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**Economic Commission for Europe**

Inland Transport Committee

**Eighty-third session**

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Item 7 (c) of the provisional agenda  
**Strategic questions of a horizontal and cross-sectoral policy or regulatory nature: Challenges and emerging trends of inland transport in different regions (statements by delegates)**

Overview of COVID-19-related challenges and emerging trends on inland transport in different regions

Note by the secretariat[[1]](#footnote-2)\*

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| *Mandate and Summary* |
| This document is prepared in line with the ITC Strategy until 2030 (ECE/TRANS/288/Add.2) and the role the Committee plays as the United Nations Platform for regional, interregional and global inland transport policy dialogues, by providing a platform to review emerging challenges in inland transport at its annual session. |
| This document contains a review of challenges and emerging trends on inland transport in different regions, with this year’s thematic focus being on COVID-19. |
| Its key conclusions are: |
| • Despite widely uneven epidemiological and macroeconomic impacts of the pandemic experienced in different United Nations regions, inland transport emergency responses followed similar uncoordinated patterns, thus rendering them less effective and more harmful both epidemiologically and economically; |
| • Existing regional and international mechanisms proved inadequate to help foster a coordinated response under the emergency conditions triggered by the pandemic; |
| • Some countries and regions were better able to bounce back and restore the functioning of cross-border flows of goods; |
| • Existing United Nations inland transport legal instruments can become an effective part of the mix of solutions under emergency situations. There are two challenges: (a) relatively low levels of accessions by non-ECE regions; (b) urgent need for their accelerated digitalization; |
| • The lack of agreed inland transport cross-border protocols for pandemics is a critical issue that needs to be addressed by the ITC as a matter of high priority and as part of a worldwide risk management strategy. |
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I. Introduction[[2]](#footnote-3)

1. During much of 2020, the global economy operated under conditions of emergency national and international responses, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. No United Nations region was spared, and inland transport was one of the critical areas affected.

2. Before the pandemic, the role of inland transport was widely recognized as an essential requirement for the economic and social development of all countries, as well as for enabling regional and global cooperation and economic production and distribution of goods. At the same time, the direct value added by the transport sector to global gross domestic product (GDP) is about 3–5 per cent, and transport typically provides 5–8 per cent of average national total paid employment.

3. The COVID-19 pandemic compromised the traditional role of transport. Transport-related non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to the pandemic led to significant disruptions to the operation of supply chains and the flow of goods and people around the world. These disruptions also impacted the transport of essential medicals goods and other critical commodities. In short, inland transport became part of the problem.

4. As such, the transport sector heavily impacted and was heavily affected by national and international responses to the pandemic. These bidirectional dynamics unfolded invariably worldwide, despite available evidence which suggests that epidemiological and economic impacts were very different between and within different United Nations regions.

5. These underlying factors make it all the more important to identify COVID-19-related challenges and emerging trends on inland transport in different regions. To do that, this document provides an overview of inland transport responses to COVID-19 by United Nations region and contrasts them with the underlying epidemiological and macroeconomic impacts due to COVID-19 to the respective regions. It also highlights certain transport-related impacts of COVID-19 and related NPIs on select key sectors in different geographical regions. Finally, the document discusses the role of United Nations inland transport conventions in this setting and key questions for the development and application of agreed inland transport protocols under emergency situations.

II. Overview of inland transport responses to COVID-19 by region

6. A study of early national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic shows that, in order to contain the spread of the virus, governments around the world constrained access through their borders to non-essential traffic for both freight and passenger flows. They did so by either closing them completely or imposing restrictions that ranged from visa issuance bans or mandatory health certificates to extended periods of quarantine, social distancing, contact-tracing and other measures.

7. These measures were invariably taken under emergency response status, thus overriding existing “standard” procedures, protocols and mechanisms. They were also taken in uncoordinated ways between the various governments, thus rendering them less effective and even more harmful, both epidemiologically and economically.

8. As a result, images of countless lines of thousands of trucks stuck at borders around the world have been recorded, symbolizing the beginning of a vicious cycle that started with uncoordinated national responses and culminated with delaying the delivery of essential goods, such as foods and medical supplies, and undermining global efforts for a swift and sustained recovery from the pandemic.

9. This section provides a brief and indicative overview of national responses that have been observed in the various United Nations regions.

A. The Economic Commission for Africa region

10. Of the 54 African countries, 38 introduced different types of border closures, causing cross-border trade to suddenly slow down.[[3]](#footnote-4) Limited comprehension and inconsistent application of COVID-19 measures have led to confusion among both truck drivers and border authorities.[[4]](#footnote-5) As a result, freight transport faced long lines at borders, significant losses when unable to cross borders and was sometimes even redirected to less safe routes.[[5]](#footnote-6) Moreover, disputes with border authorities and between different countries have arisen. Diplomatic intervention was even needed in East African disputes.[[6]](#footnote-7)

B. The Economic Commission for Europe region

11. For a detailed account of transport emergency responses to COVID-19 in the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, see ECE/TRANS/2021/4.

C. The Economic Commission for Latin America region

12. Latin American countries have also implemented numerous NPIs, such as health checkpoints on the main transport corridors, that have caused considerable increases in loading, unloading and transit times.[[7]](#footnote-8) Additionally, as in some other regions, confusion about the measures, protocols and lack of facilitation processes increased these times even more. Other specific measures such as the restriction on the time that drivers are allowed to stay in foreign countries have also lengthened these operating cycles. Moreover, cases have been reported of local authorities that closed road access, banned facilities from providing health services to drivers or even prohibited drivers from leaving their vehicle to eat or to respond to a problem with the cargo. A direct result compounded by the above dynamics was the dramatic decline in transported freight and related revenue streams for the sector, thus reducing the liquidity of hauliers, which are mostly one-person companies or micro-enterprises. The sector’s informality has additional social implications, since hauliers fall through the cracks of emergency social safety nets, as they are not eligible for financial assistance for businesses.[[8]](#footnote-9)

D. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific region

13. Transport of goods and people in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific (ESCAP) region has suffered as most countries implemented COVID-19 border regulations as well as cross-border restrictions or even temporary border closures, although, in most cases, essential goods continued to flow.[[9]](#footnote-10) During the crisis, some countries, issued new policies on trade and transport regulations without warning or consulting their partners. Some countries implemented partial or complete lockdown of border-crossing points or introduced new requirements at the borders, thus increasing cross-border transport waiting time and costs. Rapidly changing new restrictions and requirements, together with incomplete information further complicated the position of transport operators, compounding declining demand and economic uncertainty. Existing cooperation mechanisms failed to provide adequate guidance and regional coordination of emergency measures.[[10]](#footnote-11),[[11]](#footnote-12) Calls by United Nations bodies for increased transparency and coordination of emergency measures underlined the critical nature of the issue.

E. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region

14. As in other United Nations regions, the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) member States in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic introduced restrictions on the movement of people and goods and closed borders. Data for the period between 4 and 11 June 2020 show that almost 60 per cent of 97 monitored land border crossing points were not operational, and 37 per cent were only partially operational. Of 42 monitored blue border crossing points in the region, 60 per cent were fully closed for cargo flows and 33 per cent were partially operational, while only two blue border crossing points were fully operational for passengers. In most ESCWA member States, the opening of land borders was limited to trucks transporting basic commodities and goods. Complementary national safety measures such as changing trucks and drivers, sterilizing goods and imposing quarantine measures upon arrival were taken by many countries. Moreover, in some countries, truck drivers were put under quarantine when entering the country and replaced by local drivers.[[12]](#footnote-13)

15. At the height of the pandemic, dedicated trade facilitation measures during the lockdown period were taken by ESCWA member States to ensure business continuity and facilitate the delivery of essential goods and trade flows. Nevertheless, some estimates suggest that road freight transport turnover is expected to decline by 22 per cent in 2020, over the 2019 levels, owing to the pandemic.[[13]](#footnote-14)

III. Similar responses but different epidemiological and economic contexts

16. The above overview of regional/national responses provides robust evidence of similar patterns of national responses in the aftermath of the pandemic. These patterns have proven collectively suboptimal and thus signify systemic response failures to emergency situations.

17. The similarity of these responses however stands in sharp contrast to the underlying differences of the epidemiological and macroeconomic impacts of COVID-19 by region.

# Figure I

**COVID-19 epidemiological and economic impacts, by United Nations region**

*Source*: (a) Epidemiological data: [WHO COVID-19 Dashboard](https://covid19.who.int/), accessed 22 December 2020;   
(b) GDP data: [IMF Datamapper](https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/WEOWORLD/AFQ/APQ/EUQ/SMQ/CMQ/NAQ/MEQ/SAQ/SSQ/NMQ), accessed 23 December 2020; (c) own calculations

# Figure II

**COVID-19 share by United Nations region**

*Source*: Epidemiological data: [WHO COVID-19 Dashboard](https://covid19.who.int/), accessed 22 December 2020

A. The Economic Commission for Africa region

18. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) region faces a cumulative incidence rate of 1,854 cases per 1 million population (see figure I).[[14]](#footnote-15) This is far below the global rate (9,622). The continent represents only 3 per cent of the cases worldwide (see figure II). The ECA region seems relatively spared until now, although response measures have not been homogenous.[[15]](#footnote-16) Some countries have gained experience in previous disease outbreaks such as Ebola and are able to use this experience to combat the current pandemic.

19. The GDP in the ECA region is expected to decline by 3.57 per cent compared to the previous year (see figure I).[[16]](#footnote-17) This is a smaller decrease than the global GDP projection (-4.4 per cent).

20. African imports decreased by 2 per cent in the first quarter and steeply declined by 21 per cent in April.[[17]](#footnote-18) Exports even increased by 4 per cent in the first quarter but dropped immensely by 36 per cent in April. Hence, the economic effects are on the rise. Intraregional exports declined 17 per cent in April, after African countries implemented lockdowns, travel bans and border regulations in March.

21. Due to COVID-19, land freight transport is expected to face a 22 per cent annual decline in turnover compared to 2019 in the the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and a decline of 11 per cent in Sub-Saharan Africa.[[18]](#footnote-19)

B. The Economic Commission for Europe region

22. The ECE region faces a cumulative incidence rate of 31,910 cases per 1 million population making it by far the worst hit United Nations region, with more than three times the global rate of 6,662 cases per 1 million population (see figure I). Beyond the standardized metric, the ECE region had the lion’s share also in absolute figures, both in terms of global cases (55 per cent) and global deaths (50.4 per cent) due to COVID-19 (see figure II).

23. The GDP in the ECE region is expected to decline by 4.51 per cent (see figure I), slightly above the global GDP projection (-4.4 per cent).[[19]](#footnote-20)

24. Trade declines for the European Union were steepest in May 2020, with imports dropping by as much as 28 per cent and exports 32 per cent. The pattern continued for both imports and exports in the third quarter, although at a significantly lower rate: 10 and 9 per cent respectively in August 2020. Russian Federation imports and exports followed a similar pattern, with the lowest points being a 20 per cent decline of imports in April 2020 and 36 per cent decline of exports in May 2020. Russian imports continued to decline in the third quarter but at a slower pace, 11 per cent in August 2020. The decline of Russian exports was at 32 per cent in August 2020.[[20]](#footnote-21)

25. Due to COVID-19, transport of goods by road is expected to face a 20 per cent year-on-year decline in turnover compared to 2019.[[21]](#footnote-22)

C. The Economic Commission for Latin America region

26. The Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) region has a cumulative incidence rate of 22,573 cases per 1 million population which is far higher than the global rate (9,622). [[22]](#footnote-23) The region currently represents 19 per cent of the global cases worldwide and 28.8 per cent of global deaths and includes several hotspots of the virus.

27. The GDP in the ECA region is expected to decline by a dramatic 17.46 per cent compared to the 2019, the biggest decline among all United Nations regions.[[23]](#footnote-24) This is far above the global average GDP decline of 4.4 per cent. The ECLAC region is therefore one of the heaviest impacted by COVID-19 both epidemiologically and economically.

28. In the period December 2019 until May 2020, the volume of global trade in goods changed significantly compared to the same period the year before.[[24]](#footnote-25) The volume of exports decreased by 26.1 per cent and imports by 27.4 per cent. The ECLAC region experienced above-average declines in both exports and imports, both in terms of volume and value. May 2020 saw the steepest decline, with a 37 per cent year-on-year drop. This trend is expected to continue, with ECLAC projecting exports to fall by 23 per cent and imports by 25 per cent overall in 2020.[[25]](#footnote-26) While the dual effect of a supply shock and a demand shock caused the steep reduction in exports, the ongoing recession decreased imports.[[26]](#footnote-27) Mining and petroleum exports will decline the most (-33 per cent) because of oil prices, followed by manufacturing exports (-25 per cent). Imports are projected to decrease across the board although fuel imports are expected to change the most compared to last year (-44 per cent). Especially vital at this moment, is the import of medical supplies. The region needs to source 96 per cent of its medical equipment from outside the region.[[27]](#footnote-28) Export restrictions on these supplies and the general logistical limitations hinder the import of medical goods.

29. Intraregional trade is expected to decline dramatically in the whole region. Exports within the region are expected to decline by 28 per cent and imports by 29 per cent which is below the average projected change.[[28]](#footnote-29) The manufactures sector will be affected the most by the fall in intraregional trade.[[29]](#footnote-30)

30. The transport sector in the region contracted by 6.8 per cent and experienced the biggest decline after the travel sector (-17.5 per cent).[[30]](#footnote-31) The annual turnover of companies is expected to reduce by 20 per cent, which is similar to the global average reduction in turnover of 18 per cent. The adoption of nonpharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) has decreased inland transport although road freight transport is necessary for the supply of essential goods.[[31]](#footnote-32)

31. The region also faces significant declines in volume transported in the first half of the year.[[32]](#footnote-33) They vary from a 50 per cent year-on-year drop in Bolivia and Peru, to a meagre decrease of 2 per cent in Nicaragua. The region’s transport slows down as economic activity came to a standstill and operating cycles lengthened. In contrast, urban logistics and e-commerce fare much better and fulfil a vital role in the transportation of essential goods necessary in times of confinement.

D. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific region

32. The ESCAP region faces a cumulative incidence rate of 4,053 cases per 1 million population (see figure I), which is significantly lower than the global rate (9,622).[[33]](#footnote-34) The region currently represents 24 per cent of global cases worldwide and 19.1 per cent of global deaths (see figure II). It should be noted that the ESCAP region has been affected differently in its different subregions. For example, while Southeast Asia faces a pattern more similar to the global average, the Western Pacific has been relatively spared from COVID-19 cases.

33. The GDP in the ESCAP region is expected to decline by only 1.6 per cent compared to the previous year.[[34]](#footnote-35) South Asia and the Pacific Islands are expected to be affected more heavily, through a decline of 8.4 per cent and 7.1 per cent respectively. Central Asia and the Caucasus as well as Southeast Asia are expected to face a decrease of 4.1 and 3.3 per cent respectively. Whereas East Asia is likely to experience economic growth of 0.3 per cent compared to 2019.

34. The economic impacts in Asia and the Pacific differ enormously. While some countries are highly dependent on the export of commodities, others rely more on tourism, such as the Pacific Islands. Just as for the Caribbean SIDS, tourism makes up a large proportion of the GDP of the Pacific SIDS. Moreover, the economic effects also differ depending on the destination market and market of origin. Some states, like the East Asian countries, are highly connected to China, which is the only country expected to see economic growth.[[35]](#footnote-36) For example, the South Asian countries face difficulty as their export orders from the EU and the USA got cancelled.[[36]](#footnote-37)

35. The volume of exports decreased by 4.4 per cent in the period January–May 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. The volume of imports decreased by 6.6 per cent for Asia excluding China during this period compared to January–May of 2019, while the volume of Chinese imports merely decreased by 2 per cent. These numbers are below the world average of decrease of 8.8 per cent (exports) and 8.5 per cent (imports).[[37]](#footnote-38) Still, in the full year 2020, the Asia-Pacific region may be affected relatively more than trade globally.[[38]](#footnote-39) Exports from the region may shrink between 14 per cent and 37 per cent whereas global trade is expected to decrease between 13 per cent and 32 per cent.

36. Due to COVID-19, land freight transport in Asia and the Pacific is expected to face an annual decline in turnover of between 18 and 21 per cent compared to 2019.

E. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region

37. The ESCWA region faces a cumulative incidence rate of 7,122 cases per 1 million population (see figure I).[[39]](#footnote-40) This is below the global rate (9,622). The number of infections and deaths remained relatively low in the region, but recently there is an upward shift in the trends. The region currently represents 4 per cent of the global cases worldwide and 3.2 per cent of death (see figure II).

38. The GDP in the ESCWA region is expected to decline by 12.43 per cent compared to the previous year,[[40]](#footnote-41) which is far above the global average (-4.4 per cent).

39. The ESCWA region faces immense economic downturn as oil prices dropped prior to COVID-19. This development is aggravated by the ongoing pandemic as factories closed and transport decreased which also reduced the demand for oil. Oil is a major component of the region’s economy as the mining sector accounts for 24.5 per cent of the total output compared to a global share of merely 5.4 per cent. Therefore, decreased oil prices and demand will strongly affect the general economy and the COVID-19 recovery capabilities.

40. Exports are expected to decline by 88 billion USD (43 USD non-oil exports), of which a decline of 14 billion USD in Intra-Arab exports (15 per cent).[[41]](#footnote-42) Mining and chemical industries exports will decline the most, 71 per cent of total decline in exports. Imports are expected to decline by 111 billion USD (89 USD non-oil imports), of which a decline of 26 billion USD in Intra-Arab imports (23 per cent). Mechanical, electrical and other manufacturing imports will decline the most, 51 per cent of total decline in imports. Intra-regional trade will thus be relatively less affected compared to world trade.

41. Due to COVID-19, land freight transport is expected to face a 22 per cent annual decline in turnover compared to 2019 in the MENA region, this is the highest regional decline worldwide.[[42]](#footnote-43)

IV. Select sectoral/regional impacts – special cases

A. Food crisis

42. Although the ECA region has significant agricultural resources, the continent is a net importer of agri-food products. The ten basic foods are two thirds of Africa’s total imported food products. Moreover, Africa imports most food products from outside the continent: the level of imports from 2016 to 2018 reached 85 per cent. Africa’s food imports are forecasted to increase. Hence, the continent is highly reliant on global trade for food products.

43. Although world production of staple foods is currently strong, access to the supply has become challenging.[[43]](#footnote-44) In Africa, transport and logistics are more labour-intensive compared to other regions.[[44]](#footnote-45) COVID-19 measures such as social distancing and curfews have therefore disrupted transport relatively more. Additionally, such measures disrupt border crossings which affect multiple stages of the food value chains, “from input supply and production through to food distribution and consumption”.[[45]](#footnote-46) Although there are COVID-19 border closure exemptions for essential supplies, they are subject to highly strict conditions. Therefore, COVID-19 measures render food supply harder and aggravate food insecurity around the continent.

44. Like the ECA region, the ESCWA region has potential for agricultural development but still relies heavily on food imports.[[46]](#footnote-47) This makes the ESCWA region also more susceptible to trade crises like the one triggered by COVID-19. The ESCWA region imports 110 billion USD worth of food. Grain and wheat, two of the basic foods, are imported for up to 90 per cent and 65 per cent of their needs respectively. Although some countries such as Qatar and Algeria provided exemptions for food imports to some newly established COVID-19 procedures, constrained transport may prevent food to be transported to where it is needed the most.[[47]](#footnote-48) The Arab region already faced food crises prior to COVID-19. This makes the region particularly vulnerable to constrains in food transportation during global emergencies, like those triggered by the pandemic.

B. Tourist industry

45. The tourist industry was one of the sectors most heavily impacted by the pandemic globally. This section focuses on the ECLAC region for illustration purposes, but the situation globally follows similar patterns.

46. Tourism in the ECLAC region took a big hit, as tourist arrivals dropped by 39 per cent in the Caribbean and 35 per cent in Central and South America during only the first four months of 2020.[[48]](#footnote-49) Travel also saw the largest contraction in the exports of services, a decrease of 17.5 per cent.[[49]](#footnote-50) This has significant impact on the economy in general as well as on ground transport in specific. The travel and tourism sector is a relatively important sector in the ECLAC region. Tourism represented 48 per cent of the value of service exports in 2019, which is twice the share of tourism in global exports of services.[[50]](#footnote-51) According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), tourism makes up for 10.2 per cent of the GDP in the region.[[51]](#footnote-52) Caribbean countries rely even heavier on tourism, as it accounts for 45 per cent of the value of the exports of goods and service combined.[[52]](#footnote-53) Moreover, tourism accounts for 11.8 per cent directly and 28.5 per cent overall to the Caribbean GDP in 2019.[[53]](#footnote-54) Due to COVID-19, Latin America and the Caribbean are expected to see a 30 per cent drop in the travel and tourism’s contribution to their combined GDP compared to 2019.[[54]](#footnote-55)

C. Re-routing of freight from road to rail

47. As mentioned above, Asian countries implemented numerous border closures, border restrictions and hygiene protocols. Especially road freight transport suffered from these regulations, as both the time and costs of transportation increased. On the other hand, less protocols were necessary for railroad transport.[[55]](#footnote-56) A significant amount of transport has therefore shifted from road to rail.[[56]](#footnote-57) For example, the freight flows via the Euro-Asian routes through Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation and Belarus were 75 per cent larger in the second quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2019.[[57]](#footnote-58) Countries in North and Central Asia use railroads for freight transport relatively more, especially for long-distance transport.[[58]](#footnote-59) But countries with less developed railways find themselves at a disadvantage and have more trouble maintaining supply chains.

D. Declines in FDI due to reduced oil prices

48. The combined impacts of the reduced oil price in March 2020 and COVID-19 could lead to a significant decline in FDI inflows to the ESCWA region. The ESCWA foresees a decrease of 17.8 billion USD in 2020, which is a decline of 45 per cent,[[59]](#footnote-60) when globally FDI is expected to reduce by 30 per cent. ESCWA estimates that the electrical and transport industries will be affected the most by the decrease in FDI inflows as they are the “most integrated global value chains”.[[60]](#footnote-61) The reduced FDI inflows will hamper the transport sector, as it will diminish possibilities of economic growth in the long run, and turnover in the short run. Arab countries are already poorly connected through railroads.[[61]](#footnote-62) This will hinder the recovery possibility of increased inter-Arab trade. Long-term economic growth needs to include improved infrastructure connectivity.

V. The role of United Nations inland transport conventions and the international regulatory system in a global pandemic setting: opportunities and status

49. In the face of the pandemic, the Committee and its subsidiary bodies continued the development and implementation of a new generation of legal instruments supporting the digitalization/computerization of transport and border-crossing procedures, and the deployment of existing mechanisms and networks in order to accelerate the post-COVID-19 economic recovery of contracting parties to support Member States’ efforts for a sustainable recovery. These measures included the leveraging and acceleration of digitalization/computerization of existing legal instruments on transport and border-crossing procedures, such as eTIR and eCMR. The acceleration of eTIR International System development and its promotion as the tool that ensures paperless, seamless and contactless border crossings operations while keeping the borders open and keeping drivers and customs officers protected from the virus was welcomed by TIR contracting parties. So far, 16 Contracting parties have officially requested connection to eTIR International System.

50. Furthermore, building on the network of Member States/contracting parties and key transport stakeholders established by the underlying legal instruments, the subprogramme developed the “Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19”, a platform that provides updated information on the current status of 174 United Nations Member States including the national practices and measures implemented in response to the pandemic, with tens of thousands of unique views from 207 countries / regions of this world.

51. The following United Nations Conventions under the purview of the ITC are of possible significance for their contracting parties in the management of pandemics and cross-border emergencies (ECE/TRANS/2021/4):

• International Convention on Harmonization of Frontier Controls of Goods (of 1982)

• Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (of 1975)

• Convention on the Contract for the International Carriage of Goods by Road (CMR) and its Additional Protocol to the CMR concerning the Electronic Consignment Note (eCMR)

52. Despite the potential opportunities to use key elements of the existing international regulatory architecture for the development of effective frameworks for cooperation and response under emergency situations, some key challenges remain. One of them is the further evolution of the key conventions, to develop the needed provisions for emergency situations (ECE/TRANS/2021/4).

53. Another major challenge is the level of accessions to these conventions, especially in regions beyond ECE. The following section reflects the status of accessions by United Nations region and related key information.

A. The Economic Commission for Africa region

54. The ECA countries have 153 accessions to United Nations inland transport conventions. Nineteen countries (35 percent) have not acceded to any conventions. Border crossing facilitation has 57 accessions and only four of these are for the TIR convention (see ECE/TRANS/2021/12).

55. In light of the low levels of accessions to these critical instruments for the facilitation of border-crossing, 16 out of the 32 landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) are in Africa. Transport time is significantly longer and transport costs for these countries are already 50 per cent higher than for other developing countries.[[62]](#footnote-63)

B. The Economic Commission for Europe region

56. Border crossing facilitation is well developed in the region with 377 ECE accessions to the relevant border-crossing legal instruments. The convention with the highest number of individual contracting parties in the ECE region is in fact the Customs Convention on the International Transport of Goods under Cover of TIR Carnets (1975 TIR Convention) with 51 ECE contracting parties (see ECE/TRANS/2021/12).

C. The Economic Commission for Latin America region

57. Of the 33 member States of ECLAC, only 22 have acceded to at least one of ECE’s transport conventions, thus 11 (33 per cent) are not signed up to any. For border crossing, the region’s 38 accessions show that there is a lot of room for progress. It should be noted though that there are only three contracting parties to the TIR convention of 1975 (see ECE/TRANS/2021/12).

D. The Economic and Social Commission for Asia and Pacific region

58. The ESCAP member States have 266 accessions to United Nations inland transport conventions under the purview of the Inland Transport Committee, although 12 (or 25 per cent) of its members are not contracting parties to any of these conventions. In terms of border crossing facilitation, the region has 86 accessions, trailing only the ECE region. The TIR convention has seventeen accessions in the region (see ECE/TRANS/2021/12).

E. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia region

59. The twenty member States of ESCWA have 89 accessions to United Nations inland transport conventions but five countries have not acceded to any conventions. In terms of border crossing facilitation, the most common convention that has been acceded to is the TIR convention with eleven accessions (see ECE/TRANS/2021/12).

VI. Conclusions

60. Despite the continued uncertainty on the pandemic and post-pandemic dynamics, some key conclusions could be derived from the above analysis.

61. First, despite widely uneven epidemiological and macroeconomic impacts of the pandemic experienced in different United Nations regions, initial inland transport emergency responses followed similar uncoordinated patterns, thus rendering them less effective and more harmful both epidemiologically and economically.

62. Second, existing regional and international mechanisms proved inadequate to help foster a coordinated response under the emergency conditions triggered by the pandemic. Considering the global nature of supply chains, regional solutions could not adequately address the scale and scope of the challenge.

63. Third, some countries and regions, even among the hardest hit epidemiologically, were better able than others to bounce back, restore cross-border flows of goods and mitigate economic impacts. Evidence suggests that countries with higher-levels of accession to border-crossing facilitation conventions were able to record more successful responses to restore cross-border flow of goods during the pandemic emergency and its aftermath, despite many of them having suffered heavy epidemiological impacts.

64. It follows that existing United Nations inland transport conventions can become an effective part of the mix of solutions under emergency situations. There are however two challenges:

(a) relatively low levels of accessions by non-ECE regions;

(b) urgent need for adapting these conventions, including through their accelerated digitalization.

65. Finally, the lack of agreed inland transport protocols for pandemics is a critical issue that needs to be addressed by the ITC as a matter of high priority and as part of a worldwide risk management strategy.

1. \* This document was scheduled for publication after the standard publication date owing to circumstances beyond the submitter's control. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. When allocating countries to their regional commissions, it is important to note that many countries are members of more than one regional commission. In some cases, these countries have a clear geographical link to one regional commission and are thus assigned to this one only. In addition to this, though, there are two principal areas where the regional Commissions overlap: in North Africa/Western Asia (countries involved: Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia) and Central Asia (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan). In these two cases, the countries have been included under the analysis of both regional commissions. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Banga, K., J. Keane, M. Mendez-Parra, L. Pettinotti, & L. Sommer, “Africa Trade and Covid‑19, *African Trade Policy Centre Working Paper 586,* August 2020: 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. ECA, “Facilitating Cross-Border Trade Through a Coordinated African Response to COVID-19,” *Addis Ababa*, July 2020: 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. ECA, ibid: 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. ECA, ibid: 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. ECLAC, “The Effects of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Pandemic on International Trade and Logistics,” *Special Report COVID-19 No.6*, 6 August 2020: 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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