### UNECE

## Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation

**UNECE Regional Report 2024** 





## Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: ECE Regional Report 2024



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### **Foreword**

Global trade continues to grow, albeit at a slow pace. Today's trade environment is characterized by ongoing supply chain disruptions caused by multiple crises, including environmental, health and geopolitical ones. Today, more than ever, trade facilitation is essential. Trade facilitation can help address such disruptions, create an enabling environment for trade, and harness the power of digitalization - ultimately contributing to sustainable and inclusive economic growth. This fifth edition of the United Nations (UN) Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Regional Report, based on the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023, highlights the progress made by the ECE member States in this important policy area. Compared to the 2021 survey, the level of trade facilitation implementation in the ECE region improved from 76% to 80%.

Covering 60 trade facilitation measures under 13 categories, the report reviews progress in simplifying and harmonizing trade procedures, including through the use of digital technologies. It also serves as a response to the theme of the ECE's 70th Commission session held in April 2023, with its strategic direction to support digital and green transformations for sustainable development. With its recently added categories of "sustainable trade facilitation", notably those on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and women in trade facilitation, and with its pilot testing of "trade facilitation and wildlife protection", the report breaks new ground in terms of environmental and social sustainability considerations. In line with longstanding practices, the report offers evidence-based policy responses in support of the implementation of the World Trade Organization

Agreement on Trade Facilitation (WTO TFA).

Dynamic and sustainable trade facilitation reforms that effectively harness the power of digitalization require harmonized regulatory processes and interoperable digital systems based on international standards. The ECE-hosted UN Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) has been a pioneer in developing recommendations, e-business standards and guidance material in this field. During its more than four decades of operation, UN/CEFACT has delivered close to 50 government-adopted recommendations for trade facilitation and 950 e-business standards and guidelines, technical specifications and guidance materials for the electronic exchange of trade data. This report offers governments, international organizations and development cooperation partners the insights necessary to engage in evidence-based policymaking and to provide targeted technical assistance on trade facilitation. I am confident that, through this report, through the results of its normative machinery, and through its targeted support to programme countries, ECE makes an impactful and valuable contribution to sustainable, resilient, and inclusive trade and economic growth in the region and worldwide.

Tatiana Molcean
United Nations Under-Secretary-General
Executive Secretary of the United Nations

J. Holeran

**Economic Commission for Europe** 

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### **Abbreviations**

AEO authorized economic operator

B2B business-to-business

CEFTA Central European Free Trade Agreement

CITES Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

CTC Convention on a Common Transit Procedure

ECE United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

eFTI electronic freight transport information

EMSWe European Maritime Single Window Environment

ESCAP Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

EU European Union

EU+4 EU, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom

GATT General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
ICC International Chamber of Commerce

ICT information and communication technology
IEC International Electrotechnical Commission
ISO International Standards Organization
ISTA International Seed Testing Association

IoT internet of things

ITC International Trade Centre LDCs least developed countries

LLDCs landlocked developing countries

LMA Laboratory of the Ministry of Agriculture (Georgia)
MMT RDM Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model

NTFC national trade facilitation committee

OECD Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

PPP public-private partnerships SMB small and medium business

SME small and medium-sized enterprise SDGs Sustainable Development Goals

SPECA United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia

SPS sanitary and phytosanitary

TF trade facilitation

TFIG Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide

UN/CEFACT United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

UNCTAD UN Trade and Development

UNDA United Nations Development Account
UNDP United Nations Development Programme

UN/EDIFACT United Nations Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport standard

UN/LOCODE United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations

UPOV International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants

WTO World Trade Organization

WTO TFA World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement

### **Executive summary**

The fifth United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, jointly conducted by the five United Nations Regional Commissions and UNCTAD, offers an in-depth and comparative analysis of the implementation of 60 trade facilitation measures in over 160 countries worldwide in 2023. Aside from measures in the WTO TFA, the survey covers the implementation of cutting-edge paperless and cross-border trade facilitation measures and those supporting more inclusive and sustainable trade, thus going beyond the WTO TFA to a "WTO+" implementation. In this edition of the survey, 'trade facilitation for e-commerce' and 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' measures were added to the survey on a pilot-basis, due to the rising importance of cross-border e-commerce and the increasing need to combat illegal wildlife trade.

Since the 2021 survey, the level of trade facilitation implementation for the ECE region improved from 76% to 80%. All country groups recorded progress, apart from the country group of Eastern Europe. The lowest implementation rates were recorded in Central Asia and Eastern Europe at 67% and 65% respectively. More than half of the 48 ECE member States who participated in the 2023 survey have recorded higher trade facilitation implementation rates than the ECE average at 80%.

The implementation rates of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures in the ECE region have increased in 2023 compared to the 2021 survey. Among all country groups in the region, the highest implementation rates are recorded in North America and the Russian Federation, followed by the EU+4 (EU, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) and Caucasus and Türkiye country groups. Meanwhile, among all categories of measures, the implementation rates of the 'paperless trade' and 'cross-border paperless trade' categories have recorded the highest increases.

Trade facilitation measures in support of sustainable development – 'trade facilitation for SMEs', 'agricultural trade facilitation' and 'women in trade facilitation' – recorded implementation rates of 49%, 71% and 36% respectively.

The average implementation rate of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' that includes trade measures related to COVID-19, reached 59%, an increase from 46% in 2021, suggesting improvement in governments' responses of implementing trade facilitation measures during extraordinary emergency situations, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as commitment to enhance their readiness for managing future crises.

The average implementation rate of 'trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce' reached 51% for the ECE region. The measure is being implemented by 36 of the 48 ECE member States that participated in the survey.

The 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection', which relates to the implementation of the CITES electronic permit system (eCITES) reached only 25% implementation across the region, being implemented by 18 ECE countries who participated in the survey.

The report findings offer clear directions for the future, highlighting the importance of actively engaging ECE member States and partner international organizations in fast-tracking the implementation of trade facilitation measures, particularly those leveraging digital technologies to foster climate-smart, sustainable trade practices.

### Recommendations

The trade facilitation measures included in this survey play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development on multiple fronts.

This includes bolstering economic fostering social well-being and safeguarding the environment. In essence, the objective is to harmonize trade facilitation efforts with the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), ensuring a balanced approach that considers the economic, social and environmental dimensions. To keep pace with the changing landscape of trade facilitation and increased global competitiveness countries must adhere to international best practices for simplification, harmonization and standardization of regulatory practices and digitalization, including cross-border exchange of electronic trade data. International instruments such as the recommendations and standards developed by the ECE UN/CEFACT are used to align and eventually harmonize such practices. UN/CEFACT has been a pioneer in the development of recommendations, e-business standards and guidance material for over four decades with about 50 trade facilitation recommendations and 950 e-business standards, technical specifications and guidance materials. In addition, ECE developed implementation tools, such as the United Nations Trade Facilitation Implementation Guide (TFIG), to support countries in advancing on their journey for sustainable and digital trade facilitation. The new TFIG website is a pivotal tool that can help drive the international agenda towards efficient, accessible and equitable cross-border trade and guide the establishment of single windows, facilitation of transit corridors and other trade facilitation measures.

Digitalization has the potential to have a significant and positive impact on the move toward more environmentally sustainable trade practices. At the 70th Commission session, held in April 2023, ECE set its strategic direction to support the digital and green transformations for sustainable development. Implementing paperless and cross-border digital trade measures can contribute to climate-smart trade by reducing the requirements for paper-based documentation and offers the dual benefit of diminishing trade costs while streamlining complex trade-related procedures. Furthermore, facilitating trade in the e-commerce realm and implementing initiatives such as eCITES can play vital roles in promoting eco-friendly trade. These measures can contribute to more sustainable and environmentally responsible trade practices, aligning trade with a greener and more ecologically conscious future. The ECE-UN/CEFACT tools, such as the flagship Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model and relevant standards on digitalization of data exchange, <sup>1</sup> Recommendation No. 14 on authentication of trade documents, Recommendations 33, 35 and 36 related to single window concepts and detailed guidelines can accelerate the implementation of digital trade facilitation measures.

Accelerating the implementation of the 'trade facilitation for SMEs' and 'women in trade facilitation' measures can contribute to economic growth and simultaneously help mitigate inequality within the global trade landscape. These categories have notably low rates of implementation and must become priorities for governments and international organizations, given the significant potential for fostering inclusivity within global value chains, driving increased trade flows and stimulating economic growth. Prioritizing these categories can further empower SMEs, which often serve as the backbone of economies and can also pave the way for more diverse and equitable engagement in global value chains. This, in turn, has the potential to catalyse an increase in trade activity and subsequent economic growth at the country, regional and global levels. Recommendation No. 4 on national trade facilitation bodies and Recommendation No. 40 on consultation approaches can support governments in the implementation of these categories.

The implementation of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' measures can contribute to a more robust, adaptable and proactive approach to managing and mitigating future disruptions in **global supply chains.** Trade facilitation must remain resilient even during challenging times. Currently, the least implemented measures are 'agency in place to manage trade facilitation measures in times of crises and emergencies' and 'plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises'. Assigning a higher priority to the implementation of these measures is essential to increase preparedness for the risks and challenges that future crises may present. Recommendation No. 38 on Trade Information Portals, Recommendation No. 44 on cross-border facilitation measures for disaster relief and Recommendation No. 47 on pandemic crisis trade-related response provide the guidelines for the implementation of trade facilitation in terms of crisis measures.

Governments could further harness the potential of e-commerce to stimulate green economic growth and create job opportunities. E-commerce stands as a transformative force to redefine the landscape of trade, as it offers a multitude of advantages, including increasing trade flows, economic growth, job opportunities and innovation, as well as reducing trade costs and enabling SMEs to participate in global value chains. However, many countries with economies in transition in the region are still facing increasing challenges on digital technologies and e-commerce, such as infrastructure, education, employment, legislations and regulations, as well as customer trust and security concerns.<sup>2</sup> This digital divide has been exacerbated since the

COVID-19 pandemic due to limited capacities and resources in those countries.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, to harness its full potential, governments should prioritize the development of a conducive regulatory environment, invest in digital infrastructure, develop financial support programmes for SMEs and foster digital-skills-related initiatives. For example, at the recent WTO 13th Session of the Ministerial Conference (MC13) in 2024 regarding the e-commerce moratorium, WTO members agreed to maintain the current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions until the 14th Session of the Ministerial Conference (MC14) or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier.<sup>4</sup>

Trade finance facilitation measures play a critical role in promoting trade and climate-smart economic growth. A robust and diverse portfolio of trade finance services can increase trade and foster resilience in the face of global challenges. Moreover, the seamless access to finance through a single window mechanism simplifies the trading process, enabling more traders to participate in global value chains and contributing to increased trade flows. The engagement of authorities in blockchain-based supply chain projects can modernize trade finance, contributing to climate-smart trade practices. To harness the full potential of these measures, it is paramount to prioritize their implementation since they can increase trade and also support economic growth while aligning with sustainable and environmentally conscious trade practices. The ECE "White Paper: Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)", "Green Paper on Trade Finance as a Tool for Trade Facilitation" and "White Paper: Blockchain in Trade Facilitation" can provide support for the implementation of trade finance facilitation measures.

Collaborative efforts are imperative to support the transition economies in accelerating the implementation of trade facilitation measures. ECE, leveraging its extensive experience in providing technical assistance to its 17 programme countries located in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Western Balkans is well-prepared to respond to this imperative and can play a pivotal role in building the capacities of transition economies, ultimately promoting economic growth, knowledge sharing and climate-smart technological innovation. In light of the current challenges facing international trade, increased cooperation between governments international organizations critical. Governments, specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations can contribute to developing UN/CEFACT additional standards and accelerating the implementation of trade facilitation measures. particularly those leveraging digital technologies that contribute to climate-smart trade while reducing trade costs and streaming trade-related procedures The ECE calls upon all relevant actors and donors to further contribute to the substantive work of the UN/CEFACT in the development and update of its policy instruments and tools, including recommendations, standards and guideline materials, as well as continue to provide additional support and funding resources related to the capacity building and technical assistance activities in its 17 programme

countries for the implementation of those UN/ CEFACT recommendations and enhancement of the progress on trade facilitation in the region.

### 1.

## **About the 2023 Global Survey**



### 1.1 Scope and objective

Global trade growth in goods and services has rebounded since the COVID-19 pandemic. It reached a record high in 2022 but slowed down in 2023 and has continued to face increasing challenges such as the global food crisis. Recent escalations of geopolitical tensions and the rising climate crisis have also challenged global growth and the recovery process. The increasing trend of digitalization in trade activities has created new opportunities for economic development, but at the same time it may also introduce barriers to trade, especially for developing countries and vulnerable groups, including the least developed countries (LDCs) and economies in transition.

Since the WTO TFA entered into force on 22 February 2017, a wide range of measures have been introduced to reduce trade costs, to expedite the movement, release and clearance of goods and to facilitate effective cooperation between customs and other authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues, with further provisions for technical assistance and capacity-building in this area.

The fifth United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, jointly conducted by the five United Nations Regional Commissions and UNCTAD, offers an in-depth and comparative analysis of the implementation of 60 trade facilitation measures in over 160 countries worldwide in 2023. Aside from measures in the WTO TFA, the survey covers the implementation of cutting-edge paperless

and cross-border trade facilitation measures and those supporting more inclusive and sustainable trade, thus going beyond the WTO TFA to a "WTO+" implementation. Under the joint initiative of the United Nations Regional Commissions and UNCTAD, regional surveys were conducted by each Regional Commission in 2015, 2017, 2019, 2021 and 2023. The 2023 edition of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) Regional Report is a continuation of these efforts and features the results of the fifth United Nations Global Survey, which saw participation from 48 ECE member States from the seven country groups of the ECE region.

The purpose of the survey is to assess progress and help identify challenges that affect the implementation of trade facilitation measures. The findings of the 2023 Global Survey offer governments and international organizations the insights necessary to engage in evidence-based policymaking, to provide targeted technical assistance and plan capacity-building initiatives in the areas that could enable countries to increase participation in regional and global value chains and contribute to sustainable, climate-smart, economic growth.

Lowering trade costs, which are currently high across the ECE region, is crucial for achieving these goals. (See Table 1). The transition economies of Central Asia, the Caucasus and Türkiye and Eastern Europe could benefit from a decrease in trade costs and an increase in their participation in the global value chains.

Table 1.

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

Region	Caucasus and Tür- kiye	Central Asia	Eastern Europe	EU, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom	North America	Russian Federation
Caucasus and Türkiye	144.8%	192.0%	132.8%	178.7%	217.0%	84.3%
	(-12.5%)	(-2.1%)	(-10.1%)	(-6.5%)	(14.0%)	(-18.7%)
Central Asia	192.0%	99.6%	173.3%	275.9%	338.2%	91.6%
	(-2.1%)	(-7.8%)	(1.3%)	(3.8%)	(13.7%)	(-5.2%)
Eastern Europe	132.8%	173.3%	73.9%	143.5%	233.6%	68.2%
	(-10.1%)	(1.3%)	(1.6%)	(-6.5%)	(-6.1%)	(-0.9%)
EU, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (EU+4)	178.7%	275.9%	143.5%	59.4%	101.8%	96.0%
	(-6.5%)	(3.8%)	(-6.5%)	(-7.3%)	(-1.5%)	(5.0%)
North America	217.0%	338.2%	233.6%	101.8%		155.0%
	(14.0%)	(13.7%)	(-6.1%)	(-1.5%)		(6.1%)
Russian Federation	84.3%	91.6%	68.2%	96.0%	155.0%	
	(-18.7%)	(-5.2%)	(-0.9%)	(5.0%)	(6.1%)	
Average trade costs with the other ECE country groups	161.0%	214.2%	150.3%	159.2%	209.1%	99.0%

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

Notes: Trade costs may be interpreted as tariff equivalents. Percentage changes in trade costs between 2010-2015 and 2016-2021 are in parentheses. **Caucasus and Türkiye**: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Türkiye; Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan; **Eastern Europe**: Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine; **North America**: Canada; **EU, UK, Norway, and Switzerland**: France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Switzerland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.

Implementation of the trade facilitation measures included in this survey has the potential to reduce trade costs. This, in turn, could play a pivotal role in increasing the participation of small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in global value chains. A shift towards greater inclusion of SMEs could stimulate job creation and set the stage for fostering sustainable economic growth.

This report provides an assessment of the progress made in implementing sustainable and digital trade facilitation measures within the ECE region since the 2021 survey. Section 1 introduces 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 ECE region by country group and by measure. Section 3 also highlights progress in the implementation of the surveyed measures in three selected countries - Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - which are participating States of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) currently in the process of accession to the WTO. Section 4 highlights key findings and provides recommendations that could accelerate the implementation of trade facilitation measures. Finally, the report highlights the ECE tools that can assist in implementing these measures.

### 1.2 Survey structure and methodology

The survey includes 60 trade facilitation measures, categorized into four groups (Table 2). The first group, "General Trade Facilitation" measures, includes many WTO TFA measures with subgroups of 'transparency', 'formalities', 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' and 'transit facilitation'. The second group, "Digital Trade Facilitation", includes 'paperless trade' and 'cross-border paperless trade'. The third group, "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" measures, includes the 'trade facilitation for SMEs', 'agricultural trade facilitation' and 'women in trade facilitation' subgroups.

The fourth group, "Other Trade Facilitation" measures, has four subgroups: 'trade finance facilitation', 'trade facilitation in times of crisis', 'trade facilitation for e-commerce' and 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection'. These last two measures were added to the survey on a pilot-basis, due to the rising importance of cross-border e-commerce and the increasing need to combat illegal wildlife trade.

Table 2.

Grouping of trade facilitation measures and their correspondence with TFA articles<sup>5</sup>

Groups	Subgroups	Measures	Relevant TFA articles
	Transparency	Publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet	1.2
		Stakeholder consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)	2.2
		Advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation	2.1
		Advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods	3
		Independent appeal mechanism	4
	Formalities	Risk management	7.4
		Pre-arrival processing	7.1
es		Post-clearance audits	7.5
ieasur		Separation of release from final determination of customs duties, taxes, fees and charges	7.3
E =		Establishment and publication of average release times	7.6
atio		Trade facilitation measures for authorized operators	7.7
₩		Expedited shipments	7.8
General trade facilitation measures		Acceptance of paper or electronic copies of supporting documents required for import, export or transit formalities	10.2.1
	Institutional	National trade facilitation committee or similar body	23
	arrangement and cooperation	National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation	8
Ğ		Government agencies delegating border controls to customs authorities	
		Alignment of working days and hours with neighbouring countries at border crossings	8.2(a)
		Alignment of formalities and procedures with neighbouring countries at border crossings	8.2(b)
	Transit	Transit facilitation agreement(s)	
	facilitation	Limit the physical inspection 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

Groups	Subgroups	Measures	Relevant TFA articles
	Paperless	Automated customs system	
	trade	Internet connection available to customs and other trade control agencies	
res		Electronic single window system	10.4
		Electronic submission of customs declarations	
asn		Electronic application and issuance of import and export permit	
Digital trade facilitation measures  Crossoro  babealess  trade  trade		Electronic submission of sea cargo manifests	
		Electronic submission of air cargo manifests	
itat		Electronic application and issuance of preferential certificate of origin	
acil		E-payment of customs duties and fees	7.2
le fa		Electronic application for customs refunds	
trac	Cross-border	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	
tal	paperless	Recognized certification authority	
Digi	trade	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	
	Trade	Trade-related information measures for SMEs	
S	facilitation for	SMEs in AEO scheme	
ži ži	SMEs	SMEs access to single window	
eas		SMEs in national trade facilitation committee	
<u> </u>		Other special measures for SMEs	
atio	Agricultural	Testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS of main trading part-	
iii iii	trade facilitation	ners	
inable trade facilitation measures		National standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS	
tra		Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates	
pple		Special treatment given to perishable goods	7.9
aina	Women in	TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade	
Susta	trade	TF measures to benefit women involved in trade	
Ø	facilitation	Women's membership in the national trade facilitation committee or similar bodies	
	Trade finance	Single window facilitates traders' access to finance	
G	facilitation	Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance	
ä		Variety of trade finance services available	
meas	Trade facilita- tion in times	Agency in place to manage trade facilitation in times of crises and emergencies	
<u>io</u>	of crisis	Online publication of emergency trade facilitation measures	
itati		Coordination between countries on emergency trade facilitation measures	
e facil		Additional trade facilitation measures to facilitate trade in times of emergencies	
rad		Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises	
Other trade facilitation measures	Trade facilitation for e-commerce	Trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce	
	Wildlife trade facilitation	Electronic exchange of CITES permits/certificates	

ECE conducted data collection and validation activities between January and July 2023, 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, sharing with other key regional and international partner organizations in trade facilitation and submitting data to ECE 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 categories of measures. Country groups used in the analysis were defined by ECE in 2017 (Table 3).

Table 3. ECE country groups and participating countries

Country group	Participating countries
Caucasus and Türkiye	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Türkiye
Central Asia	Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan
Eastern Europe	Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine
European Union, Iceland, United Kingdom, Norway, and Switzerland (EU+4)	Andorra <sup>1</sup> , Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom
North America <sup>2</sup>	Canada
Russian Federation	Russian Federation
South-Eastern Europe	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia

Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Andorra is not a European Union (EU) country, but it is part of the European Customs Union. For trade facilitation it maintains the rules and regulations according to the European Customs Union. Andorra has observer status in the WTO.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>The United States of America is the other member State in this country group; it did not participate in the survey through SPECA, ECE or ESCAP.

### 2.

# Overview of the implementation of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures



This section provides an overview of the implementation<sup>8</sup> of trade facilitation measures in the 'transparency', 'formalities', 'institutional, 'institutional arrangement and cooperation', 'paperless trade' and 'cross-border paperless trade' categories across the ECE region. In addition, the section includes a detailed view on the progress of trade facilitation in the region since 2021, presents the implementation of trade facilitation measures by category and highlights the most and least implemented trade facilitation measures.

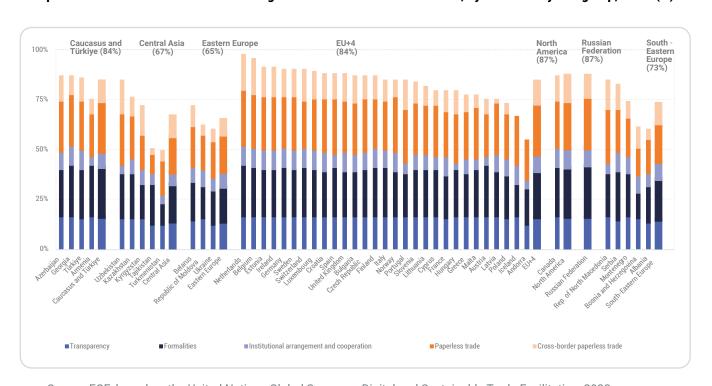
Since the 2021 survey, the level of trade facilitation implementation for the ECE region improved from

\*All implementation rates have been rounded.

76% to 80%. All country groups recorded progress, apart from Eastern Europe. The lowest implementation rates were recorded in Central Asia and Eastern Europe at 67% and 65% respectively (Figure 1).

More than half of the 48 ECE member States who participated in the 2023 survey have recorded higher trade facilitation implementation rates than the ECE average of 80%. Eight countries have achieved implementation rates of over 90%, including Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Switzerland.

Figure 1
Implementation rate of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures, by ECE country and group, 2023 (%)



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

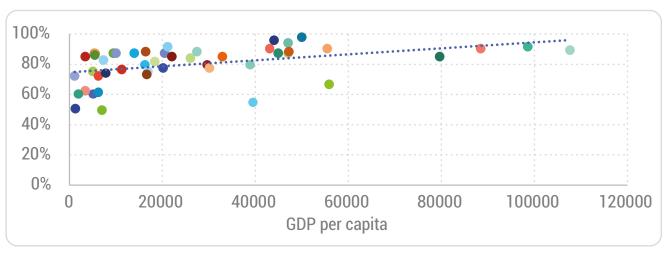
Note: Among the 60 common measures surveyed across United Nations Regional Commissions in 2023, three measures including 'electronic submission of sea cargo manifests', 'alignment of working days and hours with neighbouring countries at border crossings', and 'alignment of formalities and procedures 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 excluded for the same reason. Additionally, 'trade facilitation for SMEs', 'agricultural trade facilitation', 'women in trade facilitation', 'trade finance facilitation', 'trade facilitation in times of pandemic', 'trade facilitation for e-commerce' and 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' are excluded as these are groups of measures not included in the original Global Survey.

The ECE implementation rate is the average of the implementation rates of the 48 ECE member States who participated in the survey, which is different than the average of country-group rates.

Most countries with high implementation rates had a GDP per capita over 10,000 USD in 2022 (Figure 2). Nevertheless, there are countries with lower GDP per capita that reached higher implementation rates than the ECE average, including Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia and Uzbekistan. This indicates that factors other than

the GDP per capita have a role in the progress of trade facilitation implementation in these countries. For example, higher implementation rates could be explained by governments prioritizing trade facilitation for the purpose of regional integration and the process of accession to the WTO.

Figure 2. Implementation rate of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures and GDP per capita, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023 and World Bank.

Note: The figure shows 2022 GDP per capita (constant 2015 USD).

### 2.1 Progress in implementation between 2021 and 2023

### Key messages:

- The 2023 ECE implementation rates for all five categories of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures are higher than the global average.
- The ECE region implementation rates of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures increased compared to 2021. The 'paperless trade' and 'cross-border paperless trade' categories implementation rates represent the highest increases.
- The highest average implementation rates are recorded in North America and the Russian Federation, followed by the EU+4 and Caucasus and Türkiye country groups.
- The highest increase in the implementation of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures since 2021, among all ECE country groups, has been recorded in the Caucasus and Türkiye and South-Eastern Europe.

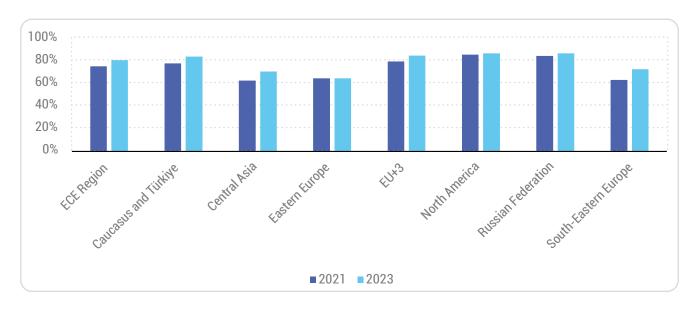
The average implementation of trade facilitation measures in the five categories – 'transparency', 'formalities', 'institutional arrangement and cooperation', 'paperless trade', and 'cross-border paperless trade' – increased from 76 per cent in 2021 to 80% in the 2023 survey.

The current survey includes four new countries compared to the 2021 survey. Iceland, Latvia and Slovenia have been added to the 2021 EU+3 group (EU, Norway, Switzerland and United Kingdom); it is now EU+4 (EU, Iceland, Norway, Switzerland and United Kingdom). Turkmenistan has been included in the Central Asia country group.

Comparing the implementation rates of the 44 countries surveyed in 2021 with their performance in 2023, the implementation rate for these countries increased from 76% to 81%. The Central Asian<sup>9</sup> implementation rate increased from 63% to 71% and the EU+3 implementation rate from 80% to 85% (Figure 3).

South-Eastern Europe recorded the highest increase in the implementation rate since 2021, from 63% to 73%. The Caucasus and Türkiye also improved, from 79% to 84%.

Figure 3. Implementation rates of trade facilitation measures, by country group, ECE, 2021 and 2023 (%)



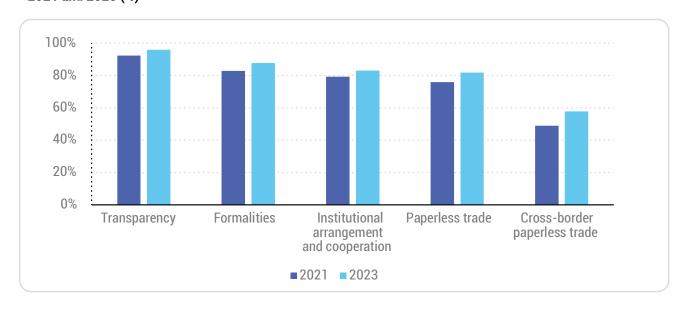
Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

In 2023, the implementation rates of the five trade facilitation categories recorded an increase compared to 2021. The 'paperless trade' and 'cross-border paperless trade' categories implementation rates registered the highest increases, from 76% to 82% and from 49% to 58% respectively. These

improvements could be attributed to the increased priority given to electronic exchange of documentation and use of digital systems to facilitate cross-border trade during and after the pandemic.

Figure 4.

Implementation rate of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures, by type of measure, ECE, 2021 and 2023 (%)



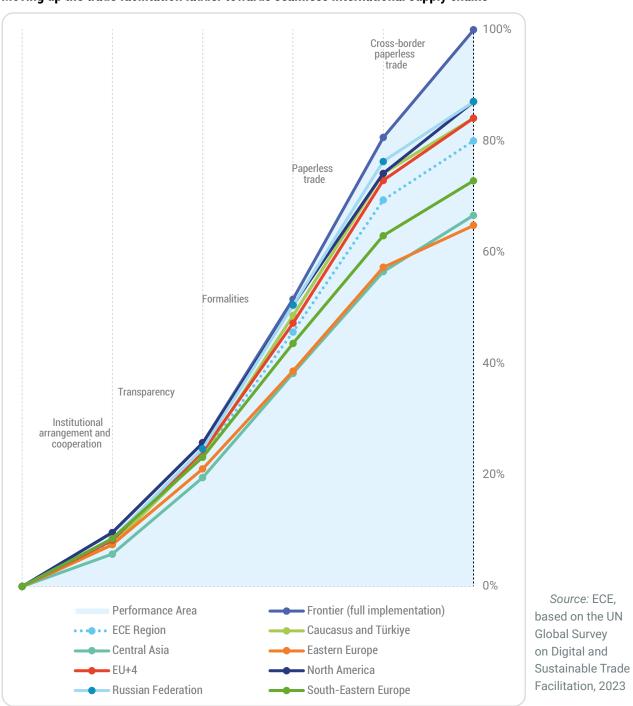
Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The implementation of the five groups of trade facilitation measures above could be described as a step-by-step process (see Figure 5). The first step consists of establishing the institutional arrangements that are critical for prioritizing and coordinating the implementation of the other four categories of measures. The next step is to make trade processes more transparent by sharing information

on existing trade-related laws, regulations and procedures, and consulting with stakeholders when developing new regulations. The final step consists of designing and implementing simpler and more efficient trade processes, leveraging information and communications technologies (ICT) and developing paperless trade systems.

Figure 5.

Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains



Note: The above figure shows global cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores for each ECE subregion for 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.

North America and the Russian Federation continue to lead, recording the highest implementation rate in the region at 87%. They are followed by the Caucasus and Türkiye and the EU+4 group with 84% implementation rate.

The implementation rate of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' reached 84% for the region. The measures have been fully implemented in North America. Caucasus and Türkiye, Eastern Europe, EU+4 the Russian Federation and South-Eastern Europe reached rates of over 78%, while Central Asia recorded 60%.

The 'transparency' measures have a high rate of implementation of 98% across the region. The Caucasus and Türkiye, North America and the Russian Federation have fully implemented these measures. Central Asia, Eastern Europe, EU+4 and South-Eastern Europe recorded implementation rates of over 84%.

The 'formalities' measures are also widely implemented, reaching a high implementation rate

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Comparison between global and ECE regional performances in 2023. The global average trade facilitation implementation rate of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures reached 69%. The 2023 ECE implementation rates for "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures are all higher than the global average (Figure 6). The highest implementation rates that have been recorded, both at the global and ECE levels, for the "General Trade Facilitation" categories include 'transparency' (96% ECE compared to 82% globally), 'formalities' (86% ECE compared to 78% globally), and 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' (83% ECE compared to 73% globally). The ECE region 'paperless trade' implementation rate reached 82%, while the global rate is 70%. The lowest implementation rates were recorded in the 'cross-border paperless trade' category, for which the ECE average reached 55%, while the global average stands at 47%.

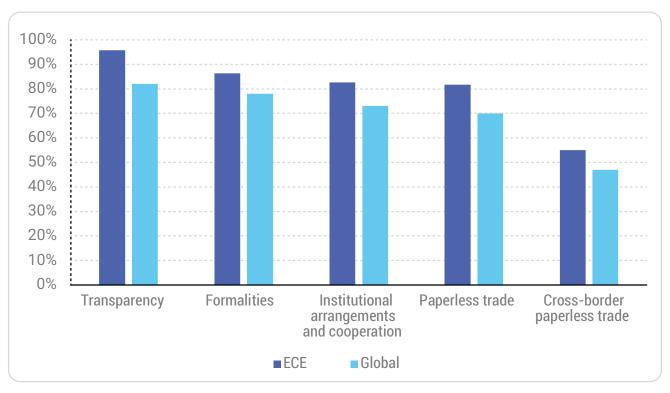
of 88% for the region. The highest rates have been recorded in the Russian Federation (100%), the Caucasus and Türkiye (97%) and North America (96%). The lowest implementation rate of 68% has been recorded in Eastern Europe.

The regional 'paperless trade' implementation rate reached 83%. There is a significant gap between the implementation rates in some of the transition economies and the other country groups. South-Eastern Europe, Eastern Europe and Central Asia recorded implementation rates of 67%, 64% and 63% respectively, while Caucasus and Türkiye, EU+4, North America and the Russian Federation have achieved implementation rates of over 80%.

The category with the lowest implementation rate in the region is 'cross-border paperless trade', with an average of 56%. Except for North America, which reached an implementation rate of 67%, the other country groups recorded implementation rates lower than 60%.

Figure 6.

Global and ECE implementation rates of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures, 2023 (%)



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

## 2.2 Implementation of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures by country group

#### Key messages:

- The average implementation rates of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures vary widely within country groups.
- The highest average trade facilitation implementation rates have been recorded in North America, the Russian Federation and the Caucasus and Türkiye.

Most of the country groups achieved high rates of trade facilitation implementation of over 72% (Figure 7). The exceptions are Central Asia with 67% implementation rate and Eastern Europe at 65% implementation rate. It is important to note that the implementation rates in all three Eastern Europe countries – Belarus, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine – are unchanged since the 2021 survey. This could be due to the geopolitical circumstances in the region.

The transition economies in the Caucasus and Türkiye country group have achieved high trade facilitation implementation rates. Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye each recorded 87% implementation rates and Armenia 75%.

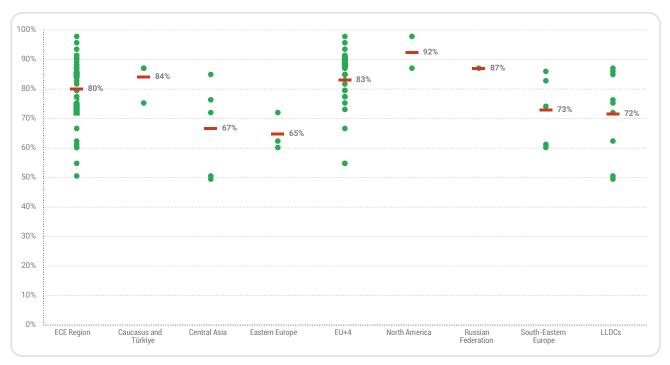
Large differences in trade facilitation implementation rates can be observed within country groups. In South-Eastern Europe, the implementation rates vary between 60% for Albania to 86% for the Republic of North Macedonia. In Central Asia the average implementation rate is 67%, with Uzbekistan reaching the highest implementation at 85%. It is worth noting that the implementation rate for Uzbekistan has increased significantly, from 62% in the 2021 survey, thanks to significant customs reforms and the introduction of advanced ICT to increase efficiency. In addition, Uzbekistan is implementing several trade facilitation initiatives with the support of ECE (see Section 3). Turkmenistan is a new participant in the

ECE survey and already achieved 49% implementation rate.

The average trade facilitation implementation rate reached by the EU+4 country group is 84%. However, there are significant differences in the implementation rates within the group, from 55% in Andorra to 98% in the Netherlands.

The landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) in the ECE region achieved an average implementation rate of 72%, including Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan (who participated in the survey for the first time this year), with the highest implementation rate recorded by Azerbaijan at 87%. The Republic of North Macedonia achieved the second highest rate in the group at 86%. It is worth noting that the Republic of Moldova trade policy focuses on engagement in the multilateral system and the regional system. The country has achieved significant progress in the WTO TFA implementation. In 2023, the implementation rate of the WTO TFA commitments of the Republic of Moldova was 77.3 per cent. The de facto implementation rate might be even higher since the Republic of Moldova had already implemented some C type commitments due in December 2025.

Figure 7. Implementation rates of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures, by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

## 2.3 Implementation of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures by subgroups

#### Key messages:

- The average implementation rates of "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures vary within the subgroups of measures, with the largest differences in 'cross-border paperless trade', 'trade finance facilitation', 'trade facilitation for SMEs' and 'paperless trade'.
- The 'transparency' and 'formalities' subgroups have the highest implementation rates, while the "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" measures continue to have low implementation rates.
- Trade facilitation for e-commerce' and 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' are not implemented by all countries.
- Trade facilitation in times of crisis' continues to have a low implementation rate.

Among all the subgroups, the 'transparency' trade facilitation measures are the most implemented across the region, with an average of 96% (Figure 8). The next subgroup of measures that reached a high implementation rate was the 'formalities' subgroup, with 86%. The lowest rate of implementation was recorded for 'establishment and publication of average release times' (68%).

The 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' trade facilitation subgroup reached a high implementation rate of 83% across all measures

The "Digital Trade Facilitation" group, which contains 'paperless trade' and 'cross-border paperless trade', vary greatly in their implementation rates. The implementation of these measures requires adequate information and communications infrastructure and skilled resources. The implementation rate of 'paperless trade' measures reached close to 82%, while the 'cross-border paperless trade' measures implementation rate was much lower at 55%. The disparity could be due to the level of cooperation between governments and interoperability between the systems used in each country. The ECE UN/ CEFACT's policy instruments, such as recommendations, standards and guideline materials are made readily available to support harmonization and

increase interoperability across digital platforms and information systems (see Box 8 and Table A-1).

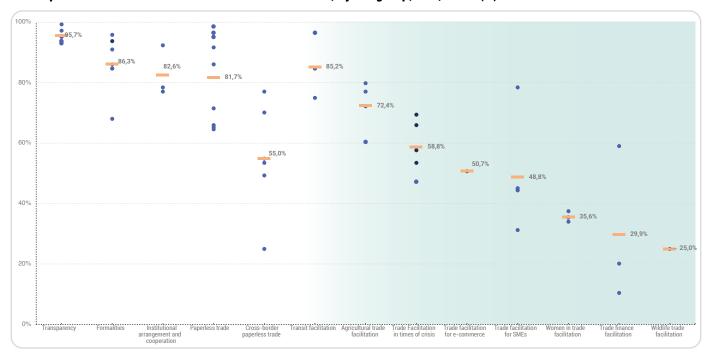
Among the "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" measures, the 'women in trade facilitation' subgroup reached an implementation rate of only 36%, the lowest in the group. It is worth noting that there has been an increase from 25% in 2021. The 'agricultural trade facilitation' subgroup recorded an increase, from 61% in 2021 to 72% in 2023. The least implemented measure in the subgroup was the 'national standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS requirements'. The 'trade facilitation for SMEs' subgroup continued to have a low implementation rate (49%) compared to most of the other subgroups. The least implemented measure for SMEs was the 'SMEs access to single window'. This measure is dependent on the 'paperless trade facilitation' measure, 'electronic single window system', which reached only 65% on average for the region.

The two new measures introduced in the 2023 survey, 'trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce' and 'electronic application, issuance and exchange of CITES permits/certificates' have low implementation rates of 51% and 24% respectively. The low implementation rate of the 'trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce'

could potentially be explained through the lack of adequate legal and regulatory frameworks, reliable Internet connectivity and access to ICT, lack of or low availability of resources and finance support. Similarly, the 'electronic application, issuance and exchange of CITES permits/certificates' requires ICT infrastructure and skilled resources. In addition,

it requires interoperability between the systems in different countries.

Figure 8. Implementation rates of trade facilitation measures, by subgroup, ECE, 2023 (%)



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

#### Most and least implemented measures

This section highlights the most and least implemented trade facilitation measures in all categories surveyed. The assessments are based on the percentage of countries that are implementing the measures (including implementation status of "pilot stage", "partially implemented" or "fully implemented") and the percentage of countries that have fully implemented the measures.

The most and least implemented measures in the "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" groups are presented in Table 44.

In the 'transparency' group, the most implemented measure is the 'advance publication/notification of

new trade-related regulations before their implementation. The measure has been fully implemented by 47 out of the 48 ECE member States who participated in the survey. The 'stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations prior to their finalization' is the next most implemented among the 'transparency' measures, with full implementation reaching close to 92%, compared to 82% in 2021. The 'advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods' was the least implemented 'transparency' measure in 2021 (97.7% implementing and 77.3% fully implemented). In 2023 the measure is being implemented by all countries participating in the survey and reached 83.3% of full implementation. The 'independent appeal mechanism' is the

least implemented measure in the 'transparency' subgroup; it is currently not being implemented in all 48 ECE member States.

Among the 'formalities' measures, 'post-clearance audits' continues to be the most implemented, as was the case in 2021. 'establishment and publication of average release times' is currently the least implemented in 89.6% of the countries.

In the 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' subgroup, the most implemented measure continues to be 'national legislative framework and/ or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation', as it was in 2021 – with an increase in the number of countries that completed its implementation from 73% to 77%.

In the 'paperless trade' subgroup, four measures are being implemented by all countries that participated in the survey: 'Internet connection available to customs and other trade control agencies', 'electronic

submission of customs declarations', 'automated customs system', and 'e-payment of customs duties and fees'. The least implemented are 'electronic application and issuance of preferential certificate of origin' and 'electronic application for customs refunds', with full implementation rates of 35% and 44% respectively.

In the 'cross-border paperless trade' subgroup, the most implemented measure continues to be 'laws and regulations for electronic transactions'. The full implementation rate for this measure increased from 39% in 2021 to 42%.

In the 'transit facilitation' subgroup, 'limit physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment' continues to be the most implemented, with the full implementation rate increasing from 84% in 2021 to 90% in the current survey. 'Supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation' is the least implemented with a full implementation rate of 48%.

Table 4

Most and least implemented "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures, 2023

	Most imple	emented (%)	Least implemented (%)	
Category	Measure	Implemented fully, partially, and on a pilot basis (%) / Full imple- mentation (%)	Measure	Implemented fully, partially, and on a pilot basis (%) / Full implementa- tion (%)
	Advance publication/no- tification of new trade-re- lated regulations before their implementation	100.0 / 97.9		97.9 / 83.3
Transparency	Stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)	100.0 / 91.7	Independent appeal mechanism	
	Publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet	100.0 / 87.5		
	Advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods	100.0 / 83.3		
Formalities	Post-clearance audits	100.0 / 89.6	Establishment and publication of average release times	89.6 / 31.3

	Most imple	emented (%)	Least implemented (%)		
Category	Measure	Implemented fully, partially, and on a pilot basis (%) / Full imple- mentation (%)	Measure	Implemented fully, partially, and on a pilot basis (%) / Full implementa- tion (%)	
Institutional arrangement and cooperation	National legislative frame- work and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation	100.0 / 77.1	Government agencies delegating controls to customs authorities	87.5 / 56.3	
Paperless trade	Internet connection avail- able to customs and other trade control agencies	100.0 / 95.8	Electronic single window system	93.8 / 14.6	
	Electronic submission of customs declarations	100.0 / 91.7	Electronic submission of air cargo manifests	87.5 / 52.1	
	Automated customs system	100.0 / 85.4	Electronic applica- tion and issuance of Preferential certifi- cate of origin	85.4 / 35.4	
	E-payment of customs duties and fees	100.0 / 79.2	Electronic applica- tion for customs refunds	79.2 / 43.8	
Cross-border paperless trade	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	87.5 / 41.7	Electronic exchange of certificate of origin	41.7 / 4.2	
	Recognized certification authority	85.4 / 60.4	Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit	68.8 / 27.1	
Transit facilitation	Limit the physical inspec- tion of transit goods and use risk assessment	100.0 / 89.6	Supporting pre-ar- rival processing for transit facilitation	89.6 / 47.9	

Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The most and least implemented "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" measures, 'trade finance facilitation', 'trade facilitation in times of crisis', 'trade facilitation for e-commerce' and 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' measures are presented in Table 5.

The "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" measures, related to SMEs, women in trade facilitation and agricultural trade facilitation have low rates of full implementation and are not being implemented by all

countries. The 'women in trade facilitation' measures are the least implemented in the "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" group.

The new measures, 'trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce' and 'electronic application, issuance and exchange of CITES permits/certificates' are being implemented by 75% and 42% of the countries respectively..

As in 2021, the least implemented measure in the 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' subgroup continues to be 'plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises'. However, it is currently being implemented by a higher number of countries, 58% as compared to 48% in the previous survey.

The new measures, 'trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce' and 'electronic application, issuance and exchange of CITES permits/certificates' are being implemented by 75% and 42% of the countries, respectively.

Table 5.

Most and least implemented "Sustainable Trade Facilitation", and "Other Trade Facilitation" measures, 2023

	Most implemented (%)		Least implemented (%)		
Category	Measure	Implemented fully, partially and on a pilot basis (%) / Full implementation (%)	Measure	Implemented fully, partially and on a pilot basis (%) / Full implementation (%)	
Trade facilitation for SMEs	Trade-related information measures for SMEs	89.6 / 60.4	SMEs access to single window	47.9 / 10.4	
Agricultural trade facilitation	Special treatment given to perishable goods	91.7 / 56.3	National standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS	72.9 / 39.6	
Women in trade facilitation	Women's membership in the national trade facilitation committee or similar bodies	56.3 / 14.6	TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade	45.8 / 20.8	
Trade finance facilitation	Variety of trade finance services available	72.9 / 37.5	Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain proj- ect covering trade finance	18.8 / 4.2	
Trade facilitation in times of crisis	Coordination between countries on emergency trade facilitation mea- sures	83.3 / 31.3	Plan in place to fa- cilitate trade during future crises	58.3 / 29.2	
Trade facilitation for e-commerce	TF measures for cross-border e-com-merce	75.0 / 8.3			
Wildlife trade facilitation	Electronic exchange of CITES permits/certificates	37.5 / 8.3			

Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

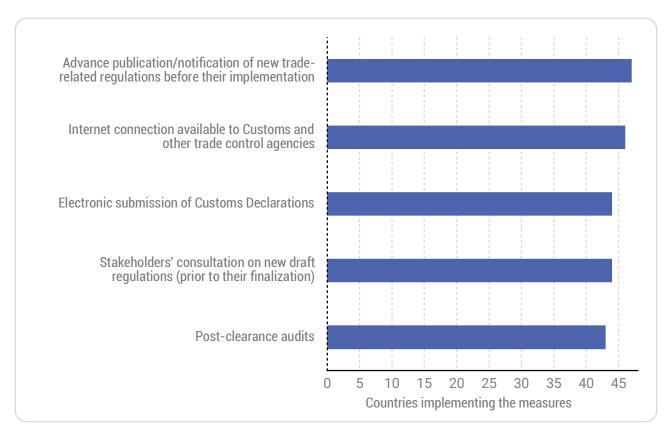
The top five most implemented measures in "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" categories belong to the 'transparency', 'paperless trade facilitation' and 'formalities' measures (Figure 9).

The 'advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation' measure has been fully implemented by the highest number of countries (47). In 2021, it had been implemented by 39 countries and ranked as the fifth most fully implemented measure.

The 'Internet connection available to customs and other trade control agencies', the 'stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations' and the 'post-clearance audits' measures continue to be among the top five, as in the previous survey. New in the top five is 'electronic submission of customs declarations', which has become a priority during the pandemic.

Figure 9.

Most fully implemented trade facilitation measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

# 3.

# A closer look at the implementation of trade facilitation measures

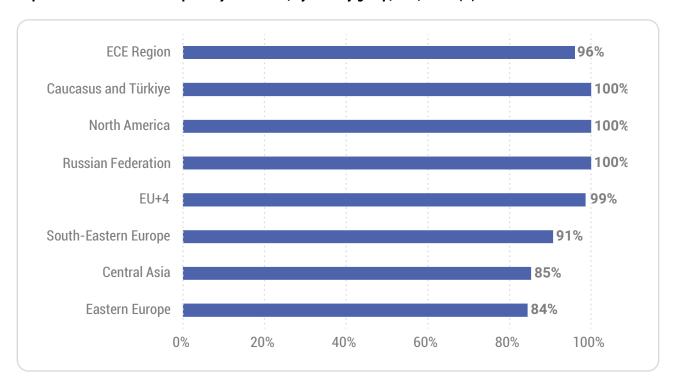


#### 3.1 Transparency

The 'transparency' measures are related to Articles 1-5 of the WTO TFA and General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Article X on publication and administration of trade regulations. In 2023, the ECE average rate of implementation reached 96%, compared to 92% in 2021 (Figure 10).

The Caucasus and Türkiye, North America and the Russian Federation fully implemented all 'transparency' measures, while EU+4 reached 99% implementation rate. The other country groups recorded between 84% and 91% implementation rates.

Figure 10. Implementation rate of 'transparency' measures, by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)

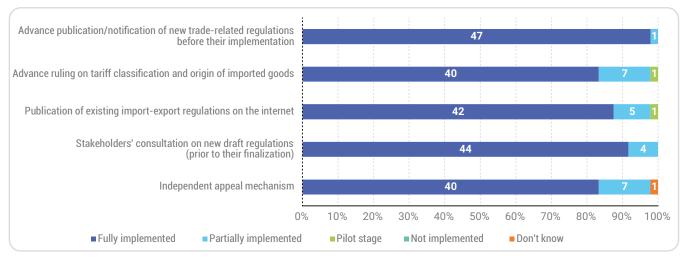


Two of the five 'transparency' measures are being implemented by all 48 ECE member States (Figure 11). The 'advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implemen-

tation' and the 'stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations' are either partially or fully implemented by all survey respondents.

Figure 11.

Implementation rate of 'transparency' measures by number of countries, ECE, 2023 (%)



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

Transparency and predictability are essential elements for the cross-border movement of goods. The ECE UN/CEFACT recommendations enable traders to obtain accurate, comprehensive and up-to-date information in order to plan their processes and resources for their cross-border operations. For example, Recommendation No. 48

on private sector participation in national trade facilitation bodies provides guidelines on public-private consultations that could provide opportunities for traders and other interested parties to comment on the proposed introduction or amendment of laws and regulations (See Table A-1 in Annex I).

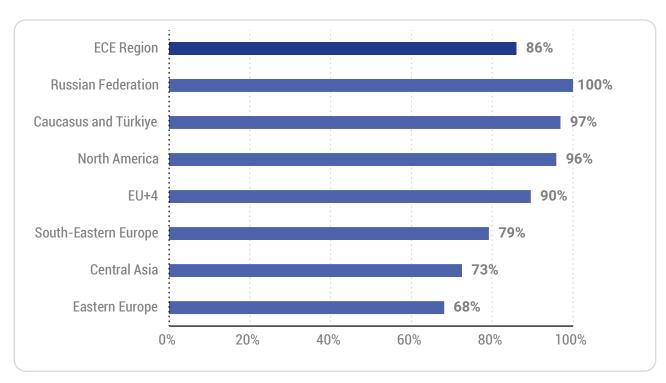
#### 3.2 Formalities

The eight 'formalities' measures surveyed are related to Articles 6-10 of the WTO TFA and GATT Article VIII on fees and formalities connected with importation and exportation.

The implementation rate for the 'formalities' measures reached 86% across the region (Figure 12).

The Russian Federation fully implemented all measures. The Caucasus and Türkiye, North America and EU+4 reached implementation rates of 90% and higher. South-Eastern Europe recorded an implementation rate of 79%, while Central Asia and Eastern Europe reached 73% and 68% respectively.

Figure 12. Implementation rate of 'formalities' measures, by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)

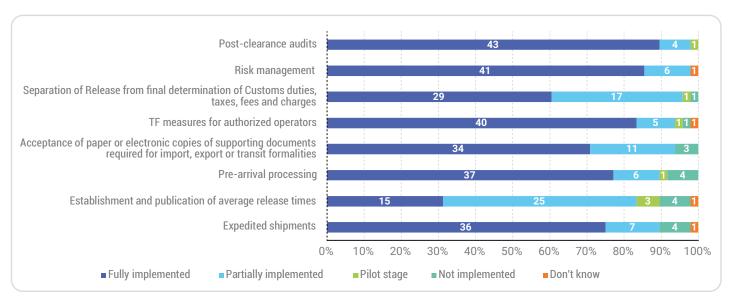


The 'formalities' measures are not being implemented in all countries (Figure 13), potentially due to different levels of priority assigned to each measure, as well as the availability of resources in each country.

For example, 'separation of release from final determination of customs duties, taxes, fees and

charges' has been fully implemented in the Caucasus and Türkiye, the Russian Federation, North America and South-Eastern Europe, while it reached only 67% implementation rate in Central Asia.

Figure 13. Implementation rate of 'formalities' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The 'post-clearance audits' measure is being implemented by all 48 ECE member States who participated in the survey and reached an implementation rate of 96%. 'Risk management' is the second most implemented, by 47 countries; it recorded an implementation rate of 94%. The measures

implemented by the lowest number of countries are 'establishment and publication of average release times' and 'expedited shipments', both being implemented by 43 countries.

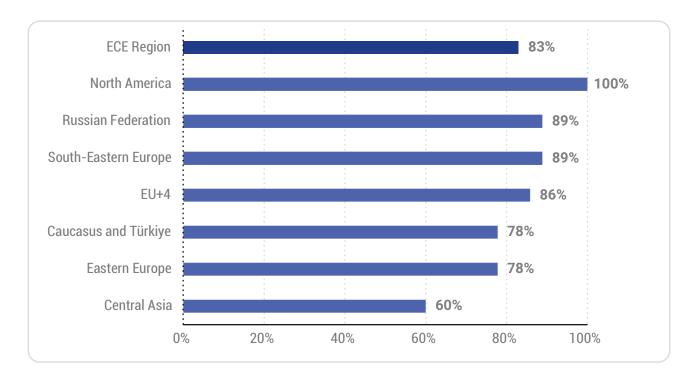
# 3.3 Institutional arrangement and cooperation

The implementation of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' measures across the region reached 83% (Figure 14), an increase from 80% in 2021.

North America has fully implemented all measures in the subgroup. South-Eastern Europe recorded the

highest increase in the implementation rate, from 78% in 2021 to 89% in the current survey. Apart from Central Asia (60%), all other country groups reached average implementation rates over 78%.

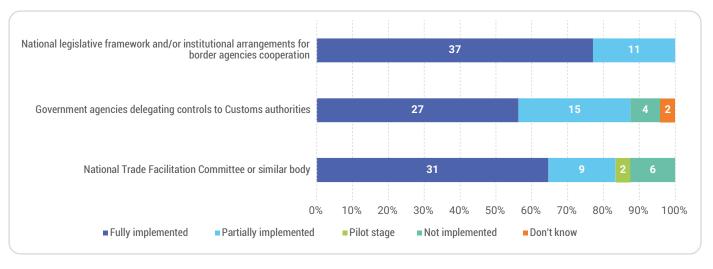
Figure 14. Implementation rate of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' measures, by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)



The most implemented measure in the subgroup is the 'national legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation'

measure, which reached an average implementation rate of 92% across the region (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Implementation of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023 (%)



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The 'NTFC or similar body' and 'government agencies delegating controls to customs authorities' reached average implementation rates of 78% and 77% respectively. There are large differences in the implementation rates of these two measures across the region. The average implementation rate of 'NTFC or similar body' ranges from 67% for the Caucasus and Türkiye, Central Asia and the Russian Federation to 100% in North America and South-Eastern Europe. The 'government agencies delegating controls to customs authorities' implementation rate reached only 33% in Central Asia, while it has been fully implemented in North America and the Russian Federation.

It is critical for any country implementing trade facilitation reforms to establish a national-level trade facilitation body that can coordinate and facilitate effective consultation among the public and private sector stakeholders. Recommendation No. 4 on national trade facilitation bodies, Recommendation No. 40 on consultation approaches, Recommendation No. 41 on public-private partnerships for trade facilitation and Recommendation No. 48 on private sector participation in national trade facilitation bodies can facilitate the implementation of the 'NTFC or similar body' measure (see Table A-1).

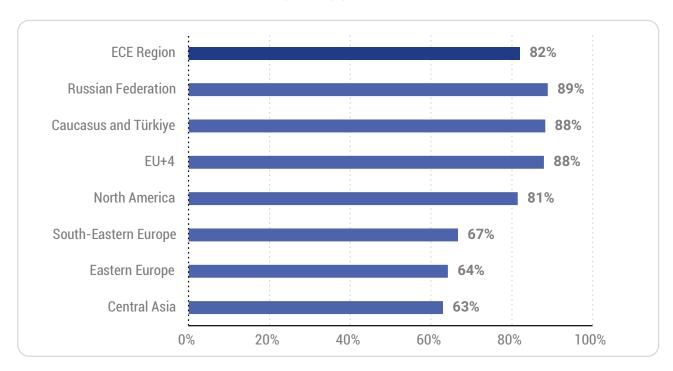
#### 3.4 Paperless trade

The nine measures included in the 'paperless trade' subgroup 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 WTO TFA 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 across the region reached 82%, an increase from 76% in the previous survey

(Figure 16). There is a significant gap in the implementation rates between the Russian Federation, the Caucasus and Türkiye, EU+4 and North America—who all reached over 80% implementation—and South-Eastern Europe (67%), Eastern Europe (64%) and Central Asia (63%). South-Eastern Europe registered an increase compared to 61% in 2021 as did Central Asia, up from 57% in the previous survey. The low implementation rates in these three country groups could be attributed to low availability of ICT infrastructure and lack of resources

Figure 16. Implementation of 'paperless trade' measures by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)



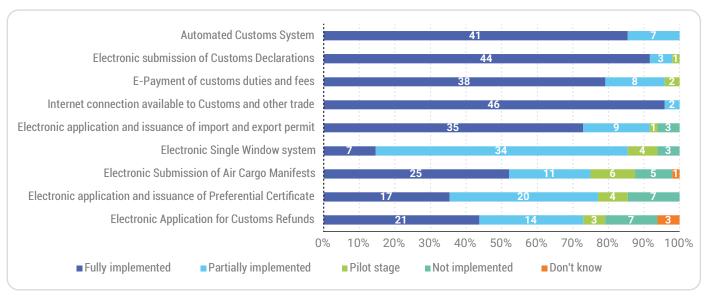
The 'automated customs system' has been the most implemented measure in the 'paperless trade' subgroup, being fully implemented in 41 countries and partially implemented in the other seven countries (Figure 17).

The 'electronic single window system' measure, which corresponds with WTO TFA Article 10.4, has been fully implemented in seven countries, compared to five countries in 2021. North America and the Caucasus and Türkiye group have the highest implementation rates of 100% and 92% respectively. Central Asia, EU+4 and the Russian Federation each recorded 67% implementation rates, while Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe reached 56% and 27% respectively.

The ECE has provided technical assistance to ten transition economies (Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Türkiye, Uzbekistan and Ukraine) on the implementation of UN/CEFACT data exchange standards and reference data models for digitalization of data and document exchange along supply chains.

Several ECE UN/CEFACT tools can guide the implementation of the 'electronic single window system' measure. These include Recommendation No. 33 on establishing a single window, Recommendation No. 35 on establishing a legal framework for an international trade single window and Recommendation No. 36 on single window interoperability (see Table A-1).

Figure 17. Implementation of 'paperless trade' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023 (%)



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The measure implemented by the least number of countries, 'electronic application for customs refunds', reached an implementation rate of 65% across the region. However, the rates vary widely between country groups. The Caucasus and the Russian Federation fully implemented the measure, while Central Asia and Eastern Europe reached 40% and 22% implementation rates respectively.

Similarly, the 'electronic application and issuance of preferential certificate of origin' with the average implementation rate of 66% for the region, ranges from 20% in South-Eastern Europe to 100% in North America.

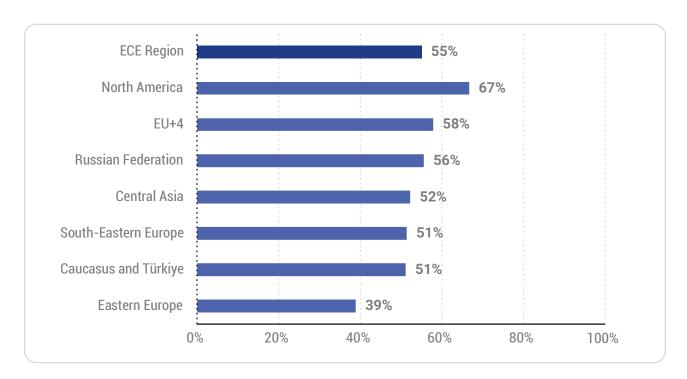
#### 3.5 Cross-border paperless trade

The 'cross-border paperless trade' subgroup includes six measures, most of them with low implementation rates across the region.

The average implementation rate for the subgroup across the ECE region reached 55% (Figure 18).

The highest implementation rates have been achieved in North America (67%), EU+4 (58%) and the Russian Federation (56%).

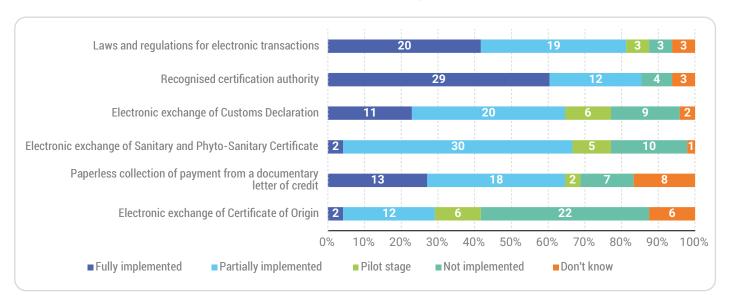
Figure 18. Implementation rate of 'cross-border paperless trade' measures, by country group, ECE, 2023



The two 'cross-border paperless trade' measures being implemented by most countries are 'laws and regulations for electronic transactions', whose implementation rate ranges from 44% in Eastern Europe to 100% in North America and 'recognized certification authority', with an implementation rate between 47% in Central Asia and 100% in the Caucasus and Türkiye, the Russian Federation and North America (Figure 19).

The measure implemented by the lowest number of countries, 'electronic exchange of certificate of origin', reached full implementation only in Belgium and the Netherlands and it is being implemented in 20 of the 48 ECE member States in the region.

Figure 19. Implementation rate of 'cross-border paperless trade' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023 (%)



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The 'electronic exchange of customs declaration' measure reached an average implementation rate of 55% across the region and recorded low implementation rates in all country groups.

The average implementation rate of the 'electronic exchange of SPS certificate' measure reached 49% and ranges between 0% in the Russian Federation and 59% in the EU+4 country group.

The 'paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit', with 53% average implementation rate across the region, has been fully implemented in North America and the Russian

Federation, while it reached only 13% implementation rate in South-Eastern Europe.

The implementation of measures in this subgroup can be facilitated by ECE UN/CEFACT instruments, including Recommendation No. 14 on authentication of trade documents, Recommendation No. 33 that provides recommendations and guidelines on establishing a single window, Recommendation No. 35 on establishing a legal framework for an international trade single window and Recommendation No. 36 on single window interoperability (see Table A-1).

In addition, UN/CEFACT has published a number of policy papers and guidance materials and launched new projects on cross-border paperless trade in the past two years. For example, the "White Paper: eDATA Verifiable Credentials for Cross Border Trade<sup>10</sup>" provides governments and policymakers implementation guidance on a highly scalable operating model for a full operation of digitization and trust of cross-border trade based on verifiable credentials, linked data, and decentralized identifiers. improving both export market access and border security. Two new UN/CEFACT projects have also been launched in 2023 on cross-border trade facilitation, namely "Data Governance for Trade Facilitation" and "Digital Identity Standardization for Trade Facilitation". The purpose of the former project is to provide governance related guidelines and controls for implementation in the light of increased data flows within domestic and cross-border trade along with data localization, privacy issues and guidelines. The latter project aims at evaluating the current management process of legal entity and asset identification in cross border paperless trade and attempts to prove that a consistent identifier for many actors involved in the supply chain hinders the development of effective IT-support systems and limits digitalization efforts by trade standards organizations.

The UN/CEFACT flagship e-business standards for trade and transport facilitation have also been further updated and published in 2023 to support the implementation of paperless and cross-border

paperless trade measures,<sup>11</sup> such as the United Nations rules for Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport (UN/EDIFACT) directories for the electronic interchange of structured data, the United Nations Code for Trade and Transport Locations (UN/LOCODE) directories for locations information of countries and territories widely used by major shipping companies, freight forwarders and governments around the world in trade related activities. These enhanced interoperable standards and harmonization of e-business practices would allow for simple, efficient, digital information exchange and enable governments and private sector to scale up the cross-border trade with reduced time and trade costs.

Furthermore, the ECE UN/CEFACT has also seen growing interests and uptake of its recommendations and standards on cross-border paperless trade in relevant regional and international policies and regulations. For example, the UN/CEFACT Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model (MMT RDM) has been referenced in two new draft EU transport regulations on electronic freight transport information (eFTI)<sup>12</sup> and the European Maritime Single Window Environment (EMSWe), as well as in the SPECA Roadmap for the Digitalization of Multimodal Data and Document Exchange in the Trans-Caspian Corridor.

Box 1.

Paperless trade and cross-border paperless trade in the region – progress and good practices

'Paperless trade' group of measures reached an 82% regional average implementation rate. However, only the Caucasus and Türkiye country group exceeded this average, recording an 88% implementation rate (Figure 20).

The implementation of 'cross-border trade facilitation' measures continues to pose challenges in the transition economies, where country-group averages range between 39% in Eastern Europe and 52% in Central Asia. The regional implementation rate is also low, at 55%.

ECE Region 55%

Caucasus and Türkiye 51%

South-Eastern Europe 51%

Eastern Europe 39%

52%

60%

80%

100%

Figure 20.

Paperless trade' and 'cross-border paperless trade', ECE transition economies, 2023 13

Central Asia

0%

Paperless trade

Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

20%

In Armenia, once the documentation and/or data requirements are received through the single window, they are not requested again by participating authorities or agencies except in urgent or special circumstances. Traders submit customs declarations electronically and are not required to submit paper-based documentation, according to Article 104, Clause 3 of the Customs Code of the Eurasian Economic Union. Import and export permits can be applied for through the single window and issued electronically, however, paper documents are still required for submission. Currently, work is being carried out to switch to electronic permit documents exclusively.

40%

■ Cross-border paperless trade

In the Republic of North Macedonia, the recognized certification authorities issue digital certificates to traders to conduct electronic transactions. The main digital certificate service provider is Makedonski Telekom. The country has an electronic application system for issuing export, import and transit licences, called EXIM.<sup>14</sup> The online system connects the 16 major cross-border regulatory agencies. It enables traders to access information on licensing 24/7, submit documentation and receive electronic licences relating to import and export through one submission. With the accession to the Convention on a Common Transit Procedure (CTC), the country started using the NCTS phase 4 system - a tool for implementing the transit procedures using advanced technologies and electronic data processing. The system allows for the exchange of electronic messages between economic operators and customs offices, as well as between customs offices. It is a tool for management and control of transit operations, enabling modern and efficient management.

The Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, with support of ECE, has developed a national trade facilitation roadmap which serves as the guiding framework for comprehensive national trade facilitation reforms over the period of 2021-2025. By 2025 the government intends to cease circulation of paper-based import- and export-related priority goods documents and transition to digital trade facilitation services to achieve 60% of implementation of digital trade facilitation measures, as laid out in the 2023 Global Survey. In order to achieve

the milestones, the government has adopted a legislative act entitled "On accession of the Kyrgyz Republic to International Convention on Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures". In 2023, the parliament passed the bill on the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the ESCAP Framework Agreement to Facilitate Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. They have also prepared a project proposal to finance the implementation of Articles 5.3 and 10.1 of the WTO TFA as part of the overall action plan of the country.

The United Kingdom's landmark Electronic Trade Documents Act came into force in September 2023, providing legal recognition to commercial trade documents in digital form, including bills of lading and exchange and promissory notes. Businesses now have the freedom to choose digital trade documents over paper documents across the entire supply chain, from freight logistics companies to banks, and to importers and exporters large and small. This is a significant milestone to digitalise the global trading system at scale. Currently, 99% of all bills of lading are issued in paper form, and with approximately 80% of all bills of lading arbitrated under English law, processing times for goods throughout the supply chain can be slashed from weeks to hours. Encouraging the mass adoption of digital trade documents could improve access to trade finance for SMEs and increase SME participation in international trade. The UK is estimated to receive £1 billion boost to the country's economy over the next decade through this innovative trade digitalization act that aims to make trade cheaper, faster and more secure.

To accommodate the supply chain's business needs, the **Netherlands** Customs is implementing several initiatives to minimize disruptions to the supply chain given that they handle large volumes of import and export declarations as a major entry point to the EU. A risk-based supervision approach has been developed and applied with all shipments being risk-assessed. Businesses can apply for a preferential risk regime, where real-time transaction inspections are reduced in return for increased insights into business systems. For the large volume of e-commerce shipments, a dedicated declaration system called 'DECO' was created in 2021, which was designed to reduce the administrative burden on shippers. This approach is in alignment with developments in the EU. The objective is to embrace digital transformation and simplify customs processes for business in the EU. These concepts are reflected in the recently released EU Customs Reform Proposal<sup>15</sup> and will be implemented on an EU-wide scale in the coming decade.

#### 3.6 Transit facilitation

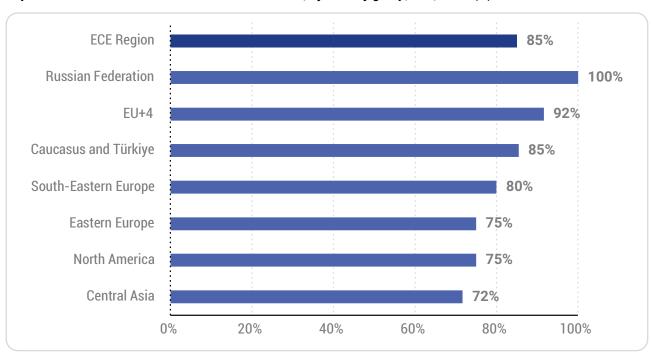
The 'transit facilitation' subgroup includes four measures, three of which correspond to WTO TFA articles. 'Customs authorities limit the physical inspection of transit goods and use risk assessment' is linked to WTO TFA Article 10 (formalities connected with importation, exportation and transit). 'Supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation' and 'cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit' corresponds to WTO TFA Article 11 (freedom of transit).

The implementation rate for the region reached 85% (Figure 21). Across the country groups, the implementation rate ranged from 72% in Central Asia to 100% in the Russian Federation.

South-Eastern Europe recorded the highest increase among the country groups, from 63% in 2021 to 80% in the current survey.

Figure 21.

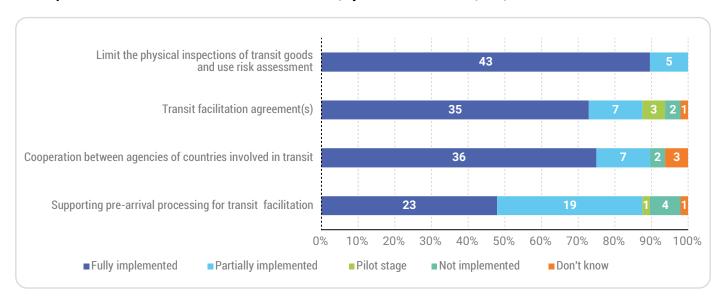
Implementation rate of 'transit facilitation measures', by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)



The measure 'limit the physical inspection of transit goods and use risk assessment' reached an implementation rate of 97% across the region and it is partially or fully implemented by all countries who participated in the survey (Figure 22).

The second measure implemented by the highest number of countries relates to 'transit facilitation agreement(s)'. The measure is implemented by 45 out of the 48 ECE member States.

Figure 22. Implementation rate of 'transit facilitation' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

'Transit facilitation agreement(s)' and 'cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit' reached 85% implementation rates across the

region, while 'supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation' recorded a 75% implementation rate.

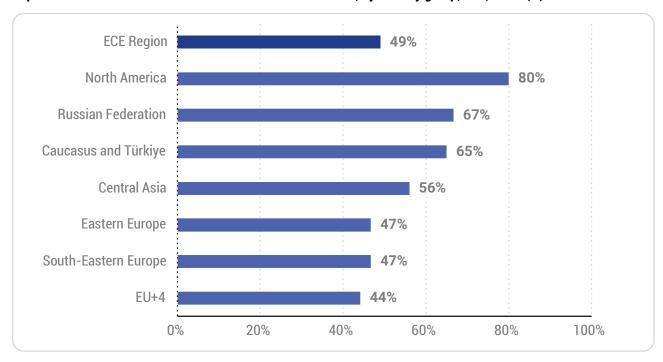
#### 3.7 Trade facilitation for SMEs

The implementation rate of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' reached 49%, one of the lowest implementation rates across the subgroups of measures (Figure 23).

The implementation rates vary across the region - from 44% for the EU+4 country group to 80% in North America. The country groups of the Russian

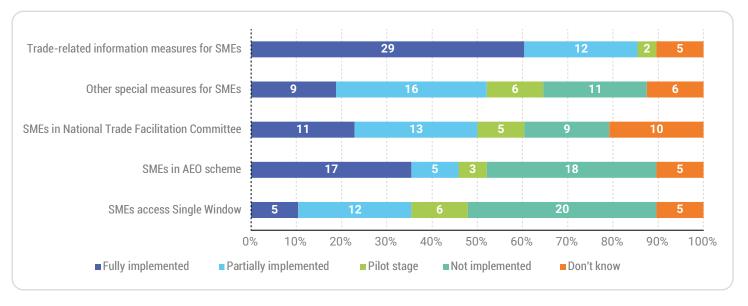
Federation and the Caucasus and Türkiye achieved implementation rates of 67% and 65% respectively. Central Asia reached 56%, above the region average, while Eastern Europe and South-Eastern Europe are lagging at 47%.

Figure 23. Implementation rate of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' measures, by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)



The measure in this subgroup being implemented by most countries in the region is 'trade-related information measures for SMEs', with an implementation rate of 78% (Figure 24). The other measures in the subgroup recorded implementation rates between 31% (for 'SMEs access to single window') and 45% (for 'other special measures for SMEs').

Figure 24. Implementation rate of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The least implemented measure in this subgroup, 'SMEs access to single window', is currently being implemented by only 23 out of the 48 ECE member States who participated in the survey. The implementation of this measure is dependent on the 'paperless trade' measure 'electronic single window system', what reached only 65% across the region. More could be done in terms of financial support for SMEs, access to infrastructure and available resources to increase the pace of the implementation of 'SMEs access to single window'.

Considering the important role of SMEs in job creation and economic development, accelerating the implementation of these measures would contribute to higher trade volumes and economic growth. This can be achieved by investing in programmes, initiatives and policies supporting the implementation of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' measures.

Box 2.

Trade facilitation for SMEs in the transition economies – progress and good practices

While the ECE average implementation rate of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' increased from 45% to 49% during the 2021-2023 period, it is important to highlight that several transition economies saw significantly greater improvements in enhancing the trade environment for SMEs.

ECE Region 49%

Caucasus and Türkiye 65%

Central Asia 56%

Eastern Europe 47%

Figure 25. 
'Trade facilitation for SMEs', ECE transition economies, 2023

0%

10%

Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

20%

Central Asia's 'trade facilitation for SMEs' implementation rate increased from 50% in 2021 to 56% in 2023, with the largest increase being recorded by Uzbekistan, rising from 60% to 87%.

30%

40%

50%

60%

709

In the Caucasus and Türkiye country group, the most significant progress has been achieved by Georgia where the 'trade facilitation for SMEs' implementation rate increased from 80% in 2021 to 93% in 2023.

The 'trade facilitation for SMEs' measure in South-Eastern Europe increased from 35% in 2021 to 47% in 2023. This notable enhancement in the country group's trade environment is exemplified by the progress made by individual countries within South-Eastern Europe. Bosnia and Herzegovina have experienced a rise in trade facilitation for SMEs from 13% in 2021 to 20% by 2023, reflecting their dedication to improving conditions for SMEs. Similarly, the Republic of North Macedonia has demonstrated remarkable growth, with trade facilitation surging from 40% in 2021 to an impressive 67% in 2023. The same increase as in the Republic of Macedonia has been registered in Serbia, signifying an effort to bolster trade opportunities for SMEs in these countries.

In Georgia, the government has developed trade facilitation measures that ensure easy and affordable access for SMEs to trade-related information. In consultation with SME associations, the government implemented programmes on accessing trade-related information and understanding trade procedures tailored to SMEs. Enterprise Georgia organizes both trainings and masterclasses on regular basis. The government is taking actions to make the single window more accessible to SMEs, setting up computing centres where SMEs can access it.

Similarly, in the Republic of North Macedonia, the government is taking actions to make the single window more accessible to SMEs. In addition, SMEs derive several advantages from streamlined trade procedures and

customs regulations. These benefits include a significant reduction in the costs associated with complying with various trade-related processes, deferred duty payments and facilitation of bank guarantees.

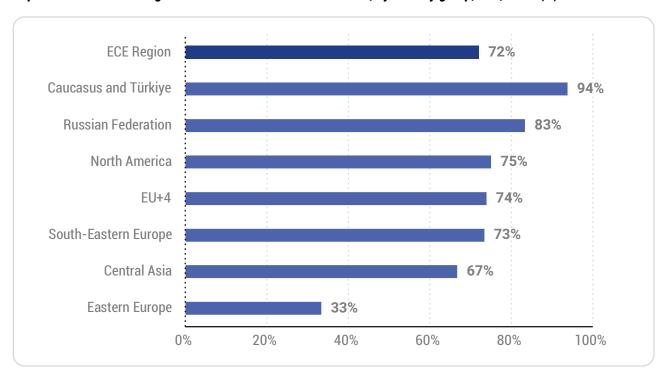
In Serbia, the Ministry of Economy promotes SME development and entrepreneurship and provides programmes and training tailored to SMEs on accessing trade-related information and understanding trade procedures. Serbia is in the process of accession to the EU and harmonization with the EU acquis. EU legislation does not recognize any difference between SMEs and other companies when authorized economic operator (AEO) authorization is in question. Legislation in this area has already been aligned with EU legislation.

## 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 WTO TFA Article 7 (release and clearance of goods). The implementation rate for this subgroup reached 72% for the region, a significant increase from 61% in 2021 (Figure 26). However, there are large differences in the implementation rates for the country groups. Eastern Europe has the lowest implementation rate

of 33%, while the Caucasus and Türkiye reached 94%. Central Asia also has a relatively low implementation rate of 67% compared to the other country groups. It is worth noting that Central Asia registered an increase in their implementation rate from 56% in 2021. The Russian Federation implementation rate reached 83%, North America recorded 75%, followed closely by EU+4 at 74% and South-Eastern Europe at 73%.

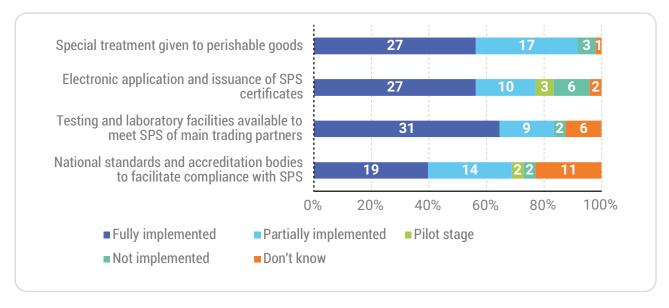
Figure 26. Implementation rate of 'agricultural trade facilitation' measures, by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)



The 'special treatment for perishable goods measure' is the most implemented, by 44 countries in the region (Figure 27). The next most implemented is 'electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates', currently being implemented by 40

countries, as compared to 28 countries in 2021 when the measure ranked as the least implemented in the subgroup. This increase can be attributed to the requirements of electronic documentation during the pandemic.

Figure 27. Implementation rate of 'agricultural trade facilitation' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The least implemented measure is 'national standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS', with an implementation rate across the region of only 60%. The implemen-

tation rates of the other measures range between 72% for 'electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates' and 80% for 'special treatment for perishable goods'.

Box 3. Agricultural trade facilitation in the transition economies – progress and good practices

The ECE average implementation rate of 'agricultural trade facilitation' increased from 61% in 2021 to 72% in 2023.

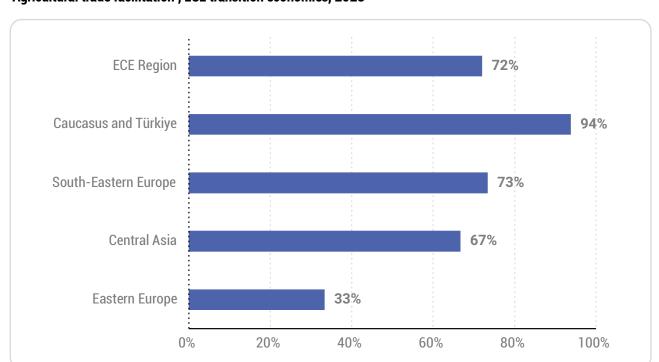


Figure 28. 'Agricultural trade facilitation', ECE transition economies, 2023

Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The implementation rate in the Caucasus and Türkiye increased from 81% to 94%. The most significant progress has been achieved by Türkiye where the 'agricultural trade facilitation' implementation rate increased from 67% in 2021 to 92% in 2023. Armenia also registered a high increase, from 83% to 92% during the same period, and Georgia from 75% to 92%.

In Central Asia, the 'agricultural trade facilitation' rate increased from 56% to 67%. It is worth noting the rise in the implementation rate in Uzbekistan, from 58% to 92%.

The **South-Eastern Europe** average also registered an increase, from 65% to 73%. The most notable progress has been recorded in the **Republic of North Macedonia**, who achieved full implementation, from 67% in 2021, and **Serbia**, where the implementation rate increased from 75% to 83%.

In Georgia, the Laboratory of the Ministry of Agriculture (LMA) is implementing food safety, veterinary and plant diseases diagnosis. The LMA network operates country-wide and includes three zonal diagnostic and eight regional laboratories. The LMA has received the international accreditation (ISO 17025) and has introduced a quality management system conforming to ISO 9001. In the Republic of North Macedonia, testing and laboratory facilities are also available to meet the SPS standards of trading partners and SPS certificates can be applied for and issued electronically through the single window.

In Serbia, SPS certificates are also applied for and issued electronically. As of February 2022, the Border Phytosanitary Inspectorate has fully transitioned to the new information system used for the recording of import controls.

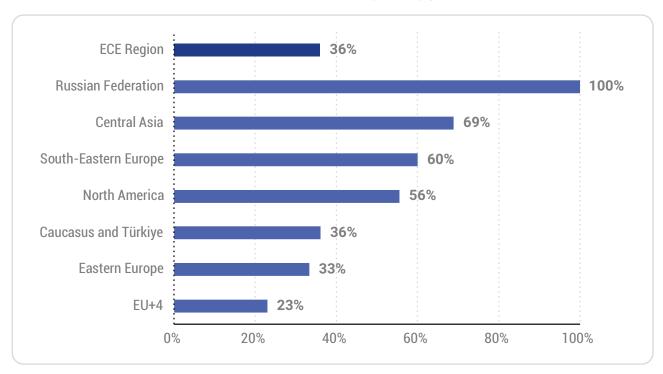
In Türkiye, the testing and laboratory facilities are recognized internationally. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has membership in OECD Seed Schemes, the International Seed Testing Association (ISTA) and the International Union for the Protection of New Varieties of Plants (UPOV).

#### 3.9 Women in trade facilitation

The 'women in trade facilitation' subgroup reached an average implementation rate for the region of only 36%, one of the lowest implementation rates among all subgroups of measures (Figure 29). It is worth nothing that there has been a slight increase from 27% in 2021.

The implementation rate varies widely across country groups. The Russian Federation reached full implementation, followed by Central Asia with implementation rate of 69%. The lowest rate of 23% has been recorded for the EU+4 group.

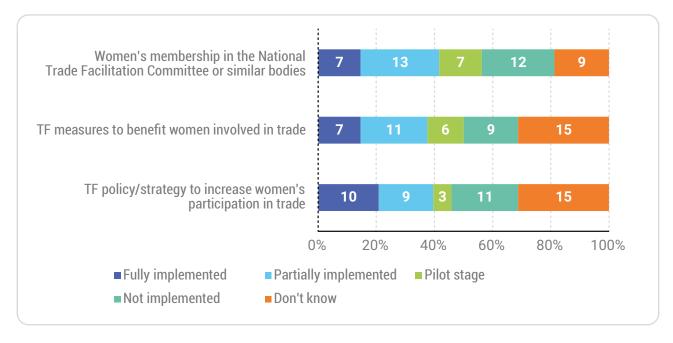
Figure 29. Implementation rate of 'women in trade facilitation' measures, by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)



The three measures included in this subgroup have close implementation rates. 'women's membership in the NTFC or similar bodies', the most implemented measure in the subgroup and currently being implemented by 39 countries, reached an implemen-

tation rate of 38% (Figure 30). 'Trade facilitation policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade' reached a 35% implementation rate and the least implemented measure, 'TF measures to benefit women involved in trade' reached a rate of 34%.

Figure 30. Implementation rate of 'women in trade facilitation' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

Many countries responded that they are not aware of whether measures related to 'women in trade facilitation' are being implemented (Figure 30). It is recommended that governments and international organizations prioritize initiatives that facilitate

increased participation of women traders in global supply chains. This could contribute to increased trade flows and sustainable economic growth as well as gender-balanced participation in global value chains.

# Box 4. Women in trade facilitation in the transition economies – progress and good practices

The ECE average implementation rate of 'women in trade facilitation' increased from 27% in 2021 to 36% in 2023 (Figure 31).

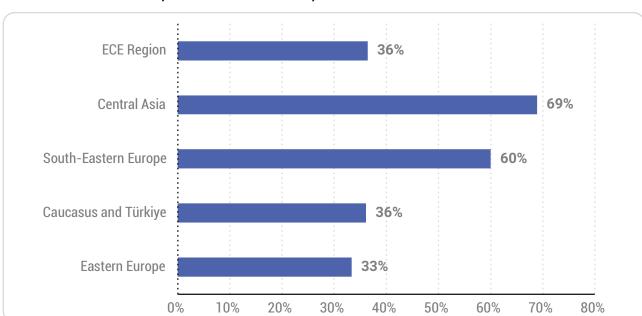


Figure 31. 'Women in trade facilitation', ECE transition economies, 2023

Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The implementation rate in the Caucasus and Türkiye group increased from 31% to 36%. The most significant progress has been achieved by Türkiye where the implementation rate increased from 0% to 56% since the 2021 survey. Georgia also registered a high increase, from 11% to 22% during the same period.

In Central Asia, the 'women in trade facilitation' average implementation rate increased from 50% to 69%. It is worth noting the rise in the implementation rate in Kazakhstan, from 56% to full implementation, and in Uzbekistan, from 33% to 78%.

Eastern Europe's average implementation rate of 'women in trade facilitation' increased from 15% to 33%. The most notable progress has been recorded in the Republic of Moldova, where the implementation rate increased from 0% to 56%.

In **Türkiye**, the Women Entrepreneurs Network Programme aims at forming a robust B2B network among women entrepreneurs at the national level in all 81 provinces of Türkiye. Through the programme, female entrepreneurs are provided information about becoming an exporter, as well as best practices for engaging in international trade. To date, the programme has brought together approximately 3,000 women entrepreneurs in 72 provinces. Women traders are participating in the NTFC, currently representing 28% of the total number of traders.

In the Republic of Moldova, the NTFC includes female traders' representatives and has been chaired by a female entrepreneur. Of the 56 business associations represented in the NTFC, 21 are led by women.

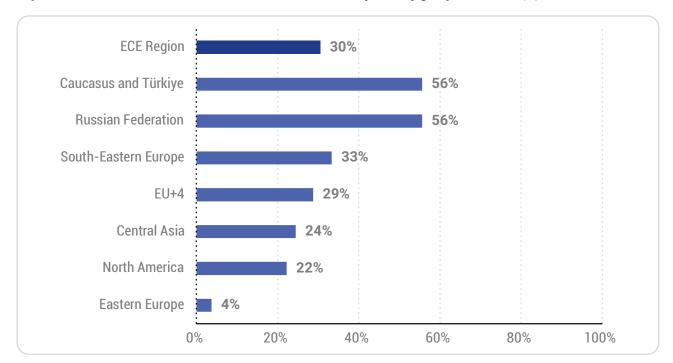
#### 3.10 Trade finance facilitation

The ECE average implementation rate of 'trade finance facilitation' measures reached 30%, an increase compared to 24% in 2021 (Figure 32).

The highest implementation rate of 56% have been achieved in the Caucasus and Türkiye and

the Russian Federation. The other country groups recorded rates between 4% for Eastern Europe and 33% for South-Eastern Europe. It is worth noting that South-Eastern Europe registered a significant increase from 18% in 2021.

Figure 32. Implementation rate of 'trade finance facilitation' measures, by country group, ECE, 2023 (%)



Many of the respondents were not aware of whether these measures are being implemented (Figure 33).

The most implemented measure, 'variety of trade finance services available', reached 59% implementation for the region. 'Single window facilitates trader to access to finance' recorded a 20% implementation rate. This can be due to the low implementation rate of 'electronic single window system' across the region.

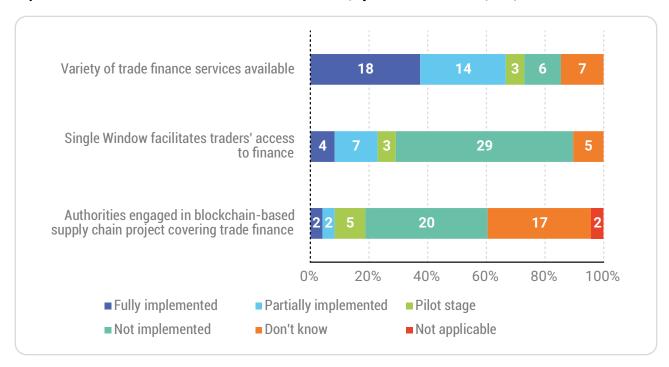
The least implemented measure, 'authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering

trade finance, is currently being implemented only by nine of the ECE countries, with 17 countries not being aware of whether this measure is being implemented.

Accelerating the implementation of 'single window facilitates trader access to finance' and 'authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance' could contribute to climate-smart trade and further increase trade flows.

Figure 33.

Implementation rate of 'trade finance facilitation' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

#### 3.11 Trade facilitation in times of crisis

The 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' subgroup of measures was introduced in the 2021 survey in response to the challenges faced by regional and global supply chains due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

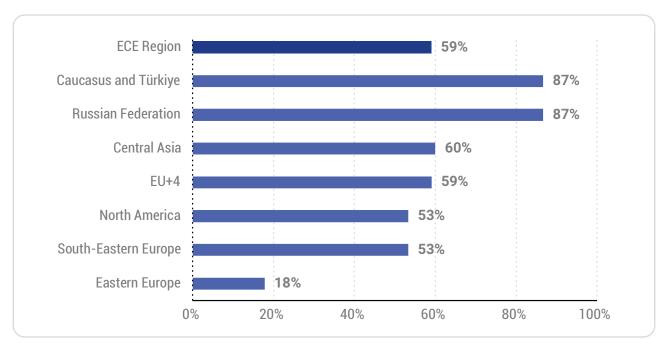
Within the 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' subgroup, there are five measures aimed at evaluating governments and customs authorities' ability to implement trade facilitation measures during extraordinary emergency situations, such as blockings at cross border points for the transportation of grain cargoes due to the ongoing geopolitical

tensions, while also enhancing their readiness to manage future crises.

In 2023, the ECE average implementation rate of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' reached 59%, an increase from 46% in 2021 (Figure 34).

The Caucasus and Türkiye and the Russian Federation achieved the highest implementation rate of 87%. The other groups recorded between 53% and 60%, except for Eastern Europe group which reached 18%.

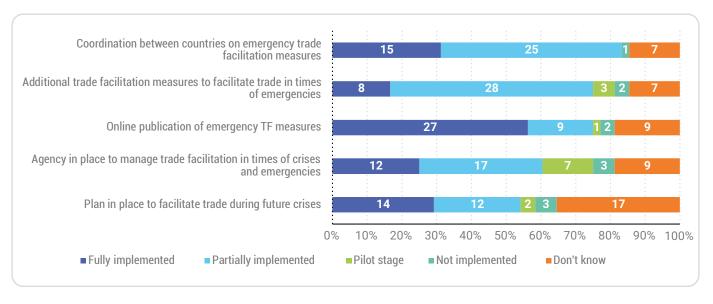
Figure 34. Implementation rate of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' measures, ECE, 2023 (%)



The measure implemented by most countries is 'coordination between countries on emergency trade facilitation measures', currently being implemented

by 41 of the 48 ECE member States who participated in the survey (Figure 35).

Figure 35. Implementation rate of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' measures, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

The measure implemented by the least number of countries is 'plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises'. In addition, 17 countries are not aware of whether this measure is being implemented.

It is critical to accelerate the implementation of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' measures to lower the risk of disruptions in regional and global supply chains in the event of future emergencies.

To achieve this, ECE suggests leveraging the use of the UN/CEFACT package of documentary and data exchange standards and trade facilitation best practices recommendations, including for cutting edge, innovative solutions such as verifiable credentials and internet of things (IoT) sensors for smart containers.

#### Box 5.

#### Trade facilitation in times of crisis in the transition economies – progress and good practices

Transition economies have registered significant progress in the implementation of 'trade facilitation measures in times of crisis'. Notably, Türkiye, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Uzbekistan recorded high increases in the implementation rate since the 2021 survey.

For Türkiye the implementation rate of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' increased from 67% in 2021 to 93% in 2023. The government has assigned the Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry to implement and manage trade facilitation measures in times of crisis. The government started accepting electronic documents for import/export/transit formalities during emergencies. The border agencies are equipped with digital platforms to facilitate remote working/inspection in times of crises and emergencies. Customs clearance of goods arriving in case of crisis and disaster is carried out according to simplified procedures and these goods are exempt from customs duties.

For Georgia the implementation rate increased from 73% to 93% during the 2021-2023 period. The Interagency Coordination Council under the Prime Minister of Georgia is implementing the 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' measure. To ensure business continuity and provide the necessary information to economic operators, the Revenue Service has used all forms of communication channels. In addition, information leaflets have been published in Georgian, English, Turkish, Azeri, Russian and Armenian and are provided to all truck drivers.

Azerbaijan achieved full implementation of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis'. The government implemented additional cross-border paperless trade measures to facilitate trade in times of crisis, accepting electronic documents for import/export/transit formalities during emergency situations that previously needed to be submitted in paper form. Legal mechanisms are in place for accepting and ensuring the validity of trade-related electronic data and documents in times of crisis and emergencies.

In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina responded on this measure for the first time with a 40% implementation rate. The Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations is responsible for implementing trade facilitation measures in times of crisis. In the context of COVID-19 Pandemic, Bosnia and Herzegovina together with other Parties to the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), established Green Line Corridors for perishable goods.

A notable increase in the implementation rate of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' measures has been registered in Uzbekistan for the first time at 87% in 2023. During the pandemic, the Republican Anti-Crisis Commission was created to promptly resolve the problems in connection arising from the pandemic and to develop additional policy measures to ensure uninterrupted business operation of the economy. The Customs Committee of Uzbekistan has established an interdepartmental operational headquarters to ensure expedited passage of goods through border customs posts. Decisions were made to create a green corridor for the supply of critical goods, with the temporary elimination of import customs duties and simplification of customs procedures.

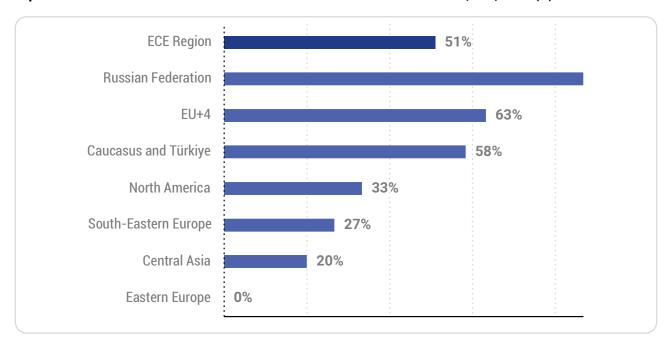
#### 3.12 Trade facilitation for e-commerce

The ECE average implementation rate of 'trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce' reached 51% for the region (Figure 36). The implementation rates vary widely, from 0% in Eastern Europe to 100% in the Russian Federation.

EU+4 and the Caucasus and Türkiye reached 63% and 58% respectively, while North America, South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia are lagging, with rates lower than 33%.

Figure 36.

Implementation rate of 'trade facilitation for cross-border e-commerce' measure, ECE, 2023 (%)

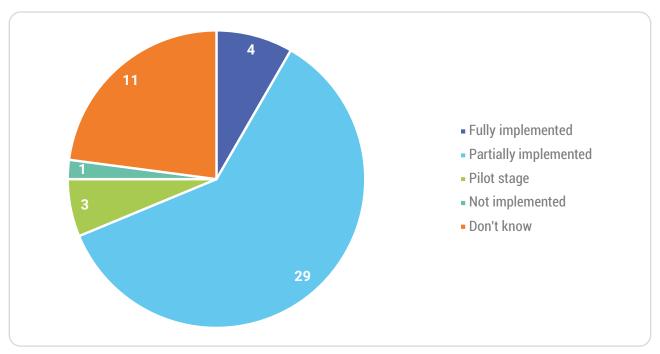


The 'trade facilitation for cross-border e-commerce' is currently being implemented by 36 of the 48 ECE member

States (Figure 37).

Figure 37.

Implementation rate of 'trade facilitation for cross-border e-commerce' measure, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

It is worth noting that 11 respondents were not aware of whether this measure is being implemented. It is recommended that governments increase awareness of trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce to enable easier and faster flow of goods across borders.

## 3.13 Trade facilitation and wildlife protection

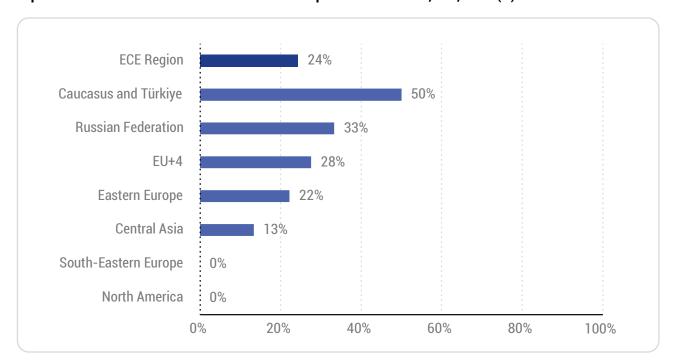
Wildlife trade, a multifaceted global industry, holds both economic and ecological significance. While it can support livelihoods and economic development, it often poses severe threats to biodiversity, driving species towards the brink of extinction.

The 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' subgroup relates to the implementation of eCITES. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, known as CITES, is an agreement between governments that aims to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plant specimens is regulated for the protection of those species. Electronic permits are an emerging digital solution for improving the implementation of the CITES convention by allowing electronic application, issuance, border control and exchange

of CITES permits or certificates. The e-permits are also being used as a means of combatting illegal trade and improving transparency and prevention of fraudulent permits. The eCITES digital solution allows for faster and more robust reporting and better scientific data.

The 'electronic application, issuance and exchange of CITES permits/certificates' measure reached only 24% implementation rate across the region (Figure 38). The highest implementation rate of 50% has been achieved by the Caucasus and Türkiye. The Russian Federation recorded the next highest implementation rate of 33%. South-Eastern Europe and North America are not implementing this measure at the moment.

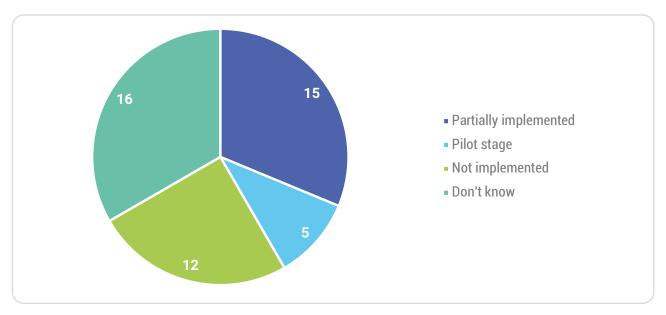
Figure 38. Implementation rate of 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' measure, ECE, 2023 (%)2023



The 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' measure is currently being implemented by 20 of the 48 ECE member States who participated in the

survey (Figure 39). A high number of respondents (16) were not aware of whether this measure is being implemented.

Figure 39. Implementation rate of 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' measure, by number of countries, ECE, 2023



Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023

#### Box 6.

#### Trade facilitation and wildlife protection in the transition economies – progress and good practices

Highlighted below are good practices for effectively implementing the measure under 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' subgroup in the transition economies.

In Armenia, 'electronic application, issuance and exchange of CITES permits/certificates' is partially implemented. The procedure for issuing permits/certificates for exporting and importing wild animals and plants, their parts and derivatives into and out of the territory of the Republic of Armenia is subject to regulation under CITES and the forms of the permit (certificate) and application have been approved by Decision N 1281-N of the Government of the Republic of Armenia, dated 22 October 2009.

In Türkiye, the focal point of the CITES Convention and the main management authority, is the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks. The main management authority is responsible for the general coordination, cooperation and communication between the secretariat, parties and related institutions. The trade monitoring and database system was established to issue the CITES permits/certificates electronically. The CITES Database program has been issuing CITES permits since 1 January 2016. However, the CITES permit must also be in paper form, as it is necessary to control the CITES permit at customs points in order to control trade flow.

In Azerbaijan, exporters can obtain the CITES international permit certificate, from the one-stop shop Export Support Centre fast and without spending additional resources and time, which in turn, simplifies the export procedures.

In the Republic of Moldova, the 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' measure is being implemented by the Environmental Agency, who issues permits for the legal trade of certain species, enforces regulations and collaborates with organizations and agencies involved in wildlife conservation. Currently, eCITES permits can be applied for and issued electronically through the Government of the Republic of Moldova website, the one-stop shop for managing government permits in the Republic of Moldova.

Spotlight on the progress of the trade facilitation implementation in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in the

### Key messages:

- This subsection highlights the progress in the implementation of "Digital" and "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" groups of measures in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, to support evidence-based policymaking in the context of their ongoing accession process to the WTO.
- For the overall implementation of the "General" and "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures, Azerbaijan reached 87% implementation rate, an increase from 85% in 2021. Turkmenistan participated for the first time in the survey and recorded an implementation rate of 49%, while Uzbekistan reached a significant increase, from 62% in 2021 to 85% in 2023.
- Specifically, the three countries have also made significant progress in implementing "Digital Trade Facilitation" measures. Azerbaijan maintained relatively high implementation rate of the 'paperless trade' measures, from 85% in 2021 to 89% in 2023, while 'cross-border paperless trade' measures remained at 67% implementation rate between 2021 and 2023. Turkmenistan recorded an implementation rate of 59% on 'paperless trade' measures and 28% on 'cross-border paperless trade' measures. The implementation rate of 'paperless trade' measures by Uzbekistan has increased from 74% to 89% in the past two years and for 'cross-border paperless trade' measures, the country recorded a significant increase from 33% in 2021 to 89% in 2023.
- The "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" group reached higher implementation rates in each of the three countries compared to the ECE average implementation rate.

ECE has been supporting its 17 programme countries - including many SPECA participating States (see Box 7) - in developing evidence-based policies on digital and sustainable trade facilitation. This subsection highlights the progress in the implementation of "Digital" and "Sustainable Trade Facilitation" groups of measures in selected SPECA participating States in the ECE region, namely Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The findings aim to support evidence-based policymaking in the context of these countries' ongoing accession process to the WTO.

According to the 2023 survey, the level of trade facilitation implementation in the ECE region reached 80%, which is considerably higher than the global average of 69%. Azerbaijan reached an overall 87% implementation, an increase from 85% in 2021. Turkmenistan participated for the first time in the survey and recorded an implementation rate of 49% (Figure 40). Uzbekistan reached a significant increase, from 62% in 2021 to 85% in 2023. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan trade facilitation implementation rate exceeds both the global and the ECE rates.

Azerbaijan 87% Turkmenistan 49% Uzbekistan 85% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100% 0% ■ Transparency Formalities ■Institutional arrangement and cooperation ■ Paperless trade ■ Cross-border paperless trade

Figure 40.

Trade facilitation implementation in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, 2023 (%)

Source: United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023

Box 7.
United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA)

The SPECA was launched in 1998 to strengthen subregional cooperation in Central Asia and its integration into the world economy. The participating States of SPECA are Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. ECE and ESCAP jointly provide overall support to the activities under this programme.

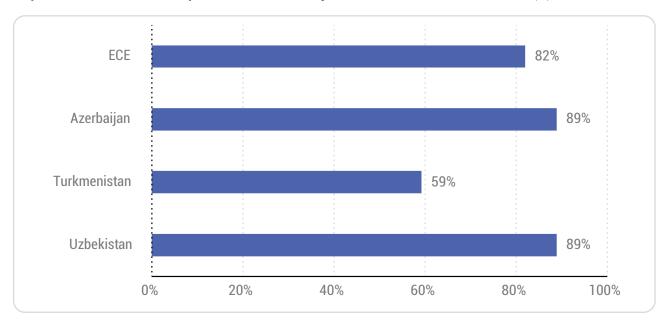
In November 2023, Azerbaijan chaired the Programme and hosted the SPECA Week in Baku. The 2023 SPECA Economic Forum focuses on the increased significance of connectivity, in the face of new challenges, in the Trans-Caspian International Transport Corridor (Middle Corridor) between Europe and China. It highlights the potential contribution of the digital transformation of data and document exchange along this trade and transport route to making the economies of the region greener, circular, and inclusive. The choice of topic reflects priority issues for the region today: the crises of the 21st century caused serious disruptions of supply chains, adding cost to logistics operations in a region already burdened with the problems of being landlocked.

### Digital Trade Facilitation implementation

The implementation of the 'paperless trade' measures for the ECE region reached 82% (Figure 41), while the implementation of the 'cross-border

paperless trade' measures is still relatively low at 55% (Figure 42).

Figure 41. 'Paperless trade facilitation' implementation in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, 2023 (%)

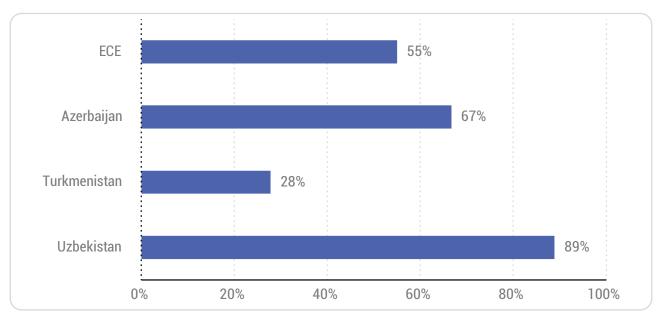


Source: United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023

Several 'cross-border paperless trade' measures depend on the implementation of 'paperless trade' measures and also require cooperation between

governments and recognition of digital trade documentation.

Figure 42. 'Cross-border paperless trade facilitation' implementation in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, 2023 (%)



Source: United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023

Azerbaijan has maintained relatively high implementation rate of the 'paperless trade' measures, from 85% in 2021 to 89% in 2023, while its implementation rate of the 'cross-border paperless trade' measures remained at 67% between 2021 and 2023. The country has fully implemented the 'electronic single window system' with no paper documentation being required for import and export permits or customs declarations. Customs refunds can also be applied for electronically through the Unified Automated Information System. The country also developed a legal framework to facilitate cross-border electronic transactions, including e-commerce, and several certification authorities issue digital certificates to traders to conduct electronic transactions (e.g., the National Certification Services Centre, which is coordinated by the Ministry of Digital Development and Transport, the Asan Certification Services Centre operated by the State Tax Service under the Ministry of Economy and the Bank Certificate Services Center under the Central Bank of the Republic of Azerbaijan).

Turkmenistan recorded an implementation rate of 59% on 'paperless trade' measures and 28% on 'cross-border paperless trade' measures. The country has partially implemented the 'electronic single window system' measure and reported that all relevant stakeholders have access to the single window. The government is also implementing a legal framework facilitating cross-border electronic transactions called the "Digital Economy Development Concept for 2019-2025". The concept aims to increase trade efficiency for both the public and private sectors.<sup>17</sup>

The implementation rate of 'paperless trade' measures by Uzbekistan has increased from 74% to 89% in the past two years. For 'cross-border paperless trade' measures, the country recorded a significant increase from 33% in 2021 to 89% implementation in 2023. The country participates in the International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures (the Kyoto Convention) and the Convention on Temporary Admission to simplify and harmonize international trade procedures and increase the efficiency of border crossing and

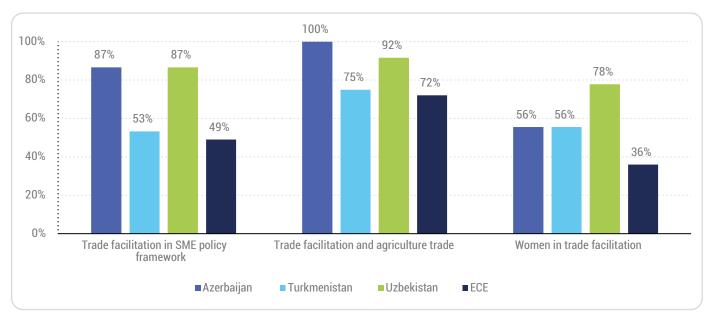
other trade-related processes. The transformation of the customs system in Uzbekistan highlights transparency and the reduction of trade costs, which are important for effective participation in the regional and global value chains. Reduced non-tariff trade expenditures, such as complex regulatory trade procedures and documentation, are critical to making trade more inclusive and efficient. During the 2017-2021 period, the government implemented numerous measures to reform the customs authorities, increase their efficiency and introduce modern, advanced ICT into their activities. The measures include the creation of an institution of authorized economic operators, the creation of an institute of customs audit, the implementation of the single window mechanism, reduction of the time required for customs clearance and release of goods, and equipping frontier customs posts with advanced inspection and screening equipment from the world's leading manufacturers. 18

Uzbekistan has also partially implemented the single window. To date, 60 types of permits have been issued by 12 ministries and departments and 60,000 participants in foreign economic activity use the system. In the first quarter of 2023, more than 120,000 permits were issued. The procedures for electronic submission of customs declarations have been published online and paper documents are not required for filing. Import and export permits can be applied for and issued electronically, air cargo manifests can be sent electronically, customs duties and taxes can be paid online, and customs refunds can be applied for electronically. Uzbekistan developed a legal framework for facilitating cross-border electronic transactions in 2004, the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On electronic commerce". On December 31, 2022, a new legislation on e-commerce entered into force, regulating the distance sales of goods, works and services and the sale of digital products, which applies to relationships arising from entrepreneurial activities as well as to relationships related to the acquisition of goods, works, services or digital products for personal purposes.

### Sustainable Trade Facilitation

"Sustainable Trade Facilitation" group reached higher implementation rates in each of the three countries compared to the ECE average (Figure 43). The lowest implementation rate in this group of measure has been recorded for the implementation of measures that support women traders.

Figure 43.
"Sustainable Trade Facilitation" implementation in Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, 2023 (%)



Source: United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023

### Trade facilitation for SMEs

In the ECE region, the implementation rate of 'trade facilitation for SME policy framework' increased from 45% in 2021 to 49% in 2023.

Azerbaijan has fully implemented trade facilitation measures that ensure easy and affordable access for SMEs to trade-related information. The Small and Medium Business (SMB) Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan offers programmes and organizes training activities tailored for SMEs on accessing trade-related information and understanding trade procedures. The programmes are developed in consultation with SME representatives. In addition, the government set up computing centres where SMEs can access the single window.

In 2023, the Customs Code of Turkmenistan was supplemented with a new chapter on AEOs. By becoming an AEO, SMEs can benefit from preferential measures, such as fewer physical inspections at customs, more rapid release times and reduced documentation and data requirements. In November 2023, customs officers met with representatives of the private sector to familiarize entrepreneurs with the new changes to the customs legislation related to the new chapter, as well as to explain the concept of the AEO scheme, and the opportunities and benefits for participants who are holders of AEO status.<sup>19</sup>

### Agricultural trade facilitation

In the ECE region, the implementation rate of 'agricultural trade facilitation' increased from 61% to 72%. Among the three countries, Azerbaijan has reported a 100% implementation rate on this measure. In the country, testing and laboratory facilities are available to certify agricultural and food products for exports in a timely manner. In addition, Azerbaijan has mutual recognition agreements of conformity assessments of agricultural or food products with trading partners and implements ISO/ IEC guides on conformity assessment procedures. The SPS certificates can be applied for through the single window and issued electronically. The border agencies give priority to perishable goods when scheduling physical examinations.

Turkmenistan, participating for the first time in the Global Survey, recorded a 75% implementation rate of 'agricultural trade facilitation', by providing testing and laboratory facilities to meet the SPS standards of its trading partners and by giving preferential treatment to perishable goods at border crossings.

Notably, the implementation rate of this measure in Uzbekistan has risen from 58% to 92%. In Uzbekistan, the Central Phytosanitary Laboratory is accredited in accordance with the international standard ISO/IEC 17025:2017. Special treatment is given to perishable goods at border crossings in accordance with Article 251 of the Customs Code of Uzbekistan.

### Women in trade facilitation

In the ECE region, the 'women in trade facilitation' rate increased from 26% in 2021 to 36% in 2023. Out of the three countries, Azerbaijan has implemented several initiatives simplifying access for women to cross-border trade operations. Such initiatives include the automation of border processes which are particularly important for women-led SMEs. Azerbaijan is promoting the active involvement of women in all areas of business with the introduction of open and equal opportunities in terms of their access to capacity-building activities, digital services and decision-making. The Customs Service of Azerbaijan, in close partnership with the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs aims to facilitate women's access to trade. One of the main activities of the Small and Medium Business (SMB) Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan is to promote the development of women's entrepreneurship.

In Turkmenistan, the trade facilitation strategy refers to gender equality as one of the objectives and addresses gender-based barriers to trade for women traders. Gender-specific impacts are considered in the assessment of any trade facilitation policy/ strategy.

It is also worth noting the rise in the implementation rate in Uzbekistan, from 33% to 78% due to several initiatives. This includes initiatives such as preferential loans for women entrepreneurs, engaging women traders in the Working Group on the accession of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the WTO TFA, and providing training programmes for women entrepreneurs. To develop women's entrepreneurship, more than 224,000 women were provided with preferential loans and women's entrepreneurship centres were created in 14 regions. The government is working on integrating gender aspects into all sectors of the economy, particularly in the areas of trade and customs administration. Since the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. UP-122 dated April 27, 2022,20 the share of women in customs authorities has at least doubled.

In Uzbekistan, the Trade Information platform was developed in 2022, providing step-by-step guidance to local and foreign entrepreneurs on import, export

and transit procedures from the user's point of view. The establishment of an NTFC is in the pilot stage. To date, a working group on the accession of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the WTO TFA has been created from among qualified specialists from interested ministries and departments, as well as traders. The composition of 40% women has been agreed upon and approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

While all three countries have reached implementation rates higher than the ECE average for each subgroup, there is still significant room to increase

the implementation rate, especially for SMEs and women in trade facilitation. It is recommended that governments and international entities accord these categories higher priority status. Expediting the implementation of measures aimed at facilitating trade for SMEs and fostering women's involvement in trade has the potential to foster economic growth while simultaneously promoting gender equality in global supply chains. Several UN/CEFACT tools can guide the implementation of these measures (see Section 4, Box 8).

### Conclusions and recommendations

Since the last survey, ECE has provided substantial support to the three countries in their trade facilitation-related effort on the accession process to the WTO, including:

- The provision of analysis on policies and regulatory frameworks for trade facilitation. For example, in 2023 jointly with the United Nations Regional Commissions, UNCTAD and the EU, ECE has been providing technical assistance to the Government of Uzbekistan to increase their preparedness to adopt and adapt to blockchain systems in international trade.<sup>21</sup> In addition, ECE also conducts studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade upon requests of member States, to support economic diversification and pro-poor growth in the region, with studies for Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan forthcoming.<sup>22</sup>
- The development and implementation of UN/ CEFACT standards and reference data models for the digitalization of data and document exchange along supply chains enabling international public goods to move from document exchange to digital dataset exchange. Between 2022 and 2023, ten transition economies including Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have received assistance and several pilot implementation projects were undertaken in the transition economies of the region.<sup>23</sup>

• Responses to capacity-building needs for evidence-based policymaking for digital and sustainable trade facilitation. For example, a technical workshop on paperless cross-border trade was organized in Baku, Azerbaijan in November 2023 during the 18th Session of the SPECA Working Group on Trade in collaboration with ESCAP. In addition, ECE is currently in the process of supporting the preparation of the national trade facilitation roadmap for Uzbekistan to help strengthen the capacity to implement trade facilitation measures and better integrate into the international rules-based trading systems.<sup>24</sup>

The secretariat invites representatives from Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to provide guidance on additional requests and further needs for policy and capacity building support regarding the WTO accession process. The secretariat also welcomes extrabudgetary support from Member States to help scale up existing approaches that facilitate broad and effective use of the respective ECE UN/CEFACT policy instruments, including through capacity-building and knowledge-sharing activities.

## 4.

# **Conclusion and way forward**



This report presents the survey results on 13 categories of trade facilitation measures covering 48 ECE member States from the seven country groups of the ECE region. Each of the 13 categories is presented, highlighting the progress and the challenges related to the implementation of the specific measures.

The findings offer clear directions for the future, highlighting the importance of actively engaging ECE member States and international partner organizations in fast-tracking the implementation of trade facilitation measures, particularly those leveraging digital technologies to foster climate-smart, sustainable trade practices.

### Recommendations

The trade facilitation measures included in this survey play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable development on multiple fronts. This includes bolstering economic growth, fostering social well-being and safeguarding the environment. In essence, the objective is to harmonize trade facilitation efforts with the broader SDGs, ensuring a balanced approach that considers the economic, social and environmental dimensions.

To keep pace with the changing landscape of trade facilitation and increased global competitiveness countries must adhere to international best practices for simplification, harmonization and standardization of regulatory practices and digitalization, including cross-border exchange of electronic trade data. International instruments such as the recommendations and standards developed by the ECE UN/CEFACT are used to align and eventually harmonize such practices.

UN/CEFACT has been a pioneer in the development of recommendations, e-business standards and guidance material for over four decades with about 50 trade facilitation recommendations and 950 e-business standards, technical specifications and guidance materials. In addition, ECE has developed implementation tools, such as the TFIG, to support countries in advancing on their journey for sustainable and digital trade facilitation. The new TFIG website is a pivotal tool that can help to drive the international agenda towards efficient, accessible and equitable cross-border trade and guide the establishment of

single windows, facilitation of transit corridors and other trade facilitation measures.

Digitalization has the potential to have a significant and positive impact on the move toward more environmentally sustainable trade practices. At the 70th Commission session held in April 2023, ECE set its strategic direction to support the digital and green transformations for sustainable development. Implementing paperless and cross-border digital trade measures can contribute to climate-smart trade by reducing the requirements for paper-based documentation and offers the dual benefit of diminishing trade costs while streamlining complex trade-related procedures. Furthermore, facilitating trade in the e-commerce realm and implementing initiatives such as eCITES can play vital roles in promoting eco-friendly trade. These measures can contribute to more sustainable and environmentally responsible trade practices, aligning trade with a greener and more ecologically conscious future. The ECE-UN/CEFACT tools, such as the flagship Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model and relevant standards on digitalization of data exchange , Recommendation No. 14 on authentication of trade documents, Recommendations 33, 35 and 36 related to single window concepts and detailed guidelines can accelerate the implementation of digital trade facilitation measures.

Accelerating the implementation of the 'trade facilitation for SMEs' and 'women in trade facilitation' measures can contribute to economic growth mitigate and simultaneously help inequality within the global trade landscape. These categories have notably low rates of implementation and must become priorities for governments and international organizations, given the significant potential for fostering inclusivity within global value chains, driving increased trade flows and stimulating economic growth. Prioritizing these categories can further empower SMEs, which often serve as the backbone of economies and can also pave the way for more diverse and equitable engagement in global value chains. This, in turn, has the potential to catalyse an increase in trade activity and subsequent economic growth at the country, regional and global levels. ECE Recommendation No. 4 on national trade facilitation bodies and Recommendation No. 40 on consultation approaches can support governments in the implementation of these categories.

The implementation of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' measures can contribute to a more robust, adaptable and proactive approach to managing and mitigating future disruptions in **global supply chains.** Trade facilitation must remain resilient even during challenging times. Currently, the least implemented measures are 'agency in place to manage trade facilitation measures in times of crises and emergencies' and 'plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises'. Assigning a higher priority to the implementation of these measures is essential to increase preparedness for the risks and challenges that future crises may present. ECE Recommendation No. 38 on trade information portals, Recommendation No. 44 on cross-border facilitation measures for disaster relief, and Recommendation No. 47 on pandemic crisis trade-related response provide the guidelines for the implementation of trade facilitation in terms of crisis measures.

Governments could further harness the potential of e-commerce to stimulate green economic growth and create job opportunities. E-commerce stands as a transformative force to redefine the landscape of trade, as it offers a multitude of advantages, including increasing trade flows, economic growth, job opportunities and innovation, as well as reducing trade costs and enabling SMEs to participate in global value chains. However, many countries with economies in transition in the region are still facing increasing challenges on digital technologies and e-commerce, such as infrastructure, education, employment, legislations and regulations, as well as customer trust and security concerns.<sup>26</sup> This digital divide has been exacerbated since the COVID-19 pandemic due to limited capacities and resources in those countries.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, to harness its full potential, governments should prioritize the development of a conducive regulatory environment, invest in digital infrastructure, develop financial support programmes for SMEs and foster digitalskills-related initiatives. For example, at the recent WTO 13th Session of the Ministerial Conference (MC13) in 2024 regarding the e-commerce moratorium, WTO members agreed to maintain the current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions until the 14th Session of the Ministerial Conference (MC14) or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier.28

Trade finance facilitation measures play a critical role in promoting trade and climate-smart economic growth. A robust and diverse portfolio of trade finance services can increase trade and foster resilience in the face of global challenges. Moreover, the seamless access to finance through a single window mechanism simplifies the trading process, enabling more traders to participate in global value chains and contributing to increased trade flows. The engagement of authorities in blockchain-based supply chain projects can modernize trade finance, contributing to climate-smart trade practices. To harness the full potential of these measures, it is paramount to prioritize their implementation since they can increase trade and also support economic growth while aligning with sustainable and environmentally conscious trade practices. The ECE "White Paper: Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)", "Green Paper on Trade Finance as a Tool for Trade Facilitation" and "White Paper: Blockchain in Trade Facilitation" can provide support for the implementation of trade finance facilitation measures.

Collaborative efforts are imperative to support the transition economies in accelerating the implementation of trade facilitation measures. ECE, leveraging its extensive experience in providing technical assistance to its 17 programme countries located in Central Asia, Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus and Western Balkans is well-prepared to respond to this imperative and can play a pivotal role in building the capacities of transition economies, ultimately promoting economic growth, knowledge sharing and climate-smart technological innovation.

### Box 8

### International progress and best practices – UN/CEFACT standards for digital and sustainable trade facilitation

To keep pace with the changing landscape of trade facilitation and to remain competitive in a dynamic global context, countries must adhere to international best practices for the simplification, harmonization and standardization of regulatory practices. This is particularly so when striving to harness the power of digitalization, including for the cross-border exchange of electronic trade data.

International instruments such as the recommendations and standards developed by the ECE UN/CEFACT are used to align and eventually harmonize such practices. These instruments provide a set of common principles and act as a "language" for international trade. They have been constantly updated and should be the first point of reference for the dynamic journey of trade facilitation.

Dynamic and sustainable trade facilitation reforms and digitalization of trade facilitation measures require a set of harmonized regulatory processes and interoperable digital systems based on international standards. For more than four decades, the ECE-hosted UN/CEFACT has been a pioneer in the development of about 50 trade facilitation recommendations and 950 e-business standards and guidance material. UN/CEFACT instruments reflect best practices in trade procedures and data and documentary requirements.

Table A-1 maps some of the key UN/CEFACT instruments against the measures in the survey as well as with the articles in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. It is noteworthy that the UN/EDIFACT is heavily used across the globe for the electronic exchange of trade data by the shipping industry. By far, it is the most widely used e-business standard developed by UN/CEFACT.

In addition to these key instruments, ECE also updated its TFIG e-learning platform (August 2023). The new TFIG website is a tool that can help drive the international agenda towards efficient, accessible and equitable cross-border trade. In its latest version, the TFIG offers an exceptionally user-friendly experience and incorporates an abundance of updated information covering diverse aspects of trade facilitation. It includes the latest updates of the ECE UN/CEFACT policy recommendations, papers and data reference models, as well as relevant work from partner organizations and case studies of countries.

In light of the current challenges facing international trade, increased cooperation between governments and international organizations is critical. Governments, specialized agencies, intergovernmental organizations can contribute to developing UN/CEFACT additional standards and accelerating the implementation of trade facilitation measures, particularly those leveraging digital technologies that contribute to climate-smart trade while reducing trade costs and streaming trade-related procedures.

The ECE calls upon all relevant actors and donors to further contribute to the substantive work of the UN/CEFACT in the development and update of its policy instruments and tools, including recommendations, standards and guideline materials, as well as continue to provide additional support and funding resources related to the capacity building and technical assistance activities in its 17 programme countries for the implementation of those UN/CEFACT recommendations and enhancement of the progress on trade facilitation in the region.

### **Annex I: UN/CEFACT instruments**

Table A-1
ECE UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards or guidelines supporting the WTO TFA and beyond

Groups Subgroups					
		Measures	Relevant TFA articles	UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards or guidelines	
	Transparency	Publication of existing im- port-export regulations on the Internet	1.2	Rec 38 – Trade Information Portals	
		Stakeholder consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)	2.2	Rec 40 – Consultation Approaches Rec 41 – Public-Private Partnerships in Trade Facilitation Rec 48 Private Sector Participation in National Trade Facilitation Bodies	
		Advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation	2.1	Rec 38 – Trade Information Portals	
		Advance ruling on tariff classi- fication and origin of imported goods	3		
		Independent appeal mechanism	4		
		Risk management	7.4	Rec 18 – Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures White Paper - Integrated Track and Trace for Multimod- al Transportation	
		Pre-arrival processing	7.1	Rec 15 – Simpler Shipping Marks	
		Post-clearance audits	7.5		
	Formalities	Separation of release from final determination of customs du- ties, 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)	
		TF measures for authorized operators	7.7	Rec 37 - Single Submission Portal	
General		Expedited shipments	7.8	Rec 18 – Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures	
trade facilitation		Acceptance of paper or elec- tronic copies of supporting documents required for import, export or transit formalities	10.2.1	Rec 13 – Facilitation of Identified Legal Problems in Import Clearance Procedures	
	Institutional cooperation and arrangement	National trade facilitation com- mittee 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 arrange- ments for border agencies cooperation	8	Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability	
		Government agencies delegat- ing border controls to customs authorities		Technical Note - Terminology for Single Window and other E-Platforms	
		Alignment of working days and hours with neighbouring coun- tries at border crossings	8.2(a)	Technical Note - Terminology for Single Window and other E-Platforms	
		Alignment of formalities and procedures with neighbouring countries at border crossings	8.2(b)	Technical Note - Terminology for Single Window and other E-Platforms	
	Transit facilitation	Transit facilitation agreement(s)		Executive Guide on the Electronic Consignment Note (eCMR)  Executive Guide - Transboundary Movement of Waste	
		Limit the physical inspection of transit goods and use risk assessment	10.5	White Paper on Integrated Track and Trace for Multi- modal Transportation	
		Supporting pre-arrival process- ing 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	

		Automated customs system			
Digital trade facilitation	Paperless trade	Internet connection available to customs and other trade control agencies		Rec 41 – Public-Private Partnerships in Trade Facili- tation	
		Electronic single window sys- tem	10.4	Rec 33 – Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a Single Window Rec 35 – Establishing a Legal Framework for an International Trade Single Window Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability	
		Electronic submission of customs declarations		Rec 33 – Recommendation and Guidelines on Estab- lishing a Single Window	
		Electronic application and issuance of import and export permit		Rec 18 – Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures Rec 33 – Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a Single Window	
		Electronic submission of sea cargo manifests		Rec 12 – Measures to Facilitate Maritime Transport  Documents Procedures  Rec 37 – Single Submission Portals (SSPs)  Rec 33 – Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a 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	
		Electronic application and issu- ance of preferential certificate of origin		Rec 33 – Recommendation and Guidelines on Estab- lishing a Single Window	
		E-payment of customs duties and fees	7.2	Rec 33 – Recommendation and Guidelines on Estab- lishing a Single Window	
		Electronic application for customs refunds		Rec 33 – Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a Single Window	
	Cross-border paperless trade	Laws and regulations for elec- tronic transactions		Rec 31 — Electronic Commerce Agreement Rec 35 — Establishing a Legal Framework for International Trade Single Window	
		Recognized certification authority		Rec 14 – Authentication of Trade Documents	
		Electronic exchange of customs declaration		Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability	
		Electronic exchange of certificate of origin		Rec 36 - Single Window Interoperability	
		Electronic exchange of sanitary and phytosanitary certificate		Rec 36 – Single Window Interoperability  Electronic SPS Certificate (ECert) BRS	
		Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit			

Sustain-	Trade facilitation for SMEs	Trade-related information measures for SMEs		Rec 38 - Trade Information Portals  White Paper - Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)
		SMEs in AEO scheme		White Paper - Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)
		SMEs access to single window		Rec 33 – Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a 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)
		SMEs in national trade facilitation committee		Rec 4 – National Trade Facilitation Bodies Rec 40 – Consultation Approaches Rec 48 - Private Sector Participation in National Trade Facilitation Bodies
able Trade Facilitation		Other special measures for SMEs		White Paper on Women in Trade Facilitation
racilitation	Agricultural trade facilitation	Testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS of main trading partners		
		National standards and ac- creditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS		
		Electronic application and issu- ance of SPS certificates		Electronic SPS Certificate (eCert) BRS
		Special treatment given to perishable goods	7.9	White Paper on Integrated Track and Trace for Multi- modal Transport
	Women in trade facilitation	TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade		White Paper - Women in Trade Facilitation
		TF measures to benefit women involved in trade		White Paper - Women in Trade Facilitation
		Women's membership in the national trade facilitation committee or similar bodies		White Paper - Women in Trade Facilitation Rec 48 Private Sector Participation in National Trade Facilitation Bodies

Other trade facilitation	Trade finance facilitation	Single window facilitates traders' access to finance  Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance  Variety of trade finance services	White Paper - Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)  Green Paper - Trade Finance as a Tool for Trade Facilitation  White Paper - Blockchain in Trade Facilitation  White Paper - Integrated Services for MSMEs in Inter-
	Trade facilitation in times of crisis	Agency in place to manage trade facilitation in times of crises and emergencies	national Trade (ISMIT)  Rec 44 - Cross-Border Facilitation Measures for Disaster Relief Rec 47 - Pandemic Crisis Trade-Related Response
		Online publication of emergency trade facilitation measures	Rec 44 - Cross-Border Facilitation Measures for Disaster Relief Rec 47 - Pandemic Crisis Trade-Related Response Rec 38 - Trade Information Portals
		Coordination between countries on emergency trade facilitation measures	Rec 44 - Cross-Border Facilitation Measures for Disaster Relief Rec 47 - 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 Rec 47 - Pandemic Crisis Trade-Related Response
		Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises	Rec 44 - Cross-Border Facilitation Measures for Disaster Relief Rec 47 - Pandemic Crisis Trade-Related Response
	Trade facilitation for e-commerce	Trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce	
	Wildlife trade facilitation	Electronic exchange of CITES permits/certificates	

Source: ECE, based on the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023.

### **Annex II: Survey methodology**

The United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023 was prepared according to the final list of commitments included in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and supplemented by forward-looking measures to be implemented under the United Nations treaty – the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.

The survey, conducted by the five United Nations Regional Commissions and UNCTAD, comprises 60 detailed common trade facilitation measures, categorized into four groups and 13 subgroups. The first group, "General Trade Facilitation" measures, includes WTO TFA measures under three subgroups: 'transparency', 'formalities', 'institutional arrangement and cooperation'. 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', 'women in trade facilitation'. The survey also includes a subgroup on 'transit facilitation'. In addition, the 'trade finance facilitation' subgroup was introduced in 2019 and developed in cooperation with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Banking Commission. In 2021, a new subgroup was introduced to assess 'trade facilitation in times of crisis', including immediate and long-term measures aimed at addressing crisis and pandemic situations like the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2023, two new measures have been added to this subgroup: 'trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce' and 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection'.

The overall scope of the survey goes beyond the measures included in the WTO TFA and includes trade facilitation measures such as those in the categories of 'Paperless trade' and 'Cross-border paperless trade' that would support the implementation of the WTO TFA. 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 help to increase participation of SMEs and women-led businesses in global value chains, as well as to evaluate countries' preparedness related to trade facilitation in times of emergencies, leading to increased trade flows and ultimately sustainable economic growth. This year's survey includes two new sets of measures on 'Trade facilitation for e-commerce' and 'Trade facilitation and wildlife protection, aiming to assess the progress on the facilitation of cross-border e-commerce and the application of electronic CITES permits and certificates.

### Table A-2

### The three-step approach for survey data collection and validation

### Step 1.

Data submission by experts: The survey instrument was sent by the ECE secretariat to trade facilitation experts and committees (governments, permanent missions, the private sector and academia) in ECE countries to gather preliminary information. The questionnaire was also made publicly available online and disseminated with the support of the 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 between January and March 2023.

### Step 2.

Data verification by the ECE secretariat: The ECE secretariat double-checked the data collected in Step 1. Desk research and data sharing among the United Nations Regional Commissions and survey partners were carried out to check the accuracy of data. Face-to-face or telephone interviews with key informants were arranged to gather additional information when needed. The outcome of Step 2 was a consistent set of responses per country. Step 2 took place between March and June 2023.

### Step 3.

Data validation by national governments: The ECE secretariat sent the completed questionnaire to each national government to ensure that the country had the opportunity to review the dataset and provide any additional information. This feedback was incorporated in order to finalize the dataset. Step 3 took place between June and July 2023.

### **Notes**

- 1 See https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/1.10%20Mario%20Apostolov%20UNECE.pdf. 2 USA is the other member State in this country group but did not participate in the survey through ECA, ECE or ESCAP.
- 2 Hendricks, S. & Mwapwele, S. D., 2024, 'A systematic literature review on the factors influencing e-commerce adoption in developing countries', Data and Information Management, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 100045, ISSN 2543-9251. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dim.2023.100045. 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.
- 3 ECE, 2022, 'Post-pandemic COVID-19 economic recovery: Harnessing E-commerce for the UNECE transition economies (ECE/TRADE/468)', January. Available at: https://unece.org/info/publications/pub/364128. 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%.
- 4 See 'MC13 ends with decisions on dispute reform, development; commitment to continue ongoing talks', available at: https://www.wto.org/english/news\_e/news24\_e/mc13\_01mar24\_e.htm.
- For this report, double quotation marks are used for groups (1st column), such as "General Trade Facilitation", "Digital Trade Facilitation", etc.; and single quotation marks are used for subgroups (2nd column) and measures (3rd column), such as 'transparency', 'publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet', etc.
- 6 Andorra is not an EU country, but it is part of the European Customs Union. For trade facilitation it maintains the rules and regulations according to the European Customs Union. Andorra has observer status in the WTO.
- 7 The United States of America is the other member State in this country group; it did not participate in the survey through ECE or ESCAP.
- 8 All implementation rates have been rounded.
- 9 The countries who participated in the 2021 survey were Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.
- 10 ECE, "White Paper eDATA Verifiable Credentials for Cross Border Trade", September 2022. Available at: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-10/WhitePaper\_VerifiableCredentials-CrossBorderTrade.pdf.
- 11 See "Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT): Report by the Chair" presented at the 132nd meeting of the ECE Executive Committee, 13 February 2024. Available at: https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/Item%205a\_2024\_3\_%20CEFACT%20Chair%26%23039%3Bs%20Report.pdf.
- 12 See https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/13661-Electronic-freight-transport-information-eFTI-procedures-and-access-rules-for-competent-authorities\_en.
- 13 Transition economies: Caucasus and Türkiye (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Türkiye); Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan); Eastern Europe (Belarus, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine); South-Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Serbia)

- 14 Republic of North Macedonia, Ministry of Finance, Customs Administration, e-customs, EXIM; https://customs.gov.mk/en-GB/pocetna/e-carina/exim/exim.nspx
- 15 European Commission, "EU Customs Reform: A data-driven vision for a simpler, smarter and safer Customs Union", 17 May 2023. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\_23\_2643.
- More information on the progress of SPECA in the United Nations Global Survey can be found in the "Report of the Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in the SPECA 2023", available at: https://repository.unescap.org/rest/bitstreams/70746eca-2fa1-4e1c-8cd1-079fb82c051d/retrieve.
- 17 Orient, "Turkmenistan starts to implement the Concept of the Development of the Digital Economy", 4 January 2019. Available at https://orient.tm/en/post/3103/turkmenistan-starts-to-implement-the-concept-of-the-development-of-the-digital-economy.
- 18 ECE, Regulatory and Procedural Barriers to Trade in Uzbekistan Needs Assessment. Forthcoming and will be available at: https://unece.org/trade/studies-regulatory-and-procedural-barriers-trade.
- 19 State Customs Service of Turkmenistan, "Customs officers explained to entrepreneurs the advantages of the Authorized Economic Operator status", November 2023. Available at https://customs.gov.tm/en/news/803.
- 20 A copy of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. UP-122 is available at: https://lex.uz/docs/5998704#.
- 21 For more information, see the UNDA Blockchains for Facilitating Trade and Enhancing Competitiveness Project website: https://unctad.org/project/blockchains-facilitating-trade-and-enhancing-competitiveness.
- 22 More information on the studies is available at: https://unece.org/trade/studies-regulatory-and-procedural-barriers-trade.
- 23 See Report from the Economic Commission for Europe Regional Adviser (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2023/INF.1), available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/ECE\_TRADE\_C\_CEFACT\_2023\_INF-01E-ReportRegionalAdvisor.pdf.
- 24 See Report from the Economic Commission for Europe Regional Adviser (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2023/INF.1), available at https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-09/ECE\_TRADE\_C\_CEFACT\_2023\_INF-01E-ReportRegionalAdvisor.pdf.
- 25 See https://unece.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/1.10%20Mario%20Apostolov%20UNECE.pdf.
- 26 Hendricks, S. & Mwapwele, S. D., 2024, 'A systematic literature review on the factors influencing e-commerce adoption in developing countries', Data and Information Management, Vol. 8, Issue 1, 100045, ISSN 2543-9251. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dim.2023.100045.
- 27 ECE, 2022, 'Post-pandemic COVID-19 economic recovery: Harnessing E-commerce for the UNECE transition economies (ECE/TRADE/468)', January. Available at: https://unece.org/info/publications/pub/364128.

- 28 See 'MC13 ends with decisions on dispute reform, development; commitment to continue ongoing talks', available at: https://www.wto.org/english/news\_e/news24\_e/mc13\_01mar24\_e.htm.
- 29 See the TFIG website, available at https://tfig.unece.org/.

# Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation UNECE Regional Report 2024

The ECE Regional Report 2023 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 Commissions Approach, agreed in Beirut in January 2010 by the Executive Secretaries of the five Regional Commissions. The fifth version of the Survey was conducted between February and June 2021 and resulted in responses from 48 member States of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)

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