Background of the Survey

Under the Joint Approach to Trade Facilitation of the United Nations Regional Commissions (UNRCs), it was decided that all UNRCs should conduct regional surveys to address the implementation ration of recent international and regional trade facilitation initiatives.

The purpose of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade is to assess progress in implementing trade facilitation measures and thus help identify policy, legal, procedural, regulatory and technical gaps that affect implementation of such measures.

Accelerating the pace of implementation can enable UNECE countries to harness the potential of trade as an engine for sustainable development, including in its economic, social and environmental dimensions.

This Brochure presents the main findings, conclusions and recommendations taken out from the 2021 edition.
Trade facilitation has an essential role to play in fostering a resilient, sustainable and inclusive post-pandemic recovery.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the vulnerabilities of value chains and has shown how essential it is to facilitate trade in times of crisis and increase preparedness for future crises.

Digitalization can help enhance resilience in preparation for future crises.

Trade facilitation can also increase the participation of SMEs, including women-owned and women-led businesses, in global value chains.
Key findings

The trade facilitation performance of the 44 UNECE member States, that participated in the survey, has improved by 4%.

Implementation rates of trade facilitation measures, by country group, UNECE, 2019 and 2021 (%)


Transparency measures have the highest implementation rate at 78% on average, followed by Formalities at 75%. Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade subgroups are less implemented. The global average implementation rate for Paperless trade stands at 64%, while the rate for Cross-border paperless trade reached only 38%.

Global and UNECE implementation rates of General and Digital trade facilitation measures, 2021 (%)

Central Asia still lags, as do Eastern Europe and South-eastern Europe, at implementation rates of 64%.

The subgroups of Sustainable trade facilitation measures – SMEs, Agricultural trade, Women in trade – have low rates of implementation. The average implementation rate of measures for Trade facilitation in times of crisis is very low. The Women in trade facilitation subgroup reached an average implementation rate of only 27% in the region.
Recommendations

Trade facilitation has an essential role to play in fostering a resilient, sustainable and inclusive post-pandemic recovery.

Digitalization can help enhance resilience in preparation for future crises.

There is a need to understand better the main factors that impede the implementation and to address the obstacles.

Developing a national trade facilitation roadmap can provide countries with a strategic vision with a specific time-frame.

Cooperation is also needed to build the countries’ capacity, including countries with economies in transition, to roll out, implement and ultimately benefit from such tools.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light the vulnerabilities of value chains and has shown how essential it is to facilitate trade in times of crisis and enhance preparedness for future crises.

The currently low implementation rates of digital trade facilitation measures call for greater attention to and engagement on this area of policymaking.

Trade facilitation can also increase the participation of SMEs, including women-owned and women-led businesses, in global value chains.

The complexity of the trade facilitation landscape, involving and affecting actors across a wide range of stakeholders across countries and regions, calls for greater cooperation.

UNECE and trade facilitation

As the international focal point for trade facilitation recommendations and standards, UNECE develops instruments to reduce, harmonize and digitalize procedures in international trade.

During the past four decades, the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) – an inter-governmental body, hosted by UNECE, has developed about 50 trade facilitation recommendations and hundreds of e-business standards, technical specifications and guidance materials on electronic exchange of trade data.

Contact

Maria Ceccarelli,
Chief, Trade Facilitation Section
Economic Cooperation and Trade Division
maria.ceccarelli@un.org
unece.org/trade/uncefact