UNECE

Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

UNECE Regional
Report 2021

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United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: UNECE Regional Report 2021

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Disclaimer

Foreword

It is a great pleasure to present the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Regional Report, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable trade facilitation 2021. This report is turning out to be a flagship publication from UNECE for the trading community in Europe and Central Asia. The timing of the publication of this report is critical as international trade is going through a transition stemming from uncertainties related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trade facilitation is a journey towards a constantly moving target. This report is an important contribution in this journey, keeping track of the key indicators for monitoring and benchmarking trade facilitation performance. This year, UNECE economies reached an impressive average rate of trade facilitation implementation of 76%, which is an increase from 72% in 2019. The report also identifies disparities among country groups, especially in digital trade facilitation.

Trade facilitation and digitalization are closely linked, as both aim at more efficient and rapid processes. Once more, this year's survey identifies gaps in pursuit of digital trade facilitation measures.

Another important aspect covered by the survey is sustainable and inclusive trade facilitation. It is encouraging to see that member States are increasingly interested in responding to questions related to these areas. This will indeed help policymakers to align policy decisions towards sustainable trade facilitation.

In this year, the section on trade facilitation in times of crisis is a welcome addition, given the lessons learned about preparing for crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The report provides important recommendations on using best practices and international standards for achieving fuller implementation of trade facilitation provisions.

The Global Survey is an important example of cooperation among the United Nations Regional Commissions. All UN member States, including the transition economies of the UNECE region, stand to benefit from this useful benchmarking tool.

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United Nations Under-Secretary-General
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Acknowledgements

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Boxes

List of Annex Tables

Abbreviations

AEO	Authorized economic operator
BRA	Border Regulatory Agency
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
EU	European Union
ICT	information and communication technology
ITC	International Trade Centre
LDC	least developed country
LLDC	landlocked developing country
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SME	small and medium-sized enterprises
SPS	sanitary and phytosanitary
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
UN/CEFACT	United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNRC	United Nations Regional Commission
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive summary

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. It is particularly relevant for the participation of developing countries and countries with economies in transition in global value chains, trade in manufactured goods and regional integration.

The rate of trade facilitation implementation[1] in the UNECE region reached 76% in 2021, higher than the global average of 65%. Two subgroups of trade facilitation measures – Transparency and Formalities – have the highest implementation rates, whereas the Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade subgroups are less implemented. Sustainable measures – in the subgroups of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Agricultural trade and Women in trade – have low rates of implementation, as do measures for Trade facilitation in times of pandemic.

Recommendations

Trade facilitation has an essential role to play in fostering a resilient, sustainable and inclusive post-pandemic recovery. Simplifying, harmonizing, standardizing, and digitalizing trade procedures can facilitate participation in the global and regional value chains criss-crossing the planet and the UNECE region, and help economies "build back better".

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. The Trade facilitation in times of crisis measures are critical to mitigate future disruptions in the regional and global supply chains in emergencies.

Digitalization can help enhance resilience in preparation for future crises. During the pandemic, the Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade measures – specifically, exchanging documents electronically – proved critical to keeping trade flowing. UNECE tools, such as Recommendation 33 of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) detailed guidelines, can accelerate implementation of Single Windows, which bring benefits for both governments and traders.

Trade facilitation can also increase the participation of SMEs, including women-owned and women-led businesses, in global value chains. Assist SMEs in complying with trade procedures and facilitate greater inclusion of SMEs and women in National Trade Facilitation Committees as per WTO TFA Article 23.2, and, as recommended by UNECE Recommendation No. 4, are possible avenues for action.

Developing a national trade facilitation roadmap will provide countries with a time-bound strategic vision. The roadmap can help guide the continuous improvement of trade facilitation by minimizing formalities and documentation requirements as mentioned in the WTO TFA Article 10.1. The UNECE Guide to Drafting a National Trade Facilitation Roadmap is a useful resource in this regard. Such a document should build upon the national level priorities and needs not only for trade facilitation but other related topics.

Cooperation is also needed to build the capacity of countries, including countries with economies in transition, to roll out, implement and ultimately benefit from such tools. UNECE has long-standing experience in supporting the organization's 17 programme countries in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, the Western Balkans, and Eastern Europe. Through its technical assistance pillar, it stands ready, with other trade and development partners, to respond to this call.

The complexity of the trade facilitation landscape, involving and affecting actors across a wide range of stakeholders within countries (e.g., different ministries, Border Regulatory Agencies (BRAs), private businesses), as well as across countries and regions, calls for greater cooperation. The process of developing and rolling out normative instruments, including through the UNECE-hosted UN/CEFACT, which has global membership, offers a promising starting point.

1.

About
the Survey

1.1 Scope and objective

Recent international and regional initiatives, such as the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA), have introduced a wide range of measures for expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods and for effective cooperation between customs and other authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance. Under the Joint Approach to Trade Facilitation of the UNRCs, it was decided that all UNRCs should conduct regional surveys. Under this initiative, the UNRCs conducted surveys in 2015, 2017 and 2019. This report is a continuation of these efforts and features the results of the Fourth Survey, part of the 2021 United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation,[2] undertaken jointly by the five UNRCs, conducted in 2021. The UNECE regional survey included 44 economies from the seven country groups of the UNECE region.

The purpose of the survey is to assess progress in implementing trade facilitation measures and thus help identify policy, legal, regulatory and technical gaps that affect implementation of such measures. The survey aims to focus the efforts of UNECE member governments and international cooperation programmes to assist countries in accelerating the pace of implementation. This can enable the UNECE countries to increase participation in regional and global value chains and harness the potential of trade as an engine for sustainable development.

To achieve these goals, it is critical to address trade barriers, which remain high in the UNECE region and globally. Analysis of trade costs, as a measure of trade barriers, between UNECE country groups shows that those costs are high for all UNECE country groups (table 1), especially for the transition economies in Central Asia (158%), Eastern Europe (143%) and Caucasus and Turkey (138%), impeding their integration in global value chains.

Table 1
Intra- and extra-regional comprehensive trade costs (excluding tariff costs) (%)

Region	Caucasus and Turkey	Central Asia	Eastern Europe	EU-2, United Kingdom	Canada	Russian Federation
Caucasus and Turkey	82.7	146.3	128.8	131.5	193.7	88.1
	(1.5)	(5.6)	(-6.9)	(-2.8)	(-3.4)	(-17.3)
Central Asia	146.3	75.7	150.5	175.2	226.1	77.8
	(5.6)	(4.1)	(4.6)	(-2.1)	(8.3)	(-3.1)
Eastern Europe	128.8	150.5	71.3	121.2	233.3	67.9
	(-6.9)	(4.6)	(-2.8)	(-6.5)	(-8.9)	(-0.1)

Region	Caucasus and Turkey	Central Asia	Eastern Europe	EU-2, United Kingdom	Canada	Russian Federation
EU-2, United Kingdom	131.5	175.2	121.2	41.4	85.6	80.8
	(-2.8)	(-2.1)	(-6.5)	(-5.9)	(-1.1)	(4.6)
Canada	193.7	226.1	233.3	85.6		146.4
	(-3.4)	(8.3)	(-8.9)	(-1.1)		(-2.6)
Russian Federation	88.1	77.8	67.9	80.8	146.4	
	(-17.3)	(-3.1)	(-0.1)	(4.6)	(-2.6)	
Average trade costs with other UNECE country groups	138	158	143	116	173	93

Source: ESCAP-World Bank Trade Cost Database, updated June 2021. Available from https:// artnet.unescap.org/databases#tradecost and https://www.unescap.org/resources/escap-world-bank-trade-cost-database

Notes: Trade costs may be interpreted as tariff equivalents. Percentage changes in trade costs between 2008-2013 and 2014-2019 are in parentheses. Caucasus and Turkey: Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey; Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan; Eastern Europe: Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine; EU-2, United Kingdom: Germany, France, United Kingdom.

The prevalence of high trade costs between UNECE country groups shows that reforms are required to lower the cost of trade. Implementing trade facilitation measures can help reduce the cost of moving goods across borders. The high costs of trading are negatively affecting businesses, especially the SMEs, in developed and transition economies. In addition, further reductions could be achieved by fostering trade facilitation implementation, including with respect to sanitary and phytosanitary certificates, shipping formalities and country of origin regulations.

The trade facilitation measures assessed in this survey can help reduce trade costs, thus contributing to greater inclusion of SMEs in global value chains, job creation and, ultimately, sustainable economic growth. This is particularly the case in the UNECE region, where SMEs play a significant role in many economies.

This report provides an assessment of the progress made in digital and sustainable trade facilitation within the UNECE region since the 2019 survey, and the challenges that UNECE countries encounter in implementing trade facilitation measures. Following is an introduction to the survey structure and methodology. Section 2 provides a region-wide overview of the implementation of trade facilitation measures. Section 3 offers details on the implementation levels of trade facilitation measures in the UNECE region and points to UNECE tools that might have helped – or can help – improve implementation. Section 4 highlights key findings and actions for advancing digital and sustainable trade facilitation.

1.2 Survey structure and methodology

The survey includes 58 trade facilitation measures, categorized into four groups: General trade facilitation, Digital trade facilitation, Sustainable trade facilitation, and Other trade facilitation measures (table 2).

Table 2
Survey trade facilitation measures and their correspondence with WTO TFA articles

Groups	Subgroups	Measures	Relevant TFA Articles
General trade facilitation measures	**Transparency (5 measures)**	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 (e.g., 30 days prior)	2.1
		Advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods	3
		Independent appeal mechanism (for traders to appeal customs rulings and the rulings of other relevant trade control agencies)	4
	Formalities (8 measures)	Risk management (as a basis for deciding whether a shipment will be physically inspected or not)	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
		Trade facilitation 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

Groups	Subgroups	Measures	Relevant TFA Articles
General trade facilitation measures	**Institutional arrangement and cooperation (5 measures)**	Establishment of a 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 facilitation (4 measures)	Transit facilitation agreement(s) with neighbouring country(ies)	
		Customs authorities 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 measures	**Paperless trade (10 measures)**	Automated Customs System (e.g., ASYCUDA)	
		Internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies at border-crossings	
		Electronic Single Window System	10.4
		Electronic submission of Customs declarations	
		Electronic application and issuance of import and export permits	
		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	

Groups	Subgroups	Measures	Relevant TFA Articles
Digital trade facilitation measures	**Cross-border paperless trade (6 measures)**	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions are in place (e.g., e-commerce law, e-transaction law)	
		Recognized certification authority issuing digital certificates to traders to conduct electronic transactions	
		Electronic exchange of Customs declaration	
		Electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin	
		Electronic exchange of Sanitary and phytosanitary Certificate	
		Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit	
Sustainable trade facilitation measures	**Trade facilitation for SMEs (5 measures)**	Trade-related information measures for SMEs	
		SMEs in authorized economic operator (AEO) scheme (i.e., a Government has developed specific measures that enable SMEs to benefit more easily from the AEO scheme)	
		SMEs access Single Window (i.e., a Government has taken action to make Single Window more easily accessible to SMEs (e.g., by providing technical consultation and training services to SMEs on registering and using the facility)	
		SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee (i.e., a Government has taken action to ensure that SMEs are well-represented and made key members of National Trade Facilitation Committees)	
		Other special measures for SMEs	
	Agricultural trade facilitation (4 measures)	Testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS standards of main trading partners	
		National standards and accreditation bodies established to facilitate compliance with SPS	
		Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates	
		Special treatment for perishable goods at border-crossings	7.9

Groups	Subgroups	Measures	Relevant TFA Articles
	Women in trade facilitation (3 measures)	Trade facilitation policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade	
		Trade facilitation measures to benefit women involved in trade	
		Women's membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies	
Other trade facilitation measures	**Trade finance facilitation (3 measures)**	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	

Source: The Third and the Fourth United Nations Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

UNECE conducted data collection and validation activities between January and June 2021, adopting a three-step approach that consisted of gathering preliminary information from experts and committees, validating data through a combination of desk research, phone interviews and sharing with other key regional and international partner organizations in trade facilitation, and submitting data to UNECE member States for their final review and confirmation.

Based on the data collected, each of the trade facilitation measures included in the survey was rated as 'fully implemented', 'partially implemented', 'on a pilot basis', or 'not implemented'. A score (weight) of 3, 2, 1 or 0 was assigned to each of the four implementation stages to calculate implementation scores for individual measures across countries, country groups, and trade facilitation subgroups of measures. Country groups used in the analysis were defined by UNECE in 2017 (Table 3).

Table 3
UNECE country groups participating in the Fourth Survey

Caucasus and Turkey	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey
Central Asia	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan
Eastern Europe	Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine
EU+3	Andorra[3] , Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom
North America[4]	Canada
Russian Federation	Russian Federation
South-Eastern Europe	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia

Source: The Third and the Fourth United Nations Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. Further information on the methodology is presented in the Annex.

2.

Implementation of General and Digital Trade Facilitation Measures: Overview

This section provides an overview of the implementation[5] across the region of these trade facilitation measures: Transparency, Formalities, Institutional arrangement and cooperation, Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade. This is followed by a discussion of the progress of trade facilitation in the UNECE region since 2019. In addition, insights are presented on the implementation of the trade facilitation measures by subgroup, as well as the most and least implemented trade facilitation measures.

Since the 2019 survey, the rate of trade facilitation implementation for the UNECE region improved from 72% to 76%. All country groups recorded progress, with greater increases in Central Asia, North America, and Caucasus and Turkey.

Despite the progress made since 2019, Central Asia still lags, as do Eastern Europe and South-eastern Europe, at implementation rates of about 64%. The other four country groups reached implementation rates close to or over 80% (Figure 1)[*].

About the Figure 1 (next page)

Note: Country groups used in the analysis were defined by UNECE in 2017. The North America and Russian Federation country groups represent Canada and the Russian Federation, respectively.

Among the 58 common measures surveyed across UNRCs, 3 measures – Electronic submission of sea cargo manifests, Alignment of working days and hours with neighbouring countries at border crossings and Alignment of formalities and procedures with neighbouring countries at border crossings – are excluded when calculating the overall score as they are not relevant to all countries surveyed. The Transit facilitation measures are also excluded, for the same reason. In addition, the Trade facilitation for SMEs, Agricultural trade facilitation, Women in trade facilitation and Trade finance facilitation subgroups are excluded, as these are groups of measures not included in the original UN Survey. The group of measures called Trade facilitation in times of crisis is also new, introduced in 2021.

The UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, different than the average of the rates for all country groups.

Figure 1
Implementation rate of General and Digital trade facilitation measures, by UNECE country and group, 2021 (%)
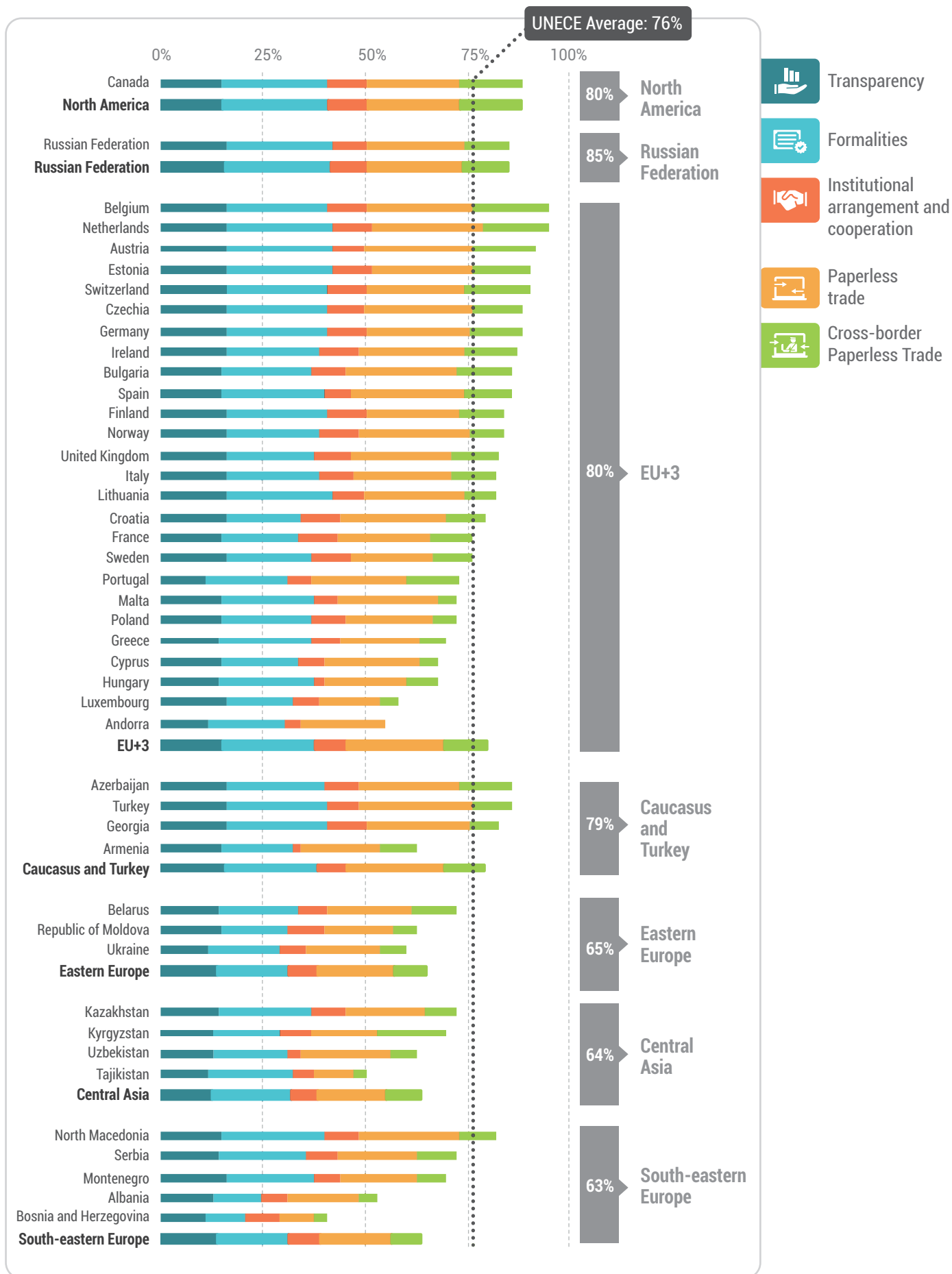
UNECE Average: 76%

Legend:
- Transparency
- Formalities
- Institutional arrangement and cooperation
- Paperless trade
- Cross-border Paperless Trade

North America: 80%
Russian Federation: 85%
EU+3: 80%
Caucasus and Turkey: 79%
Eastern Europe: 65%
Central Asia: 64%
South-eastern Europe: 63%

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

11

Box 1
Implementation in Central Asia

In Central Asia, two countries registered a sharp increase in the rate of implementation of trade facilitation measures since 2019. Kazakhstan reached a rate of 72%, up from 66% in the last survey. In Kyrgyzstan the rate increased from 38% in 2019 to 70%.

Kazakhstan has worked closely with UNECE, which conducted several capacity-building activities, such as a readiness assessment study of the implementation of the WTO TFA provisions as well as training to improve the capacities of policymakers to measure progress in trade facilitation and achieve internal and cross-border policy coherence for the simplification and harmonization of trade procedures.

Kyrgyzstan is also a target country of UNECE's capacity-building support to implement the WTO TFA. UNECE has supported the country in many ways, such as developing a National Trade Facilitation Road Map 2021-2025, streamlining export-import procedures in the textile and pharmaceutical industries, and building the capacity of local stakeholders including national trade facilitation council experts and the private sector in implementing TFA and advanced digital trade facilitation measures.

Furthermore, UNECE supported Tajikistan in developing the National Trade Facilitation RoadMap 2019-2024 to pursue a time-bound vision, goals and prioritized activities to contribute to the country's sustainable development.

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Out of 44 countries participating in the 2021 survey, five achieved over 90% implementation: Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Netherlands, and Switzerland.

In regard to Transparency, Formalities, and Institutional arrangement and cooperation measures, most countries have close levels of implementation. The survey results show that the implementation rate of Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade measures vary across the region. These are also some of the subgroups with the highest number of measures. In addition, these are all digital measures and present implementation challenges, such as having adequate ICT (Information and communications technology) infrastructure. Several countries

in the region have reached over 90% implementation in these subgroups, but none of them reported full implementation.

From the 44 countries participating in the survey, 24 have implementation rates above the UNECE region average of about 76%. While the majority of these countries have GDP per capita over 10,000 USD (Figure 2), 25% of them had GDP per capita considerably lower than 10,000 in 2020, which shows that, beside the GDP per capita, the implementation rate is dependent on other factors, that could include for example governments' identified priorities in regard to trade facilitation.
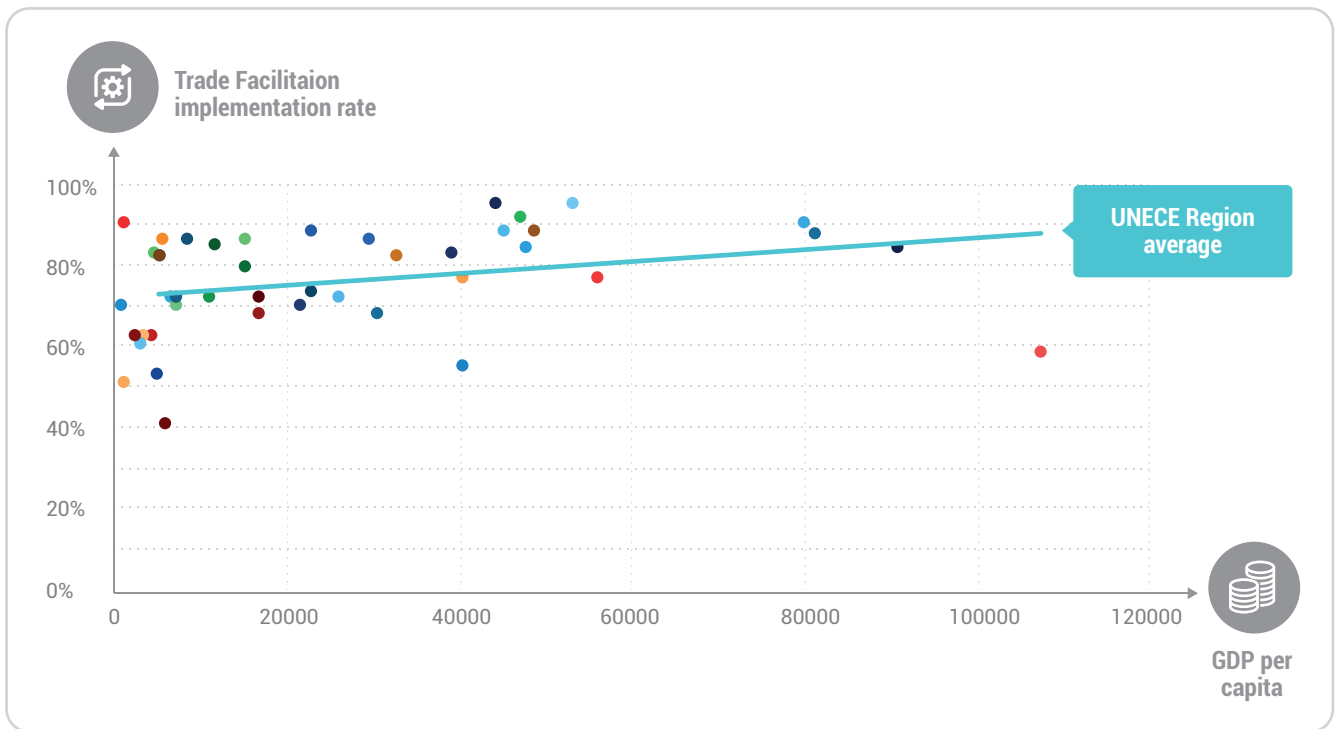
Trade Facilitaion implementation rate

100%

80%

60%

40%

20%

0%

0   20000   40000   60000   80000   100000   120000

UNECE Region average

GDP per capita

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021, and World Bank.

2.1 Progress in implementation between 2019 and 2021

Key messages:

• The implementation of General and Digital trade facilitation measures increased since 2019. The highest average implementation rates are recorded in developed economies in the North America group, and in the EU+3 group, and also in the Russian Federation group.

• Transition economies in two groups – Central Asia, and Caucasus and Turkey – recorded the highest increases in the implementation of General and Digital trade facilitation measures, among all country groups of transition economies.

The average implementation of the trade facilitation measures in the five subgroups – Transparency, Formalities, Institutional arrangement and cooperation, Paperless trade, and Cross-border paperless trade – increased from 72% in 2019[6] to 76% in 2021 (figure 3). The current survey includes two new countries. Comparing the implementation rates of the 42 countries surveyed in 2019 with the 2021 performance of the same 42 countries, the implementation rate for the region increased from 72% to 77%.

Central Asia registered an increase in the implementation rate since the last survey, from 54% to 64% and moved up one place among the country groups. Caucasus and Turkey group achieved an implementation rate close to the rate of EU+3. Although South-eastern Europe has the lowest implementation rate to date, progress has been made since the last survey in decreasing the gap between this country group and the other country groups of transition economies.

Figure 3
Implementation rates of trade facilitation measures, by country group, UNECE, 2019 and 2021 (%)
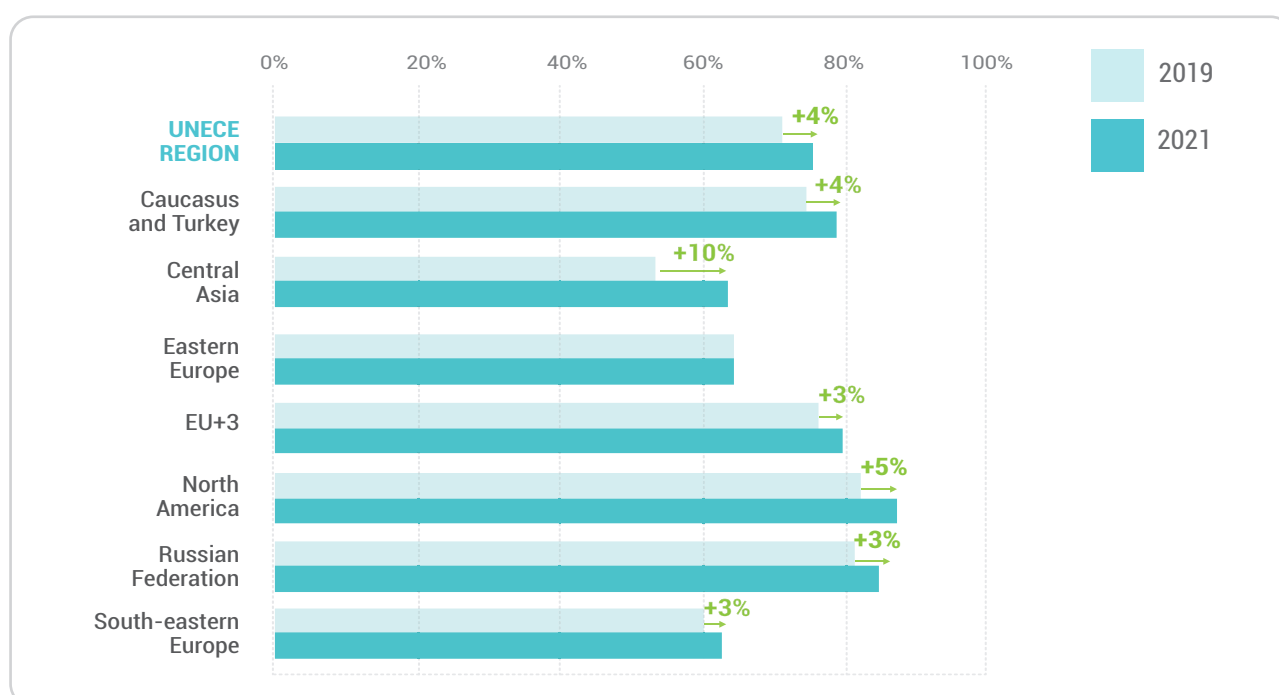
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

The results of the 2021 survey show improvements in the implementation rate of all five trade facilitation subgroups, including in Paperless trade and in Cross-border paperless trade (figure 4). This indicates the increased priority, in light of the pandemic, given to electronic submission of documentation and implementation of digital systems used to facilitate trade across borders. The implementation rates of these two subgroups increased since 2019. The Paperless trade subgroup reached a rate of over 76% across the region, and the rate for the Cross-border paperless trade subgroup was close to an average of 50% for the region.

Figure 4
Implementation rate of General and Digital trade facilitation measures, by type of measure, UNECE, 2019 and 2021 (%)

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Figure 5 shows the implementation of trade facilitation as a step-by-step process, based on the groups of measures included in this survey. Trade facilitation typically begins with setting up the institutional arrangements needed to prioritize and coordinate implementation of trade facilitation measures. The next step is to make trade processes more transparent by sharing information on laws, regulations and procedures as widely as possible and consulting with stakeholders when developing new regulations. Designing and implementing simpler and more efficient trade formalities is next. The reengineered and streamlined processes may be implemented first based on paper documents and then can be improved through ICT and the development of paperless trade systems.

Figure 5
Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.
Note: The figure shows global cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores for each UNECE subregion for the five groups of trade facilitation measures included in the survey. Scores are based on the equally weighted implementation of 31 trade facilitation measures, but the number of measures in each of the five groups varies. Full implementation of all measures = 100.

Across all five subgroups, North America and the Russian Federation continue to lead, as in the 2019 survey. As in the previous survey, the next highest implementation rates in Transparency, Formalities, Paperless trade, and Cross-border paperless trade are in the EU+3 group followed by the Caucasus and Turkey group. In the current survey, the other three groups lag: Eastern Europe, Central Asia and South-eastern Europe.

The Institutional arrangement and cooperation measures have high average implementation rates in most country groups in the UNECE region. They

are mostly implemented in North America and the Russian Federation, followed closely by the EU+3, and then Eastern Europe and South-eastern Europe. In this subgroup, two groups – Caucasus and Turkey, and Central Asia – have lower levels of implementation. Transparency and Formalities measures are close to being fully implemented in most of the country groups.

Since the last survey, implementation rates of Paperless trade measures increased in three groups: Central Asia, the EU+3; and South-eastern Europe. The average implementation rates by country groups

for Cross-border paperless trade are increasing, but they are still low compared with the rates of other measures. The increase registered from the 2019 rates, especially in Central Asia, Caucasus and Turkey, and the Russian Federation, indicates the higher priority given to these measures, most likely due to changes in supply chain processes caused by the pandemic.

Comparison between global and UNECE region performances in 2021

The global average implementation rate for all trade facilitation measures stands at 65%. Transparency measures have the highest implementation rate at 78% on average, followed by Formalities at 75% (figure 6). The rate for Institutional arrangement and cooperation reached 69%. The global average implementation rate for Paperless trade stands at 64%, while the rate for Cross-border paperless trade reached only 38%. UNECE implementation rates for the General and Digital trade facilitation measures are higher than the global averages. This could be attributed in part to the number of developed economies in the UNECE region that have the infrastructure and institutional environment required for such measures.

Figure 6
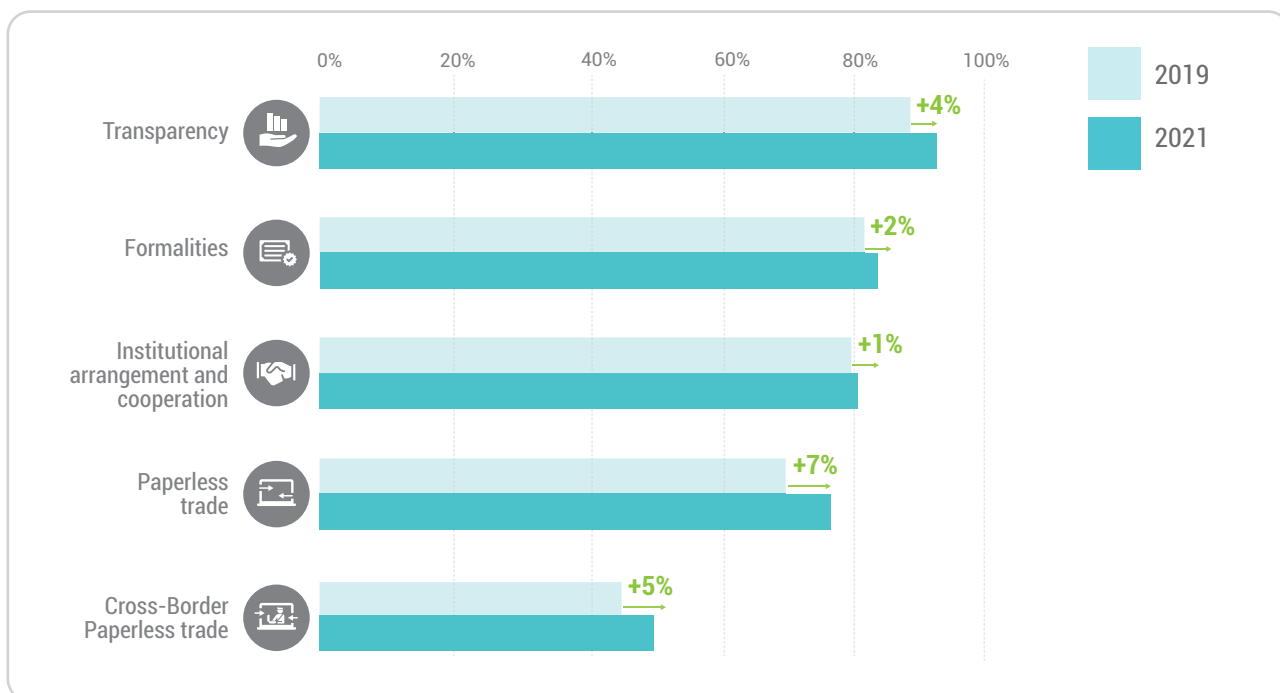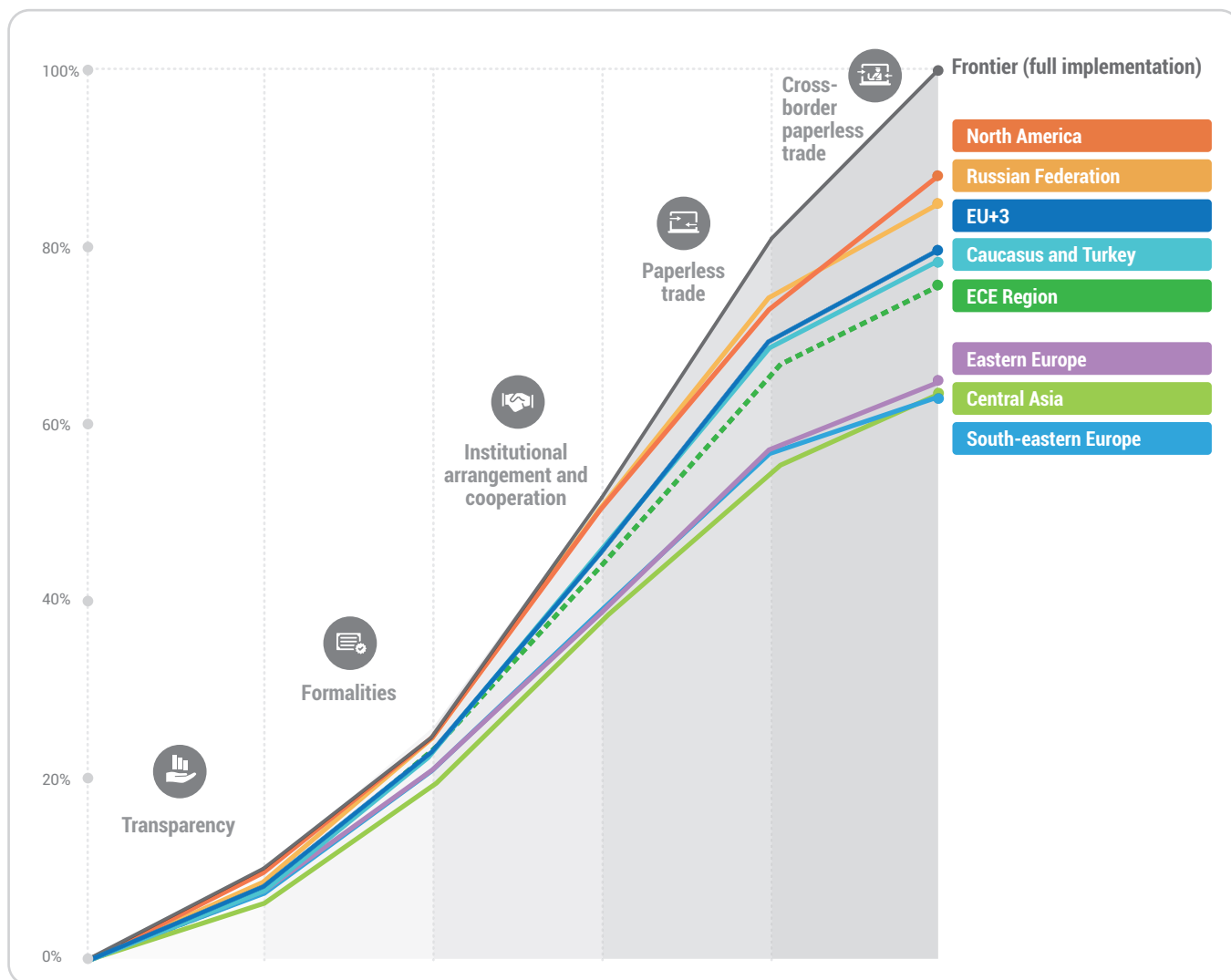**Global and UNECE implementation rates of General and Digital trade facilitation measures, 2021 (%)**
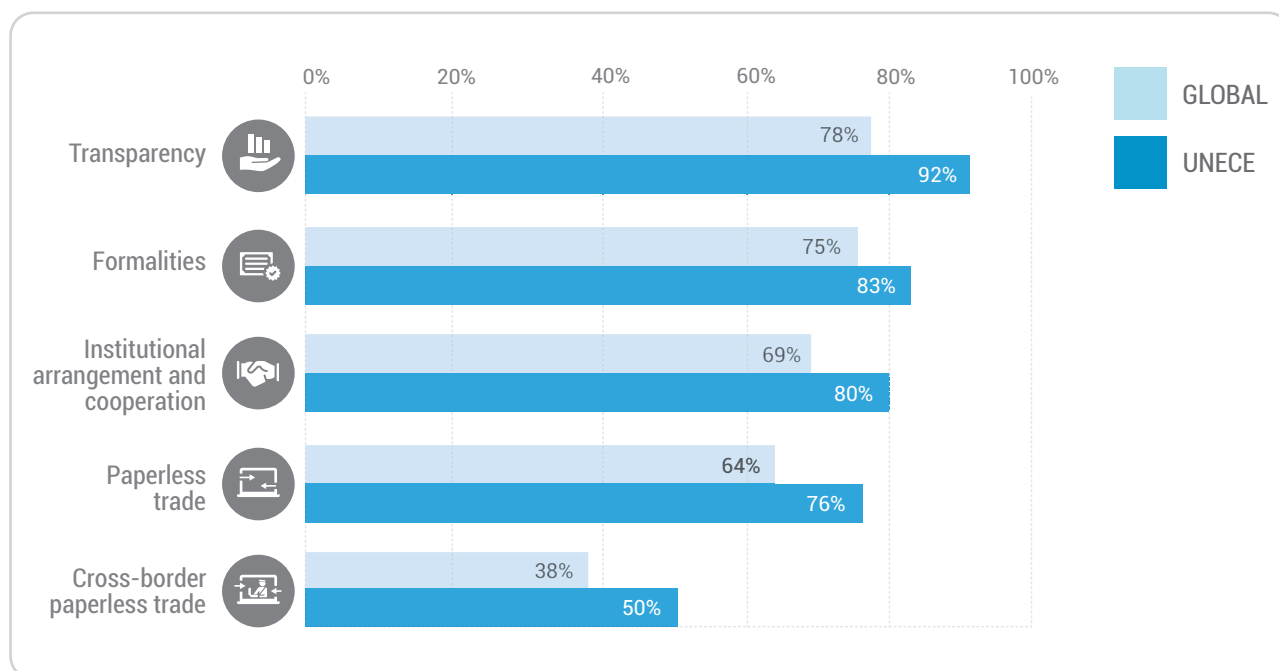
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

2.2 Implementation of General and Digital measures by country group

Key messages:

• The implementation rates of General and Digital trade facilitation measures are lowest in the transition economies.

• Transparency and Formalities trade facilitation measures have the highest average implementation rates among all surveyed subgroups, whereas Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade subgroups are less implemented across the region.

Trade facilitation implementation rates vary by country group (figure 7). Three – Caucasus and Turkey, Central Asia and South-eastern Europe – show large differences in implementation rates among countries in the group. In Caucasus and Turkey, the rate varies from 62% in Azerbaijan to 86% in Turkey. In Central Asia, the rate ranges from 50% in Tajikistan to 72% in Kazakhstan. In South-eastern Europe the rate also varies, from 52% in Albania to 82% in North Macedonia. The three countries in the Eastern Europe group – Belarus, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine – reached 60%, 62% and 72% implementation, respectively. In the EU+3 group, the 26 countries participating in the survey achieved different levels of implementation. Countries that recently started the implementation of trade facilitation measures have the lowest completion rates.

The landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) in the UNECE region, with an average implementation rate of 68%, also show differences within the group (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, North Macedonia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan). The implementation rates in the LLDCs vary from 50% in Tajikistan to 86% in Azerbaijan.

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Figure 7

Implementation rates of General and Digital trade facilitation measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
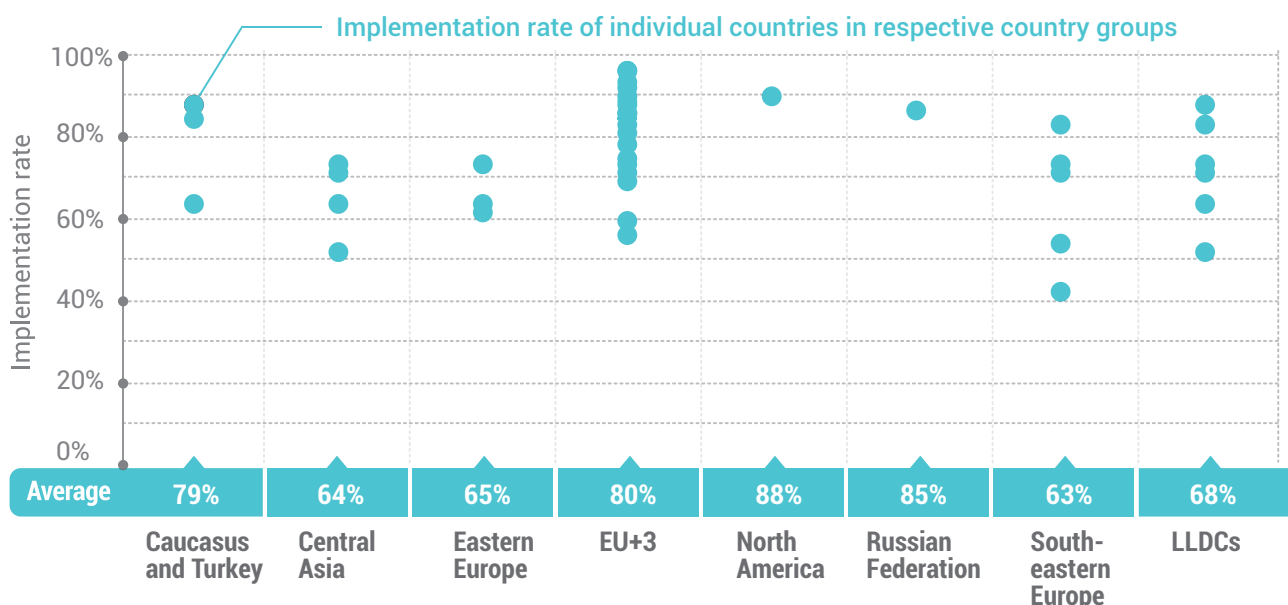
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

2.3 Implementation of trade facilitation measures by subgroups

> **Key messages:**
>
> • The rate of implementation of trade facilitation measures varies widely within most subgroups. Significant differences can be observed within the subgroups of Formalities, Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade.
>
> • 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. Not all UNECE countries are implementing these measures.

The survey results on the implementation of measures in each trade facilitation subgroup indicate that some of the measures have been implemented by most countries. For example, measures in the Transparency subgroup reached 92% implementation across the UNECE region, and all Transparency measures have high rates of implementation (figure 8). Measures in other subgroups, such as Formalities, while having a high average implementation rate of 82%, include measures that have low rates of implementation, such as Establishment and publication of average release times (53%) and Expedited shipments (66%). One of the reasons for low implementation of Establishment and publication of average release times is that European Union countries do not use this measure. Instead, they use speed of clearance, which is a similar indicator.

Figure 8
Implementation rates of trade facilitation measures, by subgroup, UNECE, 2021 (%)
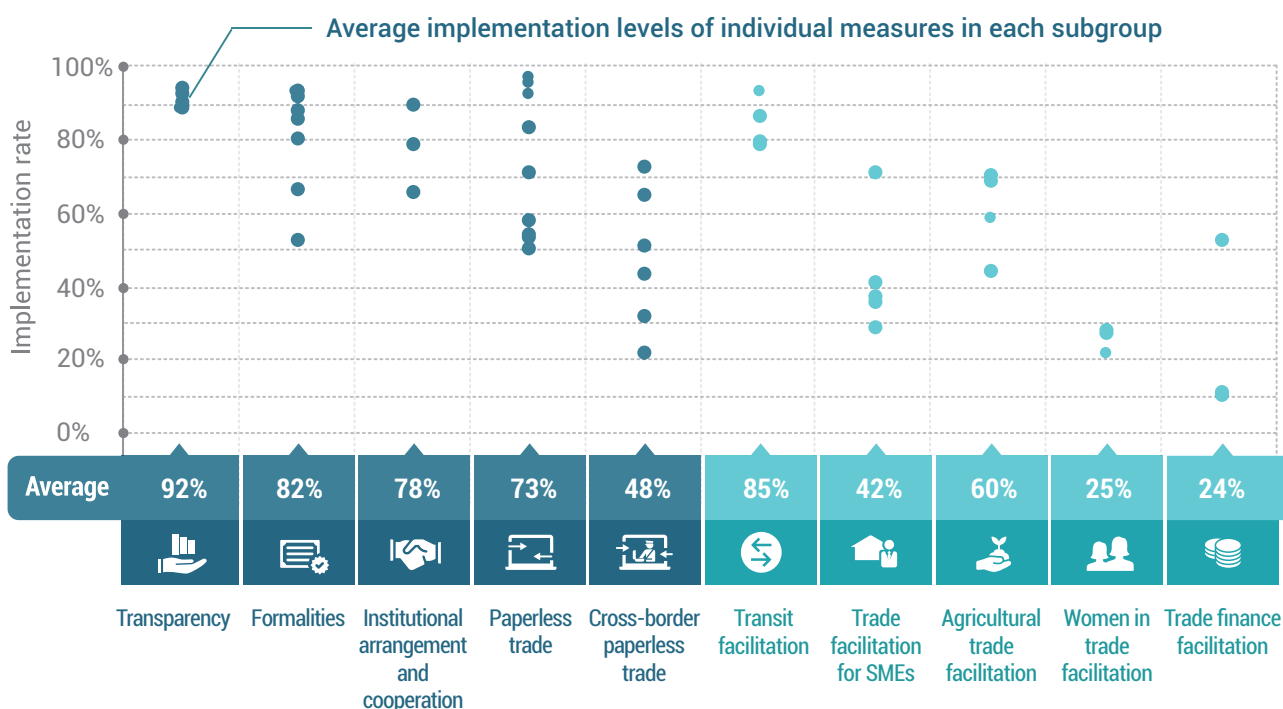
Average	92%	82%	78%	73%	48%	85%	42%	60%	25%	24%
	Transparency	Formalities	Institutional arrangement and cooperation	Paperless trade	Cross-border paperless trade	Transit facilitation	Trade facilitation for SMEs	Agricultural trade facilitation	Women in trade facilitation	Trade finance facilitation

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

The subgroups of Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade also show wide spreads of implementation rates by measure. This can be explained in part by the priority level assigned to individual measures by individual countries and by the complexity of each measure, requiring information and communications infrastructure as well as resource availability.

Among the surveyed subgroups, the least implemented are the trade facilitation measures for Women in trade and Trade finance; however, there is an increase in the implementation rates in these subgroups since the 2019 survey. The average implementation rate for the Women in trade measures increased from 20% to 25%, and the average rate for Trade finance measures increased from 18% in 2019 to almost 25% in 2021. This could imply greater awareness of the impact of these measures on trade facilitation and economic growth. These subgroups should become higher priorities for governments and international organizations, given their potential contribution to greater inclusion of traders in global value chains, increased trade flows and economic growth.

The Agricultural trade subgroup registered an increase, from 47% in 2019 to 61% in 2021. The most implemented measures were Special treatment for perishable goods (71%) and Availability of testing and laboratory facilities to meet SPS requirements of main trading partners (70%). Lower rates of implementation were reported for National standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS requirements (58%) and Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates (44%).

Box 2
Journey towards sustainable trade facilitation in the transition economies

The Sustainable trade facilitation measures are grouped in three subgroups: SMEs, Agricultural trade facilitation, and Women in trade facilitation. The figure below shows the average implementation rate of Sustainable trade facilitation measures in the transition economies in four UNECE country groups. Caucasus and Turkey lead in the implementation of trade facilitation measures for SMEs at 65%, whereas the average for the region is 45%. Central Asia has reached just 50% implementation, followed by Eastern Europe at 47%. South-eastern Europe lags at 35%.

The Agricultural trade facilitation measures reached an average implementation rate of 61%. Caucasus and Turkey recorded the highest implementation rate among the four groups. This can be explained by the importance of agricultural exports for the country group, as agricultural exports represent close to 30% of all exports from Armenia and Georgia, and approximately 10% of exports from Turkey.

Sharper focus should be placed on the implementation of trade facilitation measures related to Women in trade, for which the average for the four UNECE groups reached only 27%, with the lowest rate recorded in Eastern Europe (15%). South-eastern Europe, Caucasus and Turkey and Central Asia have each reached implementation rates above the average, showing the importance of women-led businesses in these country groups.

Sustainable trade facilitation in UNECE subregions in transition, 2021 (%)

Trade facilitation for SMEs

Agricultural trade facilitation

Women in trade facilitation

● Caucasus and Turkey   ● Central Asia   ● Eastern Europe   ● South-eastern Europe

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Most and least implemented measures

The most and least implemented General and Digital trade facilitation measures in the UNECE region in 2021 are presented in table 4. The assessments are based on the percentage of countries that are implementing the measures and the percentage of countries that implemented them fully.

In the Transparency subgroup:

• Stakeholders' consultations on new draft regulations: This measure was fully implemented by 69% of countries in 2019. In 2021, it continues to be among the most implemented, with full implementation reaching close to 82% of countries.

• Advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation: This measure is being implemented by all countries and was fully implemented by 88.6%

In comparison with the 2019 survey, a higher number of measures are now implemented by 100% of the countries surveyed in many of the subgroups.

of survey participants. In 2019, it was the least implemented in this subgroup (being implemented by 95% of countries, fully implemented by 74% of countries).

• Two other Transparency measures are among the most implemented in 2021: Publication of existing import-export regulations and Independent appeal mechanism.

In the Formalities subgroup:

• Only one measure was most implemented in 2019 – Risk management, still among the most implemented in 2021.

• In 2021, one additional measure is being implemented by all countries – Post-clearance audits.

In the Institutional arrangement and cooperation subgroup, the most implemented measure is the same as in 2019 – National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation – with an increase in the number of countries that completed its implementation, from 64% to 73%.

Compared with 2019, the Paperless trade measures most implemented in 2021 include one additional measure that is being implemented by all countries surveyed and has been fully implemented by 93% of the respondents – Internet connection available to customs and other trade control agencies.

This change could be attributed to the increased importance of digitalization in mitigating the effects of the pandemic on global supply chains and processes related to trade across borders.

The Cross-border paperless trade measure most implemented continues to be Laws and regulations for electronic transactions, as in 2019. The number of countries that completed its implementation increased from 36% to 39%.

In the Transit facilitation subgroup, the most and least implemented measures are the same as in the previous survey. The most implemented measure is Customs authorities limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment, and the least implemented is Transit facilitation agreement(s). There were slight increases in the number of countries implementing the measures and percentage of countries that completed the implementation.

Table 4

Most and least implemented General and Digital trade facilitation measures, 2021

Subgroup	Most implemented (by share of countries)		Least implemented (by share of countries)	
	Trade facilitation measure in the questionnaire	Implemented fully, partially or on a pilot basis / Full implementation (%)	Trade facilitation measure in the questionnaire	Implemented fully, partially or on a pilot basis / Full implementation (%)
Transparency	Publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet	100.0 / 81.8	Advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods	97.7 / 77.3
	Stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)	100.0 / 81.8		
	Advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation	100.0 / 88.6		

Subgroup	Most implemented (by share of countries)		Least implemented (by share of countries)	
	Trade facilitation measure in the questionnaire	Implemented fully, partially or on a pilot basis / Full implementation (%)	Trade facilitation measure in the questionnaire	Implemented fully, partially or on a pilot basis / Full implementation (%)
	Independent appeal mechanism			
Formalities	Risk management	100.0 / 81.8	Establishment and publication of average release times	70.5 / 34.1
	Post-clearance audits	100.0 / 88.6		
Institutional arrangement and cooperation	National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation	100 / 72.7	Government agencies delegating controls to customs authorities	81.8 / 47.7
Paperless trade	Automated customs system	100 / 88.6	Electronic application for customs refunds	70.5 / 29.5
	Internet connection available to customs and other trade control agencies	100.0 / 93.2		
	Electronic submission of customs declarations	100.0 / 84.1		
Cross-border paperless trade	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	88.6 / 38.6	Electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin	38.6 / 4.5
Transit facilitation	Customs authorities limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment	93.2 / 84.1	Transit facilitation agreement(s)	81.8 / 65.9

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

The most implemented measures in the Sustainable trade facilitation subgroups – SMEs, Women in trade facilitation, Agricultural trade facilitation – as well as in the Trade finance and Trade facilitation in times of crisis subgroups are currently being implemented by a low number of countries in the region and have very low implementation rates.

This could be attributed to lack of awareness of the importance of these measures for economic growth and sustainable development, as well as to lack of resources and regulatory frameworks that allow for greater inclusion of SMEs and women in regional and global value chains.

Table 5
Most and least implemented Sustainable trade facilitation, and Other trade facilitation measures, 2021

Subgroup	Most implemented (% of countries)		Least implemented (% of countries)	
	Trade facilitation measure in the questionnaire	Implemented fully, partially or on a pilot basis / Full implementation (%)	Trade facilitation measure in the questionnaire	Implemented fully, partially or on a pilot basis / Full implementation (%)
Trade facilitation for SMEs	Trade-related information measures for SMEs	84.1 / 54.5	SMEs in AEO scheme	43.2 / 31.8
Agricultural trade facilitation	Special treatment for perishable goods	84.1 / 45.5	Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates	63.6 / 18.2
Women in trade facilitation	Women's membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies	45.5 / 11.4	Trade facilitation policy/strategy incorporates special consideration for female traders	34.1 / 11.4
Trade finance for trade facilitation	Trade finance services available	68.2 / 34.1	Single Window facilitates traders' in access to finance	13.6 / 4.5
Trade facilitation in times of crisis	Online publication of emergency trade facilitation measures	65.9 / 43.2	Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises	47.7 / 20.5

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

From the top five most fully implemented measures by 2021 (figure 9), the top two are Paperless trade measures. The most fully implemented is Internet connection availability to customs and other trade control agencies. In 2019 this measure was the second most fully implemented. The changes in business processes and the automation required to mitigate the effects of the pandemic certainly increased the necessity of Internet connection and accelerated the implementation of this measure. The implementation of Automated customs systems continues to be a priority, and it is now the second most fully implemented measure.

Figure 9
Most fully implemented trade facilitation measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021
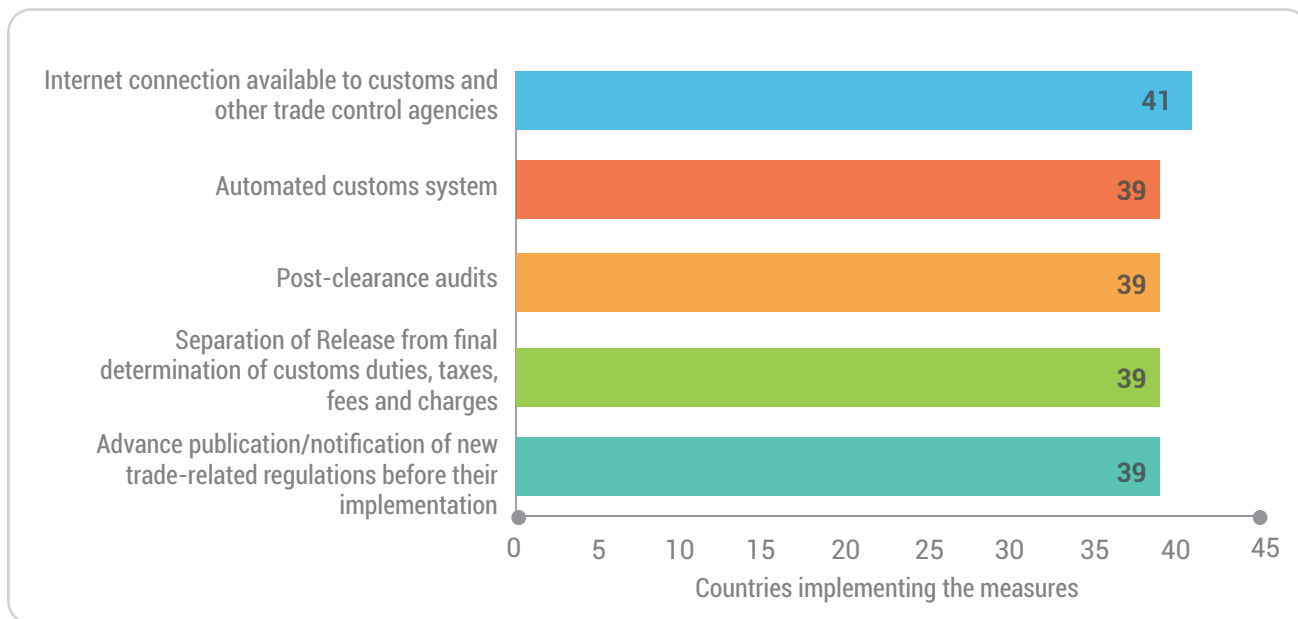
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

3.

Implementation of Trade Facilitation Measures: A Closer Look

3.1 Transparency

Five trade facilitation measures included in the survey are categorized as Transparency measures. They relate to Articles 1-5 of the WTO TFA and GATT[7] Article X on publication and administration of trade regulations. The average rate of implementation of all five Transparency measures across the region reached 92%. The Russian Federation and North America achieved full implementation. Close to full implementation occurred in Caucasus and Turkey (at 98%) and the EU+3 (at 95%). The other country groups reached between 80% and 85% implementation.

Figure 10
Implementation rate of Transparency measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
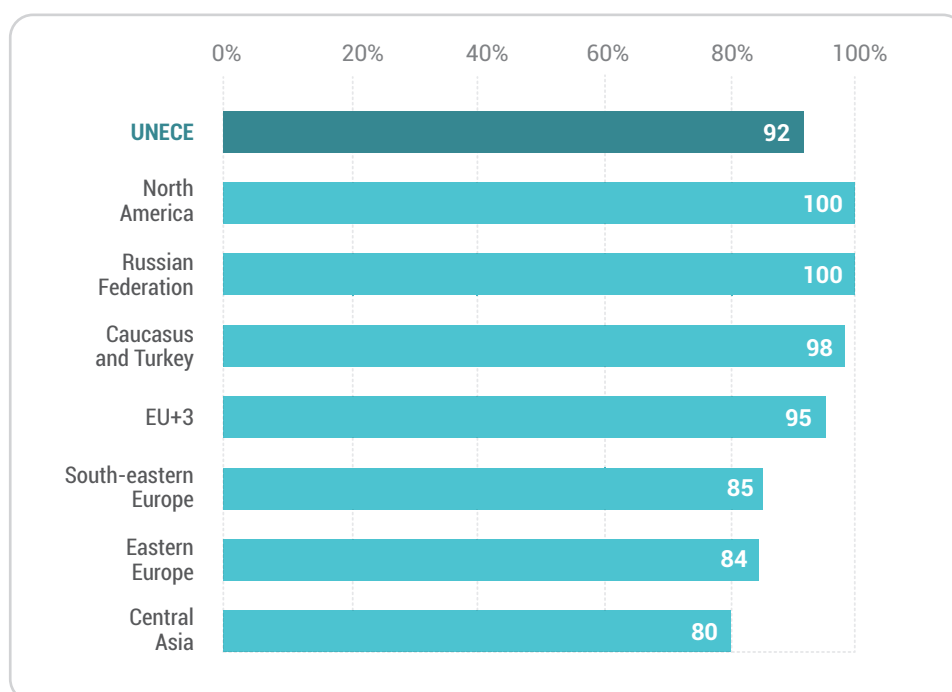
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Note: The UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates in the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the country groups rates.

Figure 11
Implementation rate of Transparency measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021
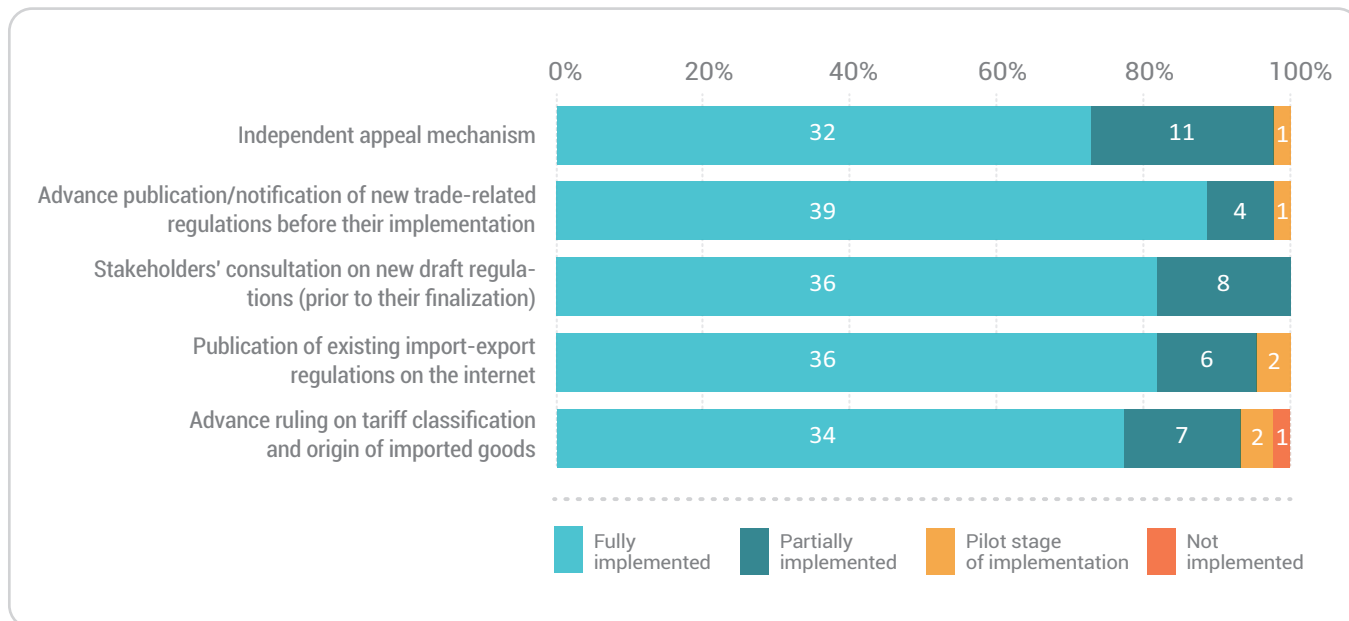
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

With the exception of Advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods, not implemented by 1 of the 44 countries, all other Transparency measures are either fully implemented or in the process of being implemented by all survey respondents. UN/CEFACT Recommendation 38 on trade information portals is a valuable resource for ensuring transparency and maintaining updated information available for the trading community (see table 6 at the end of the report).

3.2 Formalities

The eight surveyed Formalities measures are related to Articles 6-10 of the WTO TFA, and GATT Article VIII on Fees and Formalities connected with Importation and Exportation.

The average implementation for the region reached 83%. The Russian Federation and North America completed full implementation of all Formalities measures. The next highest implementation rates are recorded in Caucasus and Turkey (88%) and in the EU+3 (87%). Central Asia achieved 75% implementation, while South-eastern Europe and Eastern Europe are close to 70%.

Figure 12
Implementation rate of Formalities measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
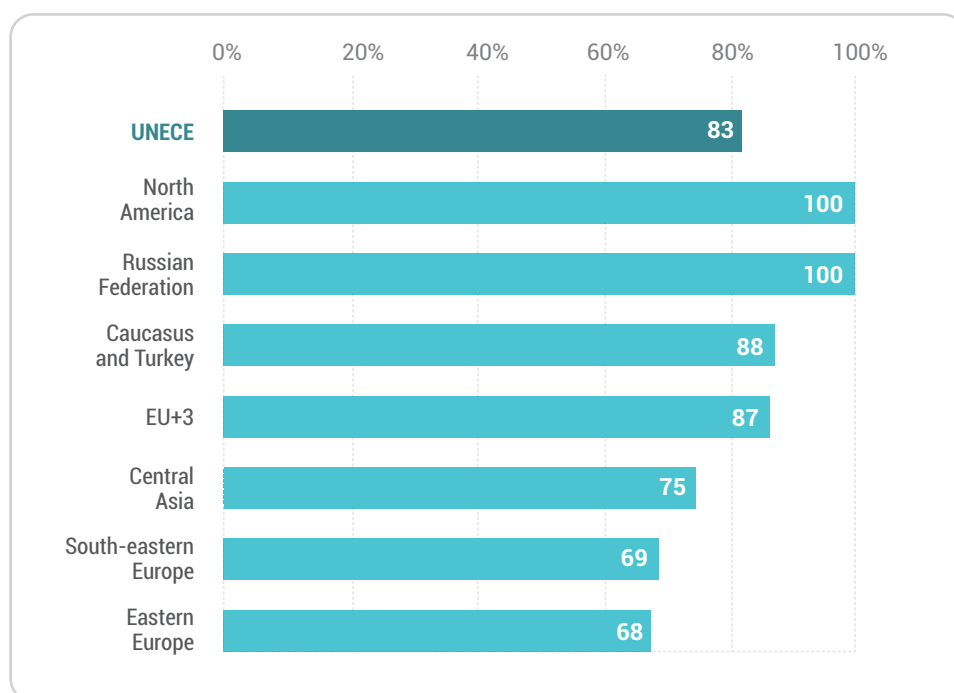
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Note: UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the country groups rates.

Figure 13 shows the status of each measure according to the number of countries that implemented that specific measure. Post-clearance audit and risk management have been implemented by all UNECE countries either fully or partially. The other six measures are not being implemented currently by all survey respondents. This could be attributed to varying levels of priority associated with each measure, as well as each country's resources available to implement these measures. For example, Expedited shipments, with one of the lowest implementation rates in this subgroup, has

been fully implemented in the Russian Federation and North America, and reached high implementation rates in Caucasus and Turkey. The Central Asia, Eastern Europe and South-eastern Europe, in turn, recorded much lower implementation rates.

Figure 13
Implementation rate of Formalities measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021
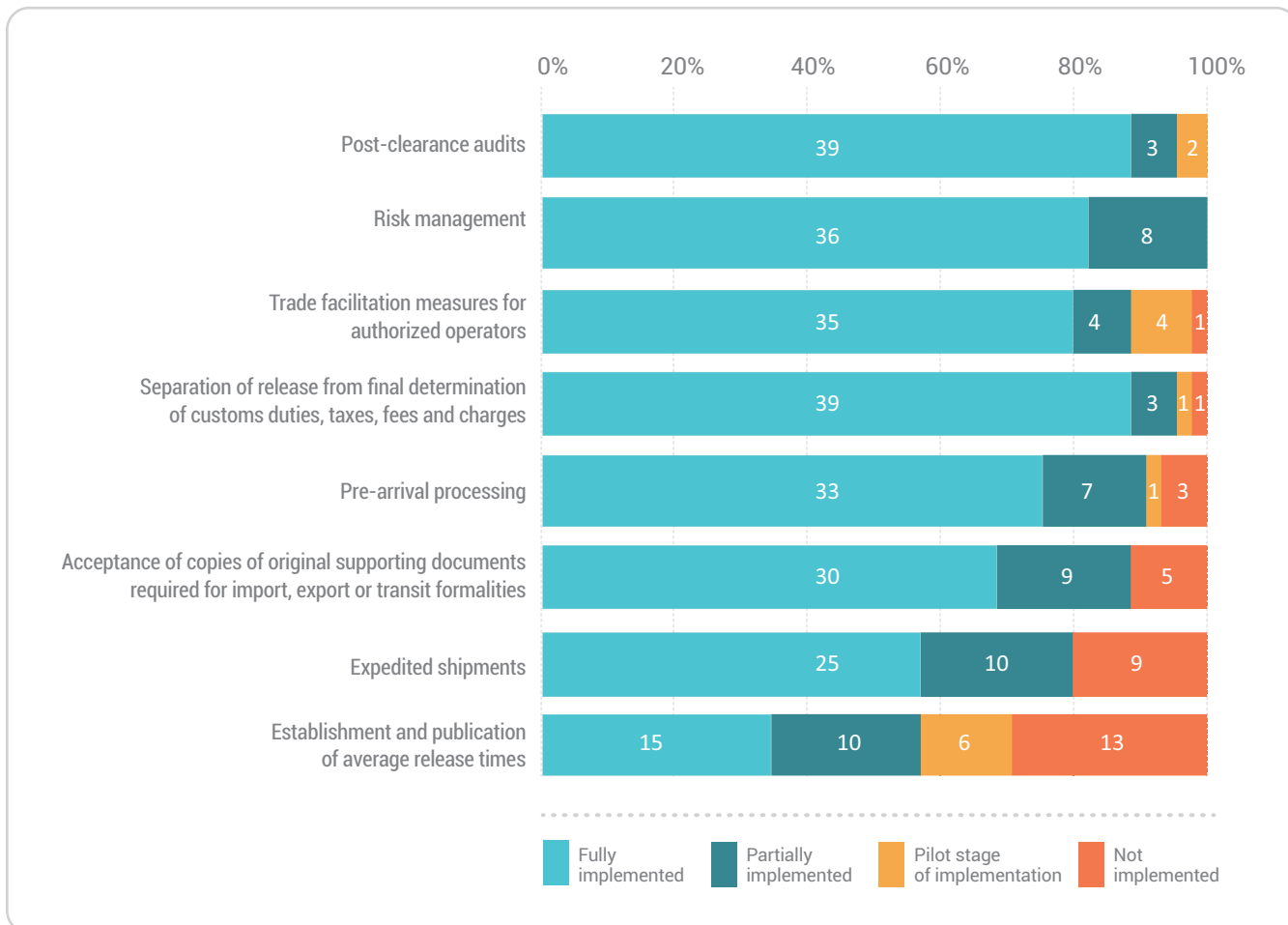
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

3.3 Institutional arrangement and cooperation

The subgroup of Institutional arrangement and cooperation includes three trade facilitation measures common to all respondents, with the average implementation in 2021 of 80% (figure 14). North America achieved full implementation of all three measures, while the Russian Federation and South-eastern Europe each implemented fully two of the three measures.

Figure 14
Implementation rate of Institutional arrangement and cooperation measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
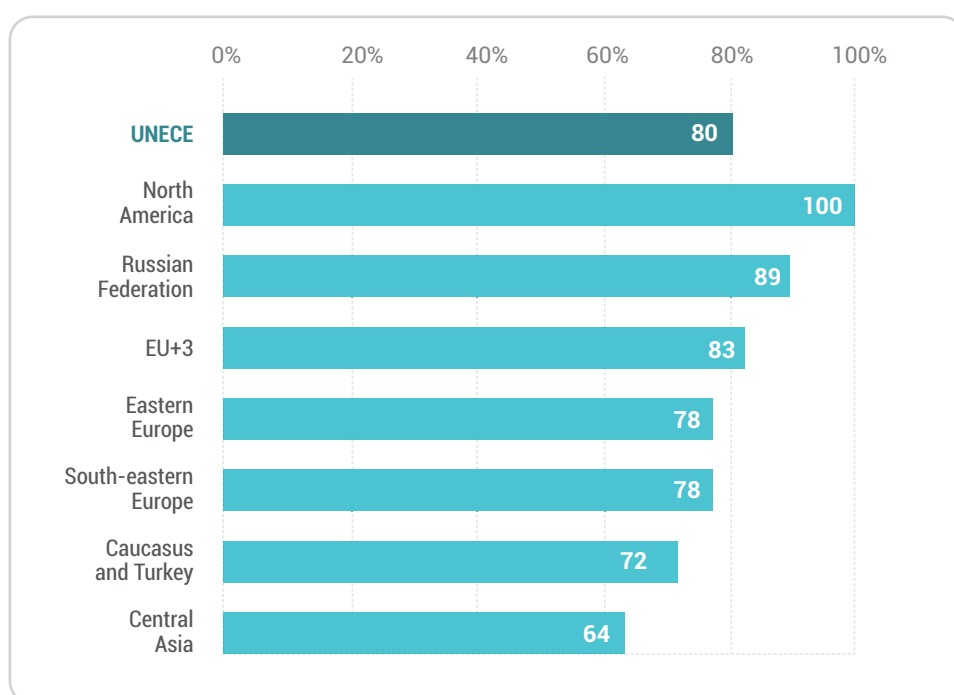
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Note: UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the rates of country groups.

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Figure 15 shows the status of each measure according to the number of countries implementing it. National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation measure reached 90% implementation across the region, while Establishment of a National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body reached 80%, and government agencies delegating controls to customs authorities 70%. While the measure Government agencies delegating controls to Customs authorities has the lowest average rate of implementation, the level of implementation varies widely by country group. The Russian Federation and North America fully implemented it, and two other groups – EU+3 and Eastern Europe – reached high implementation rates. The other three groups – Caucasus and

Turkey, Central Asia and South-eastern Europe – have very low rates of implementation. As one of the key measures for implementation of the WTO TFA as well as for leading national trade facilitation reforms, implementation of Establishment of a national trade facilitation committee or similar body can be greatly facilitated by UN/CEFACT Recommendation 4 on national trade facilitation bodies, Recommendation 40 on consultation approaches and Recommendation 41 on public-private partnerships for trade facilitation (see table 6 at the end of the report).

Figure 15
Implementation rate of Institutional arrangement and cooperation measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
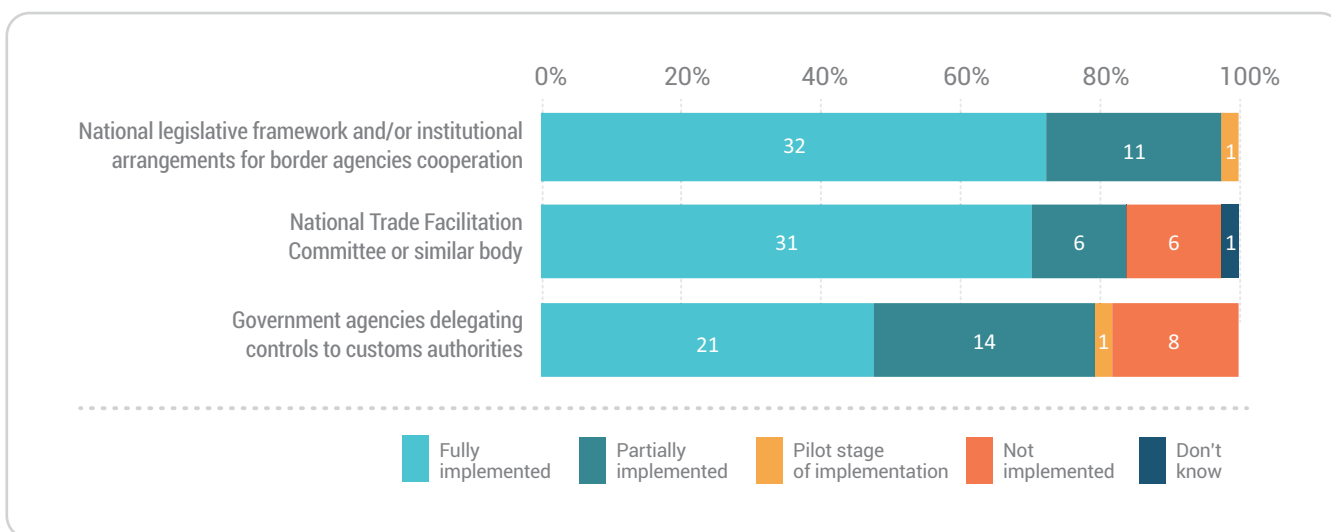
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

3.4 Paperless trade

The Paperless trade subgroup includes nine measures. The measures are related to electronic customs systems, electronic documentation and electronic payments of customs duties. Some of the measures correspond to WTO TFA articles. The measure Electronic Single Window System is linked to Article 10 Formalities Connected with Importation, Exportation and Transit. The measure E-Payment of customs duties and fees corresponds to WTO TFA Article 7, Release and Clearance of Goods.

The implementation rate for the subgroup reached 76% for the region. However, implementation levels varied widely by country group (figure 16).

Figure 16
Implementation of Paperless trade measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
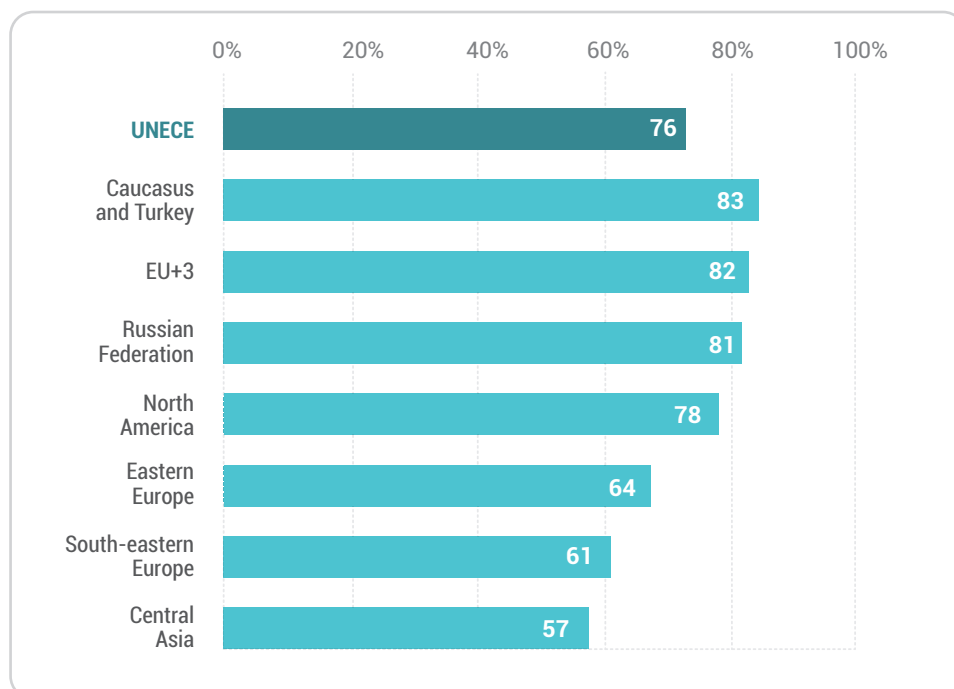
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.
Note: UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the rates for country groups.

Whereas three groups – Caucasus and Turkey; the EU+3 and the Russian Federation – recorded over 80% implementation, followed by North America with 78%, the other two groups reached implementation rates lower than 65%. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including the level of digitalization, ICT infrastructure and regulatory environment, as well as resources and skills availability.

The most implemented Paperless trade measures, reaching over 90% implementation in 2021, include Internet connection available to customs and other trade control agencies, Automated customs system and Electronic submission of customs declarations (figure 17). Other measures, such as the Electronic Single Window measure, are being implemented by 41 of the 44 countries surveyed; only 5 countries have

achieved full implementation – Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Netherlands, North Macedonia and Norway. The establishment of an Electronic Single Window, a key element in digital trade facilitation, can be guided by UN/CEFACT tools, such as Recommendation 33 on Single Window mechanisms, Recommendation 35 on establishing a legal framework for international trade Single Window and Recommendation 36 on Single Window interoperability (see table 6 at the end of the report).

Figure 17
Implementation of Paperless trade measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021 (%)
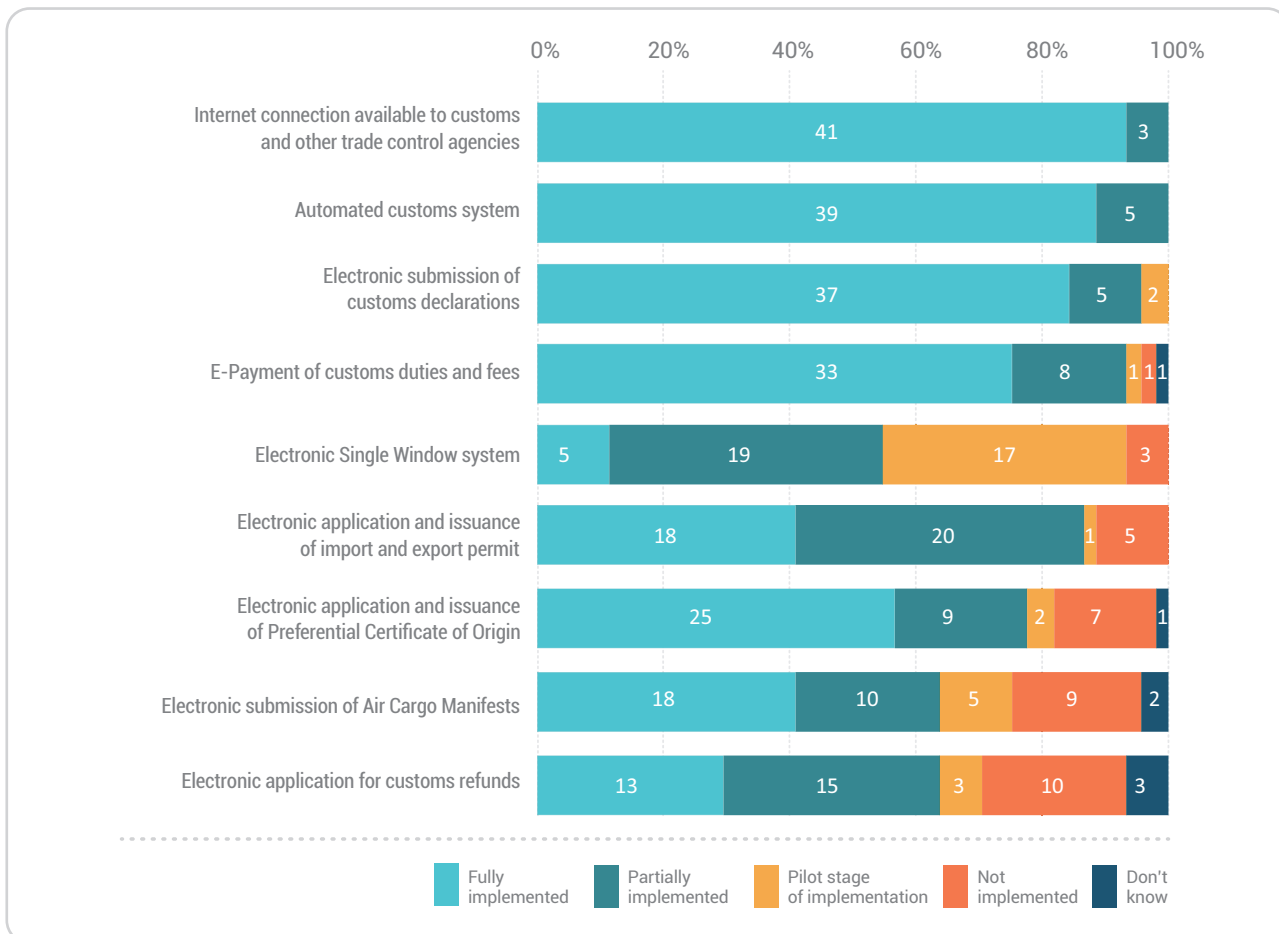
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

The measures that are currently being implemented by the lowest number of countries in the region are Electronic submission of Air Cargo Manifests and Electronic application for customs refunds. The EU+3 group has the highest implementation rate for electronic submission of air cargo manifests.

Most country groups have very low implementation rates of Electronic application for customs refunds. The exceptions are the Russian Federation, which achieved full implementation, and the Caucasus and Turkey, which has a high rate of implementation.

3.5 Cross-border paperless trade

The average implementation rate of Cross-border paperless trade measures in the region reached just 50% in 2021. Of the six measures in this subgroup, the two related to the legal and regulatory environment – Law and regulations for electronic transactions, and Recognized certification authority – have the highest levels of implementation, this could be attributed to the role of these measures in enabling the exchange and legal recognition of trade-related data and documents within a country and among stakeholders in global supply chains.

Figure 18
Implementation rate of Cross-border paperless trade measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
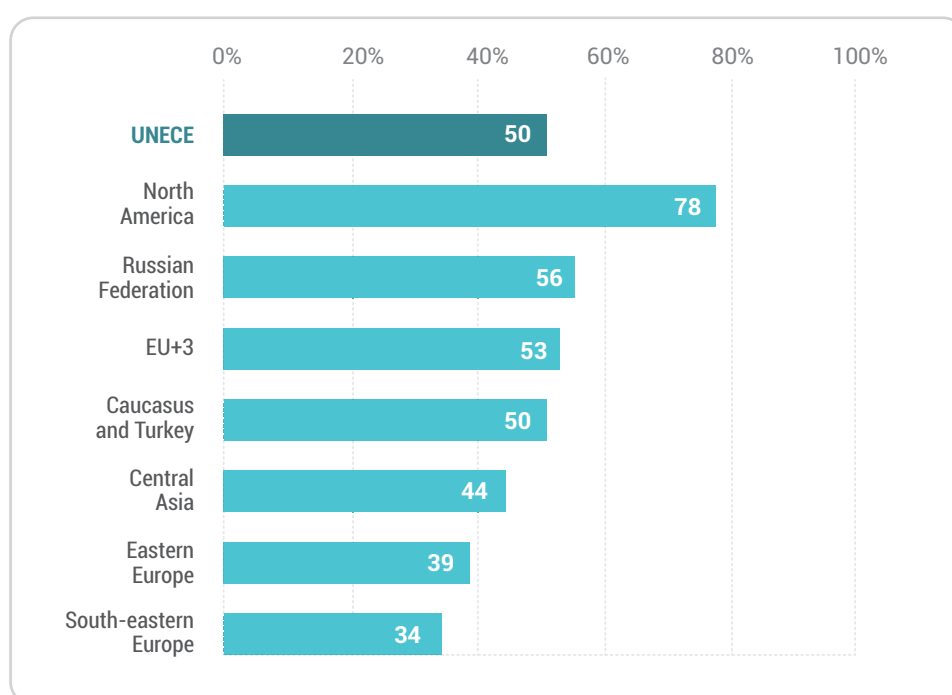
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.
Note: UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the country groups rates.

The two measures related to the legal and regulatory environment – Law and regulations for electronic transactions, and Recognized certification authority – are being implemented by most countries in the region (figure 19).

Figure 19

Implementation rate of Cross-border paperless trade measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021 (%)

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

The other four measures in the subgroup are Electronic exchange of customs declaration, Certificate of Origin and SPS Certificate and Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit. Most country groups have very low level of implementation of these four measures. The exceptions are the Electronic exchange of SPS Certificate implemented fully in North America and the Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit fully implemented in the Russian Federation and North America. The Electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin is the least implemented. Implementation of all the measures in this subgroup can be helped by UN/CEFACT instruments, including Recommendation 14 on authentication of trade documents, Recommendation 35 on establishing a legal framework for an international trade Single Window, Recommendation 33 on Single Window and others (see table 6 at the end of the report).

3.6 Transit facilitation

The Transit Facilitation subgroup includes four measures, three of which correspond to WTO TFA articles: Customs authorities limit the physical inspection of transit goods and use risk assessment is linked to WTO TFA Article 10 Formalities connected with importation, exportation and transit. The measures Supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation and Cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit correspond to WTO TFA Article 11, Freedom of Transit.

The implementation rate for the subgroup reached 86% for the region (figure 20). The Russian Federation fully implemented all measures, while the rate for the EU+3 reached 94%. The lowest level of implementation was recorded in South-eastern Europe (63%).

Figure 20
Implementation rate of Transit facilitation measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
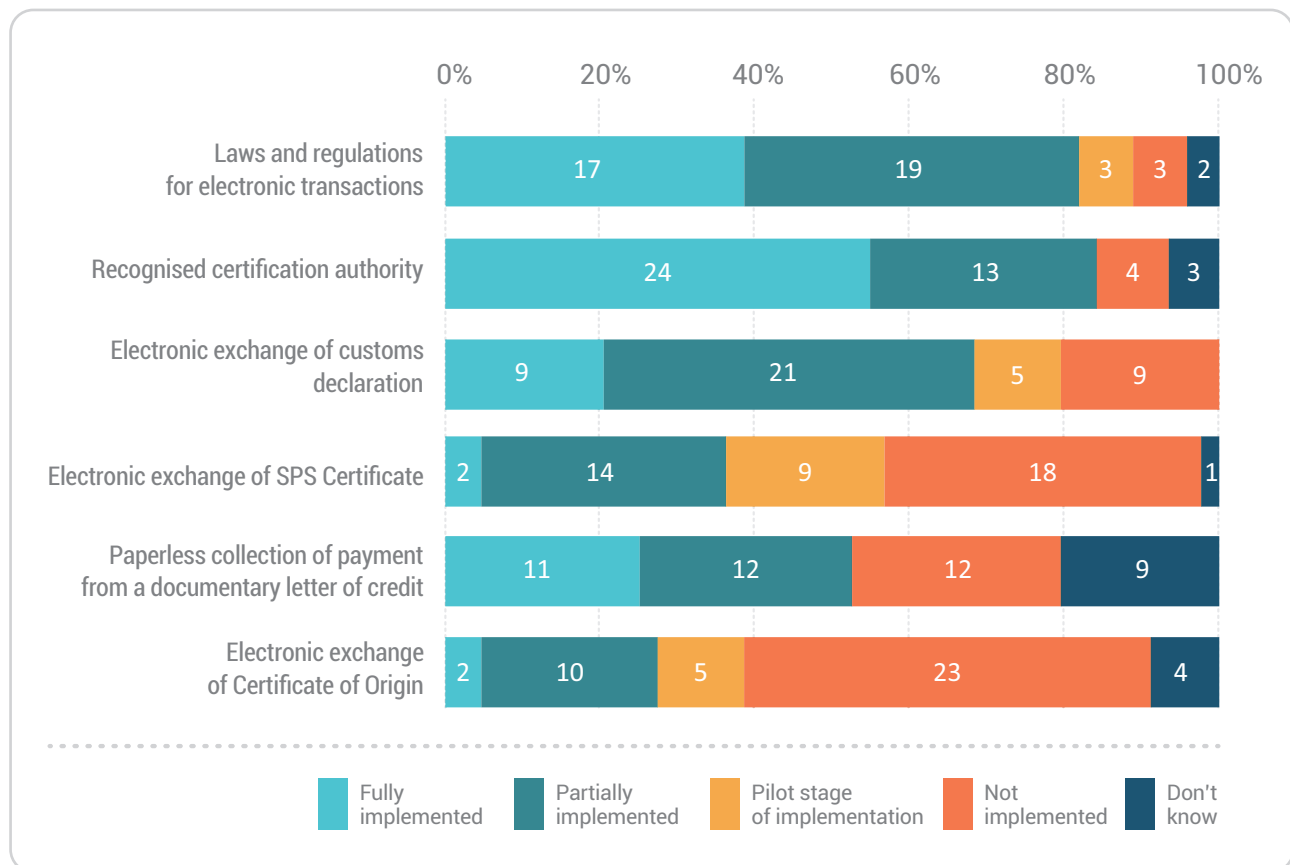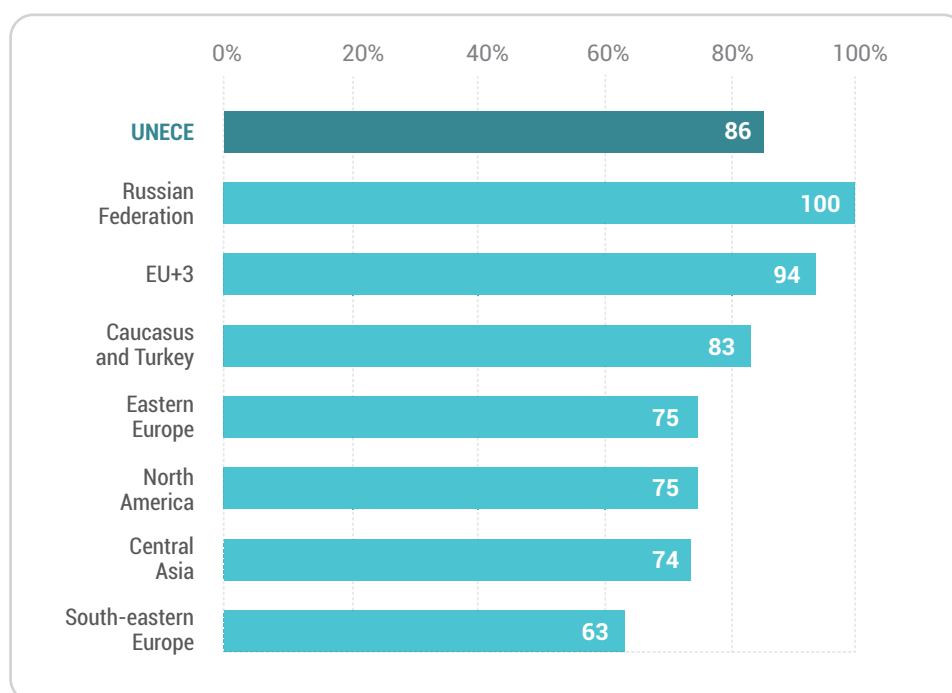

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.
Note: UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the country groups rates.

The measure related to Customs authorities limiting the physical inspections of transit goods and using risk assessment is being implemented by 41 out of 44 countries (figure 21). The measure implemented

by the lowest number of countries is the Transit facilitation agreement. Out of 44 countries, 36 are implementing a transit facilitation agreement either with neighbouring countries or at a regional level.

Figure 21
Implementation rate of Transit facilitation measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021
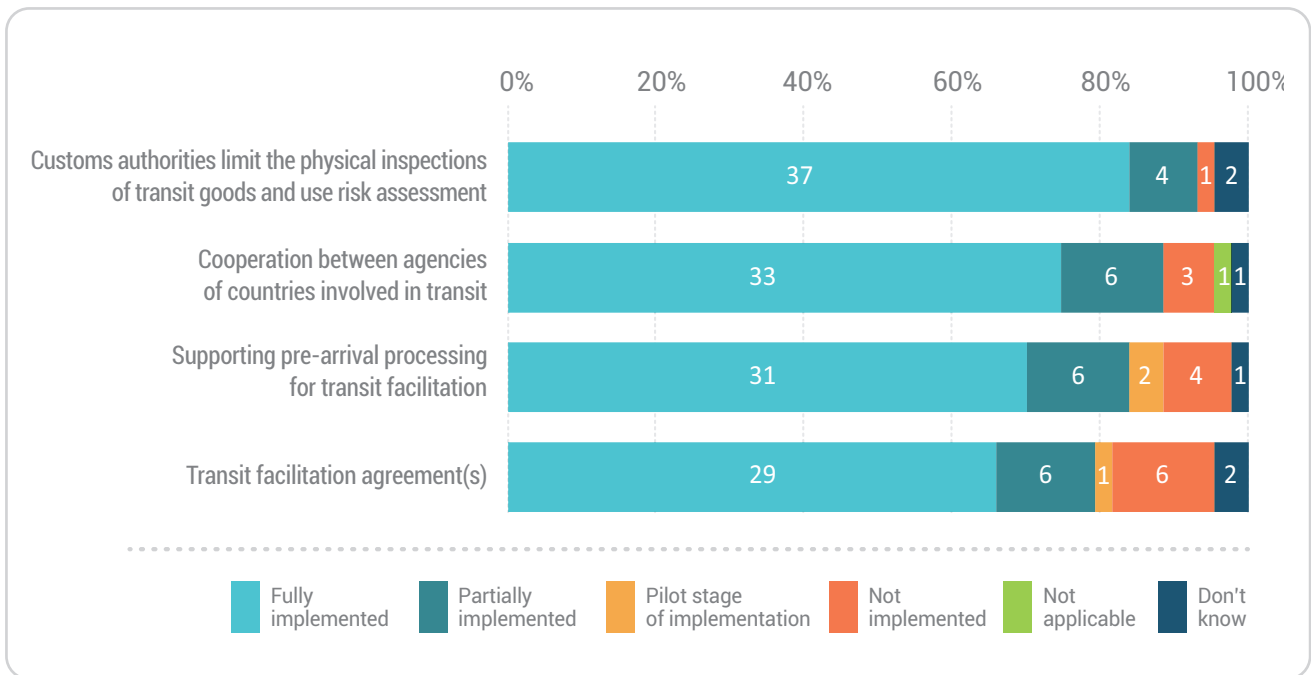
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

3.7 Trade facilitation for SMEs

The Trade facilitation for SMEs subgroup has one of the lowest implementation rates, with an average of only 45% for the region. Among all UNECE country groups, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and South-eastern Europe have the lowest implementation rates of 50%, 47% and 35% respectively.

Given the importance of SMEs in economic development and job creation, increased focus and allocation of resources to the implementation of these measures would contribute to higher trade flows and economic growth in these country groups.

Figure 22
Implementation rate of Trade facilitation for SMEs measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
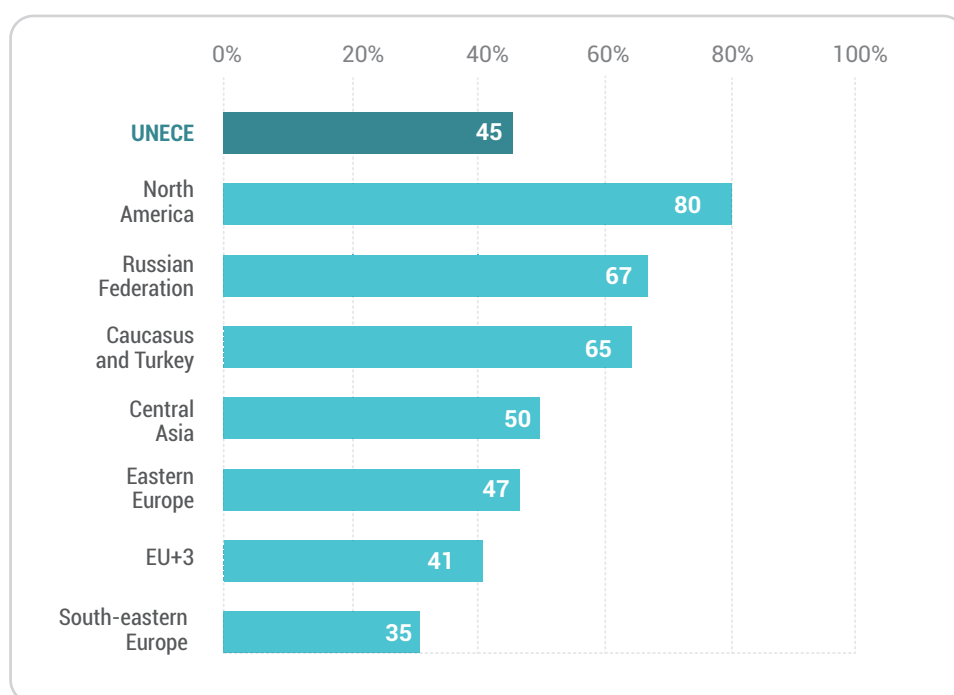
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Note: UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the country groups rates.

The Trade-related information measures for SMEs are implemented by the highest number of countries in the region, compared to the other measures that have various levels of implementation (figure 23).

The Trade-related information measures for SMEs reached a high implementation rate, while the other four measures are less implemented.

Figure 23
Implementation rate of Trade facilitation for SMEs measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021

Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

The least implemented measure is SMEs in AEO scheme. This could be partly attributed to limited capital that SMEs can invest into IT infrastructure, physical security and training of staff. Many governments have found that few SMEs join their authorized trader programmes because of the related costs and administrative burdens of the certification process.

3.8 Agricultural trade facilitation

The Agricultural trade facilitation subgroup includes four measures. The Special treatment given to perishable goods at border crossings relates to the WTO TFA Article 7, Release and clearance of goods.

The implementation rate across the region for the subgroup reached 61% in 2021 (figure 24). Caucasus and Turkey reached the highest implementation in the region at 81%, while Central Asia and Eastern Europe are lagging at 56% and 33%, respectively.

Figure 24
Implementation rate of Agricultural trade facilitation measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
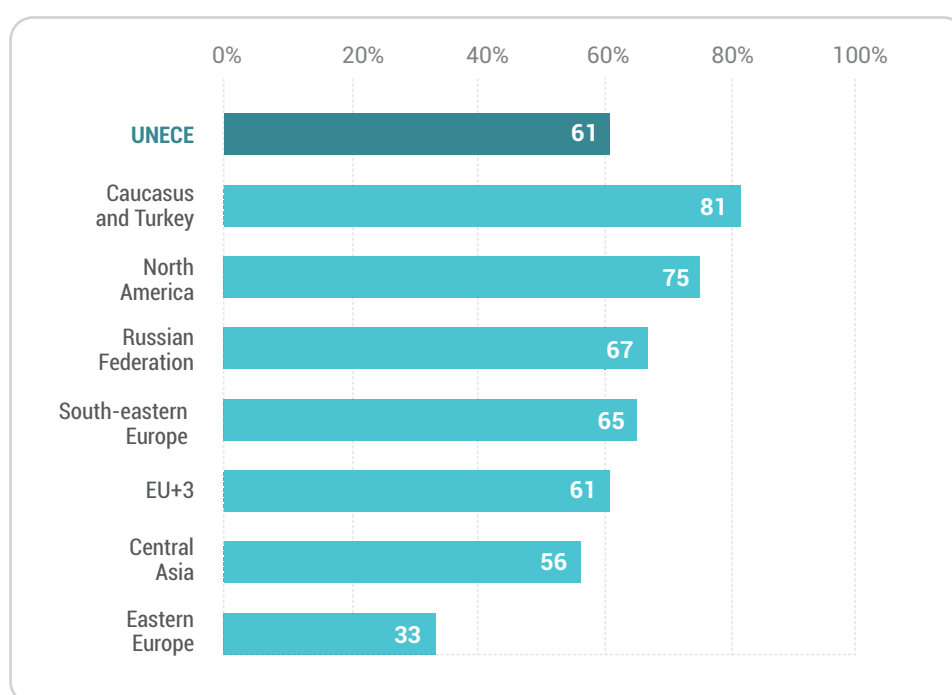
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Note: UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the country groups rates.

The Agricultural Trade measure being implemented by the largest number of countries in the UNECE region is Special treatment for perishable goods, while Testing and laboratory facilities are available or soon to be available to meet SPS requirements of main trading partners is partially or fully implemented in 34 countries (figure 25). National standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS requirements are available or in the process of being developed and established in 30 countries. These results indicate the relatively high importance of the Agricultural trade facilitation measures in the region's economies.

Figure 25

Implementation rate of Agricultural trade facilitation measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021
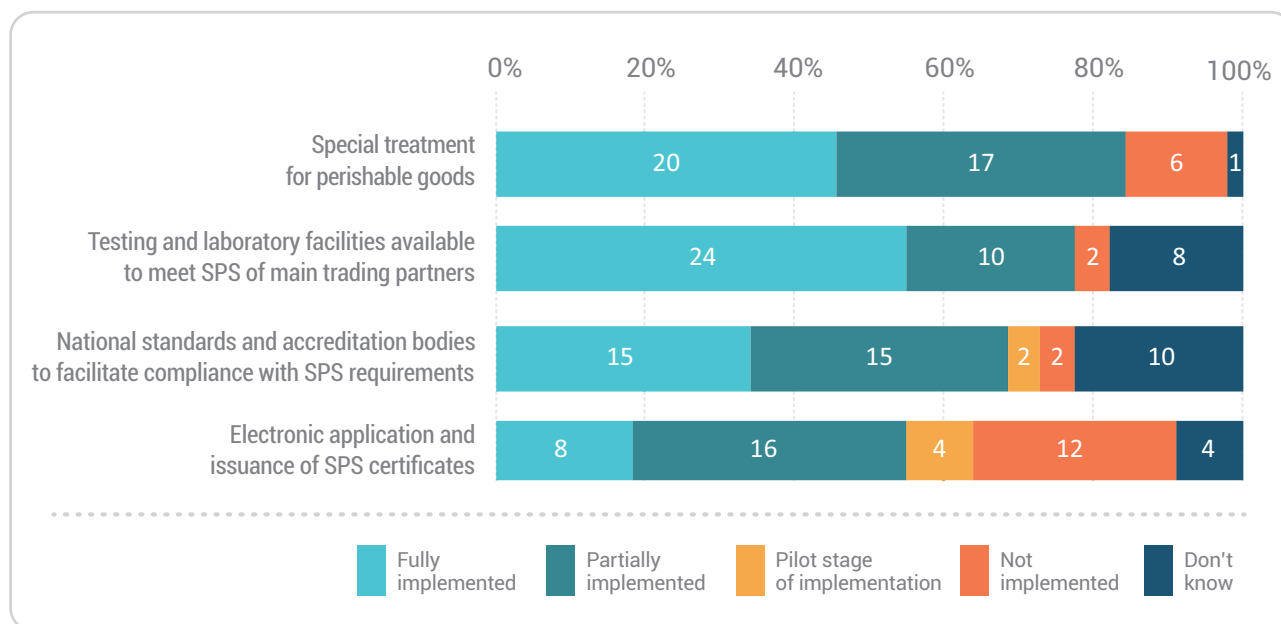
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.
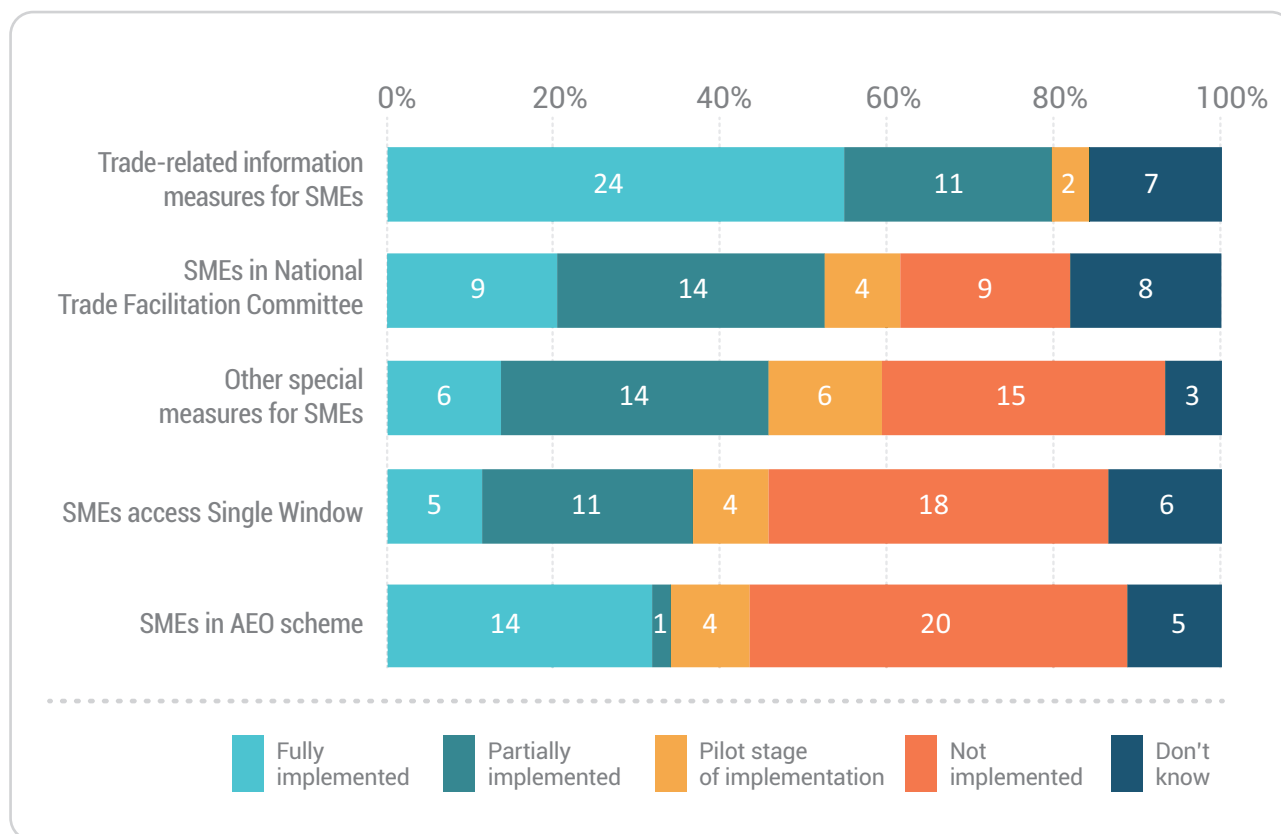
The least implemented measure in the subgroup is the Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates, in progress in only 24 countries. This could be partly attributed to the lack of legal provisions; lack of adequate ICT infrastructure and readiness for plant quarantine or food safety agencies, which are not traditionally oriented to trade transactions; and lack of required skills. Implementation of this measure could be facilitated through the UN/CEFACT e-CERT standard (see table 6 at the end of the report).

3.9 Women in trade facilitation

The Women in trade facilitation subgroup reached an average implementation rate of only 27% in the region (figure 26). Caucasus and Turkey and Eastern Europe are among the country groups that are implementing these measures, but currently have low levels of implementation (31% and 15%).

Figure 26
Implementation rate of Women in trade facilitation measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
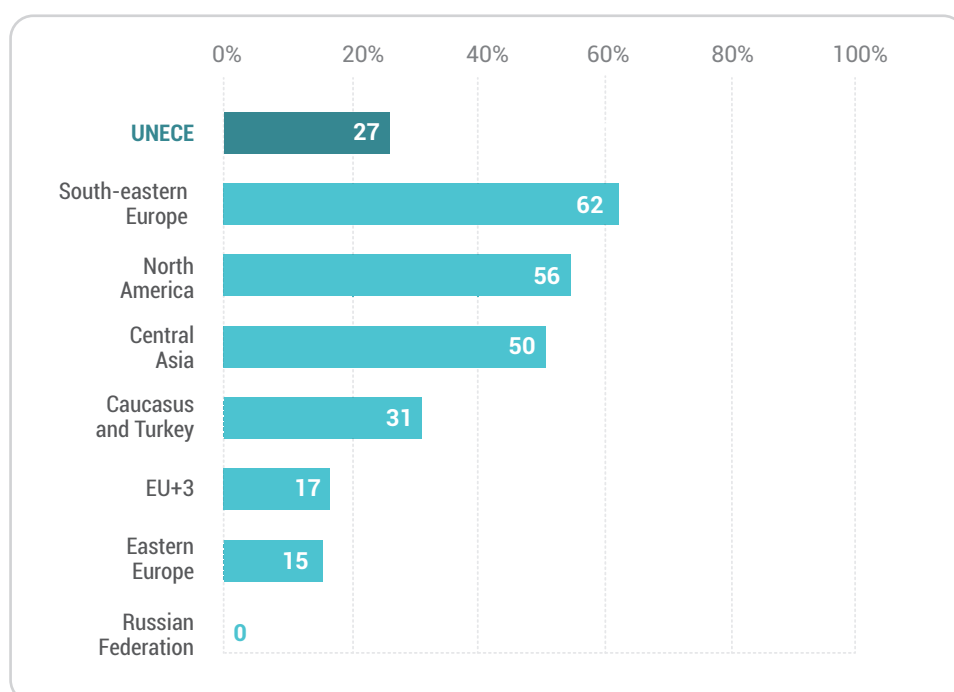
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Note: UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the country groups rates.

The measure Women's membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies is implemented by 20 countries (figure 27). The other two measures are implemented by 19 and 15 countries, respectively.

Figure 27

Implementation rate of Women in trade facilitation measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021
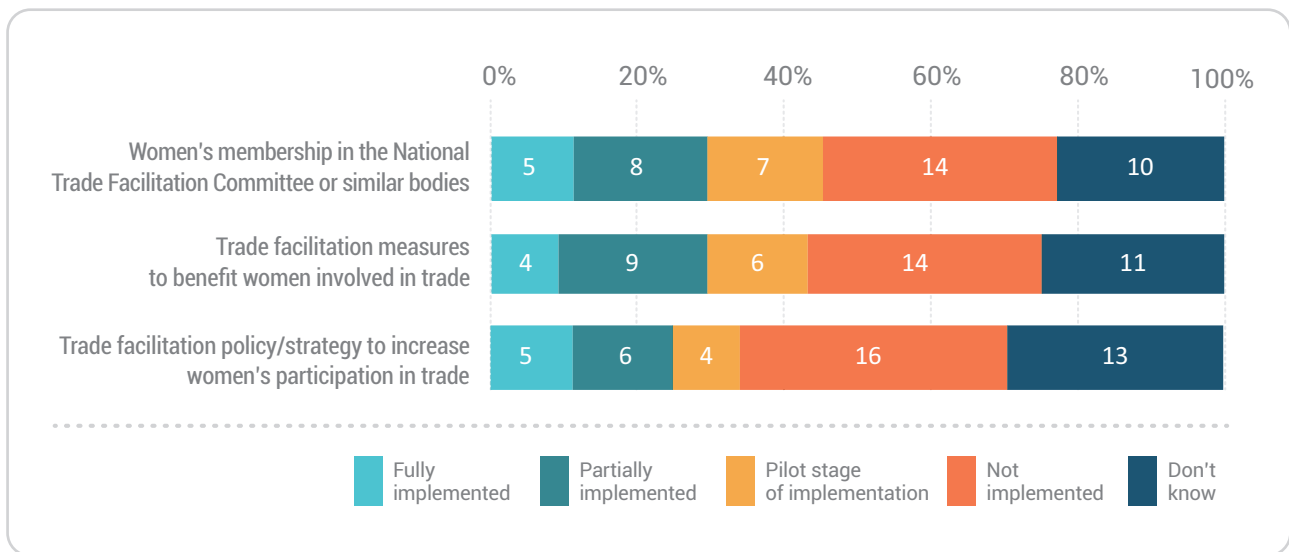
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

A large number of both developed and transition economies in the region responded that they are not aware of whether measures related to Women in trade facilitation are being implemented. This fact indicates that governments and international organizations should give greater attention to enabling women traders to participate more actively in global supply chains.

3.10 Trade finance facilitation

In the subgroup of Trade finance facilitation, implementation reached an average rate of only 24% in the UNECE region (figure 28). The Caucasus and Turkey group has the highest level of implementation at 50%, followed by the EU+3 group at 26%, and the Russian Federation at 22%. The other groups have lower levels of implementation, all under 20% (South-eastern Europe, 18%; Central Asia, 17%; Eastern Europe, 4%). North America did not report implementation of these measures.

Figure 28
Implementation rate of Trade finance facilitation measures, by country group, UNECE, 2021 (%)
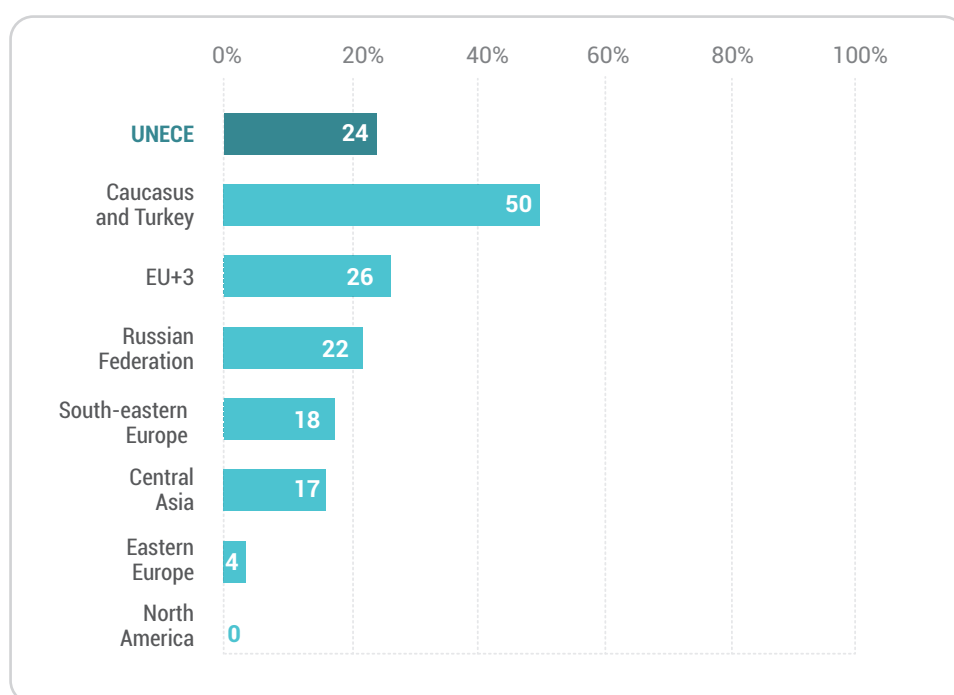
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Note: The UNECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 44 countries that participated in the survey, and it is different than the average of the country groups rates.

Trade finance services are available or being developed in 68% of the countries surveyed (figure 29). Two measures – Customs and/or other regulatory authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain (pilot) projects covering trade finance and Single Window facilitating traders' access to finance – are being addressed by only a small number of countries.

Figure 29
Implementation rate of Trade finance facilitation measures, by number of countries, UNECE, 2021
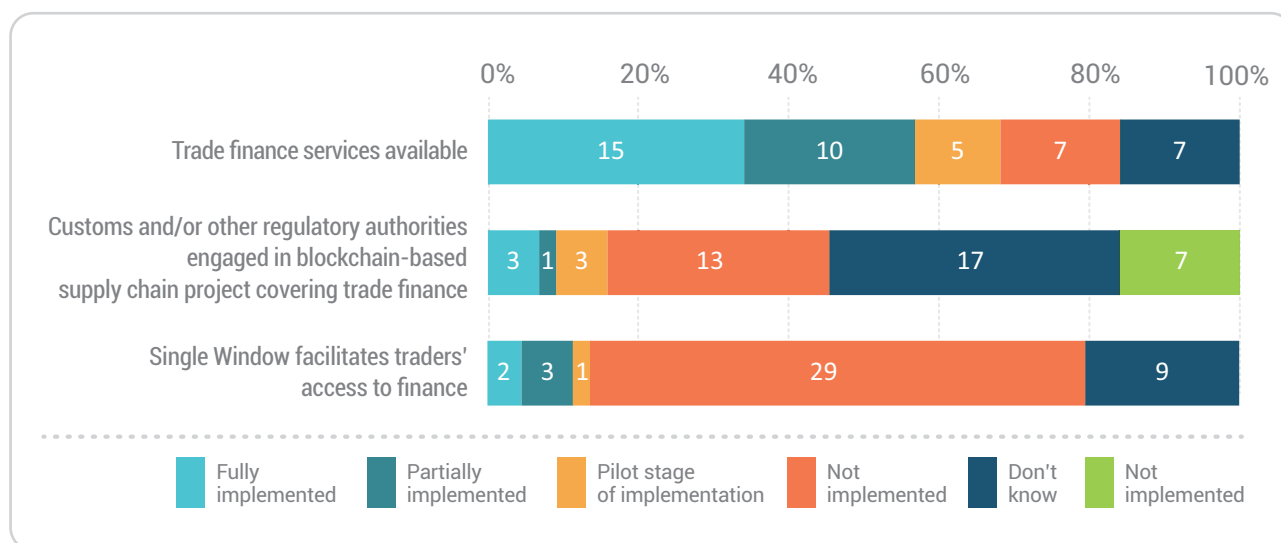
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

The least implemented measure in this subgroup is Single Window facilitates traders' access to finance. This measure is dependent on the implementation of the Paperless trade measure Electronic Single Window system, which has the lowest implementation rate in its subgroup. As highlighted by UNECE, the establishment of a Single Window is a major political reform project that encompasses multiple agencies and other partners, involving business process redesign, document simplification and data harmonization. UN/CEFACT developed Recommendation 33 and detailed guidelines to assist governments and countries' authorities in implementing a Single Window mechanism that brings benefits to both governments and traders.

3.11 Trade facilitation in times of crisis

The five measures included in the Trade facilitation in times of crisis subgroup assess the capacity of governments and customs authorities to implement trade facilitation measures under exceptional emergency circumstances, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and increase preparedness for future emergencies.

A number of countries did not provide responses for this subgroup. However, based on the examples from the responses received, some best practices from the transition economies are provided in box 3. Based on the responses, the average level of implementation of Trade facilitation measures in times of crisis in the UNECE region is 46%. At a country level, the completion rate for those implementing the measures ranges from 13% to 93%.

Box 3
Trade facilitation in times of crisis – Best practices from transition economies

To build resilience and safeguards for future crises, the "Green Corridor" has been formed between the Central European Free Trade Agreement/Western Balkans region and the EU Member States to support trade and transport facilitation and ensure rapid flow of goods in times of pandemic and beyond. Some crossing points at which customs and other inspection agencies are present have been designated as points at which the traffic flow of all essential goods is guaranteed 24/7, forming the so-called Green Corridor in the region. Prioritized movement of essential goods is secured through electronic dissemination of pre-arrival information within the IT system called SEED (System of Electronic Exchange of Data), which is in use in the whole region.

Cross-border paperless trade measures to facilitate trade in times of pandemic have been implemented on a temporary basis in Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia and on a permanent basis in North Macedonia. For example, Georgia issued guidelines on the use and exchange of the electronic certificate of origin, EURO 1, and the Republic of Moldova established a legal provision to allow for electronic certificates of preferential origin of the goods.

A number of countries have implemented Publication of emergency trade facilitation measures online to facilitate trade in times of crises and emergencies. The Republic of Moldova announced a new measure for Digitalization of the economy and public services, supported by a large number of ministries and government authorities, and also a new initiative to support in particular the digitalization of SMEs. It also launched a virtual platform for SMEs to facilitate e-commerce, to mitigate the effect of the disruption in supply chains during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Economy and Infrastructure's initiative to support digitalization of SMEs aims to expand their access to both the domestic and the global market.

In order to combat and respond to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Kyrgyzstan has undertaken a number of measures. Among others, it established the State Council to implement economic measures aimed at minimizing the consequences of external shocks and stimulating economic development. A "Green Corridor" was created for the import of food and essential goods.

Whereas two measures – Online publication of emergency trade facilitation measures and Coordination between countries on emergency trade facilitation measures – have reached relatively high implementation rates of 78% and 69% respectively (figure 30), other measures that are also critical to handling disruptions in the movement of goods across borders have low rates of implementation. These measures include Agency in place to manage trade facilitation measures in times of crises and emergencies (55%), Implementation of Additional trade facilitation measures to facilitate trade in times of emergencies (54%), and Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises (52%).

Figure 30
Implementation rate of Trade facilitation in times of crisis measures, UNECE, 2021 (%)
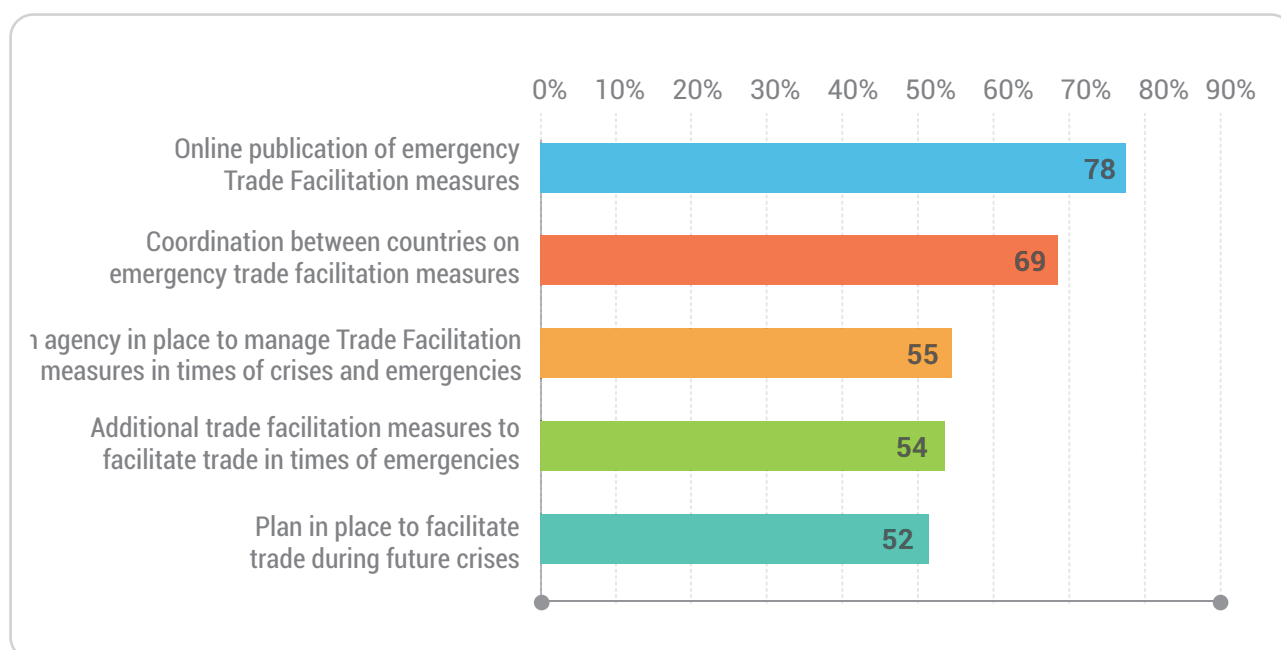
Source: UNECE, based on United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2021.

Box 4
UNECE support to address long term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

of the UN's COVID-19 response: "Transport and Trade Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics", implemented jointly by the UNRCs and UNCTAD.

As part of the project, UNECE builds on the UN/CEFACT Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model to develop specific implementation tools (e.g., multimodal bill of lading) to further the harmonization of standards for the digitalization of data and document exchange in multimodal transport. These implementation tools, available free of charge, and pilot-tested along selected trade and transport corridors (e.g., from Belarus to Central Europe) will help foster the interoperability and data exchange between documents, modes of transport and sectors.

A series of UNECE resources for addressing the long term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic are available here: https://unece.org/trade/uncefact/covid-19-response

Source: UNECE

The survey results show there is an urgent need to focus on enhancing the preparedness of trade facilitation processes, authorities and systems to mitigate the effects of future shocks on regional and global supply chains.

4.

Conclusion
and Way Forward

This report presents the survey results on trade facilitation measures in 11 subgroups, covering 44 economies from the seven country groups of the UNECE region. For each subgroup the report highlights the progress and the challenges related to implementation of the specific measures.

The findings provide the base for the way forward in engaging the UNECE governments and international organizations in accelerating trade facilitation implementation to contribute to sustainable development, including its economic, social and environmental dimensions, as well as to enhance preparedness of trade facilitation in times of emergencies.

Recommendations

Trade Facilitation has an essential role to play in fostering a resilient, sustainable and inclusive post-pandemic recovery. Simplifying, harmonizing, standardizing, and digitalizing trade procedures can facilitate participation in the global and regional value chains criss-crossing the planet and the UNECE region and help economies "build back better".

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 Trade facilitation in times of crisis measures surveyed that have low levels of implementation are also critical to mitigating future disruptions in global supply chains in emergencies. These measures include Agency in place to manage trade facilitation in times of crises and emergencies, Additional trade facilitation measures to facilitate trade in times of emergencies, and Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises.

Digitalization can help enhance resilience in preparation for future crises. During the pandemic, the Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless tradem measures – specifically, exchanging documents electronically – proved critical to mitigating disruptions in global supply chains and keeping trade flowing. Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade measures can also contribute to reducing trade costs and streamlining trade-related processes, and are also critical to enhancing preparedness in times of emergencies.

The currently low implementation rates of digital trade facilitation measures call for greater attention to and engagement on this area of policymaking. While some of the countries have high implementation rates of digital trade facilitation measures, the average in the region is low. Caucasus and Turkey, Eastern Europe and South-eastern Europe reported low implementation rates. This could be related to the low level of digitalization, the lack of adequate ICT infrastructure, challenging regulatory environments or gaps in resources and skills. There is a need to understand better the main factors that impede the implementation and to address the obstacles. UNECE tools, such as UN/CEFACT Recommendation 33 detailed guidelines, as well as targeted, needs-based technical assistance and capacity building can help accelerate the implementation of Single Window mechanisms that bring benefits for both governments and traders.

Trade facilitation can also increase the participation of SMEs, including women-owned and women-led businesses, in global value chains. To reap the benefits and contribute effectively to the achievement of several Sustainable Development Goals e.g., SDG 1, No poverty; SDG 2, Zero hunger; SDG 5, Gender equality; SDG 8, Decent work and economic growth – support is required to enable the transition economies to accelerate the pace of implementation. Assisting SMEs in complying with trade procedures and facilitating greater inclusion of SMEs and women in National Trade Facilitation Committees, as recommended by UNECE Recommendation No. 4 (National Trade Facilitation Bodies), are possible avenues for action.

Developing a national trade facilitation roadmap can provide countries with a strategic vision with a specific time-frame. A national trade facilitation roadmap, which is time-bound, measurable and flexible-enough to cater to ever-changing need of minimizing formalities and documentation requirements can help countries develop plans and review progress in trade facilitation. Such a roadmap should be based on existing and planned policy priorities, need for capacity-building support and technical assistance, and other national-level strategic priorities (economic, social or environmental). This strategic document can help guide countries in their continuous improvement of trade facilitation by minimizing formalities and documentation requirements as mentioned in the WTO TFA Article 10.1. The UNECE Guide to Drafting a National Trade Facilitation Roadmap is a useful resource in this regard. The UN/CEFACT instruments can facilitate implementation of the roadmap (box 5, table 6)

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. Such cooperation can facilitate harmonization, interoperability and mutual recognition of standards and practices between trading partners. The process of developing and rolling out normative instruments, including through the UNECE-hosted UN/CEFACT, which has global membership, offers a promising starting point (see box 5 and table 6 for UN/CEFACT instruments for digital and sustainable trade facilitation). Countries and development partners are called upon to engage in and support such normative development, including on cutting-edge issues such as blockchain technology, the internet of things or artificial intelligence.

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. Such cooperation can also help foster sharing of knowledge and diffusion of innovative technologies associated with greater digitalization. UNECE has long-standing experience in supporting the organization's 17 programme countries in Central Asia, the Southern Caucasus, the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. Through its technical assistance pillar, UNECE stands ready, with other trade and development partners, to respond to this call.

Box 5
International best practices – UN/CEFACT standards for digital and sustainable trade facilitation: a common language and common principles for international trade

The digitalization of trade facilitation and countries' quest for increased global competitiveness in support of sustainable development create a dynamic and rapidly changing environment for trade facilitation. Adhering to international best practices for the simplification, harmonization and standardization of regulatory practices and digitalization, including cross-border exchange of electronic trade data, can help countries address challenges arising from this dynamic.

International instruments, including recommendations and standards such as those developed by UN/CEFACT, are tools available to move towards alignment and, eventually, harmonization of trade facilitation practices.

UN/CEFACT has been a pioneer in the development of recommendations, e-business standards and guidance material. During the past four decades UN/CEFACT has developed about 50 trade facilitation recommendations and hundreds of e-business standards, technical specifications and guidance materials on electronic exchange of trade data. These instruments reflect best practices in trade procedures and in data and documentary requirements. They are continuously reviewed, adopted by UNECE member States, and available, free of charge, for the global trade facilitation community. UN/CEFACT instruments should be the first point of reference for the dynamic journey towards digital and sustainable trade facilitation.

Table 6 maps some of the key instruments against the measures in the survey and the articles of the WTO TFA. It is noteworthy that the United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport Standard (UN/EDIFACT) is heavily used around the globe for electronic exchange of trade data by the shipping industry. By far, it is the most widely used e-business standard developed by UN/CEFACT.

Table 6
UN/CEFACT instruments

	Subgroup	Measure in the Survey Questionnaire	Relevant TFA Article	UN/CEFACT Recommendation, Standard or Guideline
	Transparency (5 measures)	Publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet	1.2	Rec 38 – Trade Information Portals
		Stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)	2.2	Rec 40 – Consultation Approaches Rec 41 – Public-Private Partnerships in Trade Facilitation

	Subgroup	Measure in the Survey Questionnaire	Relevant TFA Article	UN/CEFACT Recommendation, Standard or Guideline
General trade facilitation measures		Advance publication/ notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation (e.g., 30 days prior)	2.1	Rec 38 – Trade Information Portals
		Advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods	3	
		Independent appeal mechanism (for traders to appeal customs rulings and the rulings of other relevant trade control agencies)	4	
	Formalities (8 measures	Risk management (as a basis for deciding whether a shipment will be physically inspected or not)	7.4	Rec 18 – Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures White Paper on Integrated Track and Trace for Multimodal Transportation
		Pre-arrival processing	7.1	Rec 15 – Simpler Shipping Marks
		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	Rec 42 – Establishment of a Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism (TTFMM)
		Trade facilitation measures for authorized operators	7.7	Rec 37 – Single Submission Portal

	Subgroup	Measure in the Survey Questionnaire	Relevant TFA Article	UN/CEFACT Recommendation, Standard or Guideline
General trade facilitation measures		Expedited shipments	7.8	Rec 18 – Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures
		Acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export or transit formalities	10.2.1	Rec 13 – Facilitation of Identified Legal Problems in Import Clearance Procedures
	Institutional arrangement and cooperation (5 measures)	Establishment of a National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body	23	Rec 4 – National Trade Facilitation Bodies Rec 40 – Consultation Approaches Rec 41 – Public-Private Partnerships in Trade Facilitation
		National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation	8	Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability
		Government agencies delegating border controls to customs authorities		Technical Note on Terminology of Single Window
		Alignment of working days and hours with neighbouring countries at border crossings	8.2(a)	Technical Note on Terminology of Single Window
		Alignment of formalities and procedures with neighbouring countries at border crossings	8.2(b)	Technical Note on Terminology of Single Window
		Transit facilitation agreement(s) with neighbouring country(ies)		eCMR (Electronic Consignment Note) Executive Guide – Transboundary Movement of Wastes

	Subgroup	Measure in the Survey Questionnaire	Relevant TFA Article	UN/CEFACT Recommendation, Standard or Guideline
	Transit facilitation (4 measures	Customs authorities limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment	10.5	[White Paper on Integrated Track and Trace for Multimodal Transportation](#)
		Supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation	11.9	[Rec 18 – Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures](#)
		Cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit	11.16	[Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability](#)
Digital trade facilitation measures	**Paperless trade (10 measures)**	Automated customs system (e.g. ASYCUDA)		
		Internet connection available to customs and other trade control agencies at border crossings		[Rec 41 – Public-Private Partnerships in Trade Facilitation](#)
		Electronic Single Window system	10.4	[Rec 33 – Single Window](#) [Rec 35 – Establishing a Legal Framework for International Trade Single Window](#) [Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability](#)
		Electronic submission of customs declarations		[Rec 33 – Single Window Recommendation](#)
		Electronic application and issuance of import and export permits		[Rec 18 – Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures](#) [Rec 33 – Single Window Recommendation](#)

	Subgroup	Measure in the Survey Questionnaire	Relevant TFA Article	UN/CEFACT Recommendation, Standard or Guideline
Digital trade facilitation measures	**Paperless trade (10 measures)**	Electronic submission of sea cargo manifests		[Rec 12 – Measures to Facilitate Maritime Transport Documents Procedures](#) [Rec 37 – Single Submission Portals (SSPs)](#) [Rec 33 – Single Window](#) [E-business Standards –Multimodal Waybill](#) [E-business Standards – Maritime Bill of Lading](#)
		Electronic submission of air cargo manifests		[E-business Standards – Air Waybill E-business Standards](#) (available soon)
		Electronic application and issuance of Preferential Certificate of Origin		[Rec 33 – Single Window](#)
		E-payment of customs duties and fees	7.2	[Rec 33 – Single Window](#)
		Electronic application for customs refunds		[Rec 33 – Single Window](#)
	Cross-border paperless trade (6 measures)	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions are in place (e.g., e-commerce law, e-transaction law)		[Rec 31 – Electronic Commerce Agreement](#) [Rec 35 – Establishing a Legal Framework for International Trade Single Window](#)
		Recognized certification authority issuing digital certificates to traders to conduct electronic transactions		[Rec 14 – Authentication of Trade Documents](#)

	Subgroup	Measure in the Survey Questionnaire	Relevant TFA Article	UN/CEFACT Recommendation, Standard or Guideline
Sustainable trade facilitation measures		Electronic exchange of customs declaration		[Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability](#)
		Electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin		[Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability](#)
		Electronic exchange of SPS Certificate		[Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability](#) [Electronic SPS Certificate (ECert)](#)
		Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit		
		Trade-related information measures for SMEs		[Rec 38 – Trade Information Portals](#) [White Paper on Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)](#)
	Trade facilitation for SMEs (5 measures)	SMEs in AEO scheme (i.e., government has developed specific measures that enable SMEs to benefit more easily from the AEO scheme)		[White Paper on Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)](#)
		SMEs access Single Window (i.e., government has taken actions to make a Single Window more easily accessible to SMEs; e.g., by providing technical consultation and training services to SMEs on registering and using the facility)		[Rec 33 – Single Window](#) [Rec 35 – Establishing a legal framework for international trade Single Window](#) [Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability](#) [White Paper on Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)](#)

58

	Subgroup	Measure in the Survey Questionnaire	Relevant TFA Article	UN/CEFACT Recommendation, Standard or Guideline
Sustainable trade facilitation measures	**Agricultural trade facilitation (4 measures)**	SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee (i.e., government has taken actions to ensure that SMEs are well represented and made key members of National Trade Facilitation Committees)		Rec 4 – National Trade Facilitation Bodies Rec 40 – Consultation Approaches
		Other special measures for SMEs		White Paper on Women in Trade Facilitation
		Testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS requirements of main trading partners		
		National standards and accreditation bodies are established to facilitate compliance with SPS requirements		
		Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates		Electronic SPS Certificate (ECert)
		Special treatment for perishable goods at border crossings	7.9	White Paper on Integrated Track and Trace for Multimodal Transport
	Women in trade facilitation (3 measures)	Trade facilitation policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade		White Paper on Women in Trade Facilitation
		Trade facilitation measures to benefit women involved in trade		White Paper on Women in Trade Facilitation
		Women's membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies		White Paper on Women in Trade Facilitation

	Subgroup	Measure in the Survey Questionnaire	Relevant TFA Article	UN/CEFACT Recommendation, Standard or Guideline
Other trade facilitation measures	**Trade finance facilitation (3 measures)**	Single Window facilitates traders' access to finance		White Paper on Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT) Green Paper on Trade Finance as a Tool for Trade Facilitation
		Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance		White Paper on Blockchain in Trade Facilitation
		Variety of trade finance services available		White Paper on Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)
	Trade facilitation in times of crisis (5 measures	Agency in place to manage trade facilitation in times of crises and emergencies		Rec 44 – Cross-Border Facilitation Measures for Disaster Relief Rec 47 – White Paper Pandemic Crisis Trade-Related Response
		Online publication of emergency trade facilitation measures		Rec 44 – Cross-border Facilitation Measures for Disaster Relief Rec 47 – White Paper Pandemic Crisis Trade-Related Response Rec 38 – Trade Information Portals

	Subgroup	Measure in the Survey Questionnaire	Relevant TFA Article	UN/CEFACT Recommendation, Standard or Guideline
Other trade facilitation measures		Coordination between countries on emergency trade facilitation measures		Rec 44 – Cross-Border Facilitation Measures for Disaster Relief Rec 47 – White Paper Pandemic Crisis Trade-related Response
		Additional trade facilitation measures to facilitate trade in times of emergencies		Rec 44 – Cross-Border Facilitation Measures for Disaster Relief
		Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises		Rec 44 – Cross-Border Facilitation Measures for Disaster Relief Rec 47 – White Paper Pandemic Crisis Trade-related Response

Annex – Survey Methodology

The United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2021 was prepared according to the final list of commitments included in the WTO TFA supplemented by forward-looking measures to be implemented under the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border paperless trade in Asia and the Pacific.

The survey, conducted by the five UNRCs, comprises 58 detailed common trade facilitation measures, categorized into 4 groups and 11 subgroups. The first group, General trade facilitation measures, includes WTO TFA measures under 4 subgroups: Transparency, Formalities, Institutional cooperation and arrangement, and Transit facilitation. The second group, Digital trade facilitation measures, includes two subgroups, Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade. The third group, Sustainable trade facilitation measures, includes three subgroups, Trade facilitation for SMEs, Agricultural trade facilitation, and Women in trade facilitation. The fourth group, Other trade facilitation measures include Trade finance facilitation and Trade facilitation in times of crisis. The Trade finance facilitation subgroup was introduced in 2019; it was developed in cooperation with the International Chamber of Commerce Banking Commission. In 2021, a new group has been introduced to assess trade facilitation in times of crisis, including immediate and long-term measures aimed at addressing crisis and pandemic situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The overall scope of the survey goes beyond the measures included in the WTO TFA and includes trade facilitation measures that would support the implementation of the WTO TFA, such as in the subgroups of Paperless trade and Cross-border paperless trade. Most of the surveyed measures included in the Sustainable Trade Facilitation group are also not specifically included in the WTO TFA, except for some of the Agricultural trade facilitation measures. These measures will contribute to increase participation of SMEs and women-led businesses in global value chains, leading to increased trade flows and ultimately sustainable economic growth. The five measures in the new subgroup of Trade facilitation in times of crisis evaluate countries' preparedness related to trade facilitation in times of emergencies.

Table A 1
The three-step approach to survey data collection and validation

Step 1.

Data submission by experts: The UNECE Secretariat sent the survey instrument to trade facilitation experts and committees (governments, permanent missions, the private sector, and academia) in UNECE countries to gather preliminary information. The questionnaire was also made publicly available online and disseminated with the support of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT), ITC and UNCTAD. In some cases, the questionnaire was also sent to relevant national trade facilitation authorities or agencies and regional trade facilitation partners or organizations. This first step took place roughly between January and April 2021. In many cases, data in one questionnaire may come from various respondents as it is shared by the main respondent with other subject-matter experts. The information is collated by the main respondent and then it is shared with respective UNRCs.

Step 2.

Data verification by the UNECE Secretariat: The UNECE Secretariat double-checked the data collected in step 1. Desk research and data sharing among UNRCs and survey partners were carried out to check the accuracy of data. Online 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 March and April 2021.

Step 3.

Data validation by national governments: The UNECE Secretariat sent the completed questionnaire to each national government to ensure that the government had the opportunity to review the data set and provide any additional information. This feedback from national governments was incorporated in order to finalize the data set. Step 3 took place between April and June 2021.

Notes

1 Andorra is not a EU country, but it is part of the European Customs Union. For trade facilitation, it maintains the rules and regulations according to the Customs Union. Andorra has an observer status in the WTO.

2 USA is the other member State in this country group but did not participate in the survey through ECA, ECE or ESCAP.

3 Andorra is not a member country of the European Union, but it is part of the European Customs Union. For trade facilitation, it maintains rules and regulations according to the Customs Union. Andorra has observer status in the WTO.

4 The United States of America is the other member State in this country group but did not participate in this year's Survey. Hence there is only one country in this group.

5 All implementation rates have been rounded.

6 The average implementation was recorded as 72.6% in the 2019 report. Since the publication of the report, scoring adjustments were made based on the 2019 data and the revised rate for 2019 is 71.7%.

7 General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (1994). https://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/gatt47.pdf.

Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

The UNECE Regional Report 2021 on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation has been produced based on the results of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation. The Global Survey is a joint initiative under the Joint United Nations Regional Commissionsí Approach, agreed in Beirut in January 2010 by the Executive Secretaries of the five Regional Commissions. The fourth version of the Survey was conducted between February and June 2021 and resulted in responses from 44 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE).

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