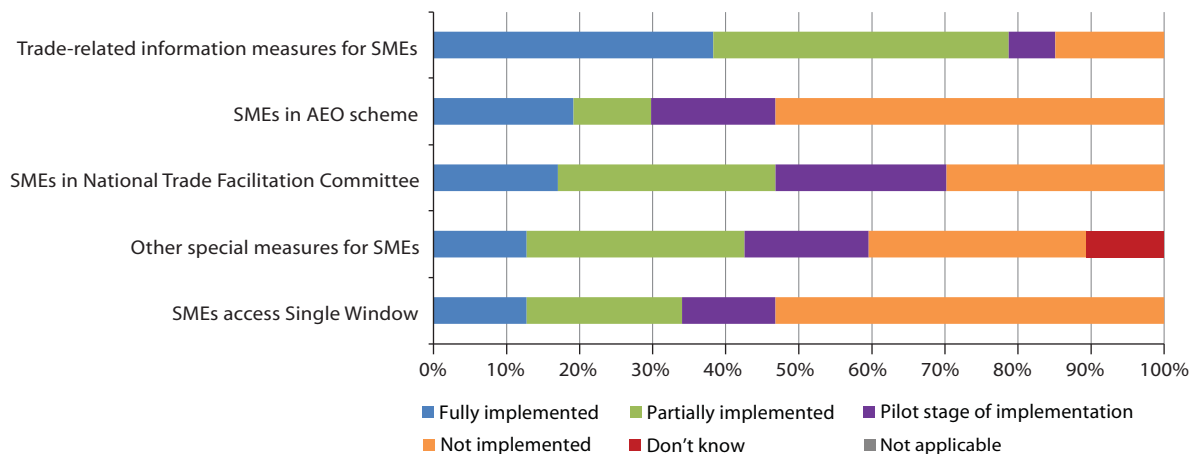
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

In terms of ‘trade-related information measures for SMEs’, the region shows a relatively higher implementation rate, reaching 67% on average, with 85% of the countries surveyed that have implemented trade-related information measures specifically tailored for SMEs, at least on a pilot basis (figure 22). However, considering the other measures in this sub-group, such as ‘SMEs in national trade facilitation committee’, ‘SMEs in Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) scheme and ‘SMEs access Single Window’, the average regional implementation rates remain low, ranging from 31% to 45% with full implementation in a small number of countries.

The interpretation of these ratings shows room for improvement when it comes to the adoption of these measures. Indeed, some countries have made very good progress, such as Cambodia which has developed the SeT4SME⁹ project for the period 2021-2023. This project aimed to empower SMEs by establishing an e-commerce portal helping Cambodian SMEs to take full advantage of an improved Customs clearance process and providing them with the skills and knowledge they need to navigate the global e-commerce market.



State of implementation of trade facilitation for SMEs measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

3.3.2. Agricultural trade facilitation

The geopolitical conflicts have brought uncertainties to global supply chains and have had a significant impact on the agricultural sector. While strengthened SPS measures are crucial for mitigating risks, they have also posed challenges to global food supplies. In this context, the role of trade facilitation in the agriculture sector becomes paramount. Facilitating trade to ensure the swift movement of agricultural goods is particularly crucial, especially for perishable items that are time-sensitive.

The average implementation level of ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ measures within the framework of “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” is higher (62%) compared with other sub-groups. However, figure 23 shows that the implementation rates of these measures vary significantly among the different subregions. East and North-East Asia have achieved a consistent implementation rate of approximately 92% for the measures ‘testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS of main trading partners’, ‘national standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS’ and ‘special treatment for perishable goods’.

⁹ Improving Small Package E-Trade for SMEs (SeT4SME) – Projects – Site (swisscontact.org)

The only exception is the ‘electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates’ (implemented at a 75% rate). Oppositely, the Pacific Island Developing Economies have shown a limited implementation rate (21%) for the measure ‘testing and laboratory facilities to meet SPS of main trading partners’. This suggests that additional technical assistance is needed to establish such facilities in the Pacific.

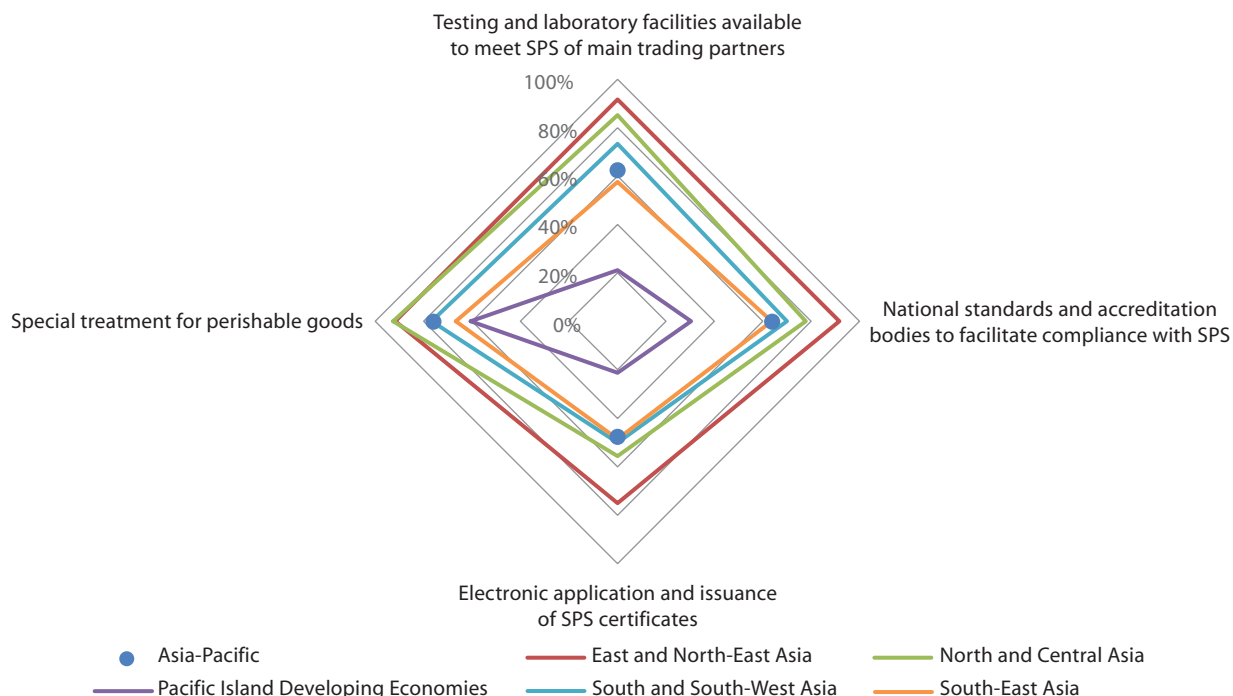
Furthermore, figure 24 illustrates that the measure ‘special treatment for perishable goods’ has been implemented, at least in pilot projects, by more than 91% of the surveyed countries. In addition, nearly 79% of the countries have made efforts to establish ‘national standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS’, at least

on a pilot basis. Testing and laboratory facilities are available in slightly more than 74% of the surveyed countries in the region; however, both measures have only 40% of countries achieving a full implementation level.

However, the measure ‘electronic application and issuance of Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary certificates’ remains a challenge for most countries. Indeed, only 19% of Asia-Pacific countries have fully implemented this measure. Nevertheless, some countries have made interesting progress in this regard, such as Pakistan, which has improved their electronic Single Window, during the past two years, integrating the application and issuance of certificates electronically via the Pakistan Single Window system.¹⁰



State of implementation of agricultural trade facilitation measures by subregion

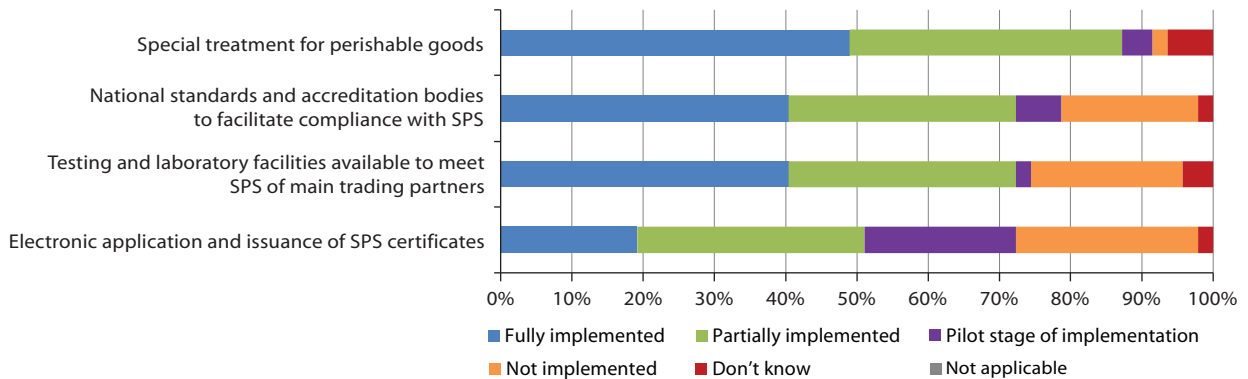


Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unftsurvey.org

¹⁰ Pakistan Single Window (psw.gov.pk)



State of implementation of agricultural trade facilitation measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

3.3.3. Women in trade facilitation

Empowering women to actively participate in international trade is important for inclusivity and gender equality. Measures under the ‘women in trade facilitation’ encompass various initiatives, such as including women in the membership of NTFCs or similar bodies, crafting trade facilitation policies that specifically consider the needs of women traders, and implementing trade facilitation measures that benefit women involved in trade.

Figure 25 demonstrates that the regional average level of implementation for the three measures in the ‘women in trade facilitation’ sub-group remains relatively low, ranging from 39% to 43% in the Asia-Pacific region. This indicates that there is significant potential for improvement in this area. Indeed, despite gender equality being integrated into numerous policy initiatives, the focus on addressing specific gender concerns for female traders in the context of trade facilitation is limited.

Figure 26 reveals that more than 72% of the countries have implemented ‘trade facilitation measures to benefit women involved in trade’, although primarily on a pilot or partial basis. These measures encompass various actions such as

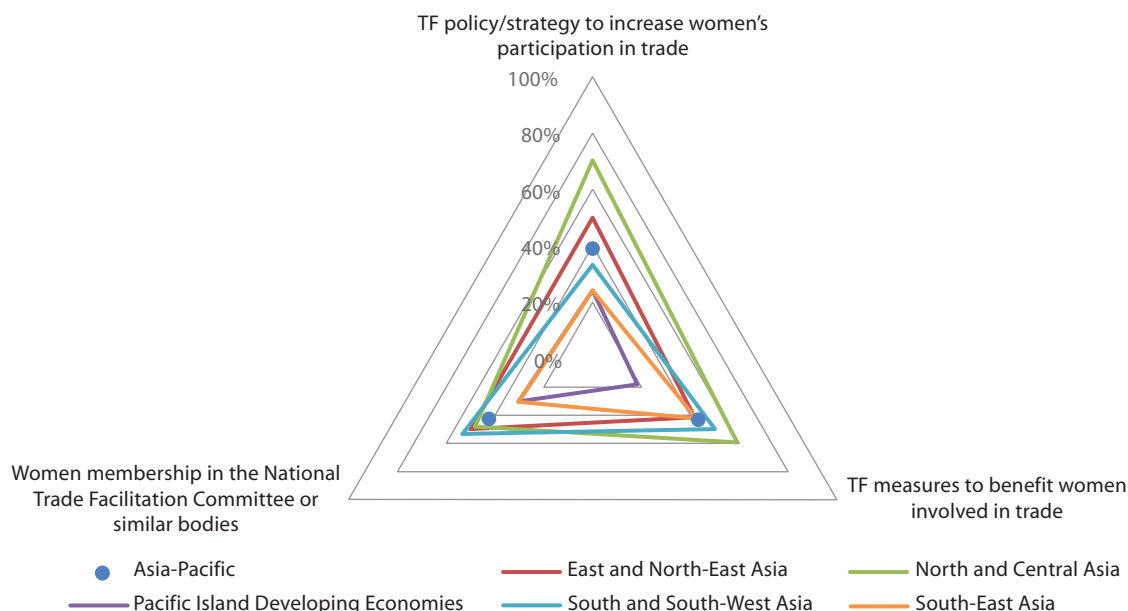
appointing a gender focal point in relevant border agencies, promoting gender-balanced participation in training and providing specific training for women engaged in trade. One of these countries is Vanuatu, which has introduced the 2019-2025 Trade Policy Framework.¹¹ This framework makes gender equality a major area of focus and recommends positive gender discrimination. Vanuatu also monitors the relevant indicators of the National Gender Policy and the National Financial Inclusion Strategy, and reports annually to the National Trade Development Committee.

Similarly, the measure ‘women membership representation in the national trade facilitation committees or similar bodies’ has been implemented in 72% of the countries surveyed, but primarily on a partial and pilot basis. Indeed, it has been fully implemented by only 9% of the countries surveyed. On the other hand, 45% of the countries have not implemented a dedicated ‘trade facilitation policy/strategy to enhance women’s participation in trade’ at all. Considering the significance of gender equality and women’s empowerment in the agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, more countries should adopt measures promoting gender balance and women’s participation in trade.

¹¹ Trade Policy Framework Update 2019-2025.pdf (nab.vu)

Figure 25

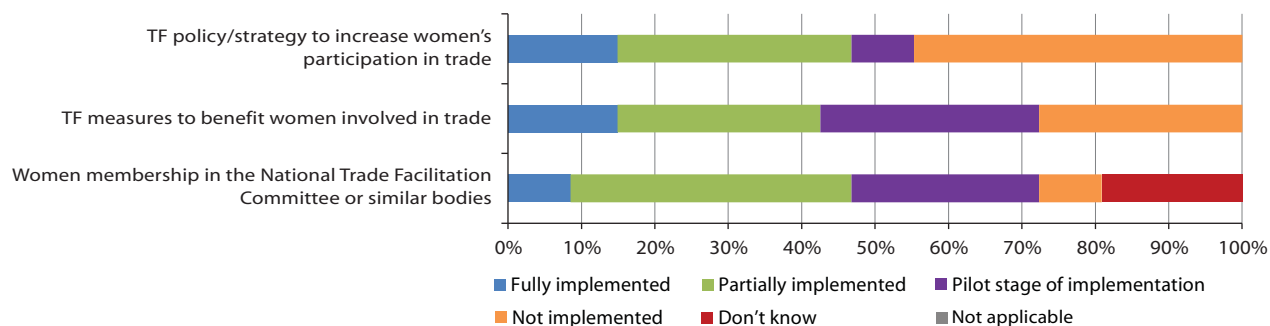
State of implementation of women in trade facilitation measures by subregion



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

Figure 26

State of implementation of women in trade facilitation measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

3.4. Implementation of digital vs. sustainable trade facilitation

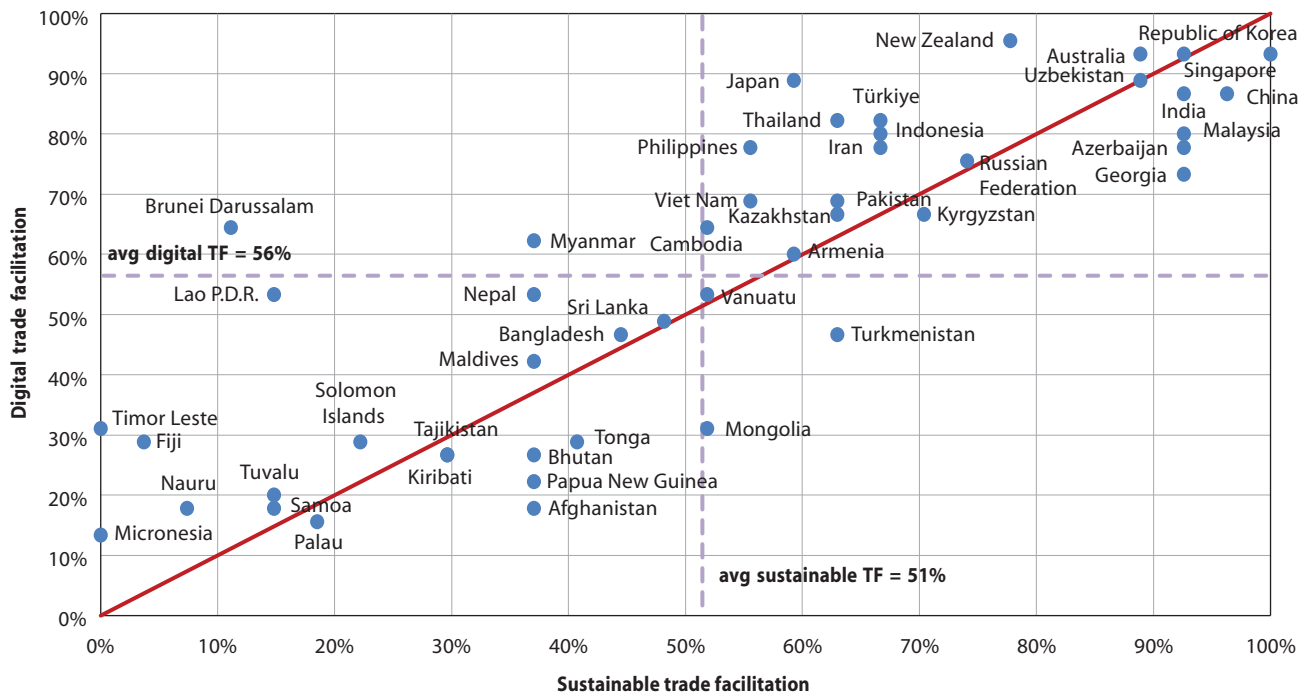
Digital solutions for trade facilitation are crucial in promoting sustainability and cannot be overstated. The COVID-19 pandemic has expedited the adoption of digital technologies, highlighting their crucial role in achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Sustainable trade facilitation plays a vital role in maximizing the developmental advantages of trade facilitation reforms, and digital solutions prove to be highly effective in reducing barriers, particularly for marginalized stakeholders in international trade. Recognizing the interconnectedness of digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures, it becomes imperative

to examine how countries have been implementing these two sets of trade facilitation measures.

Digital trade transformation can contribute to sustainable development objectives by reducing obstacles. Figure 27 provides a visual representation of the strong positive correlation between the digital and sustainable aspects of trade facilitation. The regional average implementation rates for the “Digital Trade Facilitation” and “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” groups stand at 57% and 51%, respectively. Countries that have achieved higher implementation rates for digital trade facilitation measures have also demonstrated commendable performance in sustainable trade facilitation measures. Generally, more advanced countries have excelled in both the digital and sustainable dimensions compared to their less advanced counterparts.

Figure 27

Implementation of Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation by Asia-Pacific countries



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

Note: For the sake of comparability, the study calculates the implementation rate of sustainable trade facilitation by using data from two sub-groups, namely, ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ and ‘agricultural trade facilitation’. Data for ‘women in trade facilitation’ are not adequate for an analysis and, therefore, excluded from calculating the implementation rate of the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group in this section. The rate of implementation is computed only if the level of implementation (0-3) is available for all questions associated with both aforementioned sub-groups. For digital trade facilitation implementation, DK and NA are treated as zero and the rate of implementation is calculated for all countries.

The Republic of Korea leads in sustainable trade facilitation with a 100% implementation rate, followed by China at 96%. Meanwhile, New Zealand is at the forefront of digital trade facilitation with an implementation rate of 96%, followed by Singapore, Australia and the Republic of Korea, all achieving a 93% implementation rate.

3.5. Other Trade Facilitation

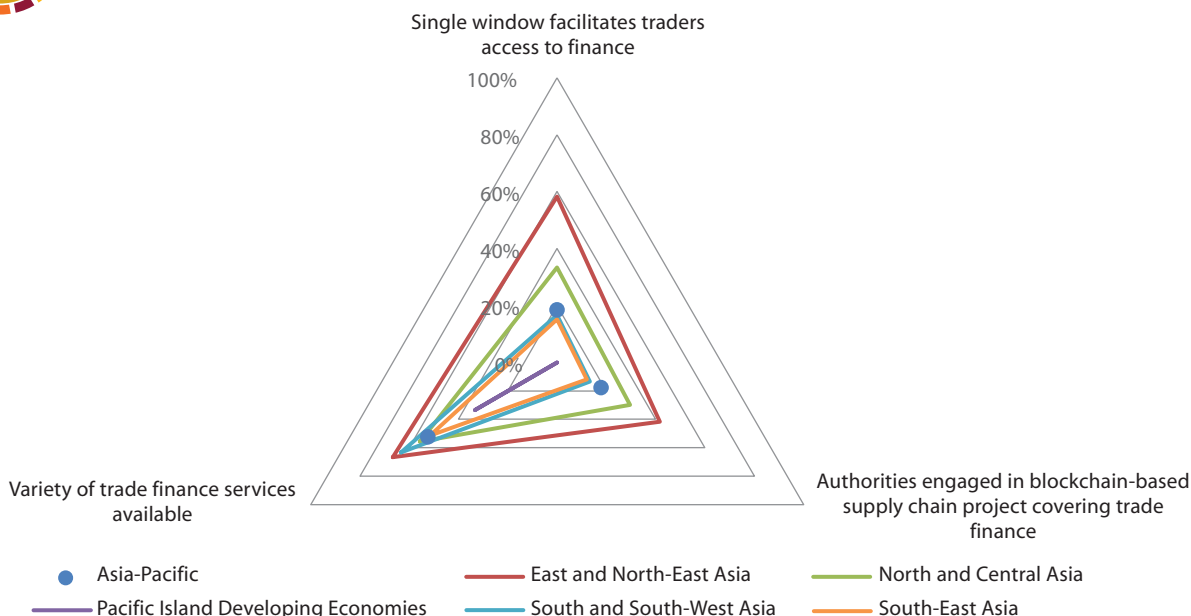
3.5.1. Trade finance facilitation

Trade finance has played a crucial role in facilitating the growth of global trade. It enables smooth transactions by providing the necessary liquidity and cash flow, ensuring that buyers receive their goods and sellers receive their payments with reduced risks. As depicted in figure 28, the most widely implemented measure,

in this sub-group, is the ‘variety of trade finance services available’, with a regional implementation rate of 52%. Data collected through the Survey indicates that a variety of trade finance services are available in 77% of the countries surveyed, at least on a pilot basis. However, only 17% of the countries enable companies to access a full range of diversified trade finance products and services.¹² Another measure related to trade finance involves new technologies, but it is still in the early stages of development. Indeed, among the countries surveyed, approximately 30% have ‘authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain projects related to trade finance’, although only one country (Azerbaijan) has fully implemented this measure (figure 29). Last, around 30% of the surveyed countries have fully, partially or on a pilot basis implemented the measure ‘Single Window facilitates traders access to finance’.



State of implementation of trade finance facilitation measures by subregion

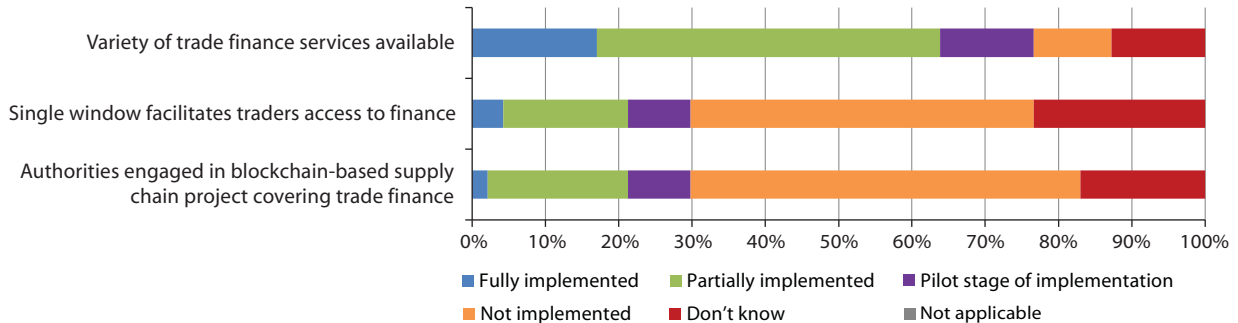


Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

¹² Full implementation is determined when all the following six products listed in the Survey questionnaire are available – a documentary letter of credit, import finance, export finance, factoring or receivables finance, payables finance and inventory finance.



State of implementation of trade finance facilitation measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

It is worth noting that data collection on this topic during the Survey proved to be challenging. The high occurrence of “don’t know” responses indicates that trade facilitation experts and officials involved in the Survey may not be familiar with trade finance. Traditional trade facilitation actors, including Customs and trade ministries, may consider financing and payment procedures for international trade transactions as beyond their scope of work. However, there is a clear opportunity to integrate trade finance practices into trade facilitation activities, including bridging trade finance with Single Windows. This calls for collaborative efforts by banks, industry players, and trade and finance regulators.

However, countries in the Asia-Pacific region continue to make progress, as witnessed by Thailand’s Joint Standing Committee on Commerce, Industry and Banking (JSCCIB) project.¹³ This project involves the integration of the blockchain-based National Digital Trade Platform (NDTP), which combines technologies from Japan’s TradeWaltz and Singapore’s Network Trade Platform (NTP). The NDTP’s primary objective is to digitize trade processes, which will accelerate imports and exports while facilitating access to trade finance for small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). In its initial phase, NDTP focuses on the digitization of various trade documents, such as purchase orders, invoices and packing lists, using internationally recognized

UN/CEFACT standards. In addition, transport documents such as bills of lading and sea waybills are also digitized, streamlining trade procedures and promoting the efficiency of cross-border transactions.

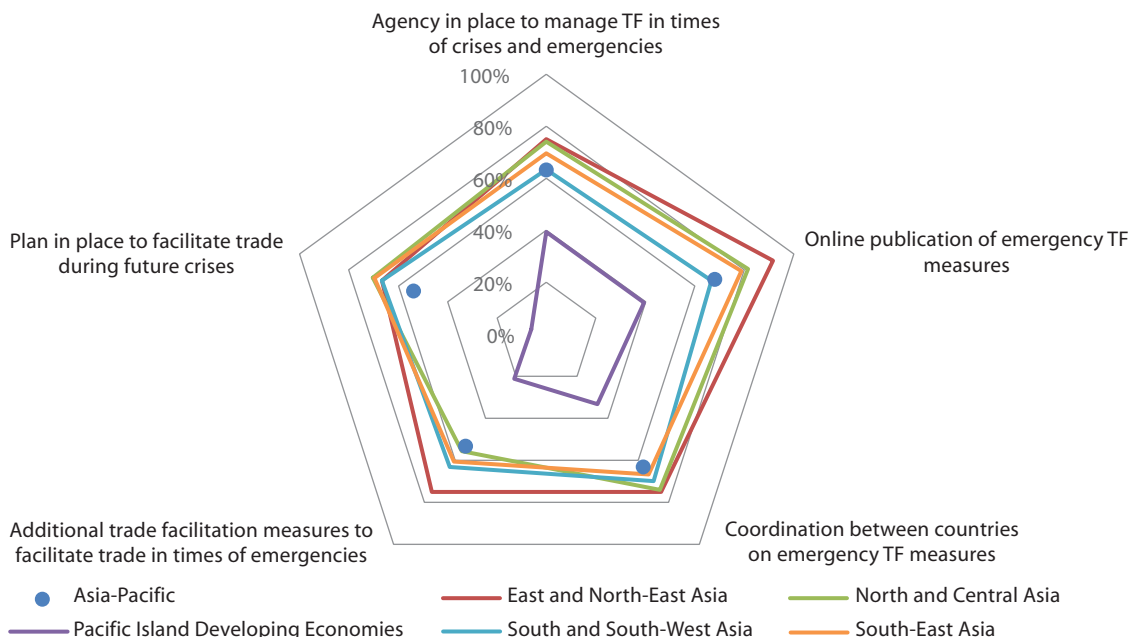
3.5.2. Trade facilitation in times of crisis

Global supply chains’ vulnerability was laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused severe disruptions in global trade. Emerging out of the pandemic, it has been widely acknowledged that ensuring the continuity of trade is essential for protecting livelihoods and ensuring a steady supply of essential goods and services. Governments, border agencies, logistics companies, and traders have been exploring ways to utilize existing trade and transport facilitation measures to keep goods flowing across borders. The crisis encouraged the implementation and enhancement of relevant trade facilitation measures, particularly in terms of digitalizing trade procedures. A sub-group of questions focusing on ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ was included in the 2021 Survey, in response to COVID-19. In recognition of the continued importance of trade resilience and preparedness, these measures are also included in the 2023 Survey. This sub-group encompasses a set of five measures aimed at addressing both immediate crisis responses and long-term resilient strategies (figure 30).

¹³ Thailand’s JSCCIB pilots blockchain-based National Digital Trade Platform (NDTP)/Cross-Border Paperless Trade Database (digitalizetrade.org)



State of implementation of trade facilitation in times of crisis measures by subregion



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [untdfsurvey.org](https://untdf.org)

Trade facilitation in times of crisis has relatively been well implemented across the Asia-Pacific region with an overall implementation rate standing at an average of 60% (figure 30). Figure 31 illustrates that 89% of the surveyed countries have implemented measures, at least on a pilot basis, to publish emergency trade facilitation measures online, making it the most widely implemented measure in this sub-group. This measure is of utmost importance, particularly when timely and transparent information is critical to ensuring seamless trade flows. Furthermore, most countries (87%) have an ‘agency in place to manage TF in times of crisis and emergencies’, but these efforts have predominantly focused on the medical response. This raises the concern that coordinating bodies for trade facilitation, such as national trade facilitation committees, have not fully utilized their potential during the crisis in the region. It is worth reiterating the significant role of national trade facilitation committees in coordinating trade facilitation practices among various stakeholders, particularly during times of crisis. Similarly, 85% of countries in the region have implemented measures to facilitate coordination between countries during

emergencies, promoting a collaborative approach to trade facilitation.

When it comes to long-term preparedness for future crises, approximately 72% of the surveyed countries have developed a ‘plan to facilitate trade during future crises’. These plans involve managing an essential goods catalogue and implementing review mechanisms to enhance cross-border trade in preparation for future crises, whether they be natural disasters or health emergencies. While only 11 countries in the region currently have such plans fully implemented, an additional 23 countries are already exploring ways to position themselves for effective crisis preparedness. Specifically, ASEAN Member States are continuing their efforts in this regard, as evidenced by the extension of the Memorandum of Understanding on the Implementation of Non-Tariff Measures Related to Essential Goods, signed in November 2020, until November 2024. In addition, the initial list of 152 essential goods has subsequently been supplemented with 199 additional food and agricultural products and goods related to the manufacture and distribution

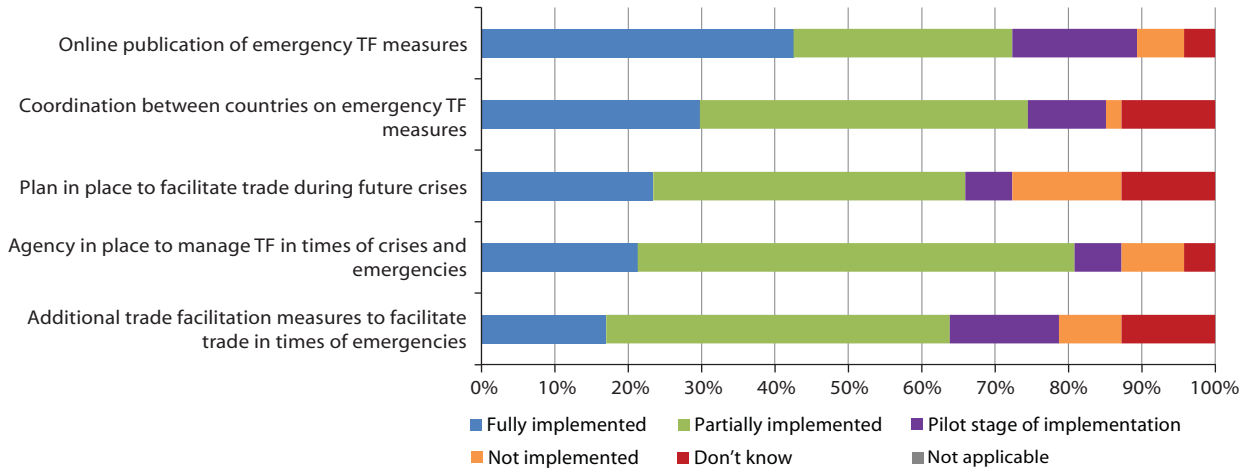
of vaccines, reaffirming the commitment of ASEAN Member States to facilitate the smooth movement of essential goods in the region and to increase trade resilience and preparedness.¹⁴

Lastly, approximately 79% of countries in the region have implemented ‘additional trade

facilitation measures to facilitate trade in times of emergencies’. These include reducing Customs duties and suspending mandatory certifications to facilitate the swift movement of essential goods. However, only 17% of the countries surveyed have fully implemented this measure, making it the least implemented in this sub-group.



State of implementation of trade facilitation in times of crisis measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

¹⁴ See the updated list of essential goods at ASEAN extends MoU on essential goods - ASEAN Main Portal

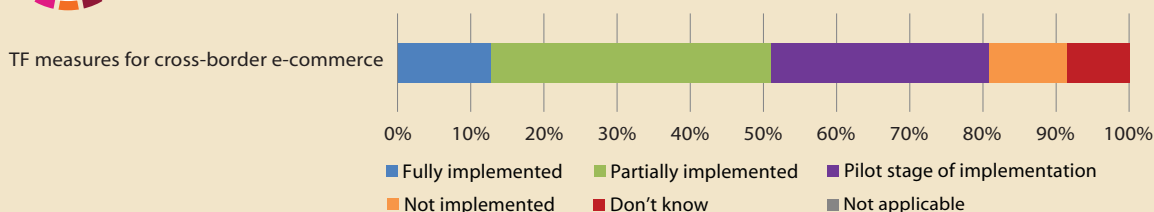
Box 1

Emerging trade facilitation measures

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) has become an increasingly important part of global trade, establishing itself as a dominant way of conducting commercial transactions worldwide. Nevertheless, the harmonization of regulations governing e-commerce at an international level is encountering difficulties, as existing regulations are struggling to keep pace with the rapid expansion of e-commerce activities. The pilot-tested measure ‘trade facilitation for e-commerce’ assesses the degree of implementation of a national strategy for cross-border e-commerce and the presence of a de minimis regime. Notably, 51% of countries have either fully or partially implemented these measures, underlining their commitment to advancing e-commerce (figure 32). Nevertheless, there is room for improvement, not only in the specific areas addressed by the measure but also in the broader context discussed in this report regarding the importance of “Digital Trade Facilitation” and its contribution to sustainable trade.

Figure 32

State of implementation of trade facilitation for e-commerce measure in Asia and the Pacific

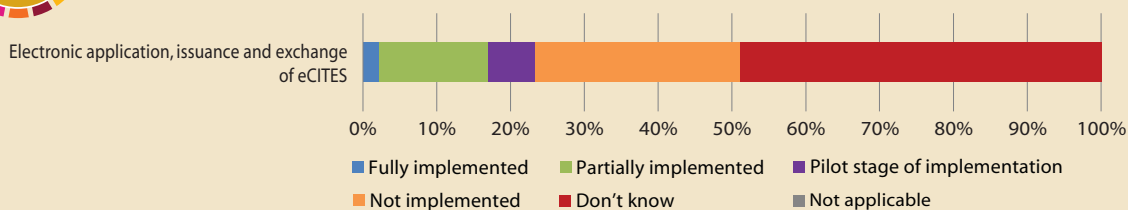


Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, known as CITES, is an agreement between Governments that aims to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plant specimens is regulated for the protection of those species. Electronic permits (eCITES) are an emerging digital solution for improving the implementation of the CITES Convention by simplifying the compliance procedure for trade in these goods. In the 2023 Survey, the pilot-tested measure, ‘trade and wildlife protection’, addressed the implementation of the eCITES electronic permit system. The Survey shows a low level of implementation of this measure in the Asia-Pacific region, with only 23% of countries surveyed having implemented it, at least on a pilot basis (figure 33).

Figure 33

State of implementation of trade and wildlife protection measure in Asia and the Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

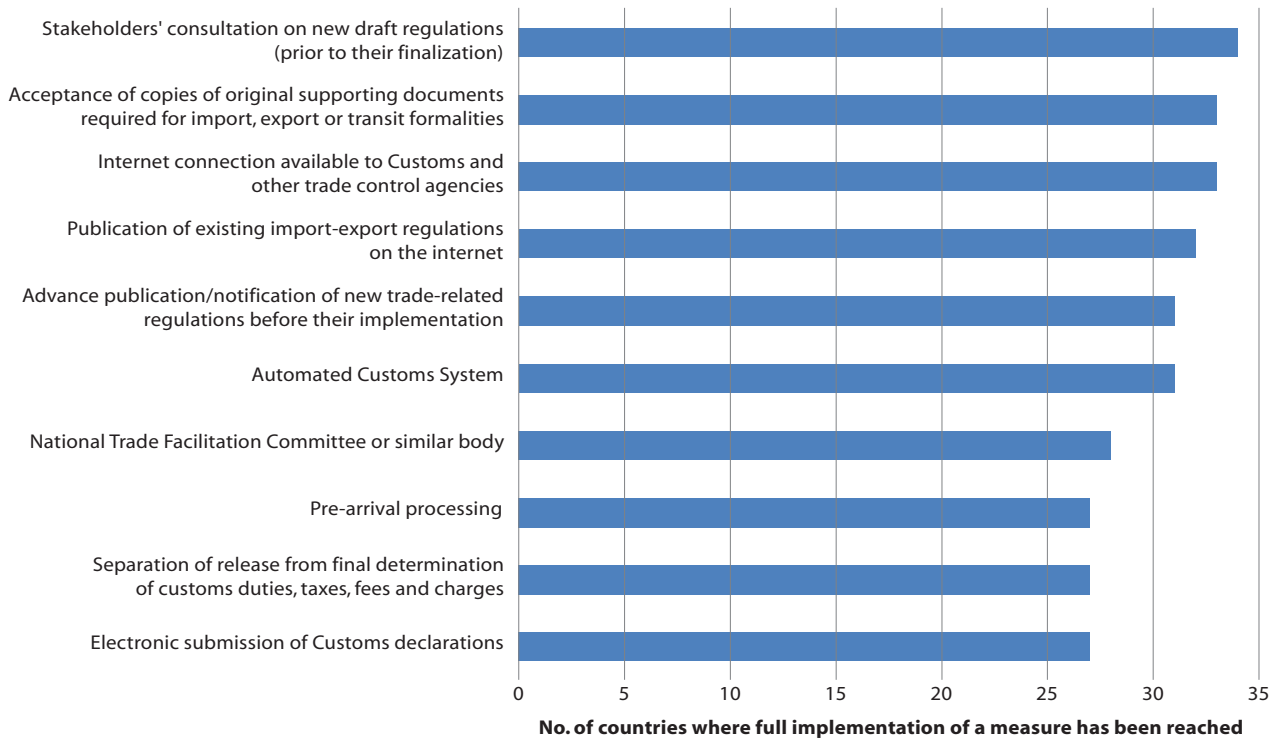
3.6. Progress and challenges in implementation

Figure 34 illustrates the top 10 trade facilitation measures fully implemented in the Asia-Pacific region in 2023. These 10 measures all fall into the categories of ‘transparency’, ‘formalities’, ‘institutional arrangements and cooperation’ and ‘paperless trade’. Specifically, countries in the Asia-Pacific region have well-implemented Customs-related measures and have prioritized

‘stakeholders’ consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)’, ‘acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export or transit formalities’ and ‘Internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies’. On the other hand, it also indicates that there is still significant room for improvement in the implementation of measures related to cross-border paperless trade and sustainable trade facilitation, which do not appear in this ranking at all.



Trade facilitation measures most fully implemented in Asia and the Pacific (47 countries)



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org



Assessing the impact of trade facilitation in Asia and the Pacific

Based on the Survey data presented here, the implementation of trade facilitation measures has been assessed for its impact on trade costs. Two models, based on United Nations (2023),¹⁵ have been developed to evaluate the potential effects of different groups of trade facilitation measures (general and digital trade facilitation measures). Model 1 considers an overall implementation rate of 31 main measures, while Model 2 distinguishes between general and digital trade facilitation measures. In addition to trade facilitation measures, traditional trade cost factors are also considered, including natural geographic factors, cultural and historical distance, regional trade agreements and trade-related infrastructure. The results indicate that the reduction in trade costs resulting from the streamlining of trade facilitation measures is three times greater compared to the impact of improvements in hard infrastructure, such as maritime connectivity. Notably, digital trade facilitation measures play a significant role in mitigating the negative impact of rising trade costs.

¹⁵ ESCAP, 2023, *Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: Global Report 2023*.

Table 3 provides further insights to trade cost reductions by examining if sets of trade facilitation measures under the WTO TFA and beyond have improved. The first set aligns with the binding measures of the WTO TFA; the second set includes both binding and non-binding TFA

measures; and the third set encompasses additional paperless and cross-border paperless trade facilitation measures. Average trade cost reductions for each set of measures are calculated based on partial and full implementation scenarios, respectively.



Table 3 Simulation results for trade cost reduction as a result of the WTO TFA implementation

Asia-Pacific: trade costs model	WTO TFA (binding only)		WTO TFA (binding + non-binding)		WTO TFA+ (binding + non-binding + other paperless and cross-border paperless trade)	
	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
Model 1						
Overall trade facilitation	-0.59%	-2.68%	-1.15%	-4.61%	-5.15%	-11.05%
Model 2						
General trade facilitation measures	-0.46%	-2.05%	-0.61%	-2.94%	-0.86%	-3.42%
Digital trade facilitation measures	–	–	-0.50%	-1.12%	-4.10%	-6.95%

Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Note: There are no digital trade facilitation measures that are classified as WTO TFA binding measures.

WTO TFA = World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement.

The implementation of binding measures under the WTO TFA alone results in a limited decrease in trade costs, with a maximum reduction of around 3% when full implementation is achieved. Figure 9 illustrates that measures related to ‘transparency’ and ‘formalities’ within the WTO TFA have already been highly implemented (over 76%). This indicates that countries in the region have already experienced the benefits of achieving baseline compliance with the WTO TFA and should now strive for higher and more diverse trade facilitation objectives. Improvement of binding and non-binding measures under the WTO TFA still has the potential to further facilitate trade and reduce unnecessary trade costs. Partial implementation of these measures leads to a moderate decrease in trade costs of more than 1%, while full

implementation yields a greater reduction of around 5%. However, the most significant impact on trade costs is observed when integrating paperless and cross-border paperless trade measures beyond the WTO TFA coverage. In this scenario, trade-cost reductions reach approximately 5% for partial implementation and approximately 11% for full implementation. Model 2 analysis demonstrates that reduction impact as a result of full implementation of WTO TFA+ in digital trade facilitation is twice as much as that of general trade facilitation. The reduction in trade costs achieved through digital trade facilitation measures is higher at around 7% compared with the reduction achieved through general trade facilitation measures at about 3%. These findings emphasize the importance of fully implementing

digital trade facilitation measures to maximize the reduction in trade costs.

Table 4 estimates the trade cost reductions that subregions in the Asia-Pacific region could achieve by enhancing implementation under WTO TFA as well as the WTO TFA+. The extent of trade cost reductions varies across the Asia-Pacific region. Notably, the Pacific Island Developing Economies,

South and South-West Asia, and North and Central Asia are the top three beneficiaries when WTO TFA+ is fully implemented, with their potential trade cost reductions standing at around 26%, 15% and 12%, respectively. In contrast, East and North-East Asia, and ASEAN, which already have a relatively advanced state of trade facilitation implementation, have the potential for an average trade cost reduction of about 8%.



Table 4 Changes in trade costs in Asia-Pacific and its subregions resulting from implementation of alternative trade facilitation reforms (per cent)

Asia-Pacific: trade costs model	WTO TFA (binding only)		WTO TFA (binding + non-binding)		WTO TFA+ (binding + non-binding + other paperless and cross-border paperless trade)	
	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
Model 1: Overall trade facilitation						
Asia-Pacific	-0.59%	-2.68%	-1.15%	-4.61%	-5.15%	-11.05%
East and North-East Asia	-0.19%	-1.76%	-0.74%	-2.72%	-3.50%	-7.62%
North and Central Asia	-1.00%	-2.96%	-1.23%	-4.57%	-5.82%	-11.75%
South and South-West Asia	-0.60%	-3.82%	-1.83%	-7.38%	-7.63%	-15.22%
Pacific Islands Developing Economies	-2.69%	-7.06%	-5.36%	-12.85%	-17.05%	-25.55%
ASEAN	-0.11%	-1.70%	-0.17%	-2.74%	-2.20%	-8.01%
CAREC	-0.94%	-4.14%	-1.73%	-6.74%	-7.60%	-15.02%
SPECA	-1.18%	-4.30%	-1.79%	-6.75%	-7.92%	-15.25%

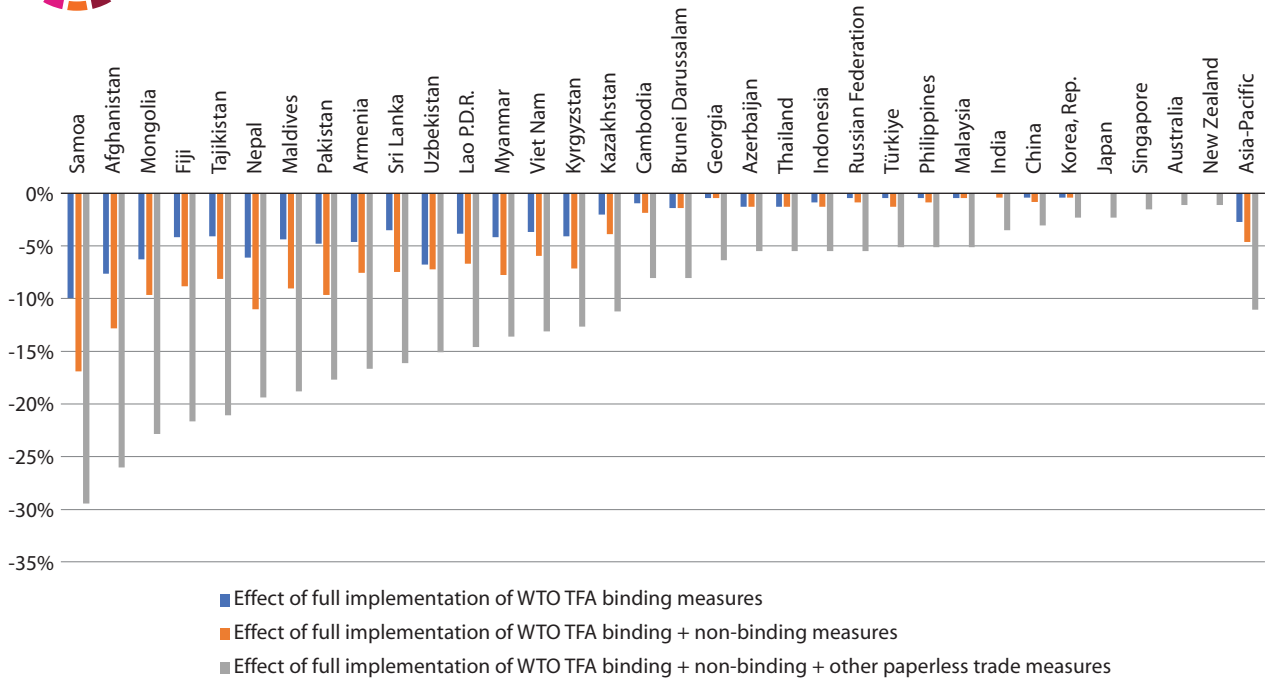
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 35 provides a detailed view of estimated trade cost reductions for 33 individual countries. The disparities in the levels of trade cost reductions are notable, particularly in the third scenario when paperless and cross-border paperless trade measures are fully implemented. These differences highlight the significant room

for improvement in trade facilitation, including streamlined processes and enhanced interoperability between Customs, among other aspects. The implementation of the CPTA over the past two years has demonstrated substantial progress and sets the course for future regional cooperation in cross-border paperless trade (see box 2).

Figure 35

Impact of trade facilitation on trade costs in Asia-Pacific countries



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org


**Box
2**
A regional United Nations treaty, “leaving no-one behind” to accelerate trade digitalization

The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA), which is a United Nations treaty, aims to promote cross-border paperless trade by (a) enabling the exchange and mutual recognition of trade-related data and documents in electronic form, and (b) facilitation of interoperability among national and subregional Single Windows and/or other paperless trade systems. It is designed as an inclusive and enabling platform that will benefit all participating economies, regardless of where they stand in terms of trade facilitation or Single Window/paperless trade implementation.

The treaty was adopted by the ESCAP Member States in 2016. On 20 February 2021, it entered into force, indicating ESCAP members’ continued efforts to accelerate trade digitalization in the region. Thirteen countries are Parties to the treaty at the time of publishing, with several other ESCAP members in the process of completing their domestic processes for accession.

Achieving cross-border paperless trade across the region is a long and difficult endeavour, and it cannot be achieved without close collaboration between countries. The CPTA is expected to support the process by providing a dedicated institutional framework for countries with the proven political will to develop legal and technical solutions for cross-border paperless trade, including pilot projects, capacity-building and technical assistance, based on existing international standards. Some of the benefits for ESCAP Member States that become parties to the CPTA include:

- (a) Accelerated progress towards a paperless trade environment at the national level, based on the political will demonstrated during the accession process to CPTA, and through access to structured and regular sharing of lessons learnt on the implementation of best practices;
- (b) Reduction in overall investment costs and maximization of returns from investments in paperless trade systems, through concurrent development of national paperless trade systems and environment for cross-border trade data exchange;
- (c) Ready access to potential counterpart countries interested in negotiating and achieving cross-border data exchange, avoiding or reducing the need for engaging in numerous and/or potentially incompatible bilateral initiatives;
- (d) Direct participation in the development of pragmatic solutions for the cross-border exchange of trade documents. For more advanced countries with relevant experience and existing practices, this will enable them to ensure that new regional systems and solutions will be harmonized and interoperable with what they have already achieved on a bilateral and/or subregional basis. Compliance with commitments a Party may have made through its bilateral and plurilateral trade agreements, such as regional trade agreements (RTAs) to collaborate on exchanging electronic data and documents (typically featured in “Paperless Trading” Articles in RTAs, or related provisions or agreements).

Note: Additional details on the CPTA are available at <https://www.unescap.org/kp/cpta>



Conclusion and way forward

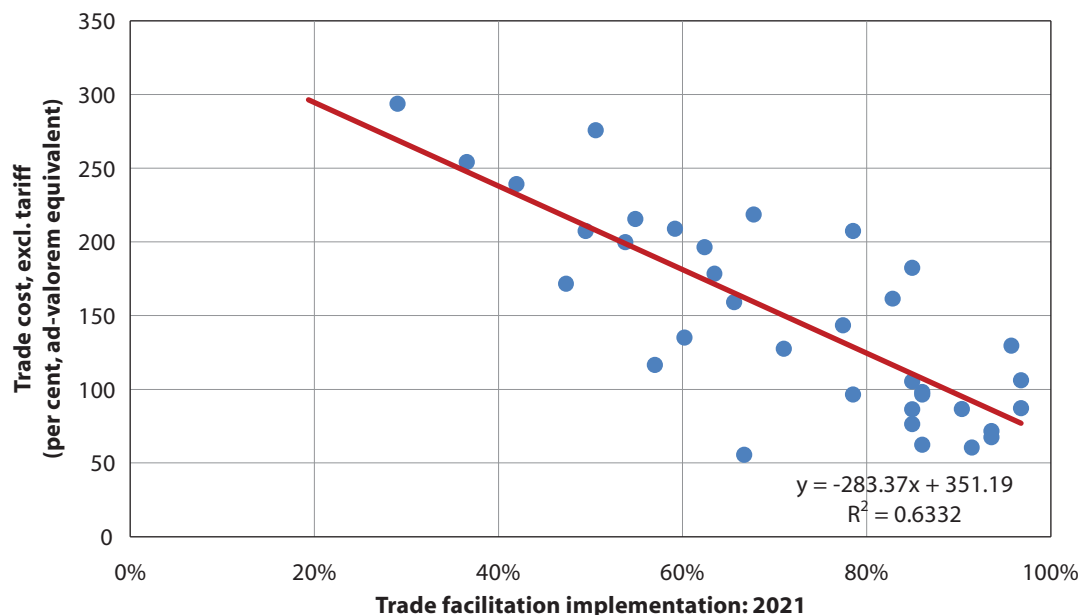
This report presents data on the implementation of trade facilitation from 47 economies in the Asia-Pacific region and covers six different subregions and three groups of countries with special needs, i.e., LDCs, LLDCs and SIDS. The Survey not only covers the implementation of general trade facilitation measures, including many of those featured in the WTO TFA, but also digital trade facilitation measures and sustainable trade facilitation measures catering to the special needs of SMEs, the agricultural sector, women as well as other measures supporting inclusive and resilient trade. Figure 36 confirms the strong relationship between the cost of international trade in the Asia-Pacific countries and their level of trade facilitation implementation.

Based on the set of 31 “General” and “Digital Trade Facilitation” measures, the Survey found that the regional average implementation rate stands at 67%. The regional average implementation rate of these measures has increased by 3 percentage points when compared with the 2021 Survey results for the 46 common countries that participated in both Surveys. The “General Trade Facilitation” group of measures, which aim to improve transparency, reduce unnecessary formalities and build institutional frameworks for trade facilitation, are generally well-implemented around the region. This reflects the strong commitment by countries to implement the WTO TFA.¹⁶

¹⁶ A total of 17 of the 31 common measures discussed in this report can be directly related to TFA commitments (both binding and non-binding). This implies that the minimum implementation rate that an economy would need to achieve full compliance with the TFA stands at almost 55% (17/31=54.8%).



Implementing trade facilitation and trade costs in Asia-Pacific economies



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org and; ESCAP-World Bank Trade Cost database. Available at <https://www.unescap.org/resources/escap-world-bank-trade-cost-database>

The “Digital Trade Facilitation” measures on ‘paperless trade’ and ‘cross-border paperless trade’ are implemented to a lesser extent. Still, building upon the significant progress made between 2019 and 2021, countries have continued their progress by building and enhancing their national paperless systems including electronic Single Windows, and also implementing integrated and compatible platforms bilaterally and at the subregional level to support cross-border electronic data exchange, including the acceleration of data exchange through the ASW. Currently, ASEAN countries are exchanging electronic data and document, namely e-Form D, the ASEAN Customs Declaration Document (ACDD) and electronic Phytosanitary (e-Phyto) certificates.

Nevertheless, the implementation of cross-border paperless trade is hampered, as many developing economies within the region are still in the nascent phases of constructing their national paperless systems. Simultaneously, whereas more advanced economies have successfully instituted paperless systems, these systems lack comprehensive interoperability with one another.

Results from the trade cost model estimations presented in this report confirm that digitalization holds substantial potential for reducing trade costs. The implementation of digital trade facilitation measures, surpassing the commitments stipulated in the WTO TFA, could yield a reduction of approximately 11% in trade cost. This is markedly more impactful, twice as much, than the anticipated 5% reduction achievable solely through compliance with the binding and non-binding requirements of the WTO TFA. In the interest of all countries in the region, collaborative engagement in the development of a regulatory framework and technical protocols is essential for the seamless electronic exchange of trade-related data and documents across the international supply chain.

In this context, the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, a United Nations treaty, aims to accelerate the implementation of digital trade facilitation measures for trade and development. The CPTA not only supports and complements the WTO TFA, it also provides a unique platform for

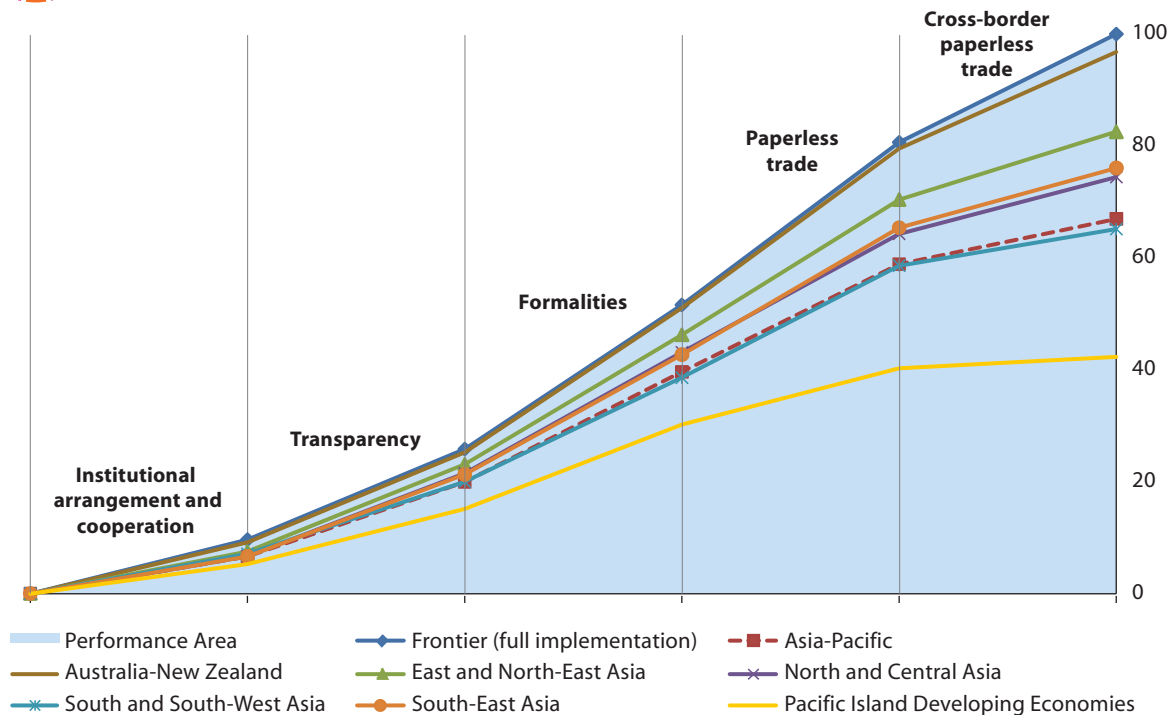
ESCAP Member States to tap into their potential. Negotiated as an inclusive and flexible intergovernmental platform to enable the electronic exchange of trade-related data and documents across borders among parties, the CPTA is set to benefit all parties regardless of their current state of implementation of paperless trade. Therefore, all countries in the region are encouraged to become parties to the treaty as soon as possible to take advantage of what the agreement offers, especially in terms of accessing capacity-building and technical assistance.

Figure 37 illustrates the step-by-step process of trade facilitation and paperless trade implementation based on the groups of measures

included in this Survey. It begins with establishing the necessary institutional arrangements to prioritize and coordinate trade facilitation measures. Transparency is then improved by sharing information on laws, regulations and procedures, and involving stakeholders in the development of new ones. The next step involves simplifying and streamlining trade formalities, initially using paper documents but to advance to ICT-based solutions and paperless trade systems. The final step is enabling electronic data and document exchange through national systems like a Single Window, allowing stakeholders in partner countries to access the information needed for efficient trade and cost reduction.¹⁷



Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Note: Figure 37 shows global cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores for different regions in five sub-groups of trade facilitation measures included in the Survey. The scores are based on the equally weighted implementation of 31 trade facilitation measures, but the number of measures varies in each of the five sub-groups. Full implementation of all measures = 100.

¹⁷ This step-by-step process is inspired by, and generally consistent with the UN/CEFACT step-by-step approach to trade facilitation in the move towards a Single Window environment.

When expanding the scope to include a broader range of 40 trade facilitation measures, which encompasses some measures in the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group, the Survey records lower implementation rates in all subregions. Specifically, the implementation of inclusive measures to promote SMEs in trade remains very low. SMEs represent a substantial portion of the regional market and they continue to encounter significant obstacles that disproportionately hinder their participation in international trade. Challenges such as inadequate access to digital infrastructure, a shortage of IT skills and limited financial resources hinder SMEs significantly. To achieve sustainable trade facilitation, it is crucial to prioritize building the capacity of SMEs and consider their specific needs in trade facilitation policies. Empowering SMEs with the necessary resources and support will enhance their ability to engage in trade and contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable trade environment.

Similarly, although significant progress has been made in implementing measures related to ‘women in trade facilitation’, the participation of women in trade remains low. The Survey highlights a lack of awareness regarding the importance of gender-inclusive policies in trade facilitation. Providing assistance to assist women traders in understanding trade procedures, setting up guidelines for standards bodies to guarantee fair representation of both genders’ interests, and promoting women’s active involvement and decision-making in trade facilitation and standards-related activities could result in significant advantages. Such an approach has the potential to boost exports and create improved

income opportunities for women. Recognizing the importance of these specific groups in attaining sustainable and inclusive development, trade facilitation strategies should be formulated more comprehensively and inclusively.

Trade finance plays a vital role in international trade, especially for developing economies and small and medium-sized enterprises looking to benefit from trade opportunities. Unfortunately, awareness of trade finance among trade policy and facilitation specialists appears limited, possibly because international payments and transactions fall outside their scope of work. To address this, trade facilitation policymakers and enforcers should collaborate with stakeholders in the financial sector to explore ways to improve the availability of trade finance and integrate it into trade facilitation strategies, including the development of Single Window systems. By fostering closer cooperation between trade facilitation and financial sectors, it will be possible to enhance access to trade finance and support a healthy trading system.

Last, results of the recently added ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ group show that countries are beginning to take note of the importance of long-term measures for building resiliency to pandemics and other crises. Sustained efforts should be made to further enhance cooperation, make trade information transparent, strengthen countries’ capacity to contribute to recovery and prepare adequately for future crises. This includes the current climate crisis, in which trade facilitation certainly has a mitigating role to play.¹⁸

¹⁸ ESCAP (2021) Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2021: Accelerating climate-smart trade and investment for sustainable development. Available at <https://www.unescap.org/kp/APTIR2021>

Annexes

Annex 1. Grouping of trade facilitation measures and correspondence with TFA articles

Groups	Sub-groups	Measures	Relevant TFA Articles
General Trade Facilitation	Transparency	Publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet.	1.2
		Stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization).	2.2
		Advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation.	2.1
		Advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods.	3
		Independent appeal mechanism.	4
	Formalities	Risk management.	7.4
		Pre-arrival processing.	7.1
		Post-clearance audits.	7.5
		Separation of release from final determination of Customs duties, taxes, fees and charges.	7.3
		Establishment and publication of average release times.	7.6
		TF measures for authorized operators.	7.7
		Expedited shipments.	7.8
		Acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export or transit formalities.	10.2.1
	Institutional arrangement and cooperation	National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body.	23
		National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation.	8
		Government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities.	
		Alignment of working days and hours with neighbouring countries at border crossings.	8.2(a)
		Alignment of formalities and procedures with neighbouring countries at border crossings.	8.2(b)
	Transit	Transit facilitation agreement(s).	
		Limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment.	10.5
Supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation.		11.9	
Cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit.		11.16	
Digital Trade Facilitation	Paperless trade	Automated Customs System.	
		Internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies.	
		Electronic Single Window System.	10.4
		Electronic submission of Customs Declarations.	
		Electronic application and issuance of import and export permit.	
		Electronic submission of Air Cargo Manifests.	

Groups	Sub-groups	Measures	Relevant TFA Articles
Digital Trade Facilitation <i>(continued)</i>		Electronic application and issuance of Preferential Certificate of Origin.	
		E-Payment of Customs Duties and Fees.	7.2
		Electronic application for Customs refunds.	
	Cross-border paperless trade	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions.	
		Recognised certification authority.	
		Electronic exchange of Customs Declaration.	
		Electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin.	
		Electronic exchange of Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Certificate.	
	Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit.		
Sustainable Trade Facilitation	Trade facilitation for SMEs	Trade-related information measures for SMEs.	
		SMEs in AEO scheme.	
		SMEs access Single Window.	
		SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee.	
	Agricultural trade facilitation	Other special measures for SMEs.	
		Testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS of main trading partners.	7.9
		National standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS.	
		Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates.	
	Women in trade facilitation	Special treatment for perishable goods.	
		TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade.	
TF measures to benefit women involved in trade.			
Other Trade Facilitation	Trade finance facilitation	Women's membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies.	
		Single Window facilitates traders access to finance.	
		Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance.	
	Trade facilitation in times of crisis	Variety of trade finance services available.	
		Agency in place to manage trade facilitation in times of crisis and emergencies.	
		Online publication of emergency trade facilitation measures.	
		Coordination between countries on emergency trade facilitation measures.	
		Additional trade facilitation measures to facilitate trade in times of emergencies.	
	Trade facilitation for e-commerce	Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises.	
		Trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce.	
Trade facilitation and wildlife protection	Electronic exchange of CITES permits/certificates.		

Annex 2. A three-step approach for data collection and validation

Data submission by experts	<p>The Survey instrument was sent by the ESCAP Secretariat to trade facilitation experts (in Governments, the private sector and academia) in Asia-Pacific countries to gather preliminary information. The questionnaire was also made publicly available online and disseminated with the support of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport for Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT). In some cases, the questionnaire was also sent to relevant national trade facilitation authorities or agencies as well as regional trade facilitation partners or organizations, such as the Asia Development Bank (ADB), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Institute, the Oceania Customs Organization (OCO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). This first step took place essentially between January and May 2023.</p>
Data verification by the UNRCs Secretariat	<p>The ESCAP Secretariat cross-checked the data collected in Step 1. Desk research and data sharing among UNRCs and survey partners were carried out to further check the accuracy of data. Face-to-face or telephone interviews with key informants were arranged to gather additional information when needed. The outcome of Step 2 was a consistent set of responses per country. Step 2 took place between January and May 2023.</p>
Data validation by national Governments	<p>Step 3 took place between May and July 2023. The ESCAP Secretariat sent the completed questionnaire to each national Government to ensure that each country had the opportunity to review the dataset and provide any additional information. The feedback results from national Governments were incorporated to finalize the dataset.</p>

Annex 3. Definition of each stage of implementation

Stage of implementation	Coding/Scoring
<p>Full implementation: The trade facilitation measure implemented is in full compliance with commonly accepted international standards, recommendations and Conventions such as the Revised Kyoto Convention, UN/CEFACT Recommendations or the WTO TFA; it is implemented in law and practice; it is available to essentially all relevant stakeholders nationwide; and supported by adequate legal and institutional frameworks as well as adequate infrastructure and financial and human resources. A TFA provision included in the commitments given under Notifications of Category A may generally be considered as a measure, that is fully implemented by the country, with a caveat that the provision will be implemented by a Least-Developed Country (LDC) member within one year of the TFA agreement coming into force. If a country registers a positive response for all sub- questions concerning a given trade facilitation measure, that measure should be considered fully implemented.</p>	3
<p>Partial implementation: A measure is considered to be partially implemented if at least one of the following is true: (1) the trade facilitation measure is in partial – but not in full – compliance with commonly accepted international standards, recommendations and conventions; (2) the country is still in the process of rolling out the implementation of the measure; (3) the measure is being used but on an unsustainable, short-term or ad hoc basis; (4) the measure is implemented in some – but not all – targeted locations (such as key border crossing stations); or (5) some – but not all – targeted stakeholders are fully involved.</p>	2
<p>Pilot stage of implementation: A measure is considered to be at the pilot stage of implementation if, in addition to meeting the general attributes of partial implementation, it is available only to a very small portion of the intended stakeholder group (or at a certain location) and/or is being implemented on a trial basis. When a new trade facilitation measure is at the pilot stage of implementation, the old measure is often continuously used in parallel to ensure that the service is still provided even when there has been a disruption with the new measure. This stage of implementation also includes relevant rehearsals and preparation for the full implementation.</p>	1
<p>Not implemented: A measure has not been implemented at this stage. However, this stage may still include initiatives or efforts towards the implementation of the measure. For example, under this stage, (pre)feasibility studies or planning for the implementation can be carried out; and consultation with stakeholders on the implementation may be arranged.</p>	0

Annex 4. Groupings of countries

Australia and New Zealand: Australia and New Zealand.

East and North-East Asia: China, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea.

North and Central Asia: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Pacific Island Developing Economies: Fiji, Kiribati, Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

South and South-West Asia: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Türkiye.

South-East Asia: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam.

Landlocked Developing Countries: Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Least Developed Countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, Kiribati, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and Tuvalu.¹⁹

Small Island Developing States: Fiji, Kiribati, Maldives, the Federated States of Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu.

¹⁹ Samoa and Vanuatu were part of the Least Developed Countries prior to their graduation in 2014 and 2020, respectively.



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