

Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in Pacific Island Developing Economies (PIDEs)

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



ESCAP
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for Asia and the Pacific



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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Pacific Island Developing Economies (PIDEs) 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 for Africa (ECA), Europe (ECE), Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and West Asia (ESCWA) as well as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The report was jointly prepared by ESCAP, UNCTAD, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and World Bank (WB). 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. Collected as part of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023, the data analysis for PIDEs was provided by ESCAP. Julian Fraga-Campos from UNCTAD supported data collection and validation and also reviewed the report. Stephen Muller and Andrea Giacomelli from PIFS reviewed and contributed to the report. Alina Antoci and William Gain from the WB provided inputs and also reviewed the report. Sanjesh Naidu from the ESCAP Subregional Office for the Pacific reviewed the report. Nichapat Saropala formatted the report. Arom Sanguanyuang created the cover design.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reducing trade costs is crucial for enabling economies to effectively participate in regional and global value chains and promote growth and sustainable development. However, the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis continues to impede international trade, with geopolitical conflicts creating new supply chain disruptions and high inflation, increasing trade costs and uncertainties. This has added further pressure to already high trade costs worldwide. Given this situation, trade facilitation assumes a pivotal role, facilitating more efficient and transparent trade procedures, thus reducing the vulnerability of global supply chains and overall trade costs. Consequently, the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and regional initiatives have focused on trade digitalization, such as the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, offering guidance on measures that should be considered for implementation.

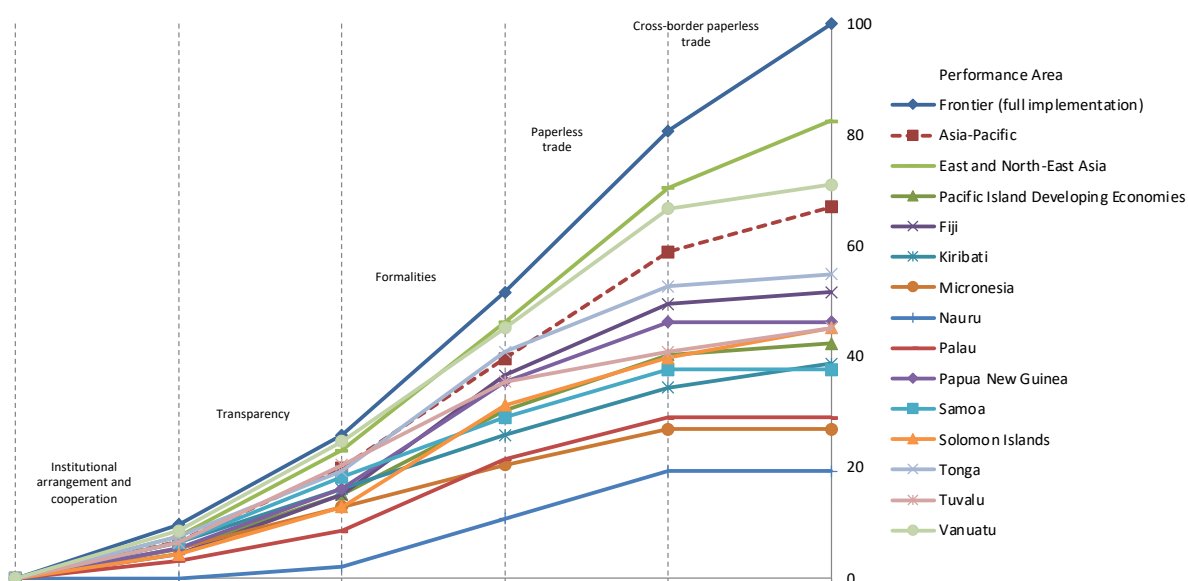
This report unveils the findings of the 2023 United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, focusing on the progress made in trade facilitation across the 11 Pacific Island Developing Economies (PIDEs). The report offers a comprehensive analysis of 60 trade facilitation measures, categorized into four groups – “General Trade Facilitation”, “Digital Trade Facilitation”, “Sustainable Trade Facilitation”, “Other Trade Facilitation” and “Pilot-Tested.” Furthermore, these groups of measures encompass 11 sub-groups, including both binding and non-binding measures of the WTO TFA. They also include 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, PIDEs achieved an average implementation rate of 42%, which is 25 percentage points lower than the Asia-Pacific region's average implementation rate of 67%.
- The implementation of general and digital trade facilitation measures differs significantly among PIDEs. Vanuatu is leading the subregion with implementation rates of 71%. On the other hand, there is still room for improvement for Kiribati, Samoa, Palau, Micronesia and Nauru falling behind the regional and subregional averages.
- Between 2021 and 2023, the average implementation rate increased from 39% to 42%. The country with the biggest growth is Kiribati, with an implementation rate going from 23% to 39% in 2023 (16 percentage points increase).

- PIDEs made the most significant progress in implementing measures related to ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ and ‘women in trade facilitation’ between 2021 and 2023, with increases of 10 percentage points and 9 percentage points, respectively.
- “Digital Trade Facilitation” related measures have shown small improvement in implementation between 2021 and 2023, with 'paperless trade facilitation' measures implementation level increasing from 31% to 35% and 'cross-border paperless trade' rising from 8% to 11%. However, the PIDEs average implementation rate of the 'paperless trade facilitation' measures is 31 percentage points lower than the Asia-Pacific's average. Also, 'Cross-border paperless trade' is one of the two least implemented sub-groups in the PIDEs. This leaves ample space for policy intervention on continuous and further advancement in the area of “Digital Trade Facilitation.”
- The adoption of measures under the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group remains limited, particularly those target SMEs and Women, which stand at 12% and 24%, respectively, much lower than those of global and regional averages, indicating that there is much space for improvement.
- The implementation of measures related to ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ is relatively low, with an implementation rate of 28%, far below the average in the Asia-Pacific region standing at 60%, despite progress made. This demonstrates the urgency to improve relevant measures, including coordination between agencies and countries as well as planning for future crises.

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 non-binding measures outlined in the WTO TFA could lead to a reduction in trade costs to about 13%. Going Beyond, the adoption of digital trade facilitation measures, facilitating seamless electronic exchange of trade data and documents across borders, has the potential to significantly reduce trade costs by nearly 26% for PIDEs in a full implementation scenario. The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific offers further opportunities for PIDEs to promote their own initiatives and solutions as well as support the further advancement of their national Single Windows and ensure interoperability across borders.

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 [unftsurvey.org](https://www.unftsurvey.org)

Note: This figure 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://www.unftsurvey.org/>.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	i
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	ii
LIST OF TABLES	vi
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF BOXES	vii
ABBREVIATIONS	viii
1. Introduction	9
1.1. Background and objective	9
1.2. Survey instrument and methodology	10
2. Trade facilitation implementation: Overview	12
2.1. Most and least implemented trade facilitation measures	14
2.2. Progress in implementation between 2021-2023	17
3. Implementation of trade facilitation measures: A closer look	19
3.1. Transparency	19
3.2. Formalities	21
3.3. Institutional arrangement and cooperation	22
3.4. Paperless trade	24
3.5. Cross-border paperless trade	25
3.6. Trade facilitation for SMEs	28
3.7. Agricultural Trade Facilitation	30
3.8. Women in Trade Facilitation	32
3.9. Trade finance facilitation	33
3.10. Trade facilitation in times of crisis	35
4. Assessing the impact of trade facilitation in PIDEs	36
5. Conclusion and the way forward	38
Annexes	43

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Intra- and extra-regional comprehensive trade costs in the Asia-Pacific region	10
Table 2. Most and least implemented measures in each sub-group of trade facilitation measures by Pacific Island Developing Economies	15
Table 3. Expected trade cost reduction from alternative trade facilitation reforms	37

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Overall implementation of trade facilitation measures in Pacific Island Developing Economies	12
Figure 2. Paper saved by TRBR Type Approval module over 6 months.....	13
Figure 3. Trade facilitation implementation in Asia-Pacific subregions including PIDEs	13
Figure 4. Implementation of different sub-groups of trade facilitation measures in Pacific Island Developing Economies	14
Figure 5. Level of implementation of WTO TFA-related measures (excluding transit) in Pacific Island Developing Economies	17
Figure 6. Trade facilitation implementation in Pacific Island Developing Economies between 2021 and 2023	18
Figure 7. Average implementation of different sub-groups of trade facilitation measures in Pacific Island Developing Economies between 2019 and 2023	19
Figure 8. State of implementation of 'transparency' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific	20
Figure 9. State of implementation of 'transparency' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	20
Figure 10. State of implementation of 'formalities' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific	22
Figure 11. State of implementation of trade 'formalities' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	22
Figure 12. State of implementation of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific.....	23
Figure 13. State of implementation of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' measures for trade facilitation in Pacific Island Developing Economies.....	24
Figure 14. State of implementation of 'paperless trade' by PIDEs benchmarking Asia-Pacific	25
Figure 15. State of implementation of 'paperless trade' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	25
Figure 16. State of implementation of 'cross-border paperless trade' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific.....	26

Figure 17. State of implementation of 'cross-border paperless trade' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	27
Figure 18. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	28
Figure 19. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific.....	29
Figure 20. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	29
Figure 21. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation for e-commerce' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	30
Figure 22. State of implementation of 'agricultural trade facilitation' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific.....	31
Figure 23. State of implementation of 'agricultural trade facilitation' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	31
Figure 24. State of implementation of 'women in trade facilitation' by Pacific Island Developing Economies	33
Figure 25. State of implementation of 'women in trade facilitation' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	33
Figure 26. State of implementation of 'trade finance facilitation' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific	34
Figure 27. State of implementation of 'trade finance facilitation' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	34
Figure 28. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific.....	35
Figure 29. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' in Pacific Island Developing Economies	36
Figure 30. Impact of trade facilitation implementation on trade costs of Pacific Island Developing Economies	38
Figure 31. Trade facilitation implementation and trade costs of Asia-Pacific economies	39
Figure 32. Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains.....	41

LIST OF BOXES

Box 1. Vanuatu Electronic Single Window.....	12
Box 2. Kiribati Trade and Investment Portal.....	18
Box 3. Climate-smart trade facilitation.....	27
Box 4. Trade facilitation for e-commerce and SMEs.....	30

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEO	Authorized economic operator
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
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
ENEA	East and North-East Asia
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ITC	International Trade Centre
LDC	Least developed country
LLDC	Landlocked developing country
NCA	North and Central Asia
NTFC	National Trade Facilitation Committee
OCO	Oceania Customs Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PIDE	Pacific Island Developing Economies
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SEA	South-East Asia
SELA	Latin American and Caribbean Economic System
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPC	The Pacific Community
SSWA	South and South-West Asia
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
UNRC	United Nations Regional Commission
VeSW	Vanuatu Single Window
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and objective

It is commonly acknowledged that reducing trade barriers plays an essential role in facilitating the active engagement of economies in regional and global value chains, thereby guaranteeing that trade remains as a main engine of growth and sustainable 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 Pacific Island Developing Economies (PIDEs) (90% tariff-equivalent) are significantly higher than the costs of trading goods among the three largest economies in the European Union (42% tariff-equivalent) or those between China, the Republic of Korea, and Japan (58% tariff equivalent).

The aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis continues to impede international trade, with geopolitical conflicts creating new supply chain disruptions, and inflation increasing trade costs and uncertainties. Although global merchandise trade volumes exhibited a rebound following the pandemic, trade growth faltered in 2022, with slow growth expected to persist throughout 2023, at 0.8% according to the latest 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.

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 and 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 pertaining to the PIDEs. Furthermore, potential impacts of implementing trade facilitation measures in PIDEs are assessed based on a trade cost model.

¹ World Trade Organization, Global Trade Outlook and Statistics, October 2023.

https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/gtos_updt_oct23_e.pdf

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

Region	ASEAN-4	East Asia-3	North and Central Asia-4	PIDEs	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%)
PIDEs Developing Economies	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%)
USA	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 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; North and Central Asia: Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation.

1.2. Survey instrument and methodology

The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023 (hereinafter 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”, 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 in digital form.

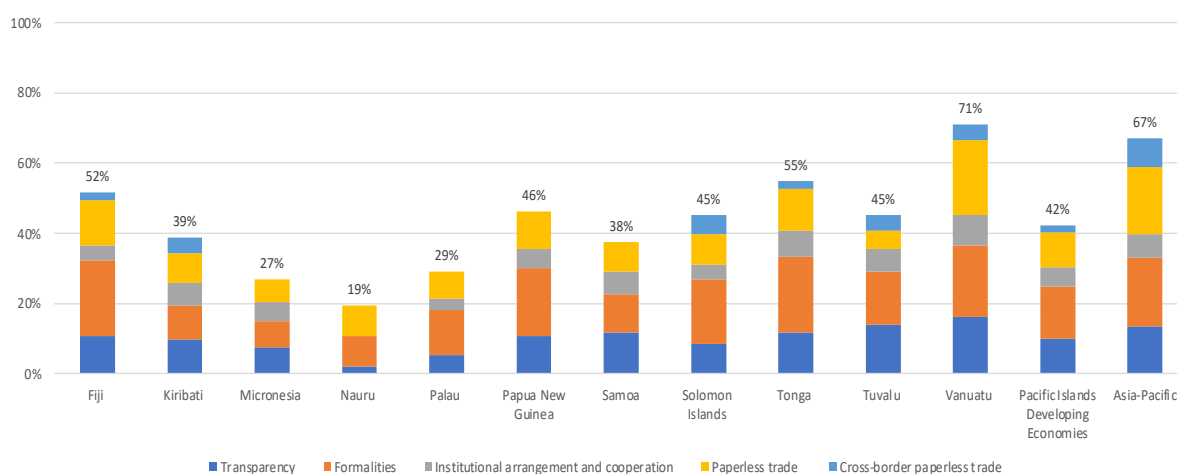
Most “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group measures are not specifically included in the WTO TFA, except for some of the ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ measures. The “Other Trade Facilitation” group is added in consideration of trade finance’s role in facilitating trade flows, as well as the challenges posed by crisis situations to global trade and the supply chain (especially COVID-19), 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 this data, 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 PIDEs are included in this report, namely: Fiji, Kiribati, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Country groupings used in the analysis are detailed in annex 1 and shown in figure 3. Further details and examples on the calculation of implementation rates are available online.

2. Trade facilitation implementation: Overview

When it comes to 31 trade facilitation measures from 5 sub-groups under “General” and “Digital Trade Facilitation” (figure 1), the average rate stands at 42% in PIDEs, significantly lower than the Asia-Pacific regional average of 67%. PIDEs also show varying levels of implementation. Vanuatu has the highest achievement rate, with 71%, far ahead of the other countries, and the only country to surpass the Asia-Pacific region's average implementation rate. Behind Vanuatu, Tonga and Fiji have achieved commendable implementation rates at 55% and 52%, respectively. In contrast, Micronesia and Palau still have relatively low implementation rates, standing at 27% and 29% respectively, indicating significant room for improvement in these countries.

Figure 1. Overall implementation of trade facilitation measures in Pacific Island Developing Economies



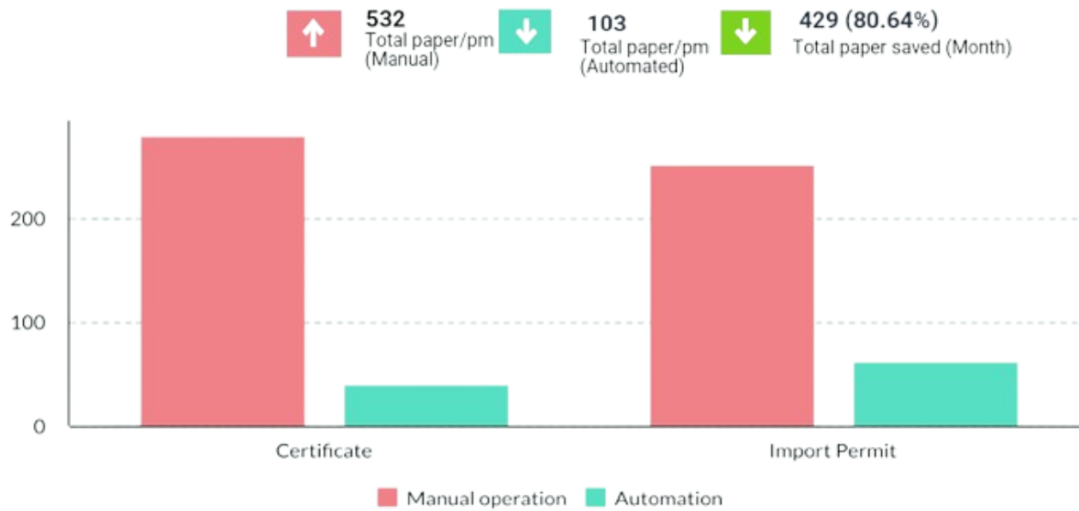
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untdf.org

Box 1. Vanuatu Electronic Single Window

Implementation of the Vanuatu Electronic Single Window (VeSW) project commenced in 2016 and is currently in phase III of its implementation. Thirteen regulatory agencies are connected to VeSW providing over eighty private sector entities the ability to transact digitally 24/7. Thirty-four of these private entities are shipping agents, airline agents and Customs Brokers. Potentially, users of the VeSW can submit applications to all regulatory authorities concerning the movement of goods across borders online, in a paperless environment. Moreover, certificates, licences and permits, various other approvals and clearances can be issued online. Finally, VeSW has established transparency and accountability in the entire regulatory process ensuring integrity of the process while minimizing opportunities for non-complaint activities. It is reported that connecting the

Vanuatu Telecommunication Radiocommunications and Broadcasting Regulator (TRBR) led to a reduction of 80.64% in paper used between February and July 2023 equivalent to over 300kg saved from carbon emissions.

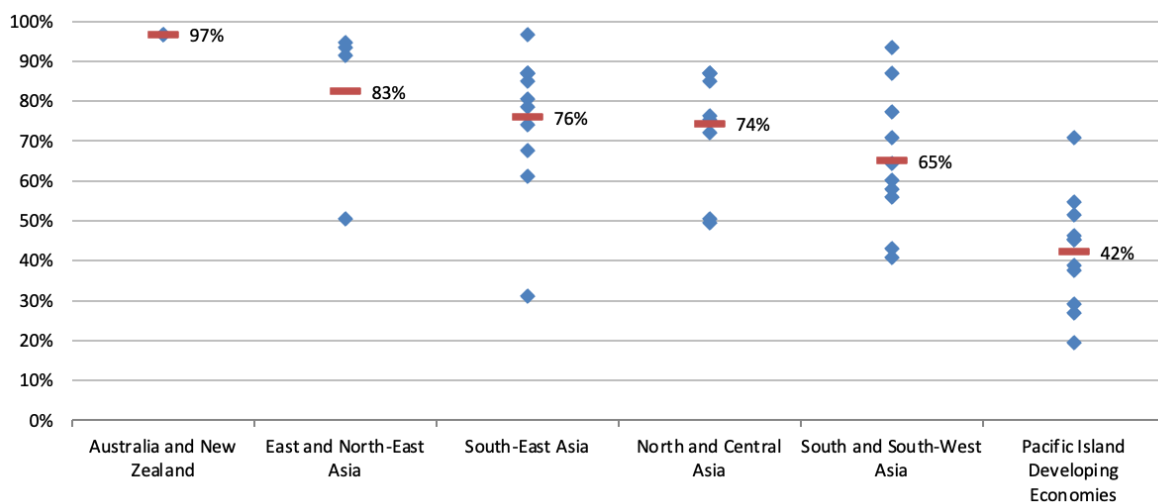
Figure 2. Paper saved by TRBR Type Approval module over 6 months



Source: Vanuatu Electronic Single Window Project Monthly newsletter. Issue 31. 30th September 2023. <https://singlewindow.gov.vu/content.isf?c=newsletter>

When comparing PIDEs' average implementation rate for these 31 trade facilitation measures with other subregions from Asia and the Pacific, the data reveals that the subregion is lagging behind (figure 3). PIDEs' level of implementation ranks at the bottom among Asia-Pacific subregions, after Australia and New Zealand (97%), East and North-East Asia (83%), South-East Asia (76%), North and Central Asia (74%), and South and South-West Asia (65%).

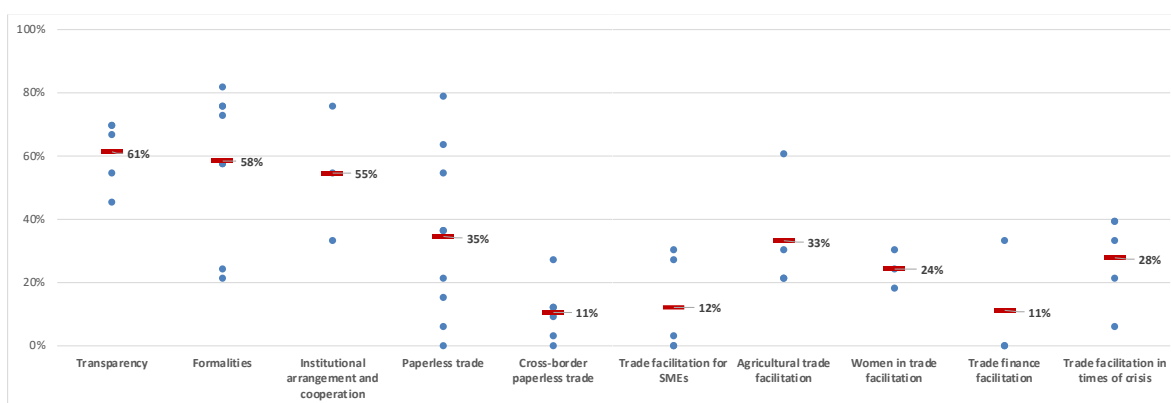
Figure 3. Trade facilitation implementation in Asia-Pacific subregions including PIDEs



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

Figure 4 introduces five additional sub-groups from the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” and “Other Trade Facilitation” groups, with implementation rates all lower than the average of 42% observed for “General” and “Digital Trade Facilitation” groups. While ‘Transparency’ is the most implemented sub-group, standing at 61%, followed by ‘Formalities’ (58%) and ‘Institutional Arrangement and Cooperation’ (55%), there is still significant room for improvement among other sub-groups. This is especially true for ‘trade finance facilitation’ and ‘cross-border paperless trade’, which are the least implemented sub-groups at 11%. In addition, particular attention should be paid to trade facilitation targeting SMEs, that only stands at 12%, in the context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Figure 4. Implementation of different sub-groups of trade facilitation measures in Pacific Island Developing Economies



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfcsurvey.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 evaluated in the Survey. In the ‘institutional arrangement and cooperation’ sub-group, ‘National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body’ stands out as the most implemented measure. On the other hand, there are measures that have not been implemented by any of the countries, even on a pilot basis. These are: ‘electronic application for Customs refunds’ from the ‘paperless trade’ sub-group; ‘recognized certification authority’ from the ‘cross-border paperless trade’ sub-group; ‘SMEs access single window’ from the ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ sub-group; and ‘authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain projects covering trade finance’ from the ‘trade finance facilitation’ sub-group.

Table 2. Most and least implemented measures in each sub-group of trade facilitation measures by Pacific Island Developing Economies

Category	Most implemented (% of countries)		Least implemented (% of countries)	
	Measure	Implemented fully, partially, or on a pilot basis (%) / Full implementation (%)	Measure	Implemented fully, partially, or on a pilot basis (%) / Full implementation (%)
Transparency	Publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet	90.9 / 27.3	Independent appeal mechanism and online lodging	72.7 / 9.1
Formalities	Separation of release from final determination of Customs duties, taxes, fees and charges	100.0 / 36.4	TF measures for authorized operators	54.5 / 0.0
Institutional arrangement and cooperation	National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body	90.9 / 54.5	Government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities	45.5 / 18.2
Paperless trade	Automated Customs System	100.0 / 36.4	Electronic Application for Customs Refunds	0.0 / 0.0
Cross-border paperless trade	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	54.5 / 0.0	Recognised certification authority	0.0 / 0.0
Transit facilitation	Cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit	0.0 / 0.0	Transit facilitation agreement(s)	0.0 / 0.0
Trade facilitation for SMEs	SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee	54.5 / 0.0	SMEs access Single Window	0.0 / 0.0
			SMEs in AEO scheme	
Agricultural trade facilitation	Special treatment for perishable goods	81.8 / 27.3	Testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS of main trading partners	27.3 / 9.1
Women in trade facilitation	Women membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies	54.5 / 0.0	TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade	36.4 / 9.1
Trade finance facilitation	Variety of trade finance services available	54.5 / 9.1	Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project	0.0 / 0.0

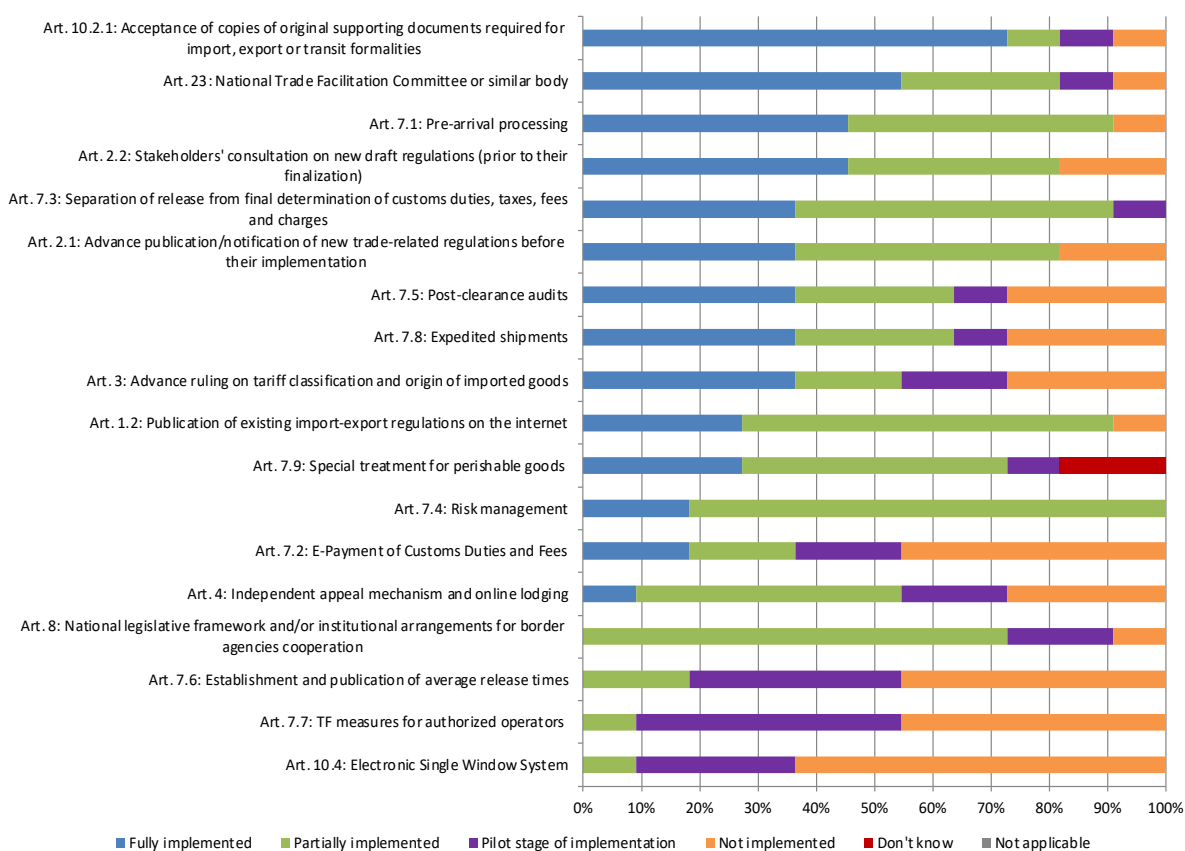
			covering trade finance	
			Single window facilitates traders access to finance	
Trade facilitation in times of crisis	Online publication of emergency TF measures	63.6 / 9.1	Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises	9.1 / 0.0

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

Figure 5 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 PIDEs, the measure which has been fully implemented by the highest number of countries is 'acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities' (Art. 10.2.1). It is noteworthy that 73% of PIDEs have fully implemented this measure. The 'electronic single window system' (Article 10.4) is the least implemented, with none of the PIDEs having fully adopted this measure. Meanwhile, 9% of the countries have partially implemented it and 64% have yet to implement it.

Figure 5. Level of implementation of WTO TFA-related measures (excluding transit) in Pacific Island Developing Economies



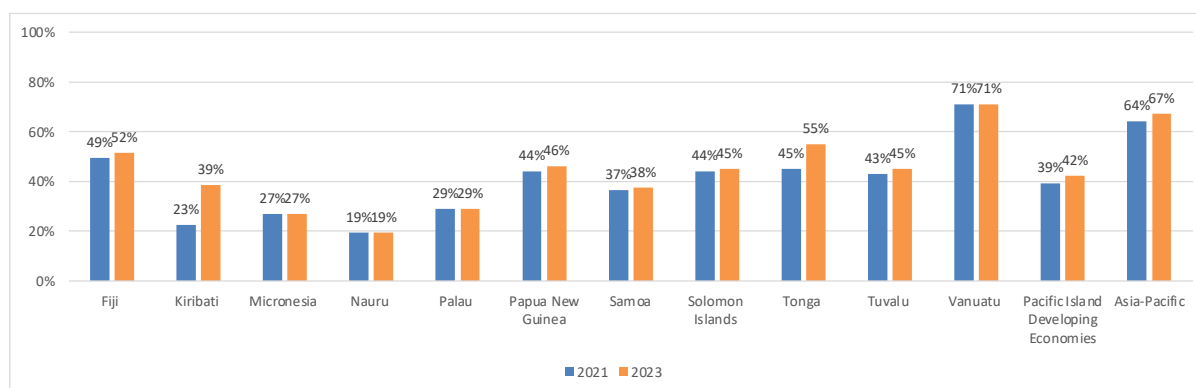
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

2.2. Progress in implementation between 2021-2023

Some progress has been made in the implementation of trade facilitation measures within PIDEs from 2021 to 2023.² The average implementation rate has witnessed a rise, climbing from 39% in 2021 to 42% in 2023 (figure 6). Notably, Kiribati has achieved the highest progress, increasing its implementation rate from 23% in 2021 to 39% in 2023, a gain of roughly 16 percentage points followed by Tonga, growing from 45% in 2021 to 55% in 2023. However, except for these two countries, other nations either showed modest progress or maintained their 2021 levels.

² A total of 7 PIDEs participated in the 2023 Survey, of which 6 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. Trade facilitation implementation in Pacific Island Developing Economies between 2021 and 2023



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

Box 2. Kiribati Trade and Investment Portal

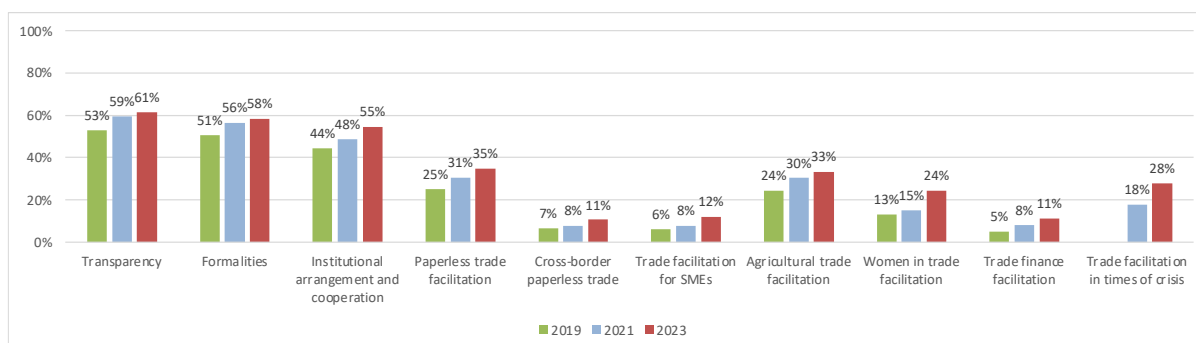
Kiribati Trade and Investment Portal has brought in the much-needed element of transparency into the trading environment by providing online access to stakeholders to all legislations and procedures relating to trade. The portal has a search facility which enables users to use search criteria such as trading across borders, services to investors, tariff, starting and operating a business, coupled with the ability to filter the search according to the information needed by the user. The Portal also provides forms, links, and contact points of the regulatory agencies involved in trade procedures including business hours, required documentation, estimated costs, procedures duration, and related laws. As Kiribati is part of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus, information specific to the PACER Plus Agreement is also available on the Portal.

Source: Kiribati Trade and Investment Portal, available at:

https://digitalgovernment.world/assets/documents/pdf/Flyer_Trade-Information%20Portal-6.pdf

Figure 7 illustrates improvements in the implementation of trade facilitation measures by sub-group for PIDEs between 2019 and 2023. While the incremental increase between 2021 and 2023 might be driven by the two best performing countries, a rather substantial increase in overall implementation rates can be observed over the longer run from 2019. This increase in implementation rates is found for all categories, with a particularly remarkable improvement on ‘Trade facilitation in times of crisis’ of 10 percentage points since 2021, and 28% over 4 years. ‘Women in trade facilitation’ measures also display an acceleration with a 9 percentage points increase since 2021, while it only rose by 2 points between 2019 and 2021.

Figure 7. Average implementation of different sub-groups of trade facilitation measures in Pacific Island Developing Economies between 2019 and 2023



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

3. Implementation of trade facilitation measures: A closer look

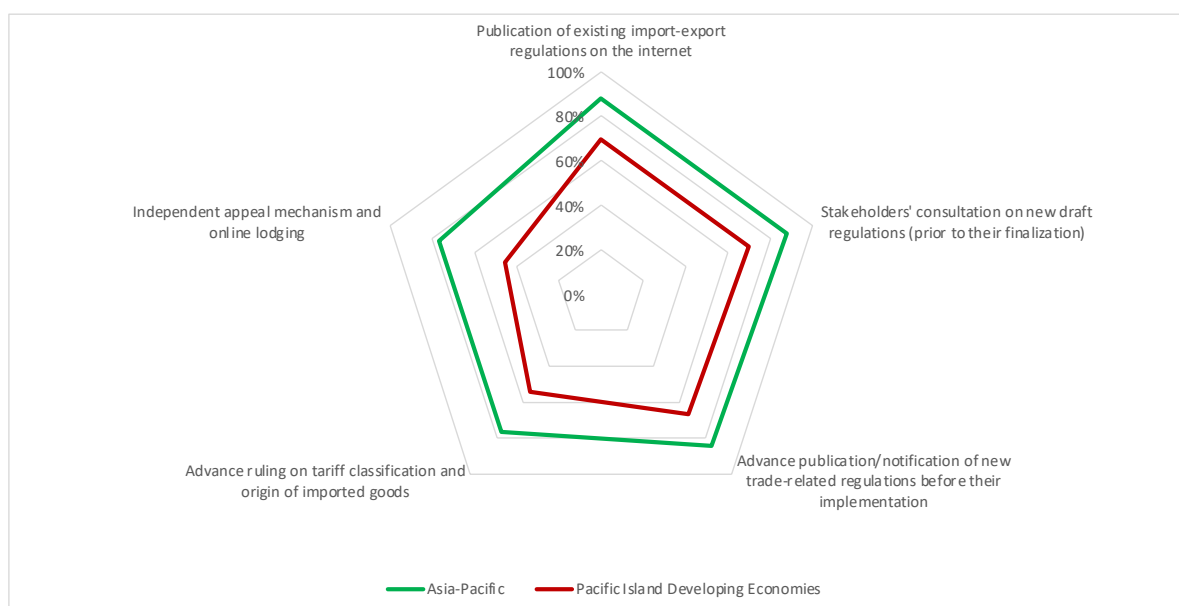
3.1. Transparency

‘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 PIDEs achieve an average implementation level of 61%, which is far behind the average implementation rate of 83% achieved by the Asia-Pacific countries in this sub-group. Within this sub-group, the subregional implementation rates related to ‘stakeholders’ consultations on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)’ and to the ‘publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet’ are the highest, both standing at an impressive implementation rate of 70%. Conversely, the measure with the lowest implementation rate, ‘independent appeal mechanism and online lodging’, is only 45% (figure 8).

In addition, figure 9 illustrates that measures under ‘transparency’ are implemented to various degrees in the PIDEs. Across all measures, at least 73% of PIDEs have advanced their implementation to at least a pilot stage. Within this sub-group, the most implemented measure, at least partially, is ‘publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet’, by 91% of PIDEs. At the subregional level, a notable achievement is the development of the web portal of the PACER Plus Implementation unit which includes Trade Information Portals developed

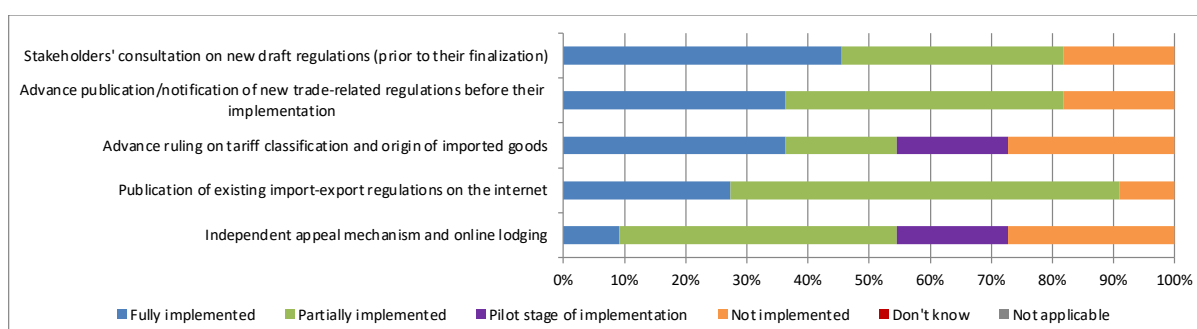
by UNCTAD for eight PIDEs with comprehensive information³. Following that, 'stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)' and 'advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation' demonstrate high levels of full or partial implementation at around 82% of PIDEs. Conversely, the measure 'independent appeal mechanism and online lodging' requires further efforts as only one country has fully implemented it, with three countries yet to start the implementation.

Figure 8. State of implementation of 'transparency' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 9. State of implementation of 'transparency' in Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

³ PACER Plus Implementation Unit Web Portal : <https://pacerplus.org/>

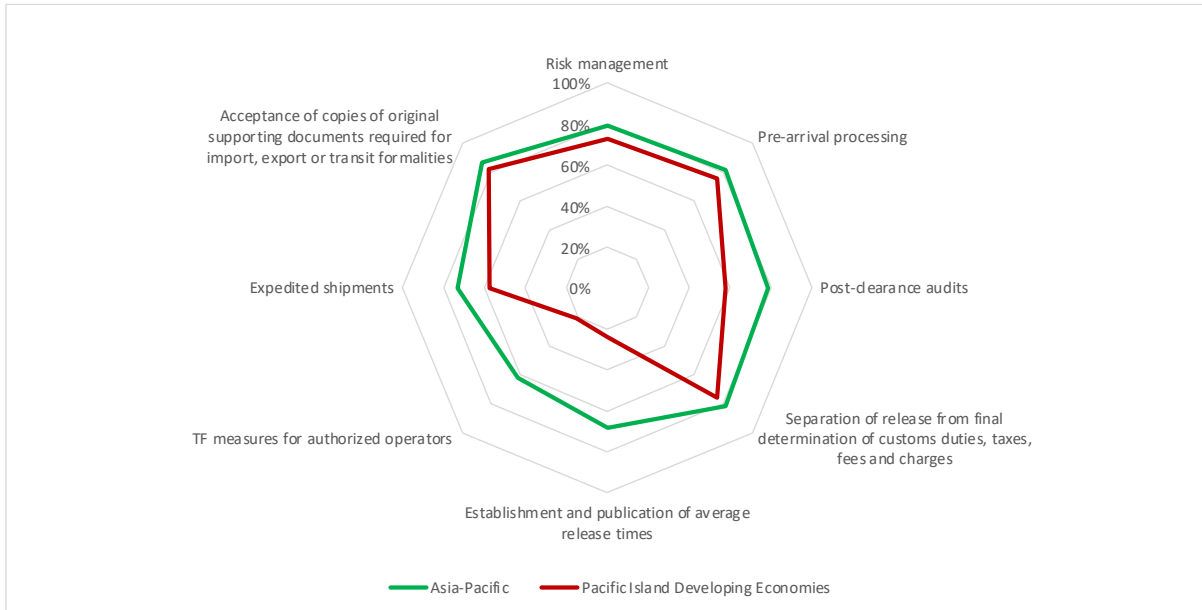
Trade Information Portals : <https://digitalgovernment.world/trade-information-portals/>

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' stands at 58%, lagging behind the regional average of Asia and the Pacific, which is 76%. The measure with the highest implementation rate in the subregion is the 'acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities,' reaching a commendable implementation rate of 82%, followed by 'pre-arrival processing' and 'separation of release from final determination of customs duties, taxes, fees and charges' with 76%. However, when it comes to 'TF measures for authorized operators' and 'establishment and publication of average release times', there is a lot of room for improvement, with implementation rates of 21% and 24%, respectively (figure 10).

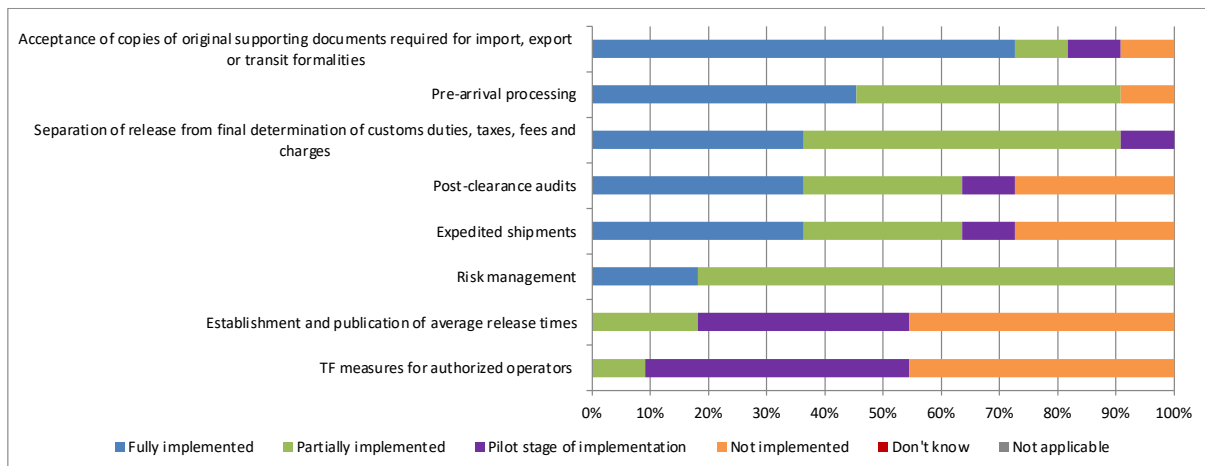
As shown in figure 11, there is a notable imbalance of implementation within this sub-group. Among all the measures, the measure 'acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities' exhibits the highest fully implemented rate at 73%. The measure 'risk management' has been implemented by all PIDEs, either fully or partially. Additionally, the measures 'pre-arrival processing' and 'separation of release from the final determination of Customs duties, taxes, fees, and charges' have been fully or partially implemented by 91% of PIDEs. Conversely, none of these countries has fully implemented the measures 'establishment and publication of average release times' or 'Trade facilitation (TF) measures for authorized operators', and 45% of PIDEs haven't even started to implement these two measures yet.

Figure 10. State of implementation of 'formalities' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 11. State of implementation of trade 'formalities' in Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

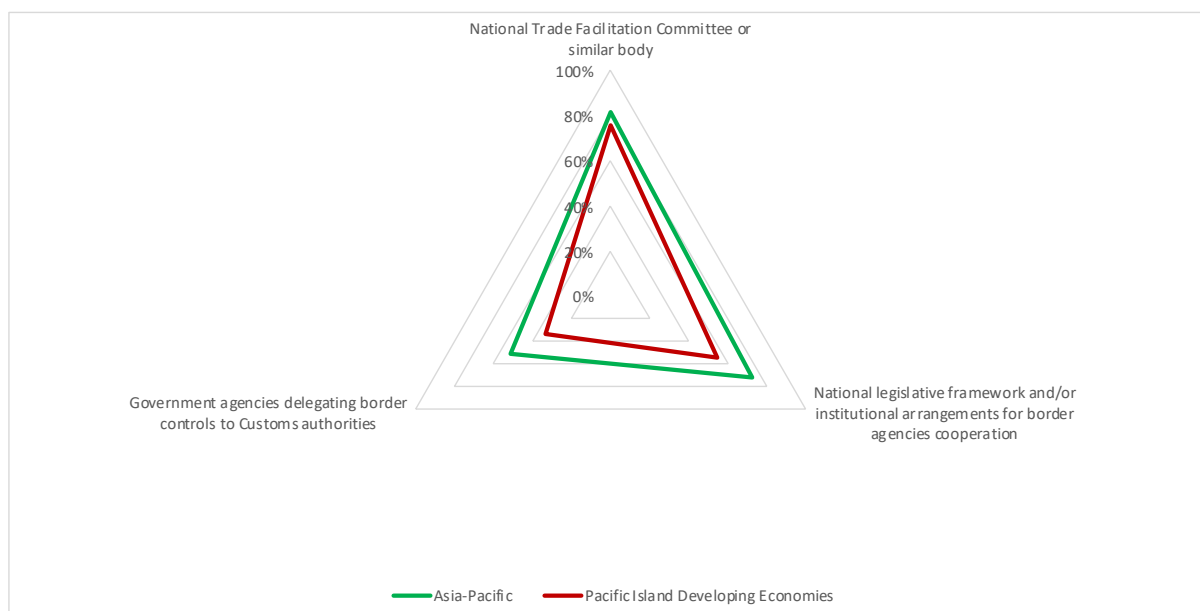
3.3. Institutional arrangement and cooperation

The 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' category comprises three trade facilitation measures highlighted in the Survey. 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 PIDEs, the implementation rate of these measures stands at 55%, far below the Asia-Pacific region’s average of 68%. Noting this status quo and recognizing the imperative of establishing sound cooperation between PIDEs, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) Secretariat in partnership with the World Bank has developed a Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy (PRTFS) in which the establishment of a regional Trade Facilitation Committee is envisaged. The strategy was endorsed by the Forum Trade Ministers in October 2023.

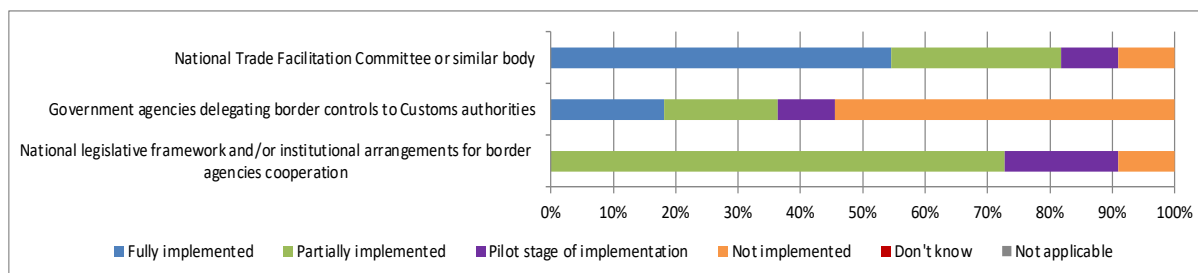
Figure 12 illustrates the varying state of implementation for each measure within this subgroup. The measure with the highest implementation rate is the ‘National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body’, with a commendable implementation rate of 76%. The implementation rate for the ‘national legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation’ is 55%, which is the same as the regional average in PIDEs. On the other hand, the measure ‘government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities’ only has an implementation rate of 33%. Nearly 55% of countries in this subregion have yet to implement this measure, making it the least implemented measure within this subgroup (figure 13).

Figure 12. State of implementation of ‘institutional arrangement and cooperation’ by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 13. State of implementation of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' measures for trade facilitation in Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

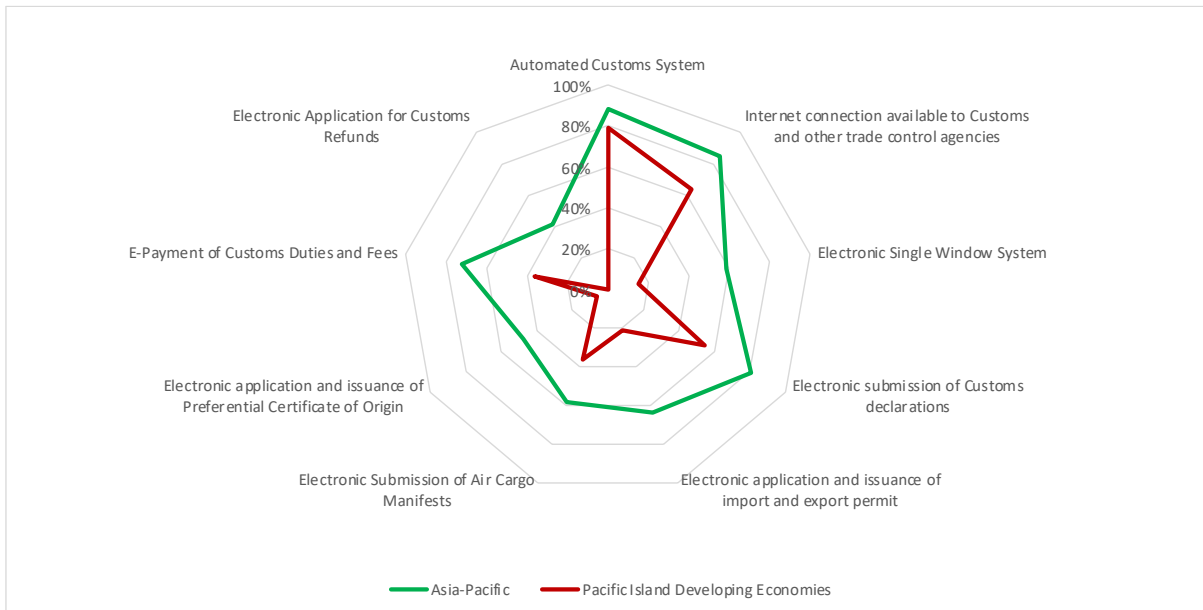
3.4. Paperless trade

Nine trade facilitation measures are categorized under the 'paperless trade' sub-group. These measures involve the utilization of modern information and communications 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 35%, far lower 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 0% to 79%. As depicted in figure 14, 'Automated Customs System' reaches 79%, the highest level in this sub-group.

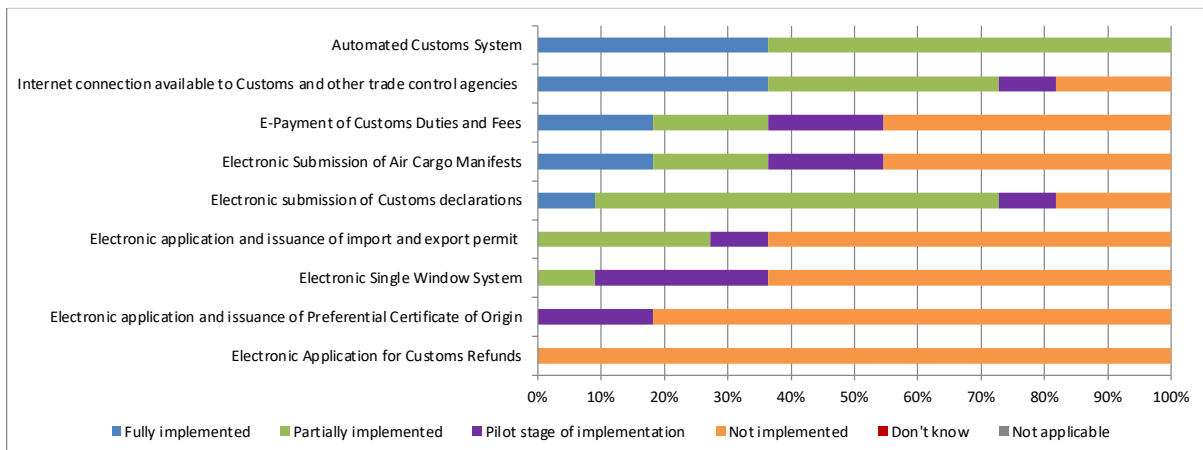
It is followed by the measure 'Internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies', which achieved a commendable implementation rate of 64%. However, the measures with the lowest implementation rate are 'Electronic application and issuance of Preferential Certificate of Origin' and 'Electronic Application for Customs Refunds', with implementation rates of 6% and 0%, respectively. None of the countries in PIDEs have fully or partially implemented either of these two measures, and none have even piloted the measure 'Electronic Application for Customs Refunds' (figure 15). These low implementation rates are largely due to the absence of an electronic single window and the still widespread use of paper for submitting certificates of origin and customs refunds. Furthermore, when ASYCUDA World Customs data processing system is implemented, as recently in Kiribati, electronic application of Certificates of Origin and Customs refunds are planned, but often not considered a priority.

Figure 14. State of implementation of ‘paperless trade’ by PIDEs benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 15. State of implementation of ‘paperless trade’ in Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

3.5. Cross-border paperless trade

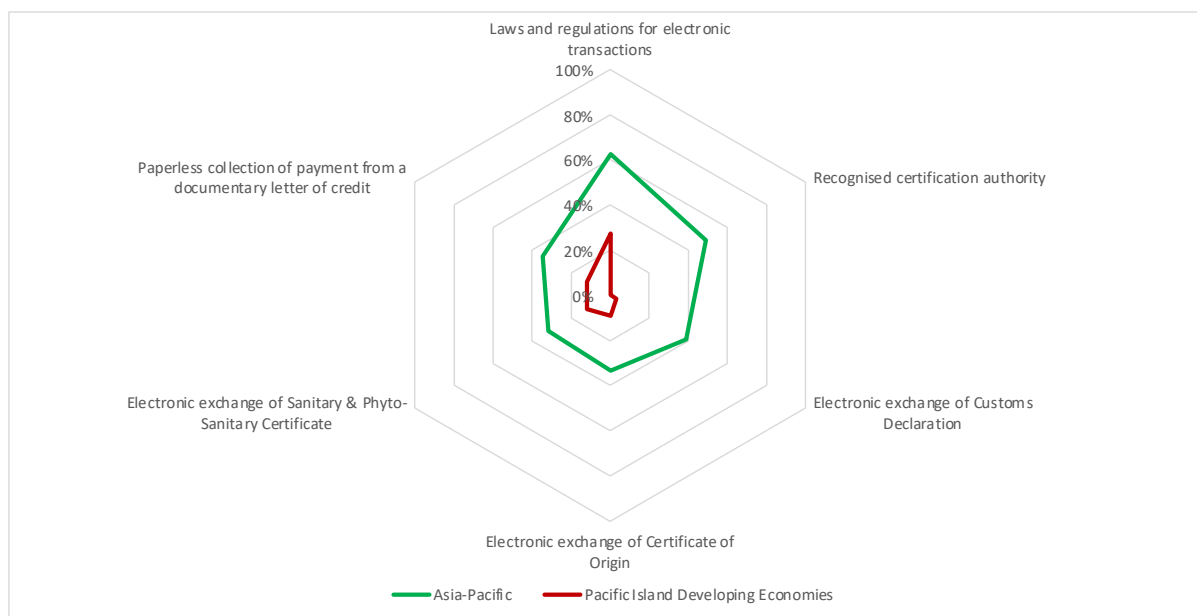
The category of ‘cross-border paperless trade’ encompasses six measures with the goal of facilitating the exchange and recognition of trade-related data and documents. Two fundamental measures in this category include the establishment of ‘laws and regulations for electronic transactions’ and ‘recognized 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 PIDEs, the average implementation rates of these two measures stand at 27% and 0%, 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 PIDEs, the implementation rate of ‘cross-border paperless trade’ stands at 11%, 31 percentage points below the Asia-Pacific regional average of 42%, indicating a great deal of room for improvement (figure 16).

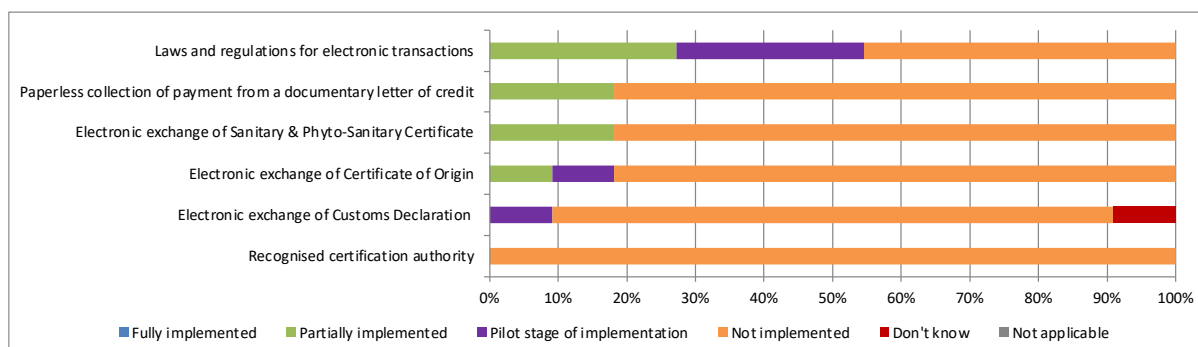
Figure 17 illustrates that none of the PIDEs has fully implemented any measure within this sub-group. The measure ‘laws and regulations for electronic transactions’ has been implemented partially or on a pilot basis by 55% of the PIDEs, making it the most implemented measure in this category. Moreover, measures such as ‘electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin,’ ‘electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary Certificate’, and ‘paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit’ are only being implemented partially or at a pilot stage by 18% of the PIDEs. Additionally, none of the PIDEs have started putting the ‘recognized certification authority’ provision into practice.

Figure 16. State of implementation of ‘cross-border paperless trade’ by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 17. State of implementation of 'cross-border paperless trade' in Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

In addition to the need to advance paperless and cross-border paperless trade in PIDEs overall, with the 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 3).

Box 3. Climate-smart trade facilitation

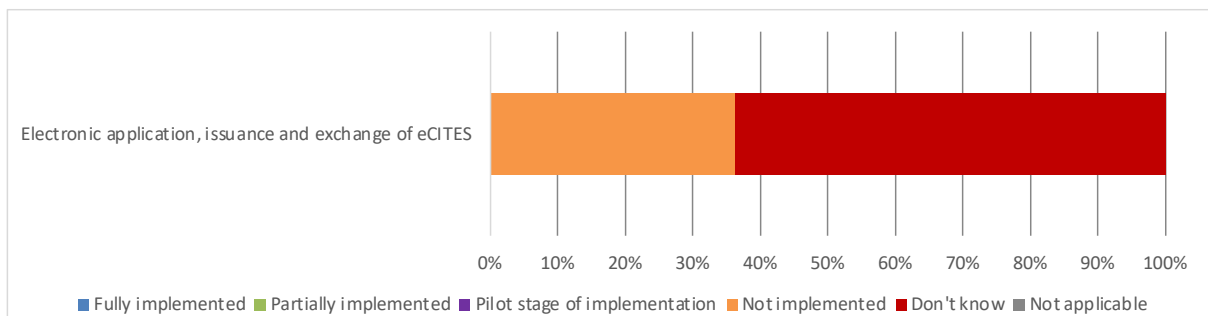
Climate-smart trade facilitation refers to trade facilitation measures that aim to make trade greener, in line with Goal 13 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on climate action. Digitalization is one key element in the green trade transition. The 2021 Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report highlighted the need for an acceleration of climate-smart trade solutions.⁴ 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 CO₂ equivalents could be saved per end-to-end transaction.⁵ 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). Notably, none of the PIDEs nations have begun to adopt eCITES permits, indicating a low degree of implementation rate for the policy (figure 18).

⁴ Asia-Pacific Trade and investment Report 2021: Accelerating Climate-Smart Trade and Investment for Sustainable Development, available at <https://www.unescap.org/kp/APTIR2021>

⁵ ESCAP, 2023, Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: Global Report 2023

Figure 18. State of implementation of ‘trade facilitation and wildlife protection’ in Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

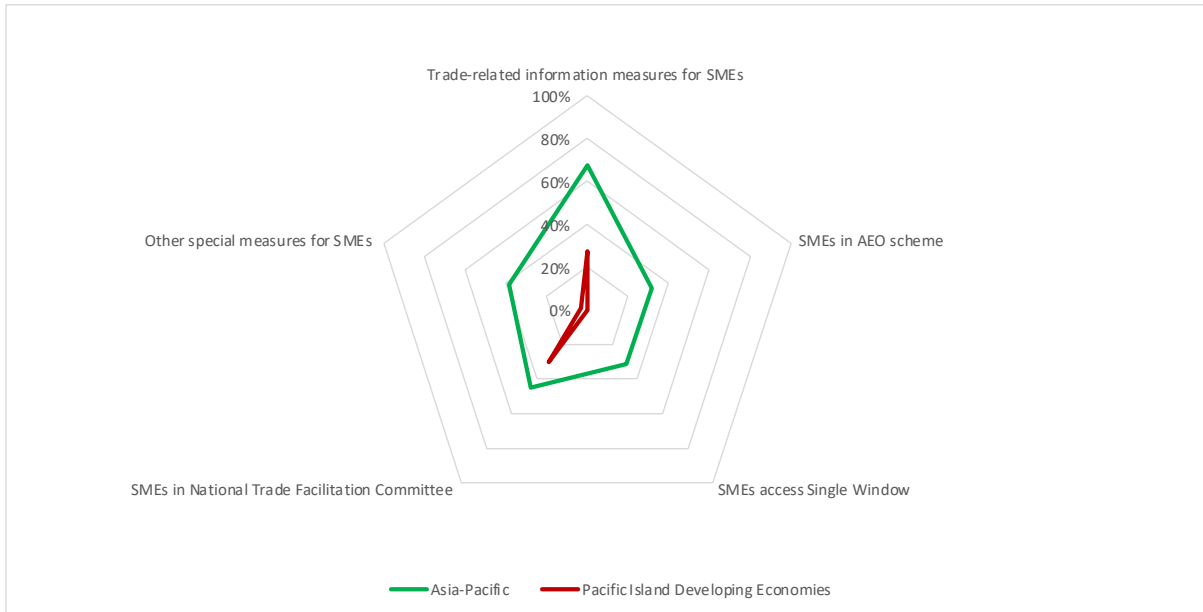
3.6. Trade facilitation for SMEs

Regarding PIDEs, there is considerable variation in the level of implementation of all five measures in ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’, as indicated by figure 19. The average implementation rate of these measures in PIDEs is 12%, which is far below the Asia-Pacific regional average rate of 43%. Moreover, PIDEs exhibit a lower level of implementation on each one of the five measures studied compared to the Asia-Pacific region.

Figure 20 reveals the overall low implementation of ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ within PIDEs. None of the PIDEs has fully implemented any measure in this sub-group. In terms of ‘SMEs access Single Window’ and ‘SMEs in AEO scheme’, it is worth noting that no PIDEs have yet implemented these measures even at a pilot stage. When it comes to measures for ‘SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee’, apart from an implementation rate above the regional average with 30%, it is noticeable that 55% of PIDEs have implemented this measure but only partially or at a pilot stage. The least implemented measures are ‘SMEs access to Single Window’ and ‘SMEs in AEO scheme’, which have not been implemented by any of the PIDEs.

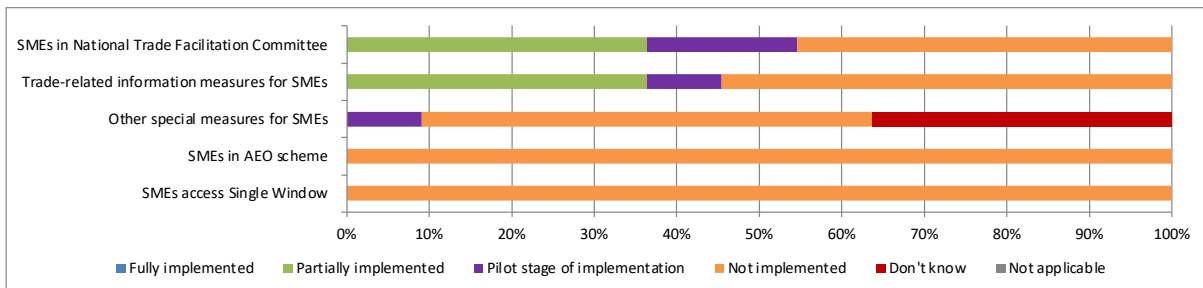
The upward trend in the use of e-commerce in the global economy could present opportunities for SMEs to connect to global supply chains, but measures specifically supporting SMEs as well as e-commerce would need to be further enhanced (box 4).

Figure 19. State of implementation of ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 20. State of implementation of ‘trade facilitation for SMEs’ in Pacific Island Developing Economies



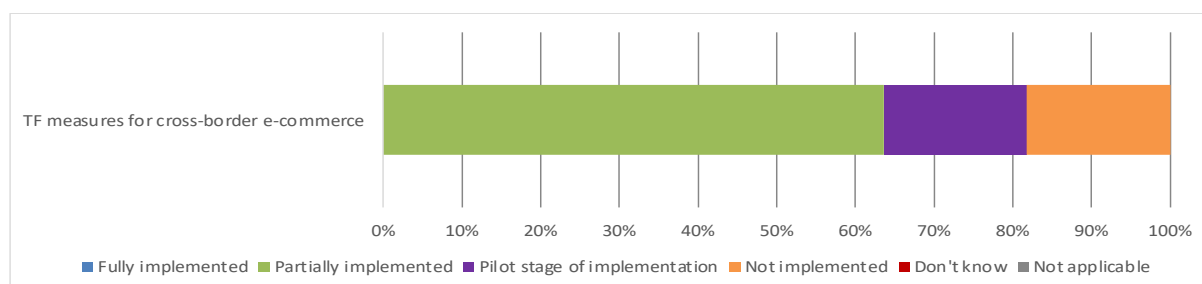
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Box 4. Trade facilitation for e-commerce and SMEs

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) accounts for a significant proportion of business transactions among Asia-Pacific 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-commerce 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 64% of PIDEs have partially implemented it, with 18% at a pilot stage (figure 21). 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 21. State of implementation of ‘trade facilitation for e-commerce’ in Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

The implementation of trade facilitation for e-commerce is also well captured in the Pacific E-commerce Portal. For the Measure 1.1.1 of the Pacific Regional E-commerce Strategy and Road Map, which refers to the level of development of the national E-commerce strategies in all Forum Island Countries (FICs) built on the model of the regional E-commerce Strategy and Roadmap⁶, FICs showed a 53.13% degree of implementation.

3.7. Agricultural Trade Facilitation

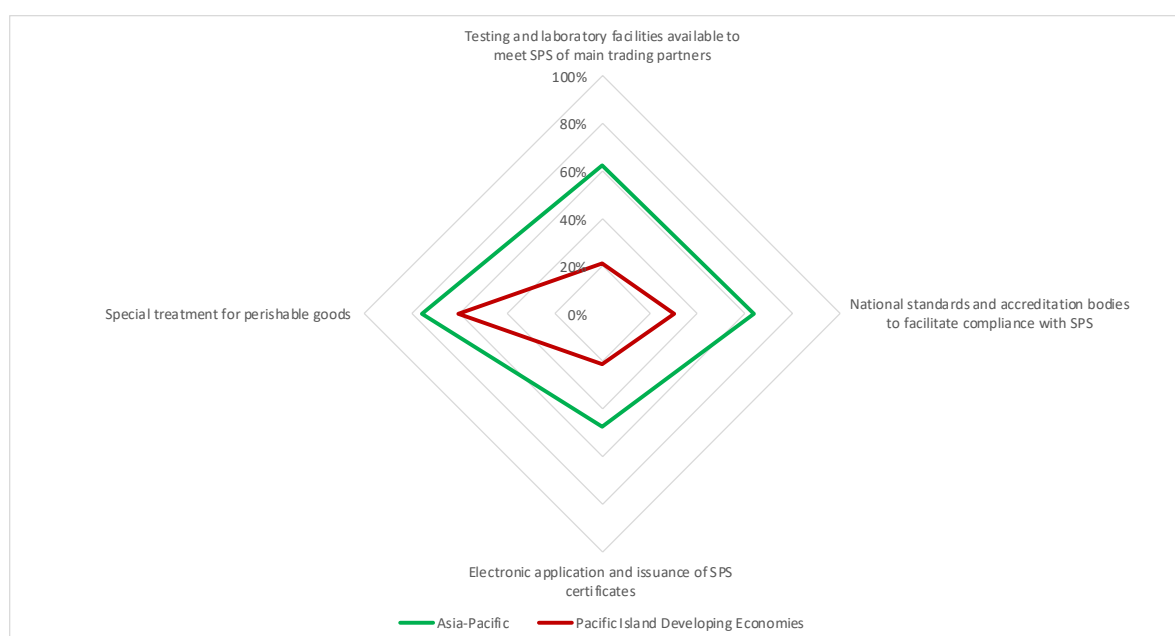
The implementation rate of ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ in the PIDEs stands at 33%, much lower than the Asia-Pacific average of 62%. The measure ‘special treatment for perishable goods’ has the highest implementation rate at 61%.

⁶ For further information visit

<https://pacificcommerce.org/Measures/?mainFilter=Measures&strategicOutput=1.1&measures=1.1.1> and <https://pacificcommerce.org/projects/?measures=c7c76a715b4f588dac78ea939e5c5bc8>

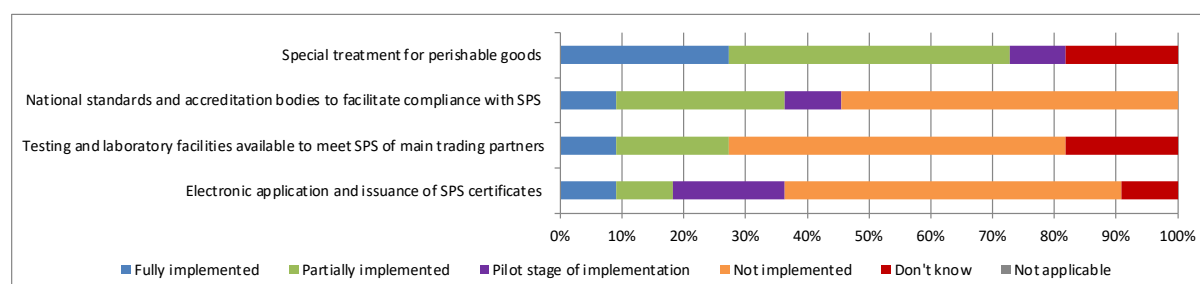
Apart from this measure, the implementation rates of other measures in this sub-group are all less than or equal to 30%. Indeed, following far behind, the second measure with the highest implementation rate is 'national standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS' which stands at 30% (figure 22). The measures with the lowest implementation rates in this sub-group are the 'testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS of main trading partners' and 'electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates', which both have the same implementation rate of 21%. Implementation of these measures is often incomplete, and only 9% of PIDEs have fully implemented them, while 55% of the PIDEs haven't started to implement these two measures at all (figure 23).

Figure 22. State of implementation of 'agricultural trade facilitation' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 23. State of implementation of 'agricultural trade facilitation' in Pacific Island Developing Economies



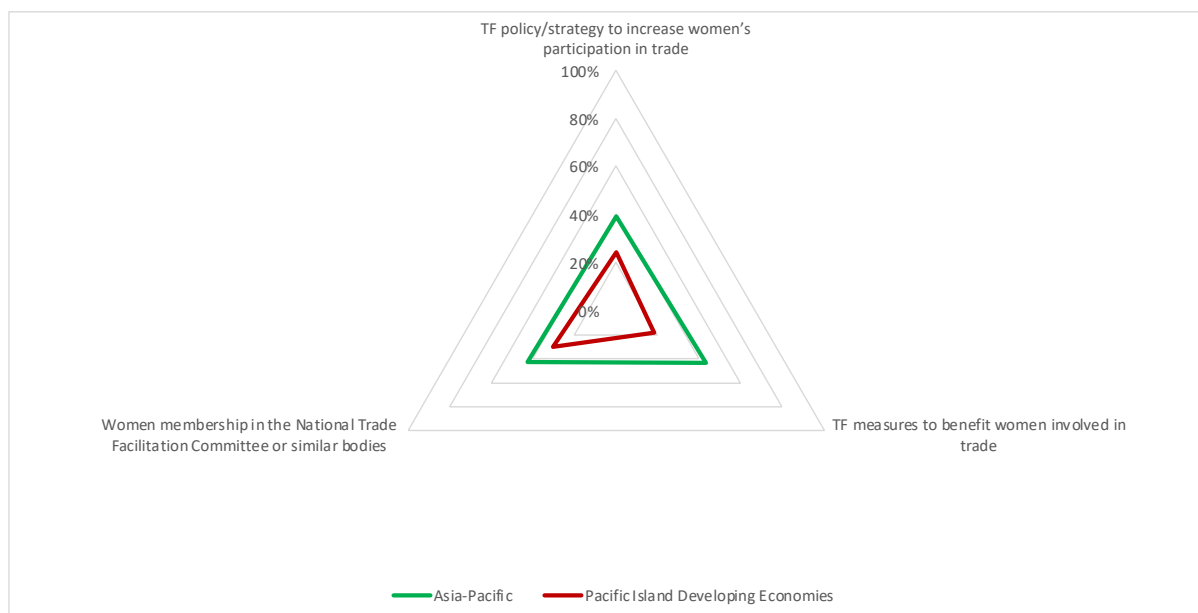
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [untdsurvey.org](https://untdp.org/untsurvey)

3.8. Women in Trade Facilitation

The average implementation level of the three 'women in trade facilitation' measures in PIDEs currently stands at 24%. This is lower than the average rate in the Asia-Pacific region (42%), demonstrating that gender equality needs further integration into various policy initiatives and the specific concerns of female traders regarding trade facilitation needs to be paid more attention in PIDEs.

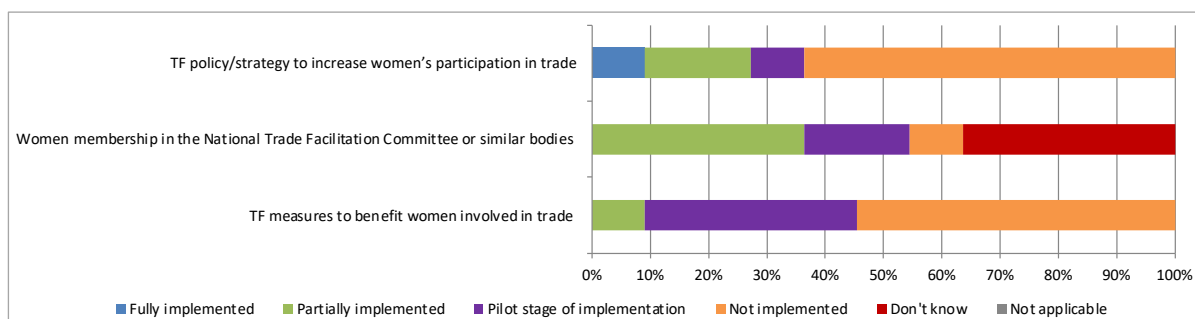
The measure with the highest implementation rate is the 'women membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies', which stands at 30%. Moreover, the implementation rate for the measure 'TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade' also follows relatively close with an implementation rate of 24%, with 36% of PIDEs having implemented it at least at a pilot stage. In contrast, the measure 'TF measures to benefit women involved in trade' lags behind with an implementation rate of only 18%. Moreover, this measure has not been implemented at all in 55% of PIDEs (figure 25).

Figure 24. State of implementation of ‘women in trade facilitation’ by Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

Figure 25. State of implementation of ‘women in trade facilitation’ in Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

3.9. Trade finance facilitation

Among the sub-group of measures in PIDEs, ‘trade finance facilitation’ has the lowest implementation rate of 11%, far below the average rate in the Asia-Pacific region (30%). The most widely implemented measure is ‘variety of trade finance services available’, which has an average implementation rate of 33%, with 55% of PIDEs reporting at least a pilot stage of implementation. In contrast, the rates of implementation of ‘single window facilitating trader access to finance’ and ‘authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain projects covering trade finance’ have not been implemented by any PIDEs, even at a pilot stage (figures 26 and 27).

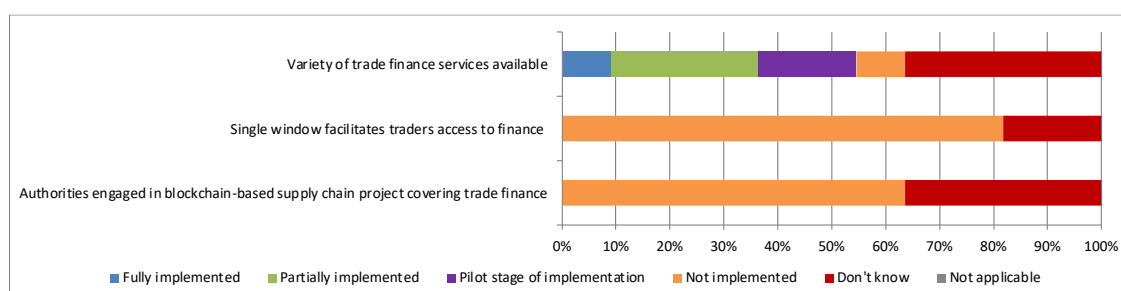
It is worth noting that data collection on this topic during the Survey proved to be challenging. For example, there was a lack of evidence regarding the implementation of Single Window features that facilitate traders' access to finance, as indicated by trade facilitation experts and officials who provided 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 26. State of implementation of 'trade finance facilitation' by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 27. State of implementation of 'trade finance facilitation' in Pacific Island Developing Economies



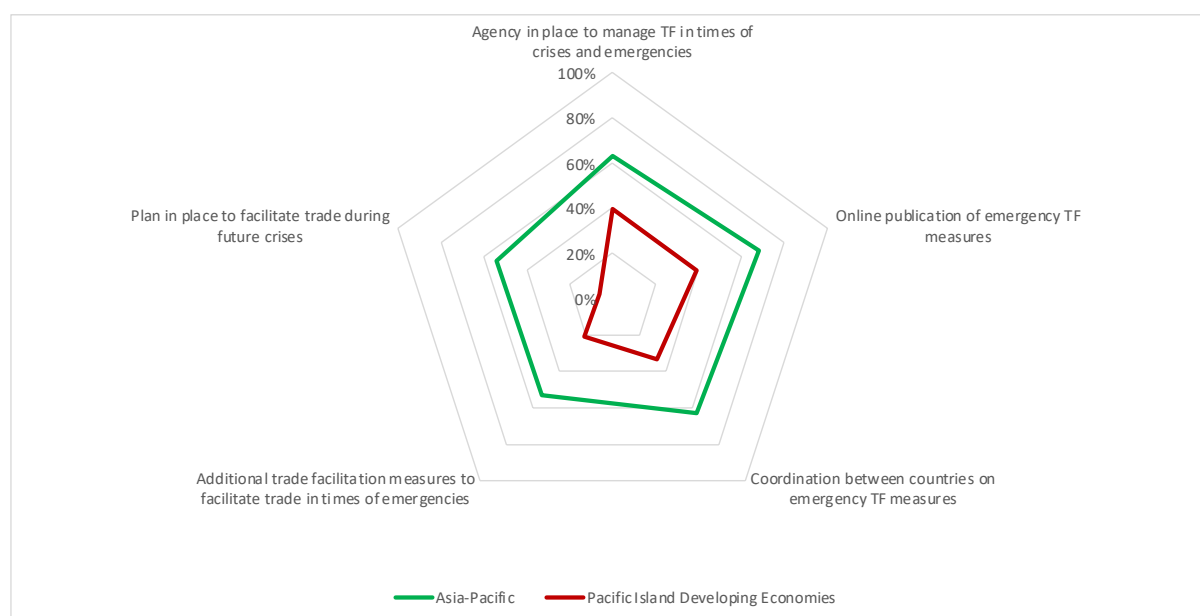
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

3.10. 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. PIDEs have achieved an implementation level of 28% in this sub-group, below the average in the Asia-Pacific region (60%). Among all measures in this sub-group, the measures ‘agency in place to manage TF in times of crises and emergencies’ and ‘online publication of emergency TF measures’ have the highest implementation rate at 39% and have been fully or partially implemented by 55% and 45% of the PIDEs, respectively (figures 28 and 29).

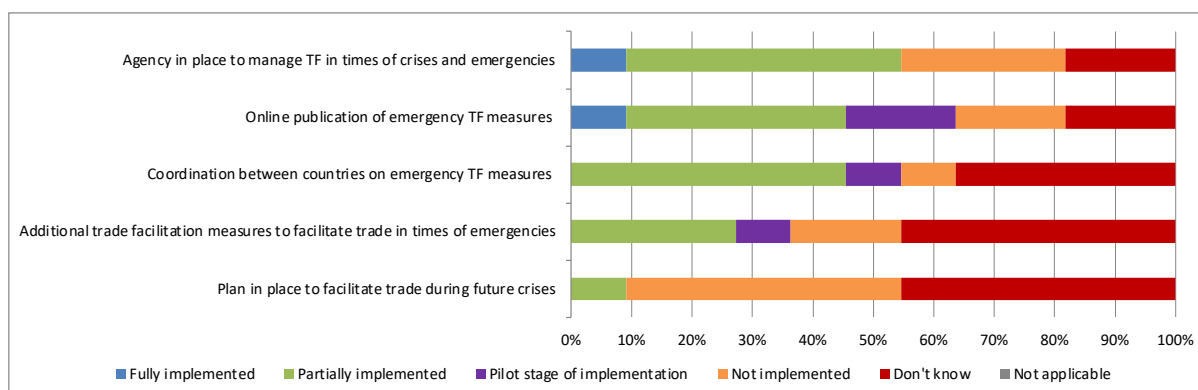
To address the challenges posed by restrictive measures, it is crucial to enhance cooperation between countries to prevent trade tensions from escalating and ensure the uninterrupted flow of essential goods in supply chains. For the ‘coordination between countries on emergency TF measures’ and ‘plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises’, PIDEs have implementation rates of 33% and 6%, respectively, both being lower than the average implementation rates of the Asia-Pacific region, indicating PIDEs still have opportunities to grow within this sub-group (figure 28).

Figure 28. State of implementation of ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ by Pacific Island Developing Economies benchmarking Asia-Pacific



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

Figure 29. State of implementation of ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ in Pacific Island Developing Economies



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

4. Assessing the impact of trade facilitation in PIDEs

To assess the potential impact of the implementation of trade facilitation measures in PIDEs, a trade cost model was 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, “landlockedness”, 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)⁷ 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 PIDEs 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 PIDEs at least partially implement all measures, or if they all fully implement all measures, are calculated.

⁷ ESCAP, 2023, Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: Global Report 2023

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

Pacific Island Developing Economies: trade costs model	WTO TFA (binding only)		WTO TFA (binding + nonbinding)		WTO TFA+ (binding + nonbinding + other paperless and cross-border paperless trade)	
	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
Model 1						
Overall trade facilitation	-2.69%	-7.06%	-5.36%	-12.85%	-17.05%	-25.55%
Model 2						
General trade facilitation measures	-1.77%	-4.62%	-2.54%	-6.97%	-3.50%	-8.02%
Digital trade facilitation measures	-	-	-2.53%	-4.47%	-14.00%	-17.88%

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

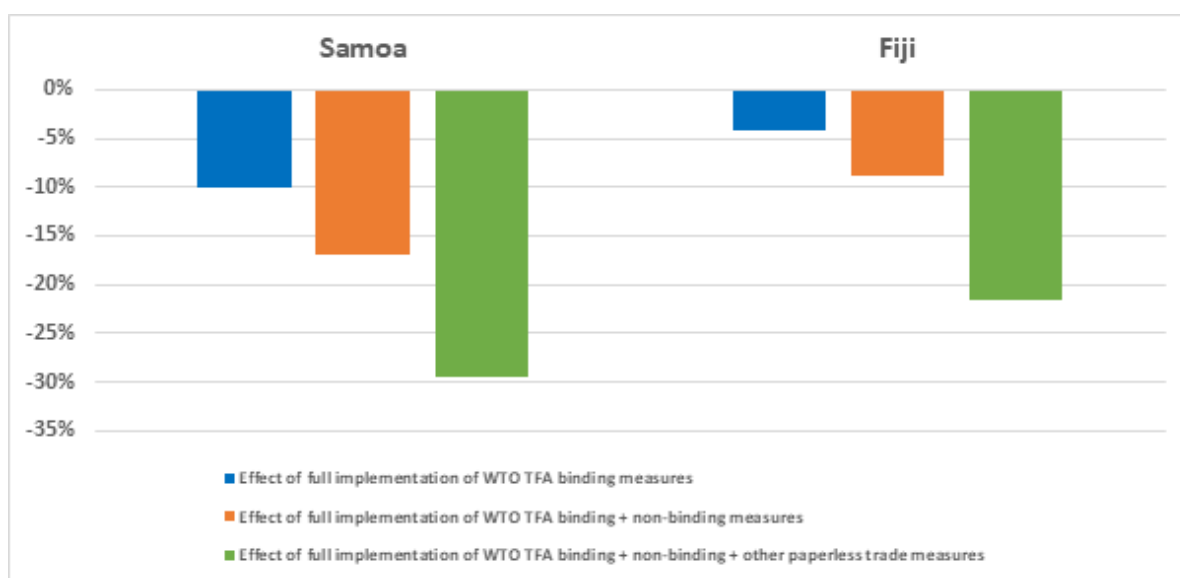
Note: There are no digital trade facilitation measures that are classified as WTO TFA binding measures.

WTO TFA = World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement.

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 7%, while full implementation of all measures (both binding and non-binding) results in nearly a 13% 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 nearly 26% for PIDEs as a whole. The results of model 2 also suggest that most of trade cost reductions are associated with digital trade facilitation measures rather than conventional trade facilitation measures. The WTO TFA is supplemented in this regard by the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. Additionally, it provides a supportive platform for ESCAP member States to facilitate the electronic exchange of trade-related data and documents relating to cross-border trade for those who have not yet implemented such mechanisms. Therefore, all PIDEs 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.

PIDEs will gain a great deal from accelerating the implementation of trade facilitation. As shown in figure 30, the full implementation of the three different sets of trade facilitation measures results in trade cost reductions for two PIDEs: Fiji and Samoa. 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.

Figure 30. Impact of trade facilitation implementation on trade costs of Pacific Island Developing Economies

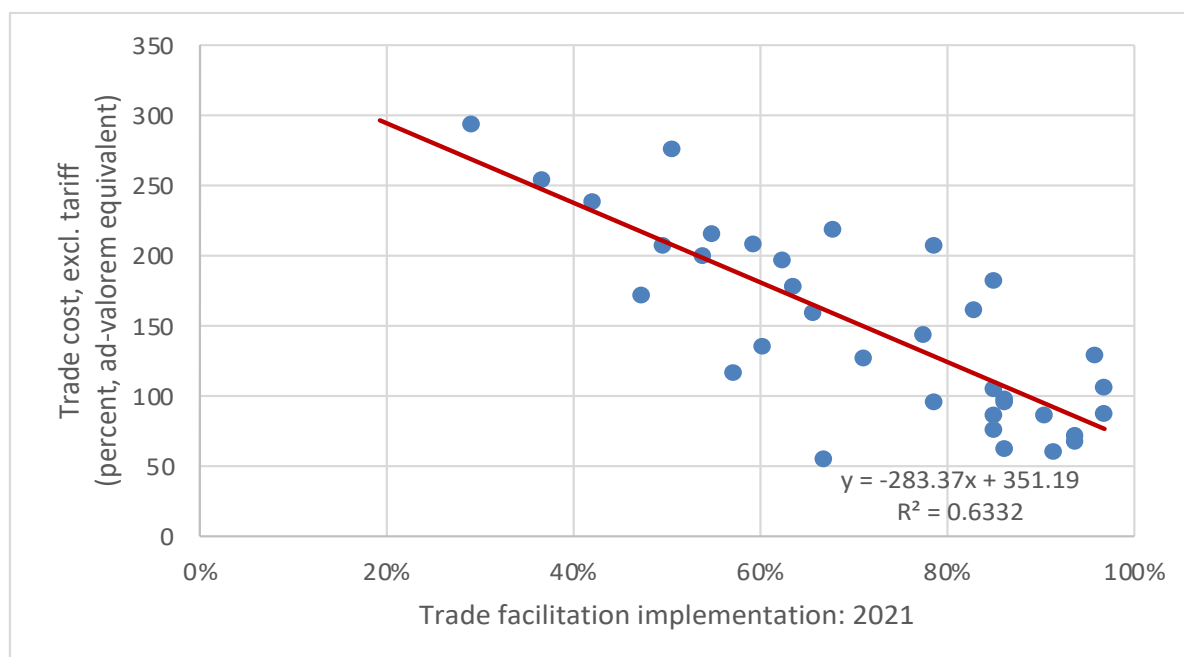


Source: United Nations ESCAP, based on data from www.untfsurvey.org and ESCAP/World Bank Trade Cost database

5. Conclusion and the way forward

This report presents the implementation data of a set of 60 trade facilitation measures collected from the 11 PIDEs and other economies across the Asia-Pacific region. The Survey, serving as the fundamental source of the report, covers the implementation of general trade facilitation measures, including most of those featured in the WTO TFA, but also digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures and beyond. Figure 31 confirms the correlation between trade costs of Asia-Pacific economies and the level of trade facilitation implementation in the region.

Figure 31. Trade facilitation implementation and trade costs of Asia-Pacific economies



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

Based on a set of 31 general and digital trade facilitation measures included in the survey, the average trade facilitation implementation in PIDEs is found to be 42% which is far behind the Asia-Pacific regional average implementation rate of 67%. This represents an increase of 3 percentage points compared to the last Survey results, suggesting significant room for improvement, as progress was observed only among a limited number of PIDEs. Although some countries such as Vanuatu, Fiji, and Tonga lead the rest overall, most trade facilitation systems remain at the pilot stage with very limited implementation, pointing the need for more targeted interventions. Many countries still struggle with implementing even basic facilities for trade facilitation, facing challenges like lack of consistent political will, absence of a clearly designated lead agency, and shortage of human and financial resources, which have possibly contributed to the slow implementation of some trade facilitation measures.

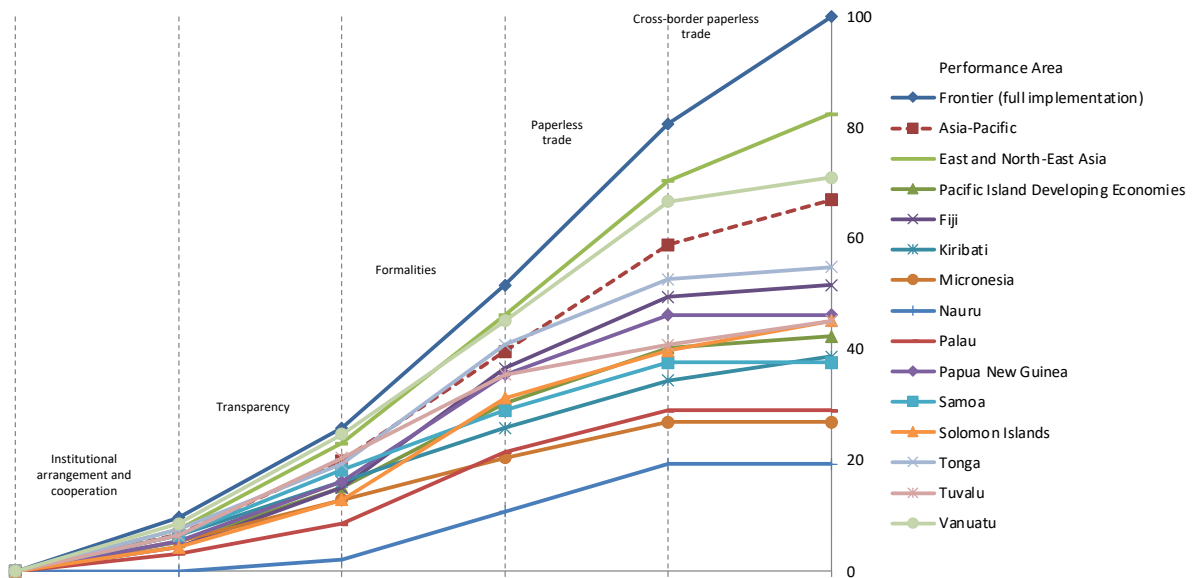
Furthermore, progress is not homogeneous among the different groups of measures but also within each group of measures. Although several projects were implemented including the Transparency in Trade Regulation and Facilitation project by UNCTAD, the group of measures related to transparency in trade facilitation have only slightly progressed in PIDEs. Within the WTO-TFA relevant “General” measures, the assessment reveals that most efforts have focused on measures strengthening the coordination and cooperation among government agencies.

It is noted that continued efforts are put in “Digital Trade Facilitation” including through projects supported by development partners, such as the ASYCUDA World project for 6 Pacific Island economies to access and leverage technology. However, it is noticeable that “Digital Trade Facilitation” is still lagging far behind, especially regarding cross-border paperless trade. Moreover, improvements observed in trade digitalization since the last Survey remain limited and show significant disparity among measures. On positive note, PIDEs show commendable performance in electronic transactions for Customs procedures towards paperless trade, but still showing very limited progress with several electronic certificates in cross-border paperless trade (namely Certificate of Origin and Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary Certificate), which is an area that calls for further attention and improvement.

Figure 32 combines seamless international supply chains to illustrate the implementation of trade facilitation as a step-by-step process, based on the five core groups of measures included in the Survey. 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 the use of 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.

The graph shows the cumulative implementation level of trade facilitation measures in PIDEs. It reveals the similarities in implementation patterns across countries, with paperless and cross-border paperless trade facilitation are the least implemented of all groups of measures. Countries have significant room to make progress in all areas of trade facilitation, starting with ‘transparency’ and ‘formalities’ sub-groups of measures.

Figure 32. 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 32 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.

In terms of “Sustainable Trade Facilitation”, the implementation of "inclusive" measures to promote SMEs, key participants in the global economy, remains low. Although SMEs play an important role in digitalized trade, trade facilitation measures tailored to SMEs are insufficient. It is noticeable that SMEs are now more included in NTFCs and that some trade facilitation measures specifically target this typology of companies, but systematically at a pilot stage level. During the same period, no progress was observed in facilitating the access of SMEs to the AEO scheme and to the Single Window whereas recommendation 33 of UN/CEFACT recognizes its significance for general trade and SMEs specifically. Therefore, building the capacity of SMEs and taking them into account in trade facilitation policies remains of critical importance.

Conversely, PIDEs have recognized the importance of gender mainstreaming in trade facilitation by implementing policies and strategies to increase women’s participation; promoting their representation in decision-making committees; and developing measures to

specifically benefit women involved in trade. This demonstrates the efforts developed by PIDEs to ensure a more balanced representation of the interests of women and men in trade, which could have an impact on increasing exports and enabling women to access higher income opportunities. Nevertheless, the implementation rate of trade facilitation measures targeting women still lags far behind the average in Asia-Pacific region and therefore, PIDEs still need to pursue furthering their efforts to consolidate gender balanced role, involvement and representation.

Facilitating trade finance and the associated payment instruments play a strategic role in developing and securing the entire international trade transaction system. Implementing trade finance is particularly important for developing economies, including PIDEs and SMEs seeking to benefit from trade opportunities. Although PIDEs have made available a wider variety of trade finance services since the last Survey, trade finance is still very limited considering Single Windows do not facilitate traders access to finance and the absence of integration of emerging technologies applied to trade finance into supply chain projects developed by national authorities. Therefore, trade facilitation policymakers and enforcers need to work together with stakeholders in the financial sectors to study how to promote trade finance and incorporate it into trade facilitation implementation strategies, including single window development plans.

Considering the results of the 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' sub-group, they demonstrate the growing importance given by PIDEs to the implementation of long-term measures able to build resiliency to pandemics and other crises. Nevertheless, the results show that the implementation level of PIDEs remains the lowest within the Asia-Pacific sub-regions and exposes the weaknesses in international trade supply chains in this sub-region. Therefore, the necessity remains for PIDEs to learn from the experience of other subregions and improve the emergency response capacity to meet future challenges. As countries move towards inclusive and sustainable development, it is crucial for PIDEs 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, PIDEs 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.⁸

⁸ 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: PIDEs are highlighted.

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	
	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 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		
	Pilot-tested	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>Data submission by experts</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>Data verification by the UNRCs Secretariat</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. Step 2 took place between January and May 2023.</p>
<p>Data validation by national Governments</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 subquestions 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