

# Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC)

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



**ESCAP**  
Economic and Social Commission  
for Asia and the Pacific



**CAREC**  
INSTITUTE

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The report was prepared by ESCAP. Silvère Dernouh, Chorthip Utoktham, Lang Sun and Kexin Chen, 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, collected as part of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023. Ghulam Samad, Yazzyev Merdan and Kuat Akizhanov all from CAREC Institute, supported data collection and validation in CAREC countries, provided good practices of CAREC countries and also reviewed the report. Wannarat Charoensri formatted the report and Arom Sangyuan created the cover design.

Jie Wei from ECE contributed to the survey efforts, in particular by facilitating data collection from relevant experts as well as data validation in several countries. The United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT), a knowledge community supported by ESCAP and ECE, also greatly facilitated data collection.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reducing trade costs is significant when it comes to increasing economies' participation in regional and global value chains and encouraging structural growth and sustainable development. Nonetheless, the consequences of COVID-19 and the surge in regional conflicts, along with the inflation that accompanies them, impede international trade and create disruptions in supply chains, leading to a rise in trade costs as well as deep uncertainties. This situation is adding to an economic environment where trade costs are already high worldwide, in which trade facilitation should play a significant role and make trade procedures more efficient and more transparent, thus reinforcing global supply chains and reducing overall trade costs. In this context, some global and regional initiatives focusing on trade digitalization offer relevant guidance, in particular the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) from the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA), offering guidance on measures that should be considered for implementation.

This report presents the results of the 2023 United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, focusing on the progress made in trade facilitation across the 11 countries from the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Program (CAREC). The report offers a comprehensive analysis of 60 trade facilitation measures, categorized into four groups, namely "General Trade Facilitation", "Digital Trade Facilitation", "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" and "Other Trade Facilitation." In addition, these groups of measures encompass 11 sub-groups, including both binding and nonbinding measures of the WTO TFA, but also measures related to digital and sustainable trade.

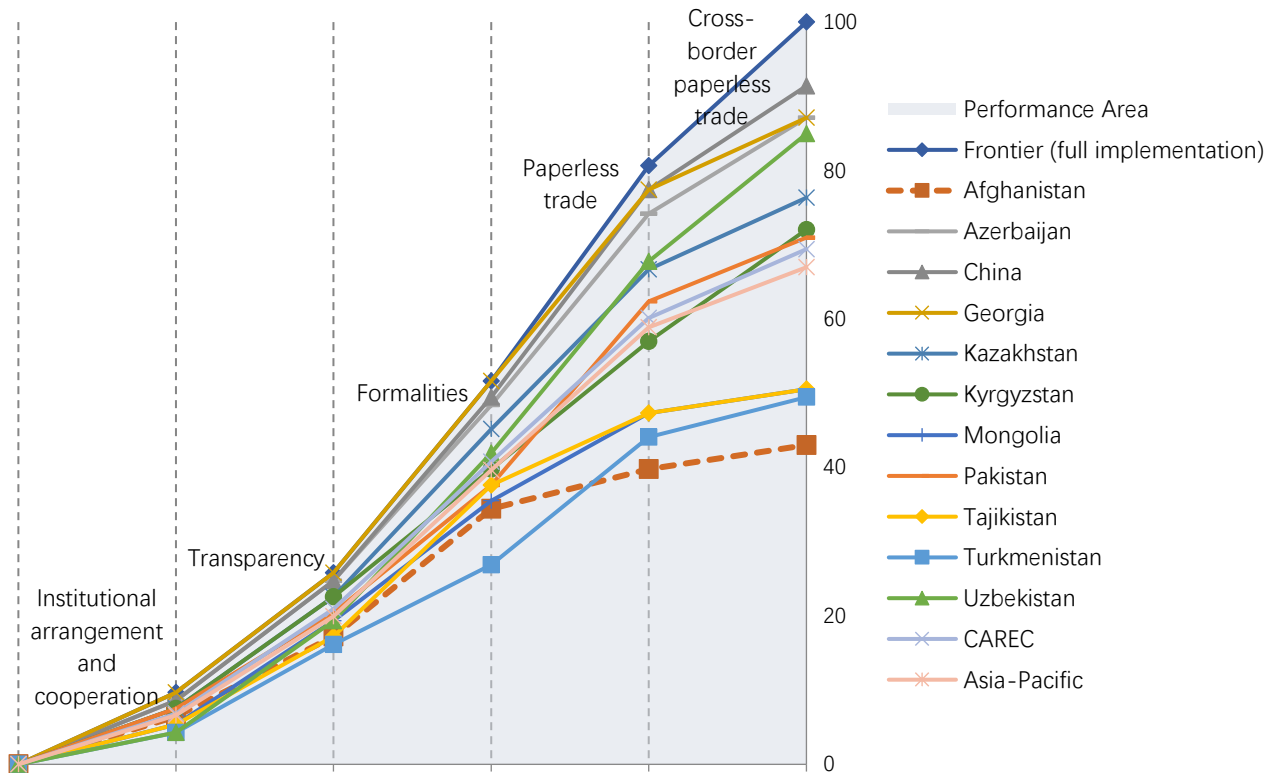
The report brings to light the following key findings:

- Based on the set of 31 general and digital trade facilitation measures, CAREC countries achieved an average implementation rate of 69%, which is about the same level as the Asia-Pacific region's average implementation rate of 67%.
- General and digital trade facilitation measures exhibit varying degrees of implementation from one CAREC country to another. China is leading the sub-region with an impressive implementation rate of 91%, closely followed by Azerbaijan and Georgia, with 87% each. On the other hand, there is still room for improvement for Mongolia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan, all lagging far behind the regional and subregional averages.

- The average implementation rate has witnessed a rise, climbing from 66% in 2021 to 71% in 2023, based on 10 common countries. Uzbekistan is the country with the highest increase, thanks to an implementation rate rising from 62% in 2021 to 85% in 2023 (an increase of 23 percentage points).
- CAREC countries made the most significant progress between 2021 and 2023 in implementing measures related to 'trade facilitation in times of crisis and pandemic' with an increase of 15 percentage points, but they also show commendable progress for 'women in trade facilitation' and 'cross-border paperless trade', with increases of 11 and 10 percentage points, respectively.
- "Digital Trade Facilitation" related measures have shown improvement in implementation between 2021 and 2023, with the implementation level for 'paperless trade facilitation' measures increasing from 60% to 67%, slightly above the Asia-Pacific's average in 2023 (66%). While the average implementation rate of 'cross-border paperless trade' in the CAREC subregion rose from 39% to 50%, this sub-group is one of the two least implemented sub-groups in the CAREC countries, leaving space for policy intervention for further advancement in the area of "Digital Trade Facilitation."
- Measures under the "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" group show high levels of implementation compared to the averages in the Asia-Pacific. It is noteworthy that the implementation rate of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' stands at 63%, 20 percentage points higher than the regional average, and 'women in trade facilitation' measures stand at 58%, while the regional average is 42%.
- The implementation of measures related to 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' is relatively high, with an implementation rate of 67%, surpassing the average of 60% in the Asia-Pacific region. Notably, the CAREC countries have implemented relatively well measures regarding the assignment of a national agency to manage trade facilitation measures in times of crisis and emergencies, as well as for the online publication of emergency trade facilitation measures.

The report highlights that significant trade cost reductions could be achieved through the implementation of paperless and cross-border paperless trade measures, surpassing the impact of conventional trade facilitation measures. Full implementation of binding and nonbinding measures outlined in the WTO TFA could lead to a reduction in trade costs of nearly 7%. Beyond that, a full implementation scenario with the adoption of digital trade facilitation measures may significantly reduce international trade costs by 15% for CAREC countries by providing seamless electronic exchange of trade data and documents across borders. Furthermore, the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific offers opportunities for CAREC countries to support them in promoting their own initiatives and solutions and receive support for the advancement of their national Single Windows leading to greater interoperability across borders. Moreover, enhancing trade facilitation measures such as overcoming regulatory frictions, unlocking technical and regulatory interoperability, enhancing capacity-building measures for technical staff and regional integration and cooperation can significantly improve the trade facilitation measures implementation level.

## 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](https://untfsurvey.org)

Note: Figure 33 shows global cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores for different regions for 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.

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



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## ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEO	Authorized Economic Operator
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BCPs	Border Crossing Points
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CATS	CAREC Advanced Transit System
CITES	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
CPTA	Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific
CTC	Common Transit Convention
DTC	Digital Transport Corridor
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
eCITES	CITES electronic permit system
ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
e-commerce	Electronic commerce
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
EU	European Union
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GRS	Georgian Revenue Services
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LDC	Least Developed Country
LLDC	Landlocked Developing Country
NCA	North and Central Asia

NCTS	New Computerized Transit System
NeLs	National eLogistics System
NTFC	National Trade Facilitation Committee
OCO	Oceania Customs Organization
PIDEs	Pacific Island Developing Economies
ROC-TF	Regional Organizations Cooperation Mechanism for Trade Facilitation
RTAs	Regional Trade Agreement
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMEs	Small and medium-sized enterprises
SPS	Sanitary and Phytosanitary
TF	Trade Facilitation
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
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
UNRCs	United Nations Regional Commissions
USA	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Background and objective

Reducing trade costs plays a key role in facilitating the active engagement of economies in regional and global value chains, thereby amplifying trade volumes and transit flows. In this regard, trade facilitation measures are crucial to ensuring that trade remains as a main engine of growth and sustainable development. In this regard, trade facilitation needs to be given special attention as a strategic contributor to trade cost reduction and trade development. As shown in Table 1, based on the latest data from the ESCAP-World Bank Trade Cost Database, comprehensive non-tariff trade costs between the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) economies (141% tariff-equivalent) are still significantly higher than the costs of trading goods among the three largest economies in European Union (42% tariff-equivalent) or those between China, the Republic of Korea and Japan (58% tariff equivalent).

Most countries are still recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, with inflation still present (albeit decelerating), and uncertainties on global economic prospects remain. Combined with regional geopolitical conflicts creating new supply chain disruptions, international trade remains partly impeded. Although global merchandise trade and services volumes exhibited a resilient rebound following the pandemic, trade growth faltered in 2022, with slow growth persisting throughout 2023, at 0.8% according to the latest WTO estimate<sup>1</sup>. However, trade facilitation measures play an important 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.

In general, significant progress has been made in reducing trade costs by eliminating or lowering tariffs during the past few decades. Studies indicate that non-tariff measures can contribute up to twice as much to trade costs compared with ordinary Customs tariffs. Hence, to achieve additional trade cost reductions, it is imperative to tackle non-tariff barriers, such as inadequate transportation networks, and transit infrastructure at and behind Border Crossing Points (BCPs), logistics infrastructure and services as well as complex regulatory procedures and documentation. In this context, this report presents a comprehensive overview of the results from the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023 for the CAREC

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<sup>1</sup>See WTO Global Trade Outlook and Statistics (Update: October 2023): [https://www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/booksp\\_e/gtos\\_updt\\_oct23\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/gtos_updt_oct23_e.pdf)

countries. Furthermore, the potential impacts of implementing trade facilitation measures in CAREC are assessed based on a trade cost model.

Table 1. Intra-and extra-regional comprehensive trade costs in the Asia-Pacific region

Region	ASEAN-4	East Asia-3	Pacific Islands Developing Economies	SAARC-3	CAREC-5	AUS-NZL	Europe-3
<b>ASEAN-4</b>	74.9% (-0.6%)	78.6% (3.2%)	298.8% (8.0%)	129.6% (2.9%)	389.3% (1.0%)	104.0% (4.7%)	105.3% (-0.2%)
<b>East Asia-3</b>	78.6% (3.2%)	58.0% (10.0%)	201.2% (-21.5%)	129.3% (5.4%)	216.1% (9.8%)	89.6% (4.4%)	85.6% (1.0%)
<b>Pacific Islands Developing Economies</b>	298.8% (8.0%)	201.2% (-21.5%)	89.6% (-19.9%)	361.4% (6.8%)	N/A N/A	102.3% (7.1%)	312.1% (0.2%)
<b>SAARC-3</b>	129.6% (2.9%)	129.3% (5.4%)	361.4% (6.8%)	160.7% (37.6%)	294.3% (-0.6%)	139.2% (2.3%)	117.4% (3.6%)
<b>CAREC-5</b>	389.3% (1.0%)	216.1% (9.8%)	N/A N/A	294.3% (-0.6%)	141.1% (1.2%)	456.4% (5.5%)	210.0% (5.0%)
<b>AUS-NZL</b>	104.0% (4.7%)	89.6% (4.4%)	102.3% (7.1%)	139.2% (2.3%)	456.4% (5.5%)	52.8% (0.8%)	103.0% (-3.5%)
<b>Europe-3</b>	105.3% (-0.2%)	85.6% (1.0%)	312.1% (0.2%)	117.4% (3.6%)	210.0% (5.0%)	103.0% (-3.5%)	41.8% (-2.7%)
<b>USA</b>	84.4% (-2.1%)	66.3% (3.9%)	183.0% (-6.4%)	111.7% (-0.2%)	274.9% (13.0%)	97.7% (-1.6%)	65.6% (-2.0%)

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

Note: Trade costs may be interpreted as tariff equivalents. Percentage changes in trade costs between 2010-2015 and 2016-2021 are shown in parentheses.

ASEAN-4: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand; East Asia-3: China, Japan, Republic of Korea; Europe-3: Germany, France, United Kingdom; SAARC-3: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; Pacific Island developing economies: Fiji, Samoa;

CAREC-5: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

## 1.2. Survey instrument and methodology

The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023 (hereafter called “the Survey”) 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 Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and supplemented by forward-looking measures that are sought to be implemented under the United Nations treaty – the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA) – and those supporting inclusive and sustainable trade.

The 2023 Survey covers 60 trade facilitation measures commonly used by five United Nations Regional Commissions (UNRCs). The 60 measures are classified into four groups and 11 sub-groups (annex 2). The first group, “General Trade Facilitation,” includes many WTO TFA measures with subgroups of ‘transparency,’ ‘formalities,’ ‘institutional arrangement and cooperation’ and ‘transit facilitation.’ The second group, “Digital Trade Facilitation” measures, includes ‘paperless trade’ and ‘cross-border paperless trade.’ 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 two sub-groups: ‘trade finance facilitation’ and ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis.’ In addition, two measures are pilot tested in 2023, namely ‘trade facilitation for e-commerce’ and ‘trade facilitation and wildlife protection.’

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 and 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 finance’s role in facilitating trade flows, the challenges posed by crisis situations to the global trade and supply chain (especially COVID-19), as well as with 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 3). Data was 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 4. A score of 3, 2, 1, or zero

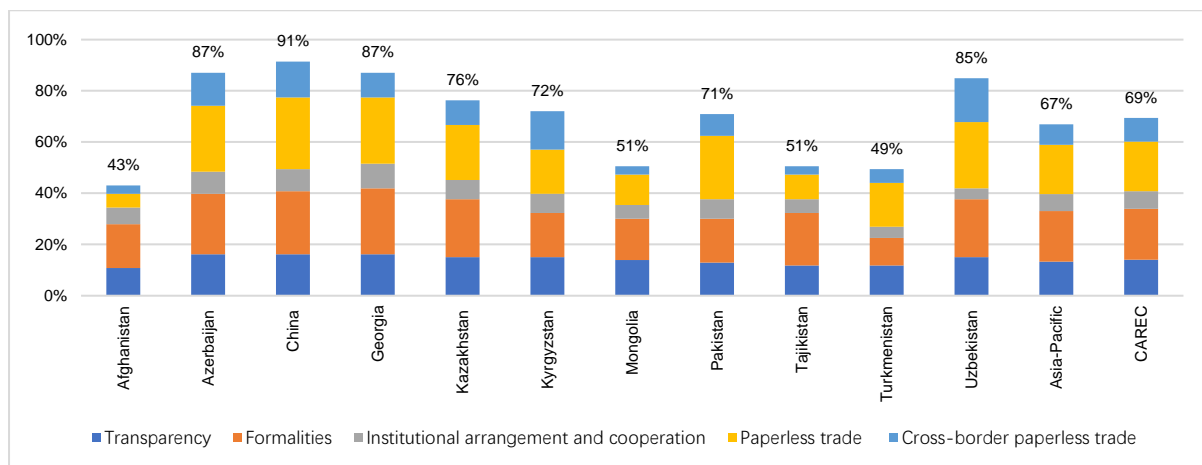


was assigned to each of the four implementation stages to calculate implementation rates for individual measures across countries, regions, or groupings. All 11 CAREC countries are included in this report, namely: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, China, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Country groupings used in the analysis are detailed in Annex 1 and shown in Figure 2. Further details and examples on the calculation of implementation rates are available online.

## 2. Trade facilitation implementation in CAREC countries: Overview

When it comes to 31 trade facilitation measures from 5 sub-groups under “General” and “Digital Trade Facilitation” (figure 1), the average rate standing at 69% in CAREC countries appears to be slightly surpassing the regional average of 67% observed in the Asia-Pacific region. At the subregional level, CAREC countries exhibit varying degrees of implementation with the lead of China, achieving an implementation rate of 91%. Azerbaijan and Georgia follow closely, behind with 87% each, and Uzbekistan has also achieved an implementation rate of 85%. On the other hand, there is still room for improvement for Mongolia (51%), Tajikistan (51%), Turkmenistan (49%) and Afghanistan (43%), which have implementation rates below the regional and subregional average.

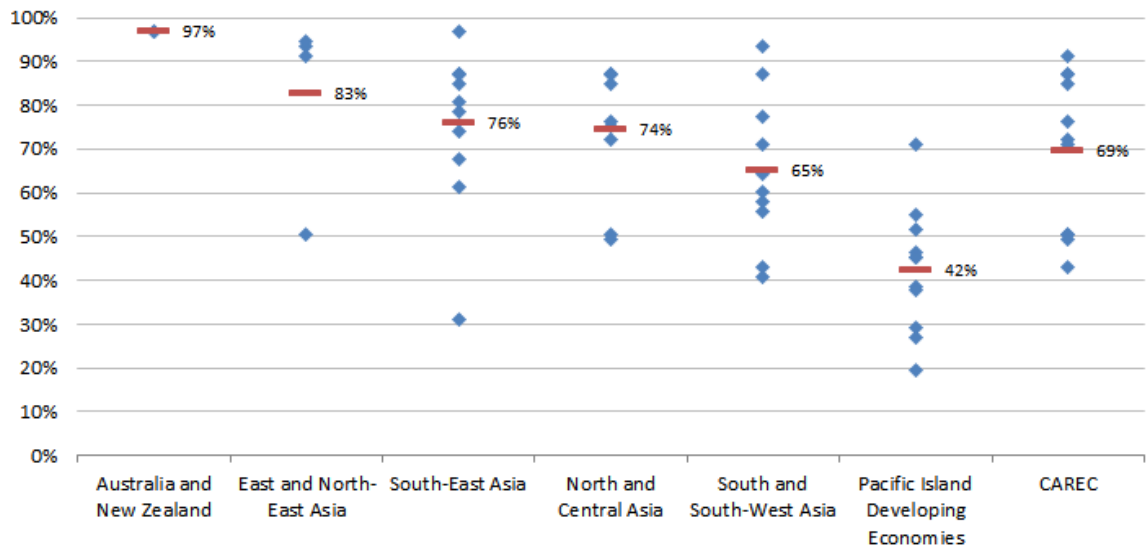
Figure 1. Overall implementation of trade facilitation measures in CAREC countries



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

The data indicates that there is potential for improvement when CAREC countries' average implementation rate of these 31 trade facilitation measures, which stands at 69%, is compared to other subregions (figure 2). CAREC countries' level of implementation ranks only fifth, after Australia and New Zealand (97%), East and North-East Asia (83%), South-East Asia (76%), and North and Central Asia (74%).

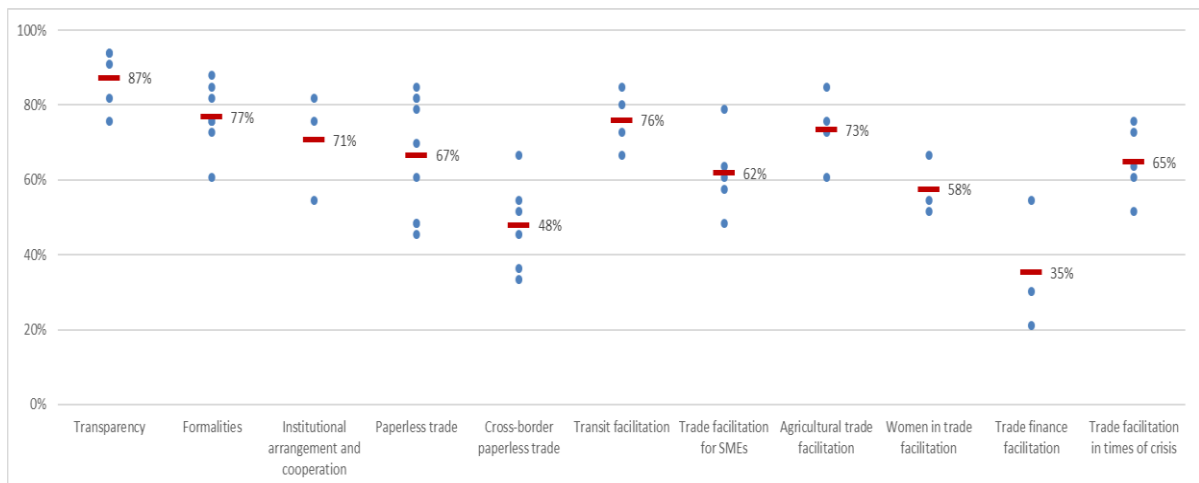
Figure 2. Average Trade facilitation implementation rate in the Asia-Pacific subregions including CAREC



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

While progress has been made in various areas, there is still room for improvement. Indeed, when it comes to ‘trade finance facilitation’ and ‘cross-border paperless trade’, the implementation rates stand at 35% and 48% respectively, making them the least implemented sub-groups covered in the Survey (figure 3). Recognizing the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, concerted efforts are necessary to enhance the participation and contribution of SMEs in trade facilitation as well as promote seamless electronic trade across borders throughout the CAREC subregion.

Figure 3. Implementation of different sub-groups of trade facilitation measures by CAREC countries



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

## 2.1. Most and least implemented trade facilitation measures

Table 2 offers insights into the implementation status of trade facilitation measures within each sub-group assessed in the Survey. In the ‘transparency’ sub-group, the measure ‘advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation’ stands out as the most implemented. On the other hand, the least implemented measure is ‘single window facilitates traders access to finance’ from the ‘trade finance facilitation’ sub-group. This indicates the need for improvement in fostering the implementation of single window in initiatives pertaining to trade finance.

Table 2. Most and least implemented measures in each sub-group of trade facilitation measures by CAREC countries

Sub-group	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 (%)
<b>Transparency</b>	Advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation	100.0 / 90.9	Independent appeal mechanism and online lodging	90.9 / 45.5
<b>Formalities</b>	Acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export or transit formalities	100.0 / 63.6	TF measures for authorized operators	90.9 / 18.2
<b>Institutional arrangement and co-operation</b>	National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies co-operation	100.0 / 45.5	Government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities	63.6 / 36.4
<b>Paperless trade</b>	E-Payment of Customs Duties and Fees	100.0 / 63.6	Electronic Application for Customs Refunds	63.6 / 27.3

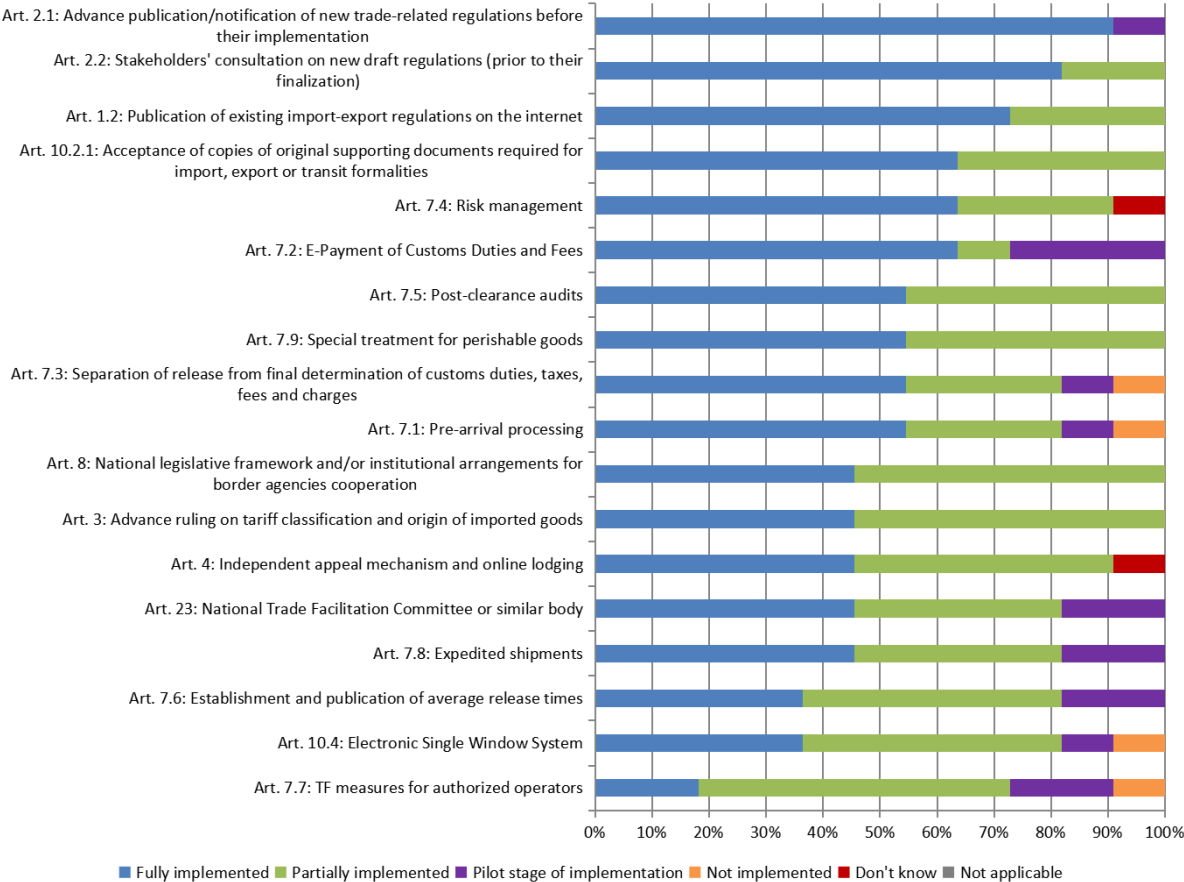
<b>Cross-border paperless trade</b>	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	100.0 / 18.2	Electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary Certificate	54.5 / 18.2
<b>Transit facilitation</b>	Limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment	100.0 / 54.5	Cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit	90.9 / 36.4
<b>Trade facilitation for SMEs</b>	Trade-related information measures for SMEs	100.0 / 45.5	SMEs access Single Window	72.7 / 27.3
<b>Agricultural trade facilitation</b>	Special treatment for perishable goods	100.0 / 54.5	Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates	90.9 / 27.3
<b>Women in trade facilitation</b>	Women membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies	90.9 / 18.2	TF measures to benefit women involved in trade	81.8 / 27.3
<b>Trade finance facilitation</b>	Variety of trade finance services available	81.8 / 18.2	Single window facilitates traders access to finance	27.3 / 9.1
<b>Trade facilitation in times of crisis</b>	Agency in place to manage TF in times of crises and emergencies	100.0 / 36.4	Additional trade facilitation measures to facilitate trade in times of emergencies	81.8 / 18.2

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

Figure 4 illustrates the extent of implementation of measures directly aligned with the requirements of the WTO TFA, as indicated by the data gathered during the Survey. These findings closely align with the information conveyed by countries through official notifications to the WTO. Among the CAREC countries, the measure with the highest implementation rate is ‘advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation.’ It is noteworthy that 91% of CAREC countries have fully implemented these measures, while the remaining 9% stand at the pilot stage of implementation. The ‘trade facilitation measures for authorized operators’ are the least implemented as only 18% of the CAREC countries have fully adopted this measure. Meanwhile, 55% have partially implemented it, 18%

have implemented it on a pilot stage, and 9% of the countries have yet to implement it.

Figure 4. Level of implementation of WTO TFA-related measures (excluding transit) by CAREC countries



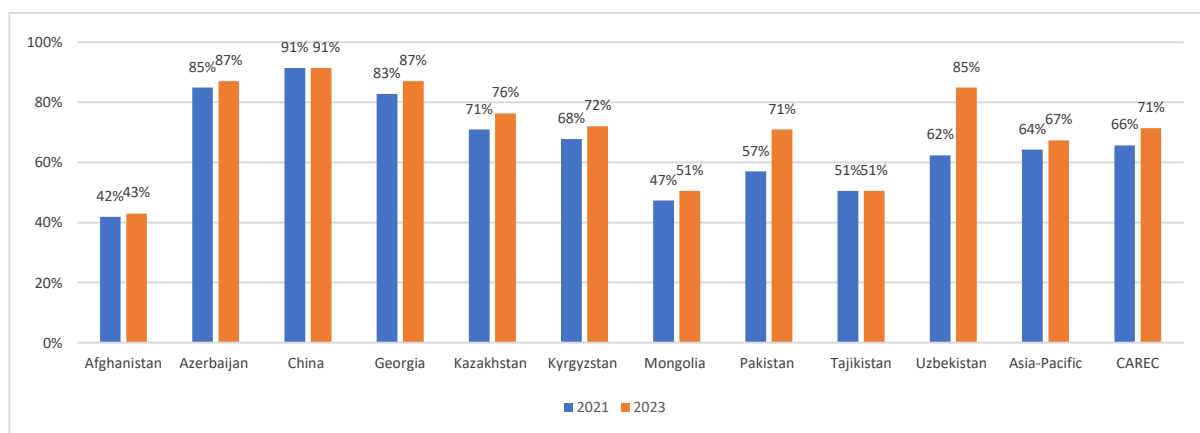
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [unftrsurvey.org](http://unftrsurvey.org)

## 2.2. Progress in implementation between 2021-2023

Some progress has been made in the implementation of trade facilitation measures within CAREC from 2021 to 2023<sup>2</sup>. The average implementation rate has witnessed a rise, climbing from 66% in 2021 to 71% in 2023, based on 10 common countries (figure 5). Notably, Uzbekistan has achieved the highest progress, with its implementation rate soaring by nearly 23 percentage points, from 62% in 2021 to 85% in 2023, followed by Pakistan (from 57% in 2021 to 71% in 2023).

The significant progress in Uzbekistan can be attributed to their continued and concerted efforts to promote trade. As an illustration, in 2022, Uzbekistan's trade portal was launched, as a joint project between the State Customs Committee and the Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade that aims to ensure openness in the procedures associated with cross-border trade.

Figure 5. Trade facilitation implementation by CAREC countries between 2021 and 2023

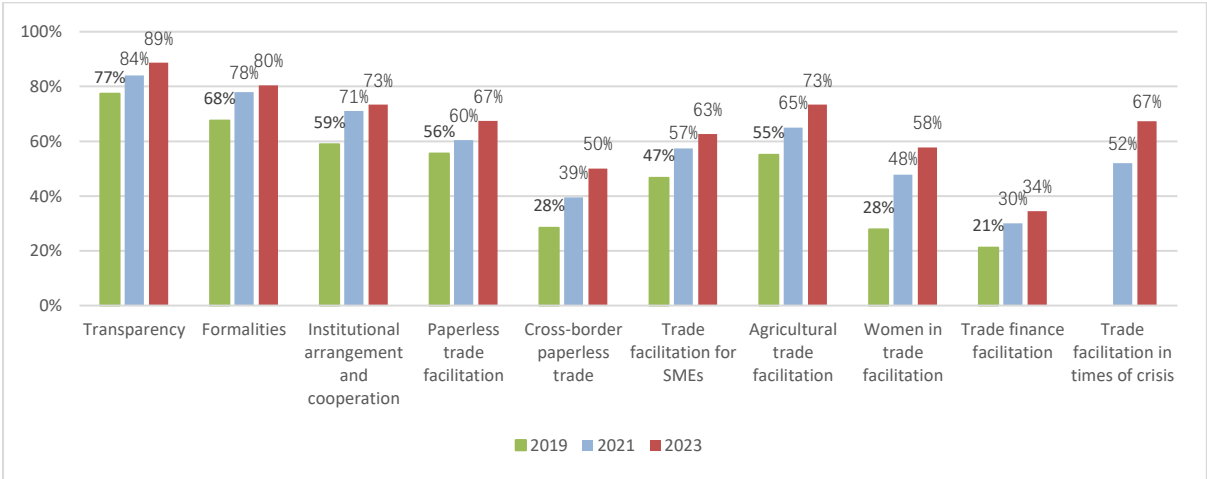


Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [unfpa.org](https://unfpa.org/surveys/unfpa-global-survey-on-digital-and-sustainable-trade-facilitation)

<sup>2</sup> A total of 11 CAREC countries participated in the 2023 Survey, of which 10 countries also participated in the 2021 Survey. Only countries covered in both Surveys are analyzed to assess progress in the implementation of trade facilitation measures over the previous two years in order to make the samples comparable.

Figure 6 shows the improvement between the 2019 and 2023 Survey years, according to the sub-groups of trade facilitation measures for CAREC countries. It shows a steady rise in implementation rates, although the increase is slightly more moderate between 2021 and 2023 than between 2019 and 2021, with 8 and 9 percentage point increase, respectively. Progress has been made in 2023 compared with 2021 in all categories, with the most notable improvement being in 'trade facilitation in times of crisis', which has increased by 15 percentage points. Moreover, significant progress has also been made in 2023 under “Digital Trade Facilitation” and “Sustainable Trade Facilitation,” notably for 'cross-border paperless trade' and 'women in trade facilitation' measures with increases of 10 and 11 percentage points each, compared to 2021.

Figure 6. Average implementation of different sub-groups of trade facilitation measures by CAREC countries between 2019 and 2023



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



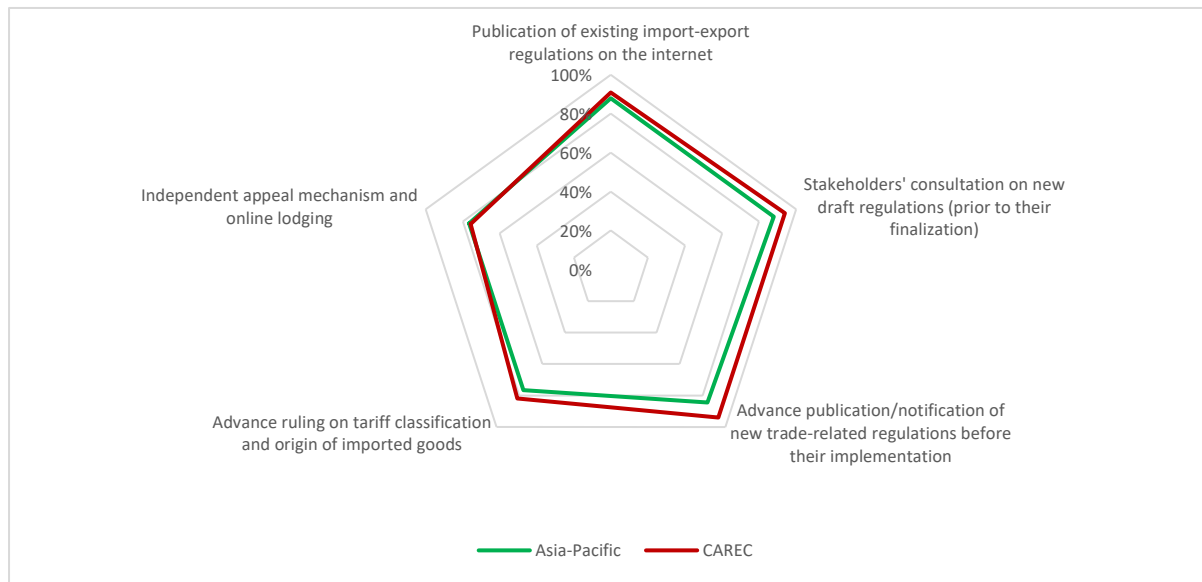
### 3. Implementation of trade facilitation measures: A closer look

#### 3.1. Transparency

'Transparency' comprises five measures related to Articles 1 to 5 of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and GATT Article X on "Publication and Administration of Trade Regulations". In this sub-group, the CAREC countries achieve an average implementation level of 87%, surpassing the Asia-Pacific average of 83%. In particular, the subregional implementation rate for the measure 'stakeholders' consultations on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)', and the measure 'advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation' both stand at an impressive 94%. Additionally, 'publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet' follows closely with a strong 91% implementation rate (figure 7).

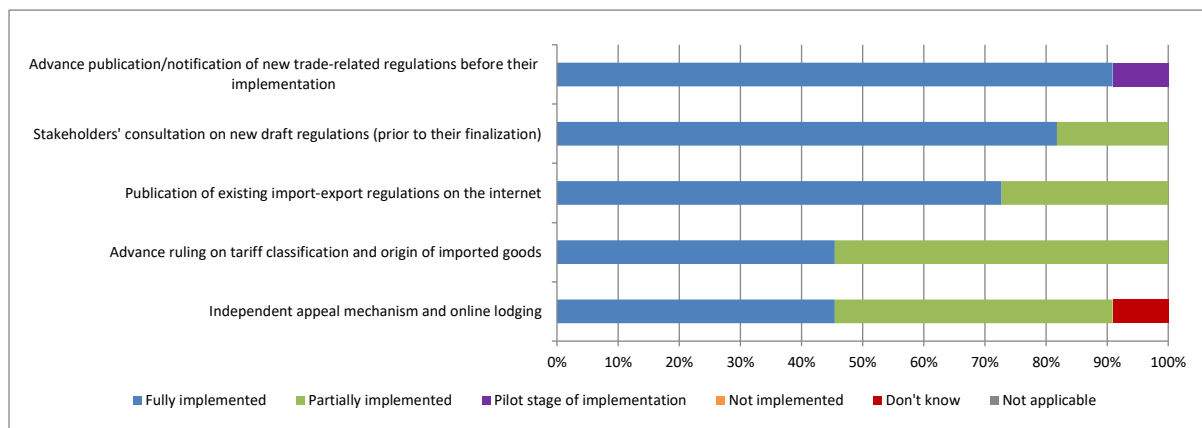
In addition, figure 8 illustrates that measures under 'transparency' are implemented to various degrees in the CAREC subregion. The measures 'advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation' and 'stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)' have been fully implemented by 91% and 82% of CAREC countries, respectively. For the measure 'publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet', it has been fully or partially implemented by all CAREC countries, but 73% of countries fully implemented it. For the two least implemented measures, 'independent appeal mechanism and online lodging' and 'advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods', they have been fully implemented by 45% of the CAREC countries.

Figure 7. State of implementation of 'transparency' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 8. State of implementation of 'transparency' in CAREC



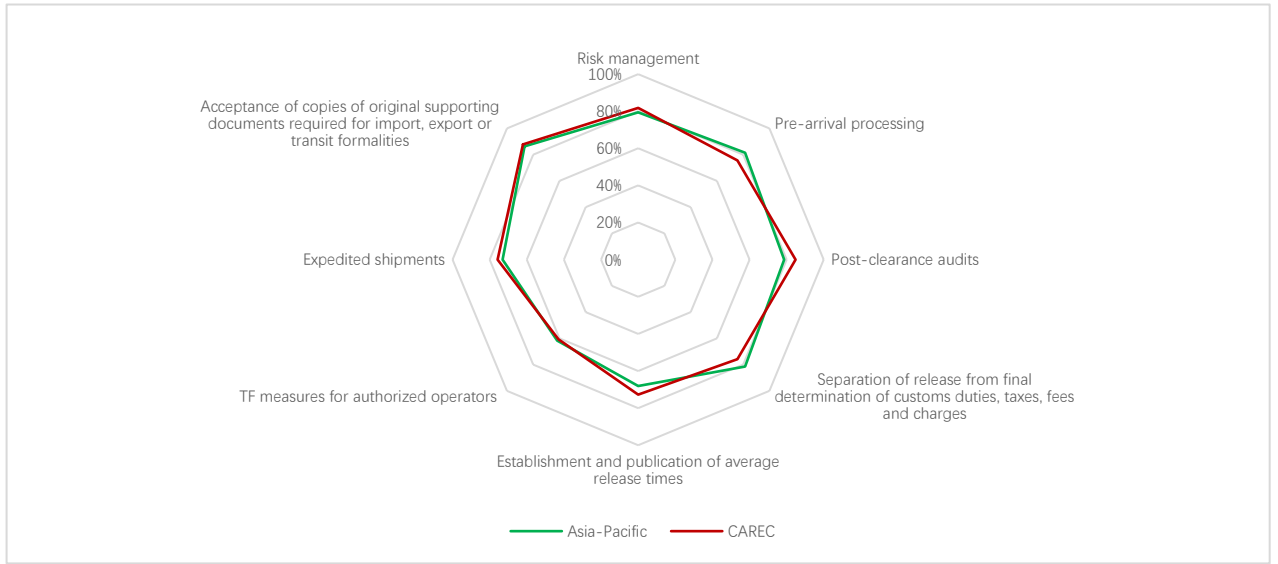
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [unfstats.org](https://unfstats.org)

## 3.2. Formalities

The 'formalities' sub-group encompasses eight general trade facilitation measures that aim to streamline trade procedures, aligning with the requirements outlined in Articles 6-10 of the WTO TFA and GATT Article VIII on "Release and Clearance of Goods". In 2023, the implementation rate for all measures within the 'formalities' category stands at 77%, closely aligned with the regional average of Asia and the Pacific, which is 76%. The measure with the highest implementation rate in the sub-region is the 'acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities' reaching an implementation rate of 88%, followed by 'post-clearance audits' with 85%. Furthermore, the subregional implementation rate for 'risk management' has achieved a commendable 82% (figure 9).

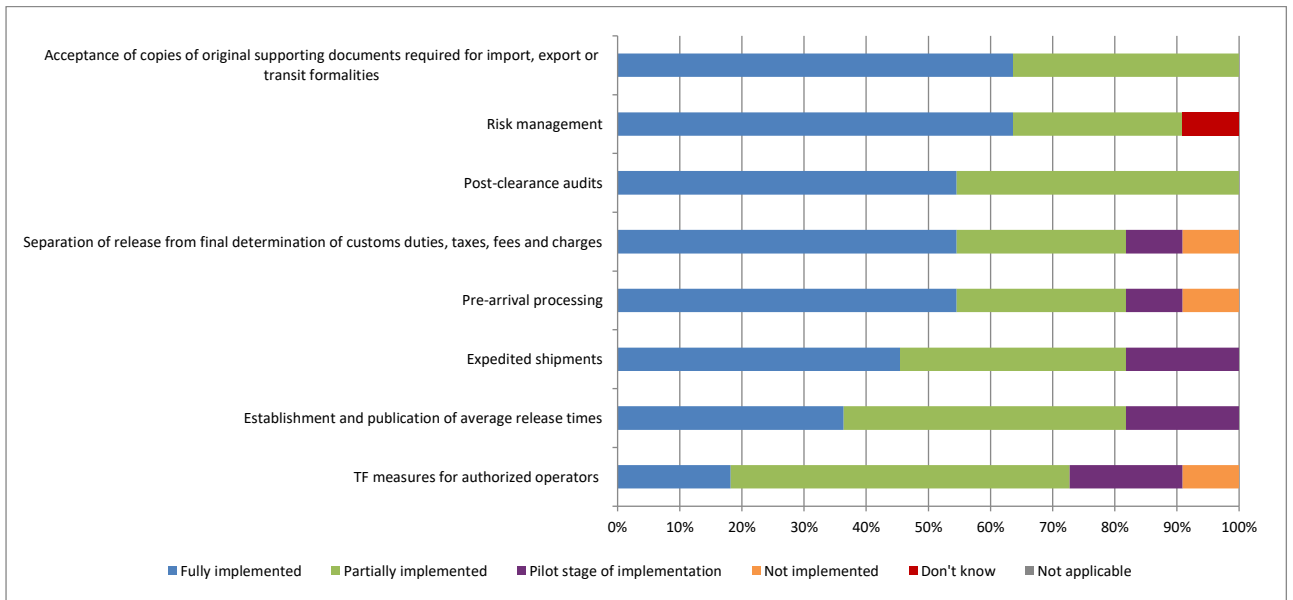
Among all the measures, 'acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities' and 'risk management' exhibit the highest full implementation rate at 64%. Moreover, 55% of CAREC countries have at least fully implemented the measures 'post-clearance audits', 'separation of Release from final determination of Customs duties, taxes, fees and charges' and 'pre-arrival processing'. Another measure 'expedited shipments' has been implemented by 45% of CAREC countries, followed by 'establishment and publication of average release times', fully implemented by 36% of CAREC countries. Finally, the measure 'TF measures for authorized operators' has been fully implemented by only 18% of CAREC countries (figure 10).

Figure 9. State of implementation of 'formalities' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 10. State of implementation of trade 'formalities' in CAREC



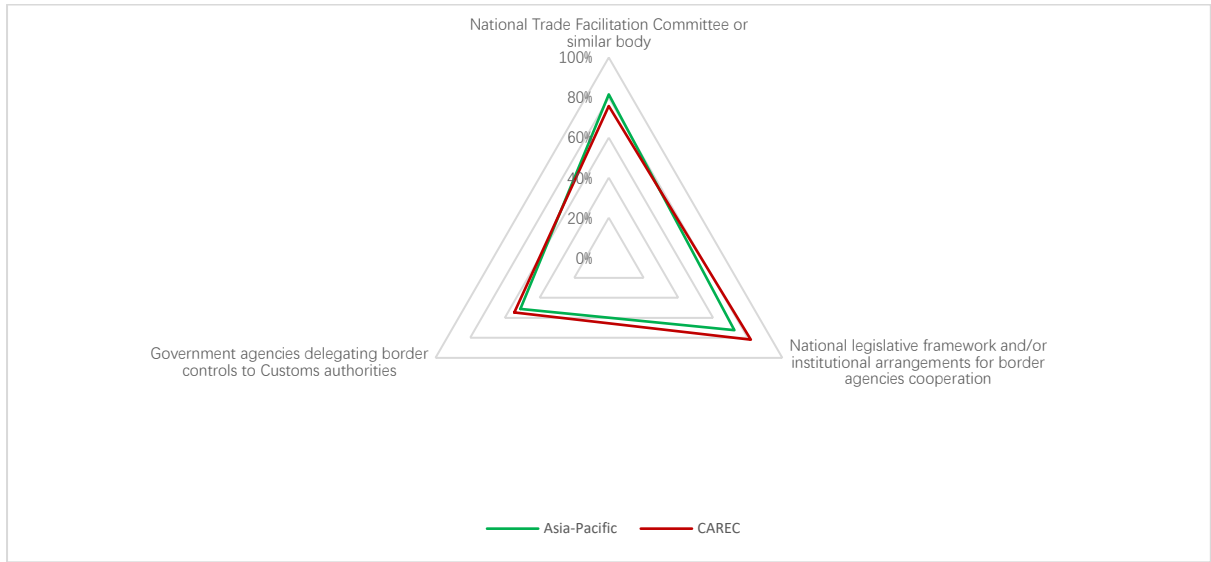
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [unfssurvey.org](https://unfssurvey.org)

### 3.3. Institutional arrangement and cooperation

The 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' category comprises three trade facilitation measures. These measures revolve around the longstanding recommendation to establish a national trade facilitation body that promotes coordination and cooperation among government agencies and other stakeholders involved in trade facilitation activities. In addition, all three measures are specified in various articles of the WTO TFA. In CAREC, the implementation rate of these measures stands at 71%, slightly above the regional average in the Asia-Pacific region (68%).

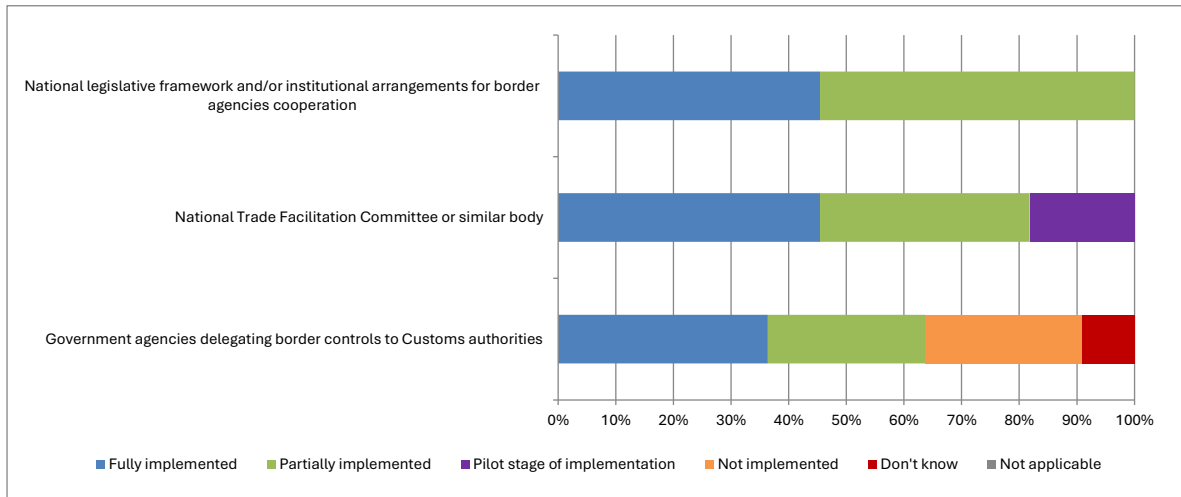
Figure 11 illustrates the varying state of implementation for each measure within this sub-group. The measure with the highest implementation rate is the 'national legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation,' for which the implementation rate is 82%. The implementation rate for the 'National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body' is 76%, which is close to the regional average of the Asia-Pacific region (82%). On the other hand, 36% of countries in this subregion have yet to implement the measure of 'government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities' or are not aware whether this measure has been implemented, making it the least implemented measure within this sub-group (figure 12).

Figure 11. State of implementation of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 12. State of implementation of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' measures for trade facilitation in CAREC



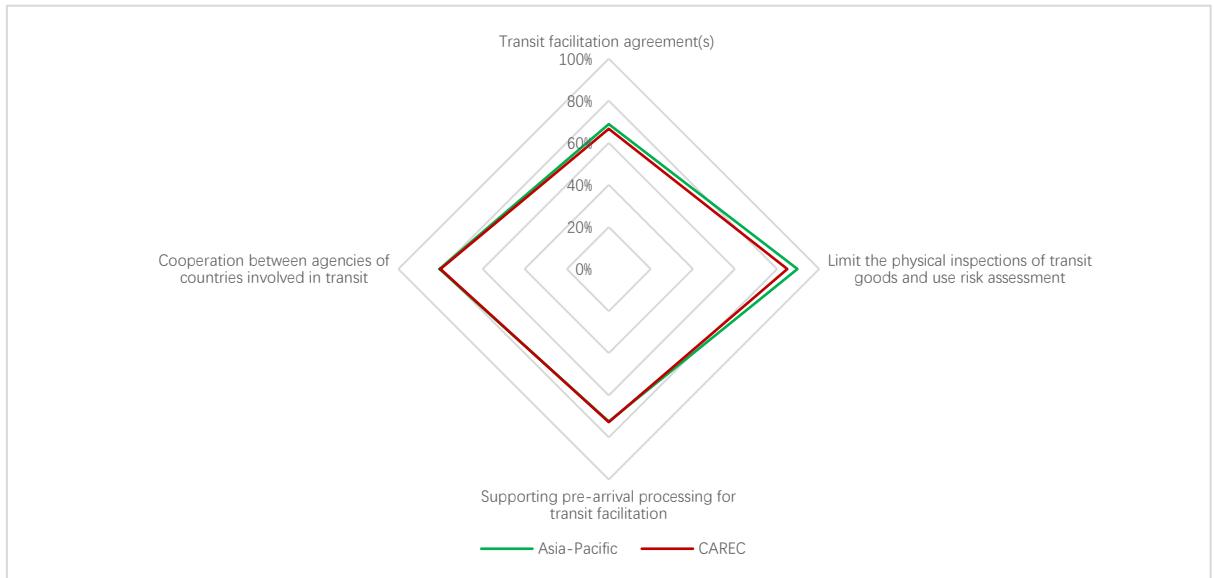
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [untfsurvey.org](https://untfsurvey.org)

### 3.4. Transit facilitation

Four trade facilitation measures surveyed pertain to ‘transit facilitation’ and are aligned with WTO TFA Article 11 on “Freedom of Transit.” These measures aim to simplify the formalities associated with transit traffic, enabling seamless transportation of goods through one or multiple transit countries. They hold particular significance for landlocked developing countries, as their goods often pass through neighbouring territories for transit. In the subregion, the implementation level of ‘transit facilitation’ stands at approximately 76%, close to the Asia-Pacific regional average of 78%.

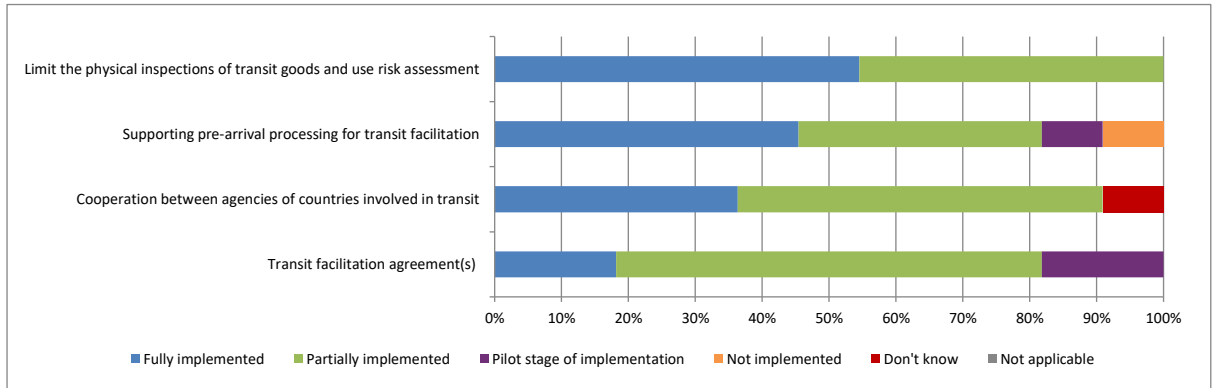
Among these measures, ‘limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment’ achieves the highest implementation rate (85%, fully implemented by 55% of countries), followed by ‘cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit’ (80%, fully implemented by 36% of countries) and ‘supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation’ (73%, fully implemented by 45% of countries). The measure ‘transit facilitation agreement(s)’ remains the least implemented with an implementation rate standing at 67%, with only 18% of CAREC countries having fully implemented it (figures 13 and 14).

Figure 13. State of implementation of 'transit facilitation' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 14. State of implementation of 'transit facilitation' in CAREC



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

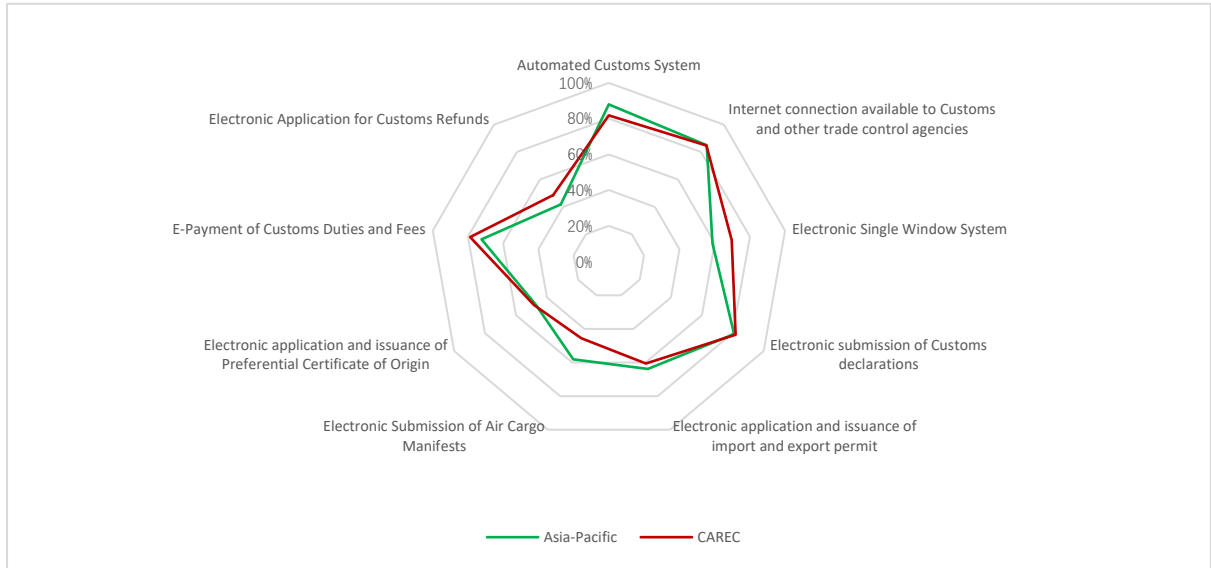


### 3.5. Paperless trade

Nine trade facilitation measures surveyed are categorized in the 'paperless trade' sub-group. These measures involve the utilization of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) in trade procedures, ranging from basic Internet connectivity at border crossings to comprehensive electronic Single Window systems. Many of these measures align with the provisions outlined in the WTO TFA. In the subregion, the implementation level of 'paperless trade' stands at 67%, slightly higher than the Asia-Pacific regional average of 66%.

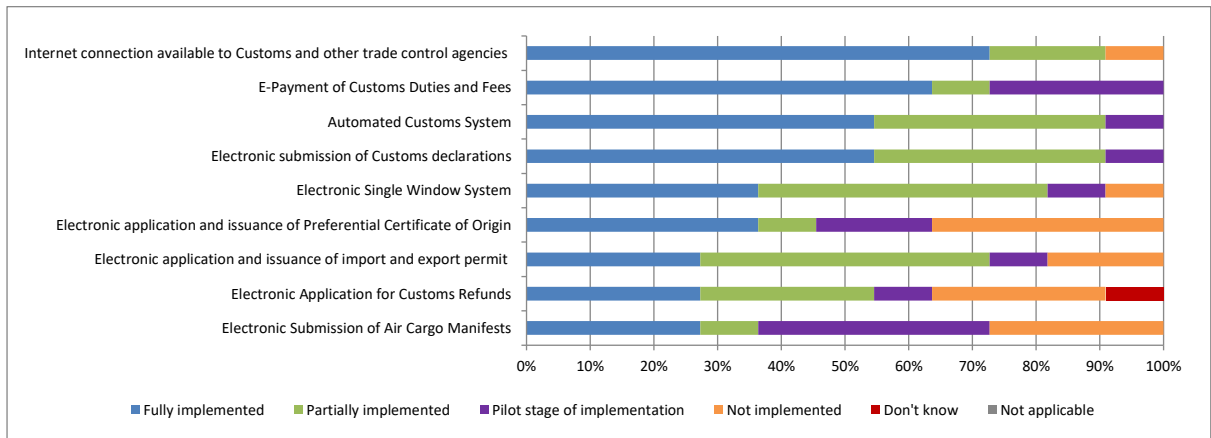
It is important to note that while the TFA encourages economies to implement such measures, it does not impose them as mandatory requirements. Consequently, there is a significant disparity in the implementation rates of the 'paperless trade' measures, ranging from 45% to 85%. As depicted in Figure 15, 'internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies' reached the 85% implementation rate, the highest level in this sub-group. It is closely followed by the measures related to the 'automated Customs system' and 'electronic submission of Customs declarations' that achieved the same implementation rate of 82%. Conversely, the measure with the lowest implementation rate is 'electronic submission of air cargo manifests,' with an implementation rate of 45%. Only 27% of the countries in CAREC have fully implemented this measure, while implementation has not yet commenced in 27% of the CAREC countries (figure 16).

Figure 15. State of implementation of 'paperless trade' by CAREC benchmarking



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

Figure 16. State of implementation of 'paperless trade' in CAREC



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

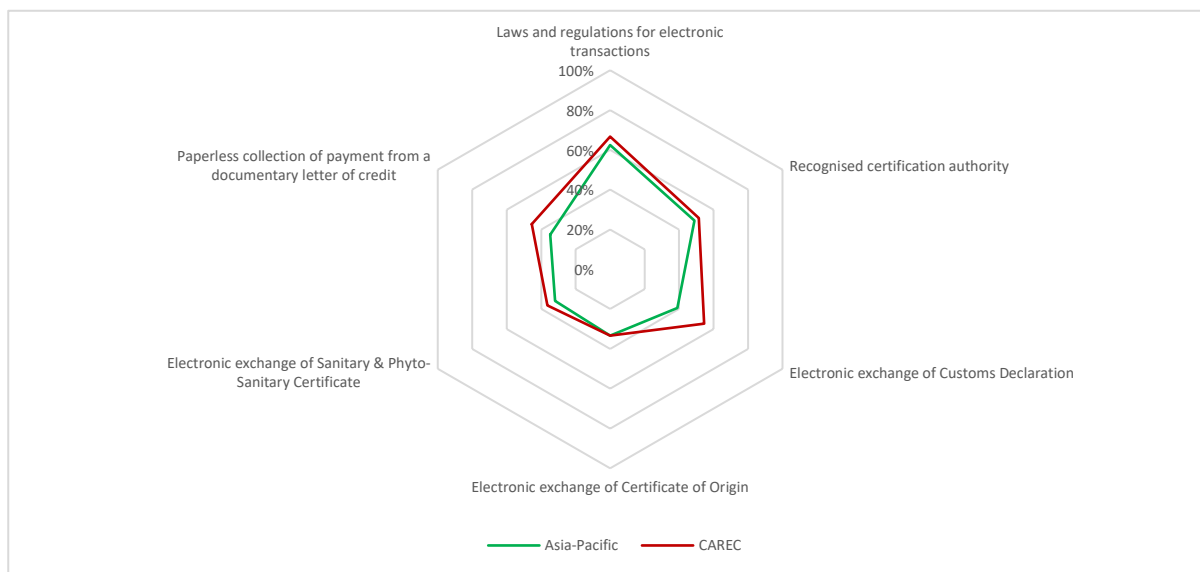
### 3.6. Cross-border paperless trade

The category of 'cross-border paperless trade' encompasses six measures aimed at facilitating the exchange and recognition of trade-related data and documents. Two fundamental measures in this category include the establishment of 'laws and regulations for electronic transactions' and 'recognized certification authority'. These measures serve as essential foundations for enabling the secure exchange of trade-related information within a country and across the entire international supply chain. In CAREC, the average implementation rates of these two measures stand at 67% and 52%, respectively. The remaining four measures focus on implementing systems that facilitate the actual exchange of trade-related data and documents across borders, eliminating the need for physical paper documents. In CAREC, the implementation rate of 'cross-border paperless trade' stands at 48% and surpasses the Asia-Pacific regional average of 42%, but still has significant room to improve, being one of the two least implemented sub-groups (figure 17).

Figure 18 illustrates that 'laws and regulations for electronic transactions' and 'electronic exchange of customs declaration' have been implemented by all CAREC countries, either fully, partially, or as pilot stage of implementation, making them the most frequently implemented measures.

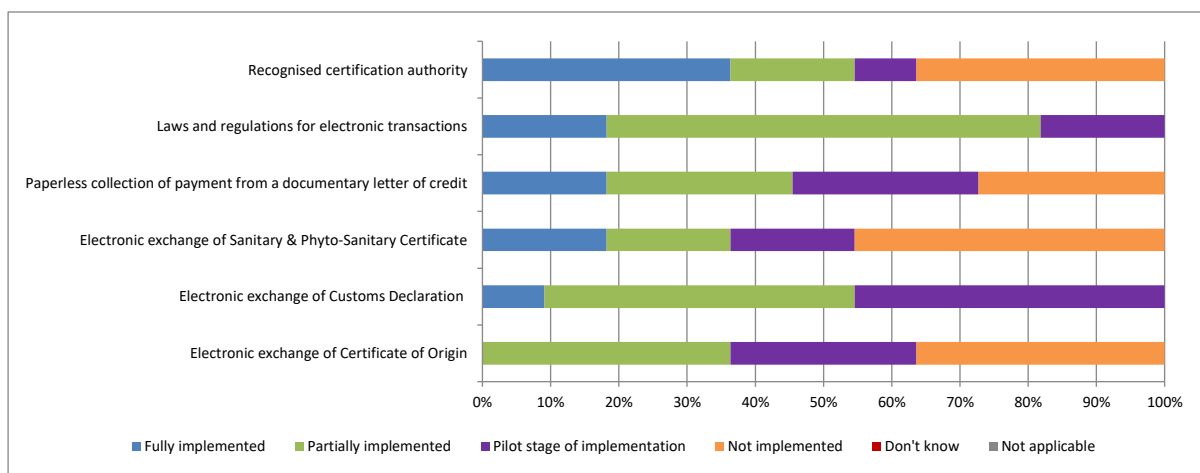
Moreover, 36% of the countries have not started to implement the measures 'electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin' and 'recognized certification authority' yet. This rate rises to 45% for the measure 'electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary Certificate'.

Figure 17. State of implementation of 'cross-border paperless trade' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 18. State of implementation of 'cross-border paperless trade' in CAREC



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

### Box 1. Georgia's good practices in cross-border paperless trade

From the early days of its independence, Georgia identified international trade facilitation as a cornerstone of its economic policy and has been striving to become a regional transport and logistics hub since then, actively developing its transport and digital connectivity with the European Union (EU). Therefore, after the disruption of international supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Georgian Revenue Service (GRS – Georgian Customs) reaffirmed the main directions of their national strategy, including further facilitation of cross-border trade, digitalization of transit corridors passing through Georgia, and digitalization of Customs operations and services.

#### **Implementation of New Computerized Transit System**

After completion of the EU-funded project “Supporting the Accession of Georgia to the Conventions on Transit Area and Launching of the New Computerized Transit System (NCTS),” from April 2023 Georgia has developed NCTS Phase 5, with the technical support of UNCTAD<sup>3</sup> This electronic transit system will be used as a national application to offer a single document and guarantee issued by the Customs Department for continuous transit through the EU, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), the United Kingdom, Turkey, Serbia and Macedonia. In ADB report<sup>4</sup> it was concluded that Georgia potentially could offer an opportunity to integrate CAREC Advanced Transit System (CATS) with NCTS in the EU.

Georgia is also in the process of accession to the Common Transit Convention (CTC), a major change in terms of transit efficiency for the country, which will be directly connected to the EU in a faster way. Georgia is progressing with legislative evolutions, and the Customs service is helping both large companies and SMEs to prepare for the potentialities of NCTS and what this service implies for their operational activities. Effective accession to the Conventions and full implementation of the NCTS with conformity testing are expected by the end of 2024.

In addition, in 2023 the GRS published an interim report<sup>5</sup> with interesting details about its implementation strategy. In particular, to meet the increased demand for remote services, they implemented significant measures, including the launch of an online platform ([infohub.rs.ge](http://infohub.rs.ge)), available to both GRS employees and taxpayers, centralizing information and documentation related to tax and Customs issues.

#### **Evolution of the paperless trade Single Window**

In 2023, the USAID office in Georgia initiated a feasibility study to support the digitalization of the transport and logistics sector<sup>6</sup> with the involvement of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development. The main objective is to develop the concept and road map for the implementation of the national eLogistics system (NeLS) and platform in Georgia, as recommended by UN/CEFACT, which is considered an important development for the next stage of the national Single Window evolution.

The integration layer of the NeLS platform is to provide connectivity and interoperability with local information systems for various modes of transport<sup>7</sup>, as well as interoperability with NeLS in other CAREC member countries as well as digital transport corridor (DTC) level platforms. The orchestration layer will digitalize the main multimodal business processes and include NeLS service

<sup>3</sup> <https://unctad.org/news/georgia-enhancing-customs-systems-unlock-trade-potential>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.adb.org/projects/documents/reg-46026-001-tacr>

<sup>5</sup> GRS Annual report- [https://www.rs.ge/Media/Default/Docs/ANGARISHI\\_2022-23\\_ENG\\_.pdf](https://www.rs.ge/Media/Default/Docs/ANGARISHI_2022-23_ENG_.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.usaid.gov/georgia/our-programs>

<sup>7</sup> <https://eufordigital.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/DTC-report-draft.pdf>

modules established in other CAREC countries to facilitate the exchange of data and electronic documents for all transport modes, including eCMR, eCertificate of Origin, and eTIR.

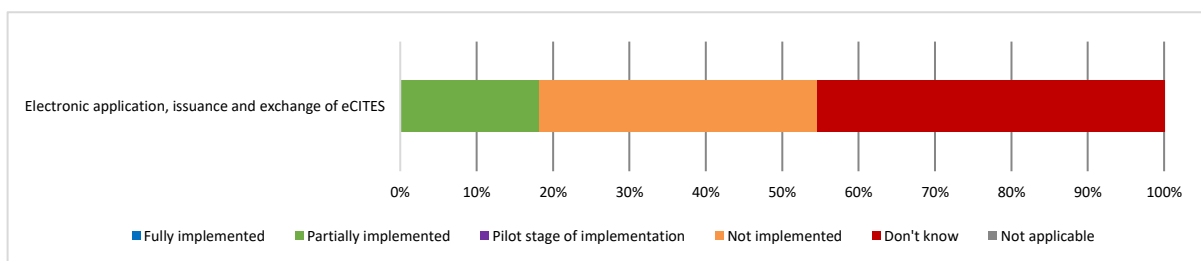
In addition to the need to advance paperless and cross-border paperless trade in CAREC countries overall, with a greater emphasis on sustainable trade, implementation of paperless and cross-border paperless trade facilitation measures could lead to making trade more sustainable and climate-smart (box 2).

## Box 2. Climate-smart trade facilitation

Climate-smart trade facilitation would refer to trade facilitation measures that aim to make trade greener, in line with Goal 13 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on climate action. Digitalization is one key element in the green trade transition. The 2021 Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report highlighted the need for an acceleration of climate-smart trade solutions.<sup>8</sup> Paperless and cross-border paperless trade measures can have positive impacts on protecting the environment and making trade more sustainable by reducing GHG emissions, both from embodied carbon emissions in paper production and in the emissions from transporting physical documents. An ESCAP study undertaken in May 2021 estimated that by fully digitalizing regulatory procedures around trade, between 32 and 86 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents could be saved per end-to-end transaction.<sup>9</sup> One example of climate-smart trade facilitation utilizing trade digitalization is the Electronic permits of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, known as CITES. It is an agreement between Governments that aims to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plant specimens are 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. It is also being used as a means of combatting illegal trade.

In the 2023 Survey, the pilot-tested measures, 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection', addressed the implementation of the CITES electronic permit system (eCITES). It is noted that CAREC countries have a low level of implementation rate eCITES permits (figure 19).

Figure 19. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' in CAREC



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

<sup>8</sup> Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report 2021: Accelerating Climate-Smart Trade and Investment for Sustainable Development, available at <https://www.unescap.org/kp/APTIR2021>

<sup>9</sup> ESCAP, 2023, Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: Global Report 2023

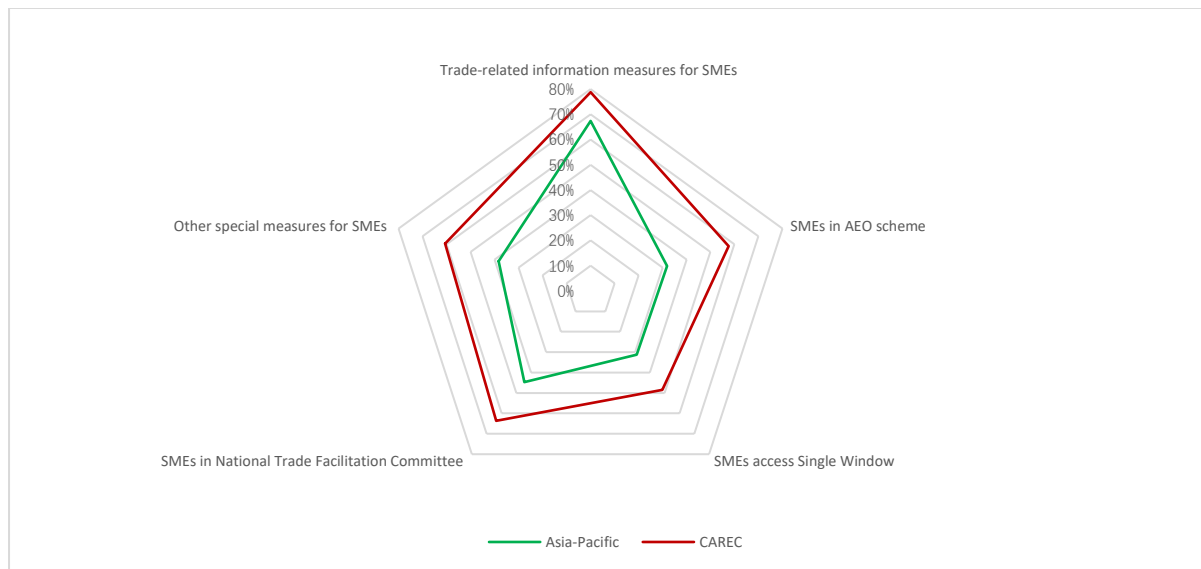
### 3.7. Trade facilitation for SMEs

In the Asia-Pacific region, there is considerable variation in the level of implementation of all five measures in 'trade facilitation for SMEs,' as indicated in Figure 20. The average implementation rate of these measures in CAREC countries is 62%, which is much higher than the regional average of 43%. Moreover, CAREC countries exhibit a higher level of implementation on each one of the five measures, compared to the Asia-Pacific region.

It is worth noting that all the CAREC countries have implemented 'trade-related information measures for SMEs,' either fully, partially or on a pilot stage with an average implementation rate of 79%. Two other sets of measures, 'SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee ' and 'other special measures for SMEs,' also show strong implementation rates of 64% and 61%, much higher than the regional average. When it comes to measures for 'SMEs in AEO scheme,' apart from an implementation rate above the regional average of 58%, it is noticeable that 82% of CAREC countries have implemented this measure either fully, partially or on a pilot stage. The least implemented measure is 'SMEs access Single Window,' which is not implemented in 27% of the countries and has an average implementation rate of 48%, as shown in Figure 20 and Figure 21. The upward trend in the use of e-commerce in the global economy could present opportunities for SMEs to connect to global supply chains but measures specific to SMEs as well as to supporting e-commerce would need to be further enhanced (box 3).

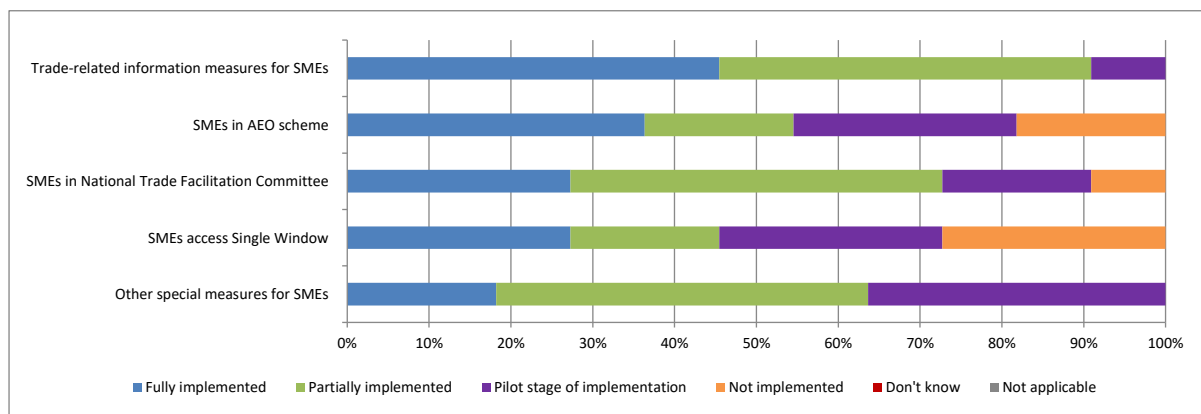


Figure 20. State of implementation of 'trade Facilitation for SMEs' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 21. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' in CAREC



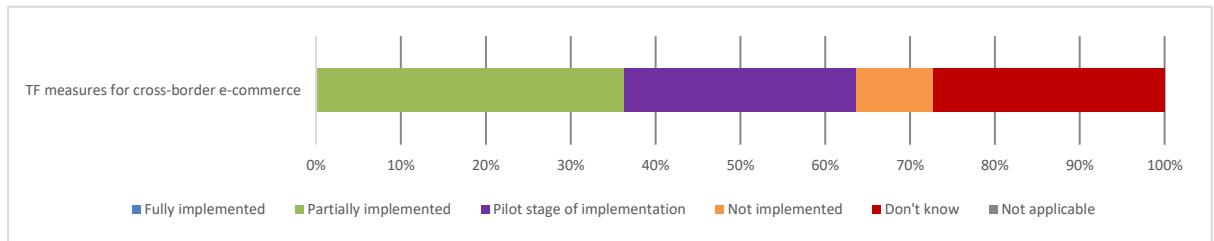
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [unfssurvey.org](https://unfssurvey.org)

### Box 3. Trade Facilitation for e-commerce and SMEs

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) accounts for a significant proportion of business transactions among CAREC countries and is an increasingly important element in international trade. An ongoing challenge in this space is to harmonize regulations governing e-commerce across nations; although progress has been made, regulations governing e-commerce have not kept pace with the rapid expansion of e-commercial transactions.

In the 2023 Survey, the pilot-tested 'trade facilitation for e-commerce' measure reflects whether countries have implemented a national strategy on cross-border e-commerce and a de minimis regime. It is observed that every 36% of CAREC countries have partially implemented them, with 27% on a pilot stage (figure 22). This highlights the need for significant improvements, not only for the areas indicated in the measure but also in a broader context for the overall e-commerce environment. These improvements are crucial for enhancing overall "Digital Trade Facilitation" and ensuring its positive impact on sustainable trade.

Figure 22. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation for e-commerce' in CAREC



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

### 3.8. Agricultural trade facilitation

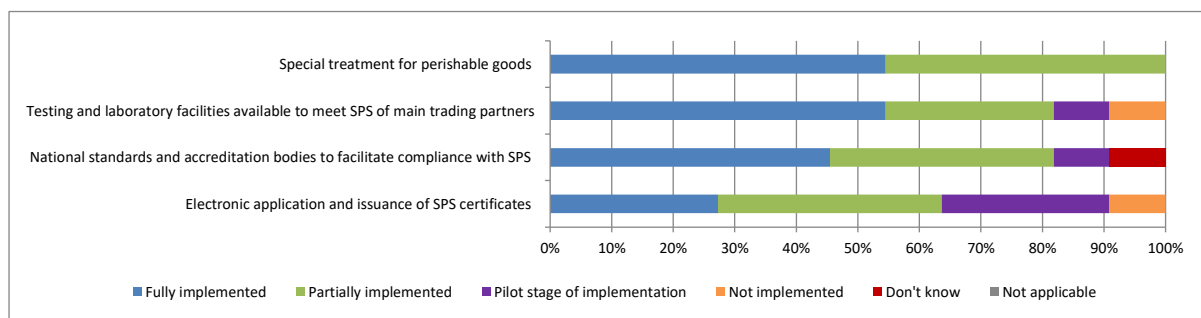
The implementation rate of 'agricultural trade facilitation' in the CAREC subregion stands at 73%, higher than the Asia-Pacific average of 62%. The measure 'special treatment for perishable goods' has the highest implementation rate of 85%, followed by the measure 'testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS requirements of main trading partners,' which stands at 76% (figure 23). Following closely is the presence of 'national standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS' with an implementation rate of 73%. The measure with the lowest implementation rate in this sub-group is the 'electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates' with a subregional implementation rate of 61%. Implementation of this measure is often incomplete, and only 27% of countries within the subregion have fully implemented it (figure 24).

Figure 23. State of implementation of 'agricultural trade facilitation' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 24. State of implementation of 'agricultural trade facilitation' in CAREC



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

### 3.9. Women in trade facilitation

The implementation level of the three ‘women in trade facilitation’ measures in CAREC countries stands at 58%. This is higher than the average in the Asia-Pacific region (42%), indicating that gender equality has been integrated into various policy initiatives and the specific concerns of women traders regarding trade facilitation addressed to some extent in CAREC countries.

The measure with the highest implementation rate is the ‘TF policy/strategy to increase women’s participation in trade,’ which stands at 67%, well above the average in the Asia-Pacific region (39%). Moreover, the implementation rates for the other two measures in this category, ‘TF measures to benefit women involved in trade’ and ‘women membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies,’ reach commendable scores of 52% and 55%, respectively (figure 25).

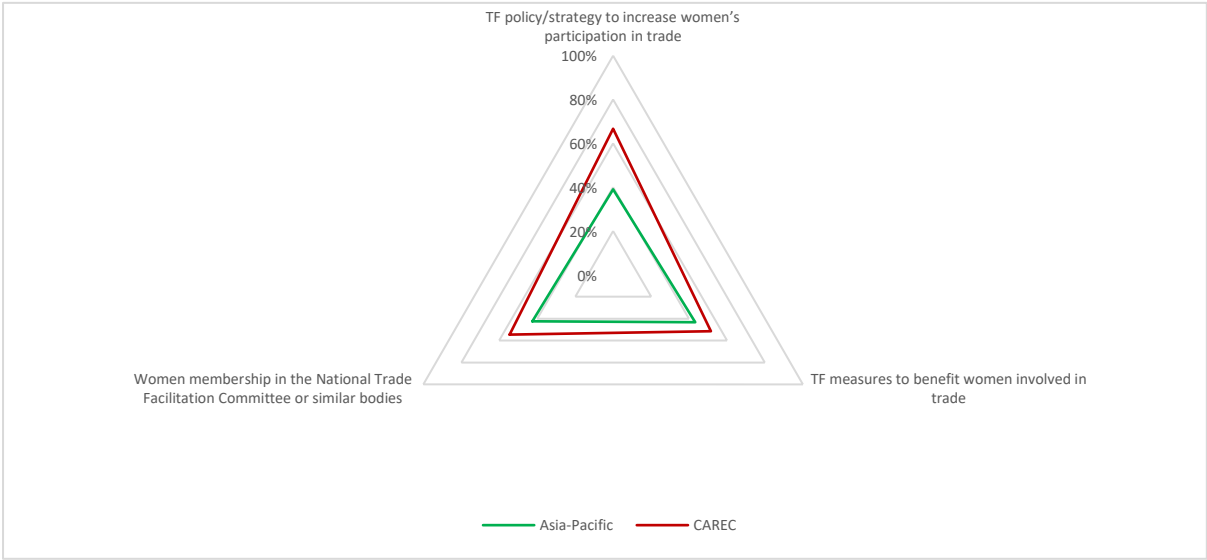
Most CAREC countries have introduced ‘women membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies’ and ‘TF measures to benefit women involved in trade’ at least as a pilot stage. These measures include having a designated gender focal point in relevant border agencies, promoting gender-balanced participation in training, and providing specialized training for women engaged in trade. Moreover, ‘TF policy/strategy to increase women’s participation in trade’ has been implemented by 82% of the CAREC countries, and all these CAREC countries have fully or partially implemented this measure (figure 26).

More than 80% of CAREC countries have introduced all these measures connected to “women in trade facilitation” at least at a pilot stage. The measure “TF policy/strategy to increase women’s participation in trade” has been fully or partially implemented by 82% of the CAREC countries while “woman membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies” has been implemented by 97% of them at least at a pilot stage. This measure includes having a designated gender focal point in relevant border agencies, promoting balanced participation of men and women in trainings and providing specialized training for women engaged in trade.

Several regional and national efforts are noted in this regard. Kazakhstan is actively working to enhance gender representation in companies with state participation, aiming for a 30% female presence in management bodies. Additionally, Kazakhstan is fostering women's entrepreneurship through financial and non-financial support measures, including "interest rate subsidy" and "loan guarantee" instruments, contributing to advancing women's participation in trade and business facilitation. Also, as part of Turkmenistan’s plan and efforts to accede to the WTO, there are initiatives to support women-led businesses in integrating into global and regional value chains,

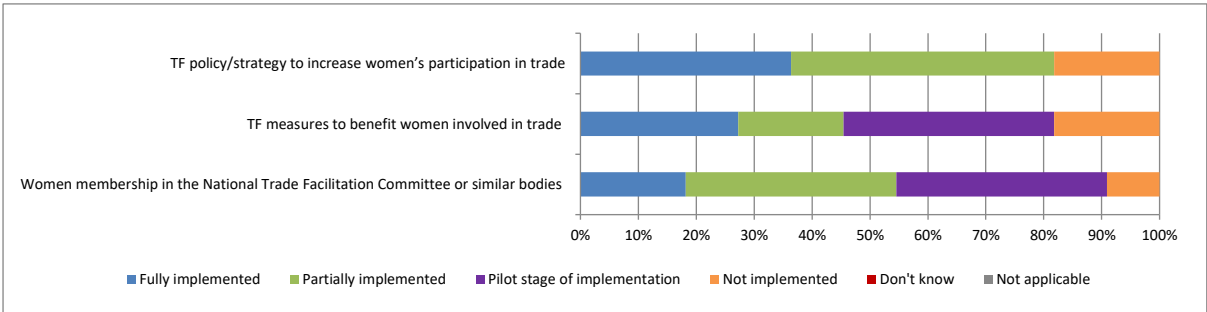
foster a gender-inclusive environment, and assist women policymakers. In Uzbekistan, under a project "Enhancing Economic Opportunities for Rural Women," efforts are undertaken to boost economic prospects for marginalized rural women within designated areas by focusing on skills development and enhancing their access to finance and markets.

Figure 25. State of implementation of 'women in trade facilitation' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 26. State of implementation of 'women in trade facilitation' in CAREC



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

### 3.10. Trade finance facilitation

In CAREC countries, among all the sub-groups of measures, ‘trade finance facilitation’ has the lowest implementation rate of 35%. The most widely implemented measure is ‘variety of trade finance services available,’ with 82% of countries reporting at least a pilot stage of implementation. However, the rates of implementation for measures such as ‘Single window facilitates traders’ access to finance’ and ‘authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain projects covering trade finance’ are relatively low, standing at 21% and 30% respectively, although above Asia-Pacific regional average of 18%, and observed in a very small number of countries (27% and 36%) as fully or partially Implemented (figures 27 and 28).

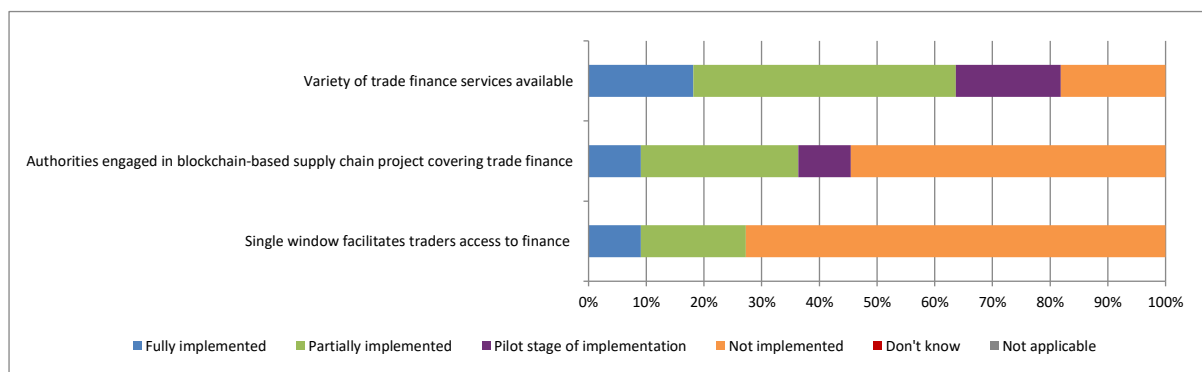
It is worth noting that data collection on this topic during the survey proved to be challenging. For example, there was a lack of evidence regarding the implementation of Single Window features that facilitate traders’ access to finance, as indicated by trade facilitation experts and officials who provided or validated the survey responses. This suggests a general unfamiliarity with trade finance among these stakeholders. Traditional trade facilitation actors, including Customs and Government Ministries responsible for trade, may perceive financing and payment procedures in international trade transactions as beyond their scope of work. However, considering the interconnectedness of goods and financial flows, the results highlight the necessity for enhanced coordination and cooperation with stakeholders involved in developing financial and payment services.

Figure 27. State of implementation of 'trade finance facilitation' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 28. State of implementation of 'trade finance facilitation' in CAREC



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

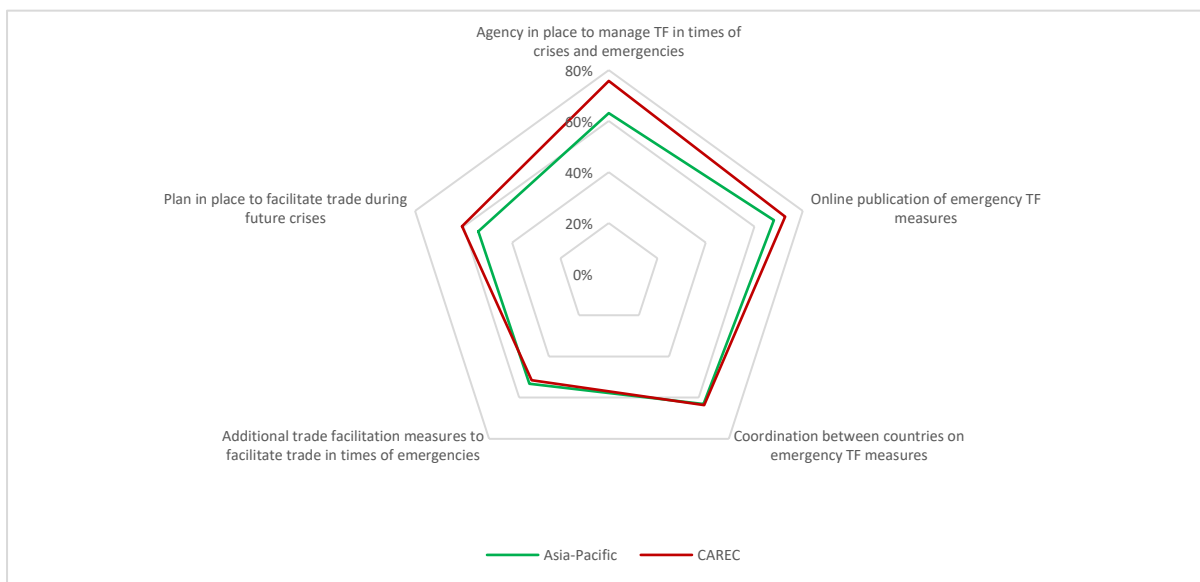
### 3.11 Trade facilitation in times of crisis

In the 2021 Survey, a new category called ‘trade facilitation measures in times of crisis’ was introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2023 Survey continued to include measures addressing both immediate crisis responses and long-term resilient strategies. CAREC has achieved an implementation level of 65% in this sub-group, slightly surpassing the average in the Asia-Pacific region (60%). Among all measures in this sub-group, the measure ‘agency in place to manage TF in times of crises and emergencies’ has the highest implementation rate at 76% and has been fully or partially implemented by 91% of CAREC countries. It is followed by ‘online publication of emergency TF measures,’ with a subregional implementation rate of 73% (figures 29 and 30).

To address the challenges posed by restrictive measures, it is crucial to enhance cooperation between countries to prevent trade tensions from escalating and ensure the uninterrupted flow of essential goods in supply chains. For the ‘coordination between countries on emergency TF measures’ and for the ‘plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises,’ CAREC countries have had a slightly higher implementation rate than the average of the Asia-Pacific region, with 64% and 73% of the countries having fully or partially implemented these measures (figures 29 and 30).

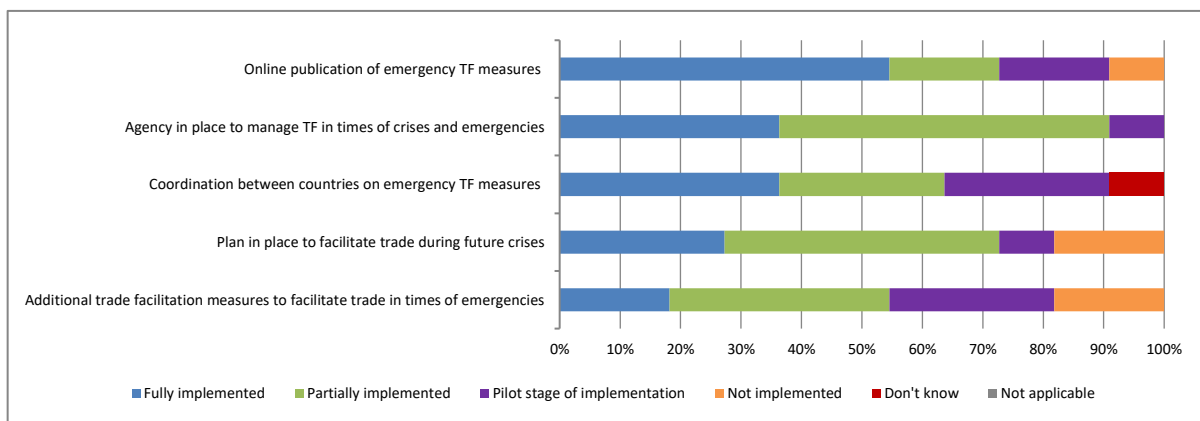


Figure 29. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' by CAREC benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 30. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' in CAREC



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

## 4. Assessing the impact of trade facilitation in CAREC countries

To assess the potential impact of the implementation of trade facilitation measures in CAREC countries, a trade cost model has been formulated as a function of trade facilitation implementation rates based on the Survey data. This is in addition to other traditional trade cost factors such as natural geographic factors (distance, “land-lockedness” and contiguity), cultural and historical distance (e.g., common official language and/or former colonial relationships), the presence of regional trade agreements, and maritime connectivity. The model is based on ESCAP (2023)<sup>10</sup> by capturing the changes in trade costs resulting from the implementation of trade facilitation measures by each country.

The overall trade cost reductions expected in CAREC countries from the implementation of three sets of trade facilitation measures are shown in Table 3. The first set of trade facilitation measures is limited to the implementation of WTO TFA binding measures only. The second set of measures includes all binding and non-binding WTO TFA measures included in the Survey. The final and most ambitious set is a WTO TFA+ set of measures, including digital implementation of TFA measures and cross-border paperless trade. For each set of measures, the average changes in trade cost achieved if all CAREC countries at least partially implement all measures, or if they all fully implement all measures, are calculated.

Table 3. Expected trade cost reduction from alternative trade facilitation reforms

CAREC: 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
<b>Model 1</b>						
Overall trade facilitation	-0.94%	-4.14%	-1.73%	-6.74%	-7.60%	-15.02%
<b>Model 2</b>						
General trade facilitation measures	-0.77%	-3.09%	-0.93%	-4.23%	-1.23%	-4.74%
Digital trade facilitation measures	-	-	-0.84%	-1.75%	-6.43%	-9.84%

Source: United Nations ESCAP, based on data from [www.untfsurvey.org](http://www.untfsurvey.org) and ESCAP/World Bank Trade Cost database.

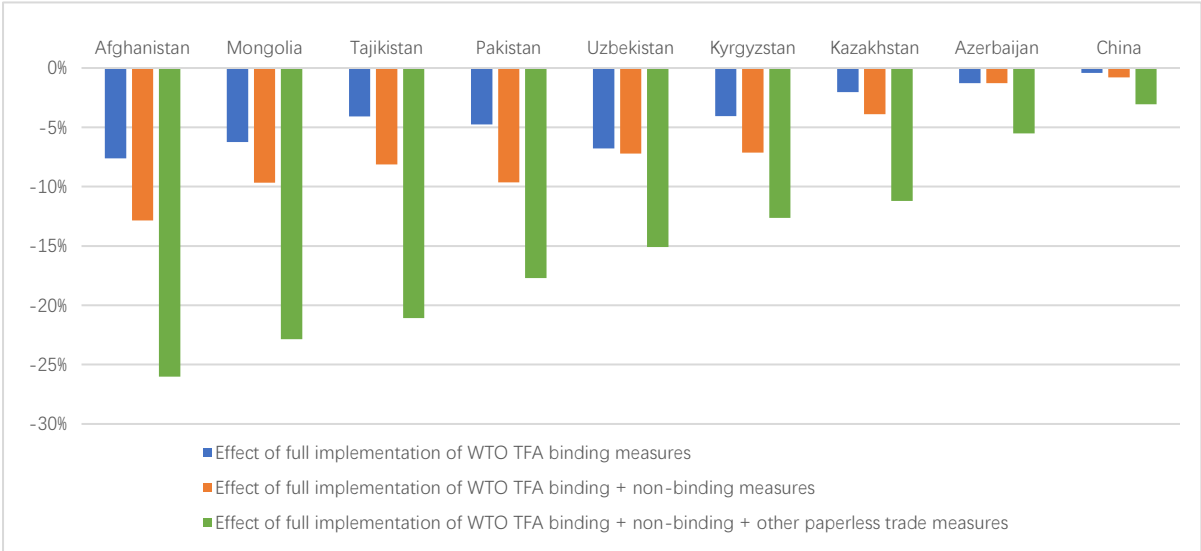
Note: There are no digital trade facilitation measures that are classified as WTO TFA binding measures. WTO TFA = World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement.

<sup>10</sup> ESCAP, 2023, Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: Global Report 2023

Two main findings emerge from this impact analysis. First, complying with WTO TFA by implementing binding measures can only slightly reduce trade costs. Full implementation of binding measures in the overall trade facilitation model results in a decrease in trade costs of about 4%, while full implementation of all measures (both binding and non-binding) results in about 8% reduction. Second, the paperless implementation of the TFA measures, together with enabling the seamless electronic exchange of trade data and documents across borders, will help to significantly reduce trade costs by about 15% for CAREC countries. The results of model 2 also suggest that most of the trade cost reductions are associated with digital trade facilitation measures rather than conventional trade facilitation measures.

CAREC economies will reap significant benefits from accelerating the implementation of trade facilitation. As shown in Figure 31, the full implementation of the three different sets of trade facilitation measures results in trade cost reductions for these nine CAREC economies. As expected, the trade cost reductions are much larger when cross-border paperless trade is achieved. However, achieving such trade cost reductions will require closer cooperation between economies on developing interoperable paperless trade systems, as envisaged in the CPTA (see box 4).

Figure 31. Impact of trade facilitation implementation on trade costs of CAREC economies



Source: United Nations ESCAP, based on data from [www.untfsurvey.org](http://www.untfsurvey.org) and ESCAP/World Bank Trade Cost Database

#### Box 4. 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. 13 countries are Parties to the treaty as of publication of the report, 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 endeavor, 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 in 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).

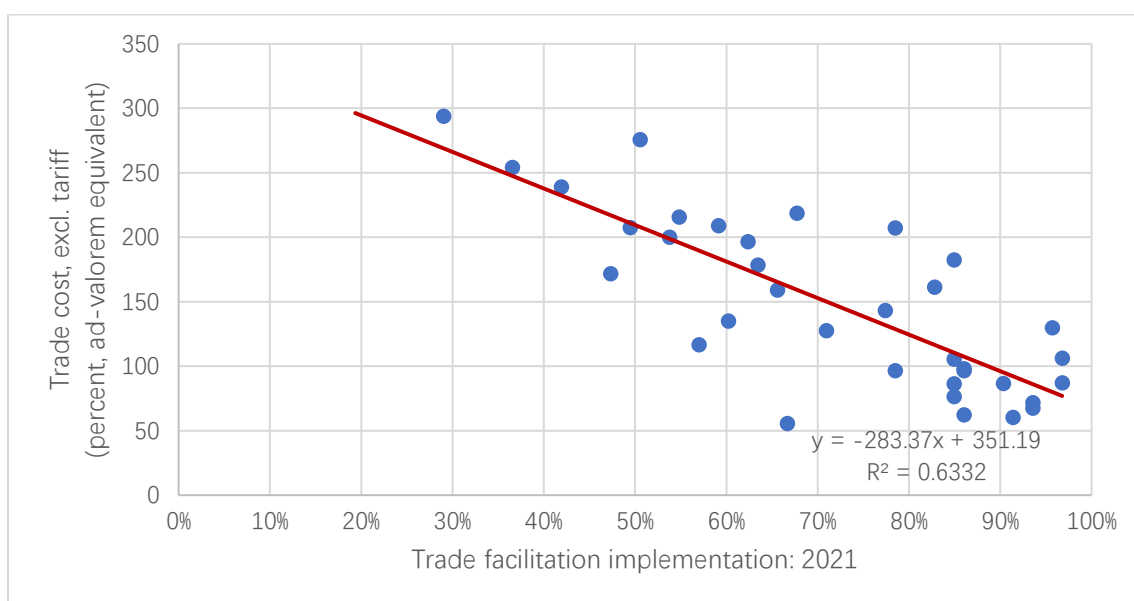
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*Note:* Additional details on the CPTA are available at: <https://www.unescap.org/kp/cpta>

## 5. Conclusion and the way forward

This report presents data on the implementation of a set of 60 trade facilitation measures from 11 CAREC countries and 36 other economies across the Asia-Pacific region. The Survey, serving as the basis of the report, not only covers general trade facilitation measures, as outlined in the WTO TFA, but also digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures and beyond. Figure 32 confirms the strong relationship between the cost of international trade in the Asia-Pacific countries and their level of trade facilitation implementation.

Figure 32. Trade facilitation implementation and trade costs of Asia-Pacific economies



Source: UN Trade Facilitation Survey and ESCAP/World Bank Trade Cost.

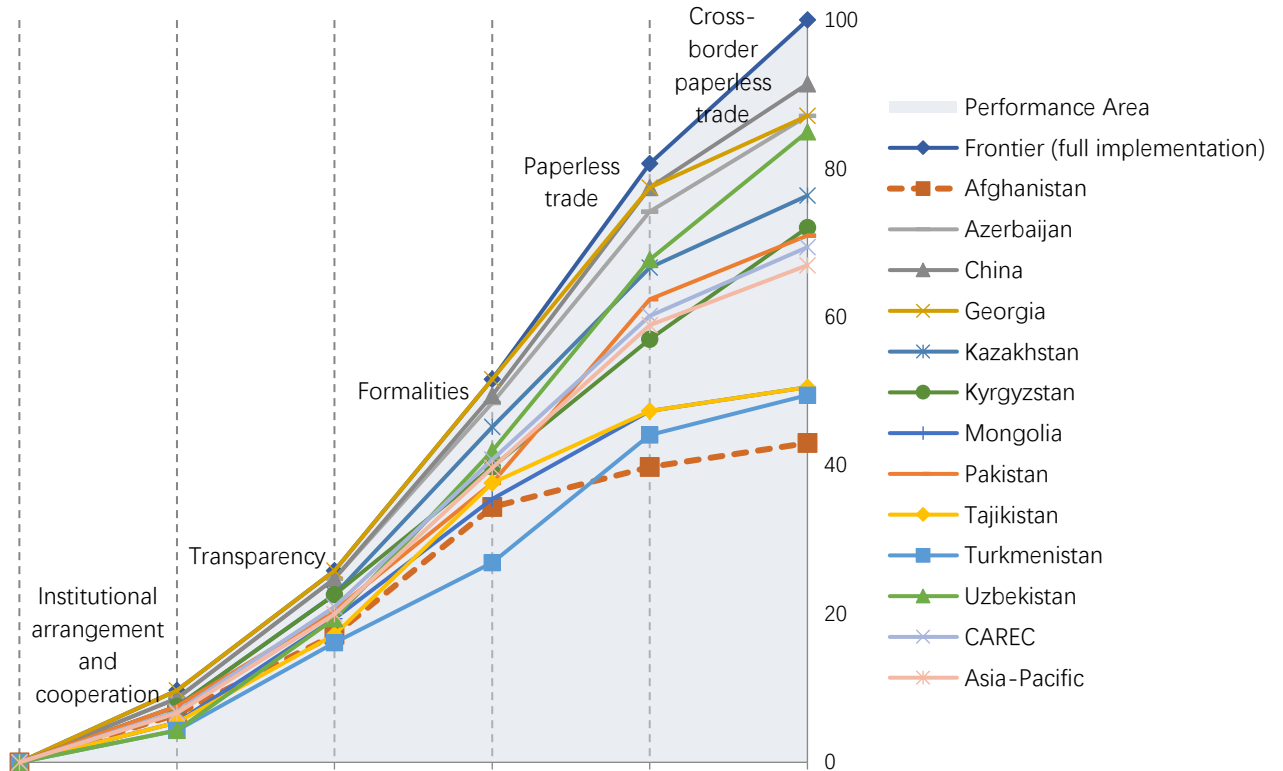
Based on the set of 31 general and digital trade facilitation measures, the Survey reveals an average implementation rate of 69% in CAREC, slightly surpassing the Asia-Pacific regional average implementation rate of 67%.

The Survey results reveal that most CAREC countries have implemented some measures to improve transparency as well as simplify trade-related costs and procedures, either fully or partially implemented. Besides, the 'paperless trade' subgroup shows a commendable implementation rate of 67%, although there is still a significant disparity among measures, from 'electronic Submission of Air Cargo Manifests' at 45% to 'internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies' at 85%.

On one hand, CAREC countries developed advanced national paperless systems facilitating the electronic exchange of data and documents between government agencies and businesses, including electronic single window systems and automated Customs systems. On the other hand, electronic submission and issuance of key documents such as air cargo manifest and preferential Certificate of Origin, and electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary certificate have not been well implemented. In terms of cross-border paperless trade, there has been a notable increase of 11 percentage points compared with 2021, indicating significant progress, especially in the implementation of 'electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary certificate' and 'recognized certification authority' during the past two years. However, there is still significant room for improvement, with being one of the two least implemented sub-groups of measures.

To further advance trade facilitation, figure 33 illustrates the implementation of trade facilitation as a step-by-step process. Trade facilitation begins with establishing the 'institutional arrangement' to prioritize and coordinate trade facilitation measures. The next step is to enhance 'transparency' by widely sharing information on existing laws, regulations, and procedures, and engaging in negotiations with stakeholders when developing new ones. The third step involves designing and implementing simplified and efficient trade 'formalities.' Initially, these re-engineered and streamlined processes may rely on paper documents, but they can be further improved through using ICT and 'paperless trade' systems. The ultimate step is to enable the exchange of electronic trade data and documents among traders, governments, and service providers within national systems such as the Single Window, allowing stakeholders in partner countries to access the necessary information to expedite the movement of goods and reduce overall trade costs.

Figure 33. 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 [unfssurvey.org](https://unfssurvey.org)

Note: Figure 33 shows global cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores for different regions for 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.

Moving forward, it is crucial for CAREC countries to expedite the advancement of digital trade facilitation. The impact analysis of trade facilitation measures on CAREC countries' trade costs strongly emphasizes the necessity of implementing paperless trade and establishing a seamless electronic exchange of trade data and documents between CAREC countries and their trading partners. An ambitious trade digitalization strategy is projected to reduce trade costs by about 15%, whereas achieving basic compliance with the WTO TFA would only result in a reduction of around 8% in trade costs. In this regard, the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific complements the WTO TFA, and it provides a supportive platform for ESCAP member States to facilitate the electronic exchange of cross-border trade-related data and documents for those who have not yet implemented such mechanisms. Therefore, all CAREC countries are encouraged to become a party to the treaty as soon as possible and promote harmonization of trade facilitation measures across the Asia-Pacific region.

Regarding “Sustainable Trade Facilitation,” the adoption of inclusive measures to support SMEs in CAREC countries are commendable, with the implementation rate of ' trade facilitation for SMEs' stands at 63%, 20 percentage points higher than the regional average. Still, with SMEs holding significant importance in the global economy and digital trade, it is crucial to continue its efforts to enhance the capacity of SMEs and integrate proper supportive measures for SMEs into the trade facilitation policy-making process to achieve sustainable trade facilitation. Considering their pivotal role in fostering sustainable and inclusive economic development, trade facilitation strategies should be designed holistically and inclusively.

Moreover, it is encouraging to note that CAREC countries have a relatively high implementation level for women in trade facilitation measures at 58%, surpassing the Asia-Pacific regional average of 42%. Also, there was a significant increase by 10 percentage points compared to 2021. This accomplishment highlights the efforts put into the integration of gender equality into various policy initiatives, addressing the specific concerns of women traders regarding trade facilitation. Further improvements can be achieved by providing support to guide women traders in understanding trade procedures, establishing guidelines for standards bodies to ensure equitable representation of both genders' interests, and encouraging women's active participation and decision-making in trade facilitation and standards-related activities, such as in the National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), which could yield substantial benefits.

A better understanding and collaboration among trade finance and facilitation agencies is also necessary to ensure the integration of trade finance and payment instruments into trade facilitation implementation strategies, including Single Window development plans. Furthermore, results of the 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' subgroup show that countries are beginning to take note of the importance of long-term measures for building resilience to pandemics and other crises. As countries move towards inclusive and sustainable development, it is crucial for CAREC countries to prioritize sustainable and resilient trade facilitation measures and foster collaborative efforts to embrace forward-looking trade facilitation policies that benefit all stakeholders. By doing so, CAREC countries can pave the way for a sustainable and prosperous future in the subregion, while simultaneously working towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes the current climate crisis, in which trade facilitation certainly has a mitigating role to play.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, (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. List of participating countries

Country	Subregion
Afghanistan	South and South-West Asia
Armenia	North and Central Asia
Australia	Australia-New Zealand
Azerbaijan	North and Central Asia
Bangladesh	South and South-West Asia
Bhutan	South and South-West Asia
Brunei Darussalam	South-East Asia
Cambodia	South-East Asia
China	East and North-East Asia
Fiji	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Georgia	North and Central Asia
India	South and South-West Asia
Indonesia	South-East Asia
Islamic Republic of Iran	South and South-West Asia
Japan	East and North-East Asia
Kazakhstan	North and Central Asia
Kiribati	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Kyrgyzstan	North and Central Asia
Lao PDR	South-East Asia
Malaysia	South-East Asia
Maldives	South and South-West Asia
Micronesia	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Mongolia	East and North-East Asia
Myanmar	South-East Asia
Nauru	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Nepal	South and South-West Asia
New Zealand	Australia-New Zealand
Pakistan	South and South-West Asia
Palau	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Papua New Guinea	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Philippines	South-East Asia
Republic of Korea	East and North-East Asia
Russian Federation	North and Central Asia
Samoa	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Singapore	South-East Asia
Solomon Islands	Pacific Islands Developing Economies

Sri Lanka	South and South-West Asia
Tajikistan	North and Central Asia
Thailand	South-East Asia
Timor-Leste	South-East Asia
Tonga	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Turkey	South and South-West Asia
Turkmenistan	North and Central Asia
Tuvalu	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Uzbekistan	North and Central Asia
Vanuatu	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Viet Nam	South-East Asia

*Note:* CAREC countries are highlighted in yellow.

## Annex 2. Grouping of trade facilitation measures and correspondence with TFA articles

Groups	Subgroups	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 Sea Cargo Manifests				
Electronic Submission of Air Cargo Manifests				
Electronic application and issuance of Preferential Certificate of Origin				
E-Payment of Customs Duties and Fees			7.2	
Electronic Application for Customs Refunds				
		Laws and regulations for electronic transactions		
	Recognized certification authority			

	Cross-border paperless trade	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 in SME policy framework	Trade-related information measures for SMEs	
		SMEs in AEO scheme	
		SMEs access Single Window	
		SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee	
		Other special measures for SMEs	
	Agricultural trade facilitation	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	
		Special treatment for perishable goods	
	Women in trade facilitation	TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade	
		TF measures to benefit women involved in trade	
		Women's membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies	
	Other Trade Facilitation	Trade finance facilitation	Single Window facilitates traders access to finance

		Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance	
		Variety of trade finance services available	
	Trade facilitation in times of crisis	Agency in place to manage trade facilitation in times of crises 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	
		Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises	
	Trade facilitation for e-commerce	Trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce	
Trade facilitation and wildlife protection	Electronic exchange of CITES permits/certificates		

### Annex 3. A three-step approach for data collection and validation

<p><b>Data submission by experts</b></p>	<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>
<p><b>Data verification by the UNRCs Secretariat</b></p>	<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.</p> <p>Step 2 took place between January and May 2023.</p>
<p><b>Data validation by national Governments</b></p>	<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 in order to finalize the dataset.</p>

## Annex 4: 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 Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA); it is implemented in law and in 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, which 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 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



