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#### Recommendations and standards:

**Support to capacity building and technical cooperation**

## **Guide for National Trade Facilitation Bodies on How to Use UN/CEFACT Standards and Tools**

**Submitted by the secretariat for information**

### *Summary*

UNECE produced a Guide for National Trade Facilitation Bodies on How to Use UN/CEFACT Trade Facilitation Standards and Tools. The objective is to help NTFBs in their response to current and long-term challenges to international trade, using the instruments of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT). The Guide introduces the concept of NTFBs, their role in raising awareness and implementing UN/CEFACT standards and tools. It highlights the role that NTFBs can play in the review of processes and procedures, document and data harmonization, standardization of electronic information exchange, assisting Single Window implementation projects. It informs NTFBs how they can collaborate with UN/CEFACT on these issues. The plan is to distribute this Guide to the NTFBs worldwide and to organize training events. UNECE is organizing training events on the functioning and regional cooperation of National Trade Facilitation Committees, notably for the countries with economies in transition.

Document ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2021/INF.8 is submitted by the secretariat to the twenty-seventh session for information.

1. Under its regional advisory services and the United Nations multiagency project “Transport and Trade Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics: UN solutions for contactless, seamless and collaborative transport and trade” UNECE produced a Guide for National Trade Facilitation Bodies on How to Use UN/CEFACT Trade Facilitation Standards and Tools. The objective is to help NTFBs in their response to current and long-term challenges to international trade, using the instruments of the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT).

2. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted supply chains and global trade flows. As part of the emergency response, governments worldwide adopted measures to fast-track imports of essential goods and provide public services, while introducing contact restrictions. They stepped up the promotion of measures to digitalize information exchange and reduce the frequency of physical inspections of goods and means of transport. Limiting person-to-person contacts to avoid spreading the virus is combined with the search for higher efficiency of international trade transactions and official controls through trade facilitation and the digitalization of trade information flows. The pandemic made more visible pre-existing structural problems in trade procedures and information flows, which trade facilitation can address efficiently. The pandemic precipitated a worldwide surge in the digitalization of cross-border trade and transport: a transformation that must be based on long-term, established standards and rules. The UN Framework for the Immediate Response to the COVID-19 from April 2020 stressed that “The integration of international norms and standards in the design and implementation of socio-economic responses is as critical as ever.”<sup>1</sup>

3. This opens a window of opportunity for national trade facilitation bodies (NTFBs). They should become one of the mechanisms for coordinating the response to the challenge, including for the use of international trade facilitation standards. NTFBs have always been at the forefront of implementing these standards, notably those of UN/CEFACT, either as implementers or coordinators on the national level, as inscribed in Recommendation 4: National Trade Facilitation Bodies<sup>2</sup>. UN/CEFACT produces trade facilitation and electronic business standards and recommendations that governments and the business community can use to address concrete issues. These instruments offer a basis for NTFBs to work on practical trade facilitation and simplification measures.

4. With these objectives in mind, the Guide is intended to help NTFB members and staff understand how to use UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards and other guidance materials to support trade facilitation reforms and paperless trade initiatives. To make this Guide more user-friendly, most of the important trade facilitation instruments mentioned are hyperlinked so the reader can follow those links and use the cited instruments. The Guide exists in English and Russian at this point.

5. The Guide introduces the concept of NTFBs, their role in raising awareness and implementing UN/CEFACT standards and tools. It highlights the role that NTFBs can play in the review of processes and procedures, document and data harmonization, standardization of electronic information exchange, assisting Single Window implementation projects. It informs NTFBs how they can collaborate with UN/CEFACT on these issues. The plan is to distribute this Guide to the NTFBs worldwide and to organize training events, notably in Russian for the transition economies.

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<sup>1</sup>Project document, “UN Framework for the Immediate Response to the COVID-19” p. 9: <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/UN-framework-for-the-immediate-socio-economic-response-to-COVID-19.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> [https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/recommendations/rec04/ECE\\_TRADE\\_425\\_CFRec4.pdf](https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/recommendations/rec04/ECE_TRADE_425_CFRec4.pdf)

## Guide for National Trade Facilitation Bodies on How to Use UN/CEFACT Trade Facilitation Standards and Tools

Disclaimer: This document was prepared by Ms. Birgit Viohl, international expert and UNECE consultant, with guidance from Mr. Mario Apostolov, UNECE regional advisor, as part of the United Nations response to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic under the United Nations multiagency project “Transport and Trade Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics: UN solutions for contactless, seamless and collaborative transport and trade”. The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials or member States.

This is a living document open for discussions with stakeholders and further development. It will be sent for information and use by national trade facilitation bodies around the world.

**Acronyms**

APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
B2B	business to business
BRS	business requirement specification
BSP	buy-ship-pay (model)
BPA	business process analysis
B2G	business to government
CCL	Core Component Library
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CITES	Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
EDI	electronic data interchange
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
G2G	government to government
IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IT	information technology
MSME	micro, small and medium enterprise
MMTRDM	Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model
NTFB	national trade facilitation body
PDA	project development area
PPP	private-public partnership
RTA	regional trade agreement
RDM	reference data model
SCRDM	supply chain reference data model
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement of the WTO
UN/CEFACT	United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNLK	United Nations Layout Key for Trade Documents
UNTDDED	United Nations Trade Data Elements Directory
UN/EDIFACT	United Nations/Electronic Data Interchange for Administration, Commerce and Transport
WCO	World Customs Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
XML	extensible markup language

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## About this document

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted supply chains and global trade flows and affected delivery of public services. As part of the emergency response, governments worldwide adopted measures to fast-track imports of essential goods and medical supplies, and to provide public services while maintaining contact restrictions and changes in staff assignments. They also adopted provisional measures to digitalize information exchange or just receive scanned or photographed copies of documents, to verify content through electronic means and to reduce the frequency of physical inspections of goods and means of transport.

Getting out of the emergency phase, policy-makers and the business community seek to turn provisional simplification arrangements into long-term change and scale up their digitalization efforts. Limiting person-to-person contacts to avoid spreading the virus can be combined with searching for improved efficiency of international trade transactions and establishing official controls through the digitalization of trade information flows. The pandemic has precipitated a worldwide digital surge that has the power to transform cross-border trade and transport operations for the future. Yet this transformation must be based on long-term, established standards and rules. The UN Framework for the Immediate Response to the COVID-19 from April 2020 stressed that “The integration of international norms and standards in the design and implementation of socio-economic responses is as critical as ever.”<sup>3</sup>

This is an opportunity for national trade facilitation bodies (NTFBs).<sup>4</sup> They may become one of the mechanisms for coordinating the response to the COVID-19 challenge, including through the use of international trade facilitation standards.

The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) produces trade facilitation recommendations and electronic business standards that governments and the business community can use to address their requirements. These instruments offer a basis for NTFBs to develop trade facilitation and simplification measures. This guide is intended to help NTFB members and staff understand how to use UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards and other guidance materials to support trade facilitation reforms in general, and paperless trade initiatives in particular. To make this guide more user-friendly, most of the important trade facilitation instruments mentioned are hyperlinked so the reader can follow those links and use the cited instruments.

## Introduction

### *Trade facilitation and national trade facilitation bodies*

UN/CEFACT defines trade facilitation as the simplification, harmonization and standardization of procedures and associated information flows required to move goods and services from seller to buyer and to make payments.

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<sup>3</sup>Project document, “UN Framework for the Immediate Response to the COVID-19” p. 9: <https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-04/UN-framework-for-the-immediate-socio-economic-response-to-COVID-19.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup>NTFB refers to any type of public-private dialogue platform for trade facilitation, such as a national trade facilitation committee (the term used, for example, in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, art. 23.2) or a PRO committee. According to the definition in UNECE Recommendation No. 4, an “NTFB is a formally constituted body where all public and private-sector parties who are interested in the country’s international trade, multimodal transport, transit, logistics, finance, agriculture, sanitary and phytosanitary requirements, health, electronic business and related topics can present their respective views and problems, and seek, through consultation and consensus, mutually agreeable solutions.”

Implementation of trade facilitation reforms should generally be based on

- a) a national vision
- b) analysis of business processes, documents and information flows and their simplification
- c) application of international standards
- d) collaboration across government agencies and participation of the private sector.

Since 1974 UNECE has recommended the establishment of national trade facilitation bodies through its Recommendation No. 4: National Trade Facilitation Bodies. The role of NTFBs is to coordinate activities on trade facilitation across government and executive agencies and to provide a platform for dialogue with the business community. According to UNECE Recommendation No. 4, the mandate of an NTFB is to identify issues that affect the cost and efficiency of the trading process and to develop and implement simplification measures. NTFBs have been established worldwide under different names: for example, PRO committees such as JASPRO or SWEPRO - the NTFBs in Japan and Sweden - or national trade and transport facilitation committees. The concept of a multi-stakeholder trade facilitation committee has been integrated as a mandatory requirement under Article 23.2 of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). Since 2013,<sup>5</sup> there has been a surge in the number of NTFBs worldwide; most are now called national trade facilitation committees (NTFCs). A recent survey showed that out of 126 economies 115 have a national committee dealing with trade facilitation,<sup>6</sup> and a 2016 WTO survey<sup>7</sup> showed that 50% of existing NTFBs were established after 2013.

Trade facilitation efforts and cross-border digital exchange efforts in particular need to adopt a standardization perspective so as to achieve interoperability, economies of scale and efficiency of solutions. In the past, efforts to harmonize and standardize international electronic information flows have been stymied by divergent corporate and agency interests. This is the key *raison d'être* of national trade facilitation bodies – to bring together stakeholders to agree on the common cause for trade facilitation, including during a pandemic.

Traditionally, NTFBs have been coordinators and catalysers of the implementation of international standards and techniques and have translated global, regional and sectoral standards at the national level (figure 1). In this sense, working on the national implementation of global standards for trade facilitation and electronic business must be understood as an important aspect of the work of NTFBs in the aftermath of the pandemic. Greater degrees of collaboration between parties and information flows along the entire supply chain that use electronic data exchange make the issue of standardization even more important.

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<sup>5</sup> The year 2013 refers to the WTO Ministerial Conference in Indonesia in December 2013, during which the WTO Members basically agreed on the text of the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

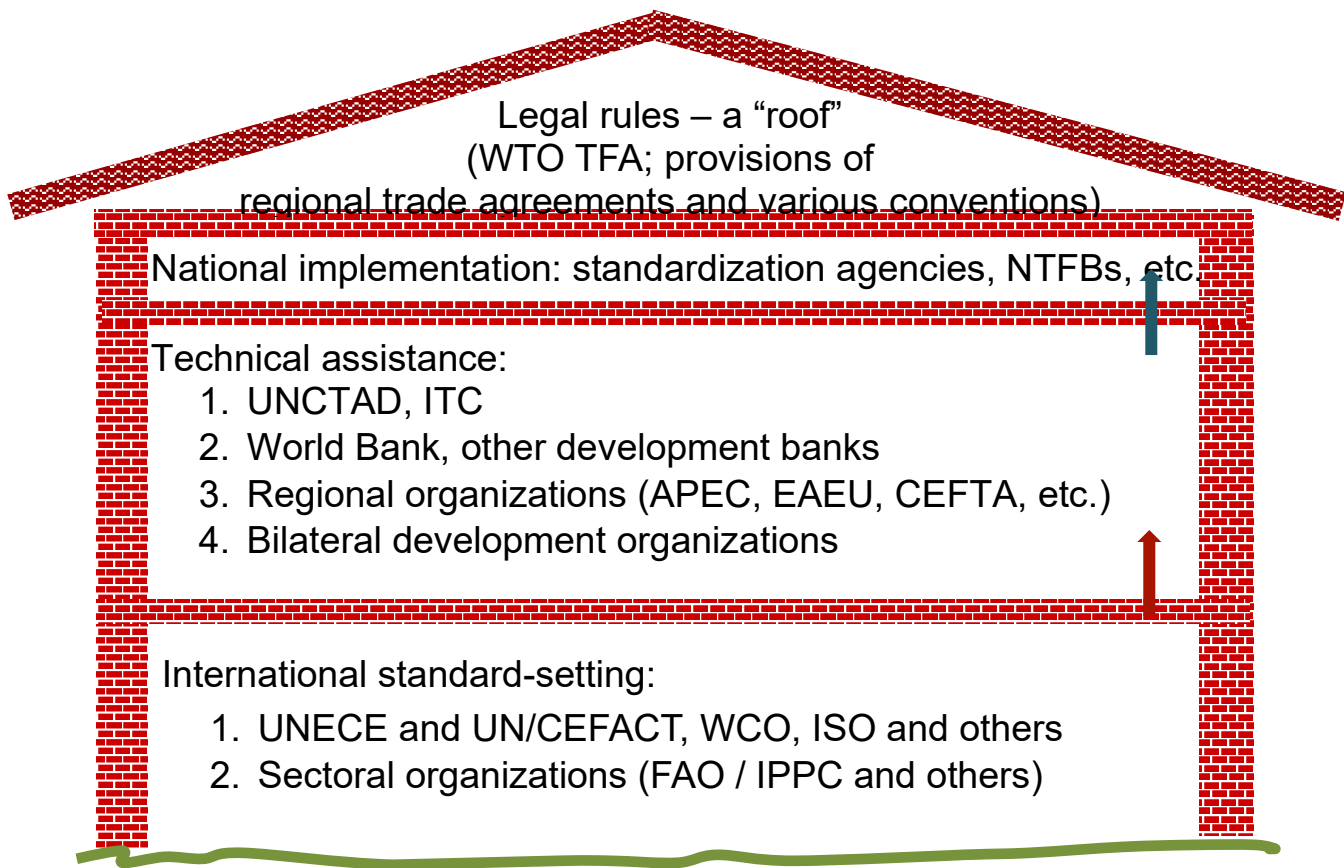
<sup>6</sup> UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, available at <https://untfsurvey.org>.

<sup>7</sup> WTO (2016), National Committees on Trade Facilitation: Current Practices and Challenges.

[https://www.tfafacility.org/sites/default/files/news/tfa\\_national\\_committees\\_trade\\_facilitation\\_web\\_e.pdf](https://www.tfafacility.org/sites/default/files/news/tfa_national_committees_trade_facilitation_web_e.pdf).

UNCTAD carried out two in-depth surveys, of 59 NTFBs in 2017 and 52 NTFBs in 2019.

Figure 1: Implementing international trade facilitation standards: role of international organizations<sup>8</sup>



Source: Mario Apostolov, Regional Adviser, UNECE Economic Cooperation and Trade Division

#### *The role of NTFBs in the COVID-19 context*

The COVID-19 pandemic has strengthened commitment in the public and private sectors to better coordinating reactions to economic and trade effects, and to advancing paperless trade and digitalization of information flows along international supply chains. In the aftermath of the pandemic, NTFBs may become platforms for coordinating the response to such trade, transport and business impacts. NTFBs can develop practical recommendations to improve the efficiency of operations of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), the business community at large and control agencies, and to introduce electronic procedures.

This need for practical recommendations and support calls for NTFBs to get involved in activities such as review of procedures and business processes, data harmonization, development of electronic data exchange in digital corridors and Single Window efforts. In these areas UN/CEFACT deliverables can be used as a basis for developing trade facilitation and simplification solutions.

<sup>8</sup> The abbreviations cited in this chart stand for: WTO TFA – World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement; UNCTAD – United Nations Conference on Trade and Development; ITC – International Trade Centre; APEC – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum; EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union; CEFTA – Central European Free Trade Agreement; WCO – World Customs Organization; ISO – International Organization for Standardization; FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and IPPC – FAOs International Plant Protection Convention



### *The role of UN/CEFACT*

UN/CEFACT is a subsidiary, intergovernmental body of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), which is the designated focal point for trade facilitation recommendations and electronic business standards in the UN system. It was established in 1996 as a successor to the UNECE Working Party 4 on International Trade Procedures.<sup>9</sup> UN/CEFACT activities support the facilitation of international trade transactions through the simplification and harmonization of processes, procedures and information flows. Its vision is to promote “simple, transparent and effective processes for global commerce”.

UN/CEFACT develops and maintains<sup>10</sup> trade facilitation recommendations and e-business standards for an efficient and effective trading process. Its business and technical standards are applied by industry and governments worldwide. UN/CEFACT deliverables<sup>11</sup> are generally grouped in three categories:<sup>12</sup>

- Trade facilitation recommendations, which provide best practices for trade procedures and data and document requirements (for example, UNECE Recommendation No. 4: *National Trade Facilitation Bodies* regarding the establishment, purpose and functioning of NTFBs)
- Code list recommendations that are an integral part of data exchange (for example, UNECE Recommendation No. 16: *UN/LOCODE*)
- Standards and technical specifications, as well as guidance documents on their use<sup>13</sup>

UN/CEFACT deliverables are made freely available to users from the public and private sectors. They are developed and maintained by experts from government agencies and the business community. Participation in the standard-setting process is open to all UN Member States. It continuously develops new tools and updates existing ones in line with trade policy developments, such as the adoption of the TFA, and with technology evolution, such as the Internet of Things and blockchain technology.

### *Benefits of using UN/CEFACT tools*

Using UN/CEFACT deliverables as a basis of their work will enable NTFBs to develop concrete, practical tools to improve the efficiency of both trade transactions and official controls, and to enhance the capacity of their national economies to implement paperless trade and digitalization of information flows along international supply chains. Limiting person-to-person contacts to avoid the spread of the virus can be combined with searching for improved efficiency of international trade transactions and official controls through the digitalization of trade information flows. UNECE works on the development of new standards and repackaging of existing ones for the digitalization of information flows in the international supply chain, and NTFBs can be a strong supporting element in the realization of this objective.

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<sup>9</sup> UN/CEFACT is the successor of the UNECE Working Party 4 on International Trade Procedures (itself created in the first years of UNECE in the 1940s).

<sup>10</sup> This includes recommendations and standards developed by its predecessor entity, UNECE Working Party 4.

<sup>11</sup> This term includes recommendations, standards, technical specifications and other guidance materials.

<sup>12</sup> The UN/CEFACT trade facilitation recommendations, standards, technical specifications and guidance materials can be found on the UN/CEFACT website at <http://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/un-centre-for-trade-facilitation-and-e-business-uncefact/outputs.html>.

<sup>13</sup> The technical specifications and standards include the UN/EDIFACT standard, the UNTDED – ISO 7372, the CCL, business requirements specifications for trade documents and UN/LOCODE. These are mainly standards concerning the description, definition, use and transfer of information related to international trade.

More specifically UN/CEFACT deliverables help to

- Embed analytical capabilities inside NTFBs.

NTFBs have broad membership of experts and officials from public authorities and the business community. When working together, NTFB members need to have tools that all can use and understand. UN/CEFACT instruments offer a standardized approach to the analysis of trade procedures and business processes. They offer a consistent framework for process modelling and analysis, that NTFBs can use.

- Adopt a common language to consistently describe business processes, documents and data across sectors and government agencies, as well as between countries.

A common semantic understanding of concepts and terminology is central to NTFB activities, to avoid confusion. UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards, reference models and glossaries provide a comprehensive semantic library for describing trade documents, data elements and business processes, involved parties (actors and roles) and business information entities (documents and data) in a consistent manner.

- Streamline the use of standards.

The use of internationally recognized standards is essential for the harmonization of processes, information and document exchanges. Standardization helps achieve interoperability and collaboration along the international supply chain. The TFA (Art. 10.3) specifically encourages WTO Members that have ratified the TFA to follow best practices in the form of international standards and to participate in the review and development of international standards.

- Adopt a comprehensive supply-chain perspective of trade facilitation.

UN/CEFACT recommendations, standards and reference data models (RDMs) cover the entire supply chain, including regulatory, commercial, logistics and payment business domains and process areas. They reflect both commercial and regulatory requirements and business processes, and support simplification and trade facilitation measures for import, export and transit, for all modes of transport and all governmental agencies. Following the above perspective, UN/CEFACT's work builds capacity to implement paperless trade and digitalization along international supply chains and to roll out such advanced trade facilitation instruments as Single Window mechanisms for export, import and transit clearance.

## **NTFB activities in response to the COVID-19 challenges**

### *Review of procedures and processes*

#### **What is it?**

Trade facilitation reforms look to simplify trade procedures and documentation by removing redundant requirements and activities. Simplification initiatives start with an assessment of procedures and processes and lead to recommendations of improvements. Creating a trade procedures inventory is a good basis for developing trade facilitation and simplification measures. Such an inventory also supports document and data harmonization.

A review of procedures and formalities can be carried out as a recurrent activity or in the context of a specific reform initiative, a Single Window project or the modernization of Customs clearance processes and information technology (IT) systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the importance of reviewing procedures and processes from the point of view of robustness and resilience to a public safety crisis. The objective should be to identify measures that ensure continuation of operations and clearance in a context of limited staffing, reduced human contact, disruptions to logistical flows and a sudden surge of trade policy measures.

### **The role of NTFBs**

An NTFB can set up a working group and coordinate the review process, train its members and outside experts in the methodology used for business process analysis (BPA), maintain a record of the descriptions and compile recommendations for improvement.

### **How is it done?**

The first step is to build an inventory of trade procedures and related business processes. The inventory provides a comprehensive description and mapping of commercial and regulatory processes. It defines the parties and the business information entities, such as data, messages exchanged and the sequence in which transactions are carried out. Building such an inventory requires using appropriate tools to manage the complexity of cross-border trade transactions. Such tools ideally include a reference model to describe and map the existing business processes, and a modelling technique.

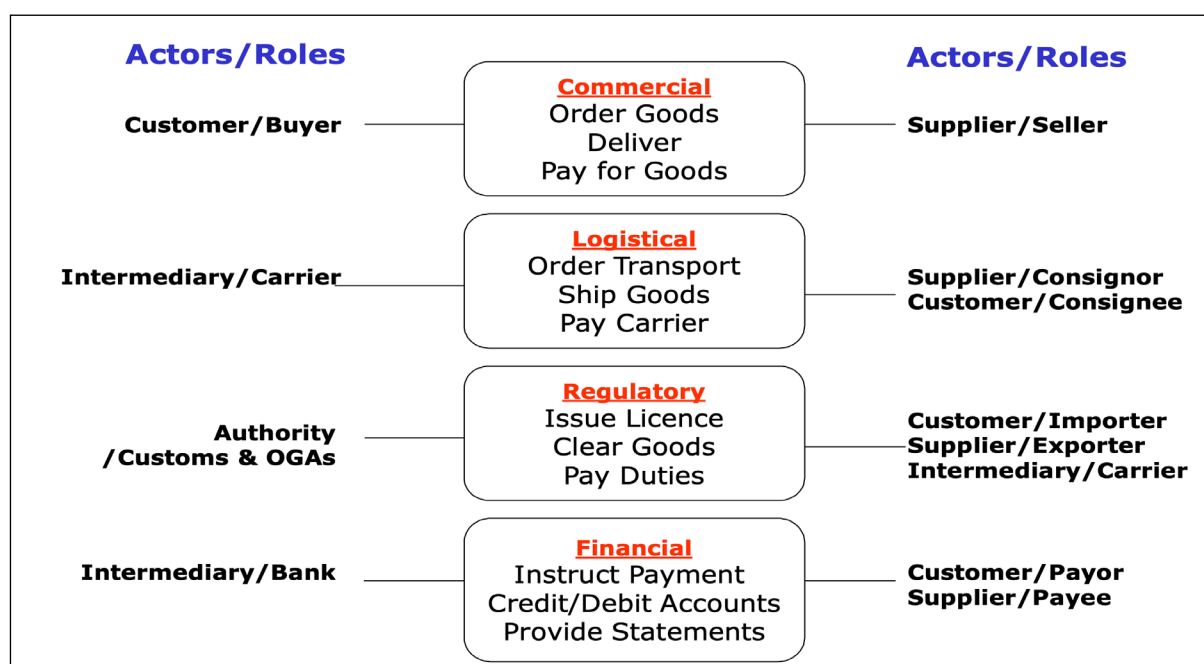
The second step is to systematically analyse existing procedures and processes to identify opportunities for simplification. Ideally this step includes both a regulatory review and a BPA. The regulatory review looks to eliminate legal requirements that are unnecessary from the point of view of achieving policy objectives, that create an unjustified burden on trade, or that have a protective intent or discriminatory effect. The process review looks in more detail at how procedures and formalities are carried out, with a view to improve the process by eliminating duplication of activities and of data and document requirements, as well as delays, bottlenecks and redundancies. The pandemic underscored the importance of removing person-to-person interaction from processes. The review of procedures and processes should be done against this specific requirement.

In 2020 UNECE initiated work on two deliverables that can help NTFBs in their efforts to eliminate the effects of the pandemic on connectivity trade and transport. First, experts worked on completing a package of standards for electronic document equivalents for multimodal transport that would provide for interoperability and eliminate person-to-person contacts in multimodal cross-border transport and supply chains. Second, NTFBs can use guidance from UNECE studies on how to ensure that non-tariff measures, legitimately imposed during the pandemic, do not become non-tariff barriers to trade.

### **Available UN/CEFACT tools**

UN/CEFACT has developed the International Supply Chain Reference Model (ISCRM), also referred to as the buy-ship-pay (BSP) reference model. The BSP reference model is a high-level, simplified representation of cross-border trade transactions, comprising four business areas – commercial, logistics, regulatory and financial (figure 2).

Figure 2: International supply chain processes and procedures



Source: UN/CEFACT International Supply Chain Reference Data Model business requirement specification.

The BSP model provides the framework for a systematic inventory of business processes by business area and regulatory procedure. It helps analysts to maintain linkages between business processes and to understand relations between areas and processes in terms of how information is exchanged. It also makes possible the use of consistent terminology for describing processes and a uniform methodology for modelling and presenting the processes.

More recently, UN/CEFACT has recommended the use of business requirement specifications for the harmonization of data in trade and transport documents (see Supply Chain Reference Data Model, or SCRDM).<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, UN/CEFACT has developed two recommendations that can be applied to review, reform and streamline existing business processes.

UNECE Recommendation No. 18: Trade Facilitation Measures Related to International Trade Procedures establishes a set of principles to apply in all four business areas of the BSP (as in figure 2). This Recommendation provides a collection of best practices for reviewing the trade-related business process. It was prepared as an “umbrella” recommendation to give an overall view of all trade facilitation measures in a structured and related manner. NTFBs have used Recommendation No. 18 effectively to prepare and support a national trade facilitation strategy, roadmap or action plan. It was last updated in 2000 to reflect the BSP reference model. Given the rapid development of the field of trade facilitation, Recommendation No. 18 needs to be updated, and NTFBs may take active part in the process.

<sup>14</sup> See [http://www.unece.org/cefact/brs/brs\\_index.html](http://www.unece.org/cefact/brs/brs_index.html).

UNECE Recommendation No. 14: Authentication of Trade Documents encourages the use of authentication methods or guarantees that can be transmitted electronically. It can be used to review national and international requirements for signatures on international trade documents with the aim of eliminating requirements for paper documents and meeting requirements for signatures through electronically transmitted authentication methods or guarantees.

UN/CEFACT has elaborated a white paper on trade-related responses to the pandemic crisis to provide guidance on best practices and operations for efficient control, clearance and release facilitation measures in such situations. It covers specific aspects such as adapting existing regulations and policies that enable staff to use digital services while respecting data privacy and protection obligations. It covers transparency measures to ensure that information on regulatory requirements that affect trade operations and changes to operating practices are easily accessible. It also recommends clearance simplification measures based on paperless processing, cross-border data exchange and recognition of control methods and results.

### *Document simplification and harmonization*

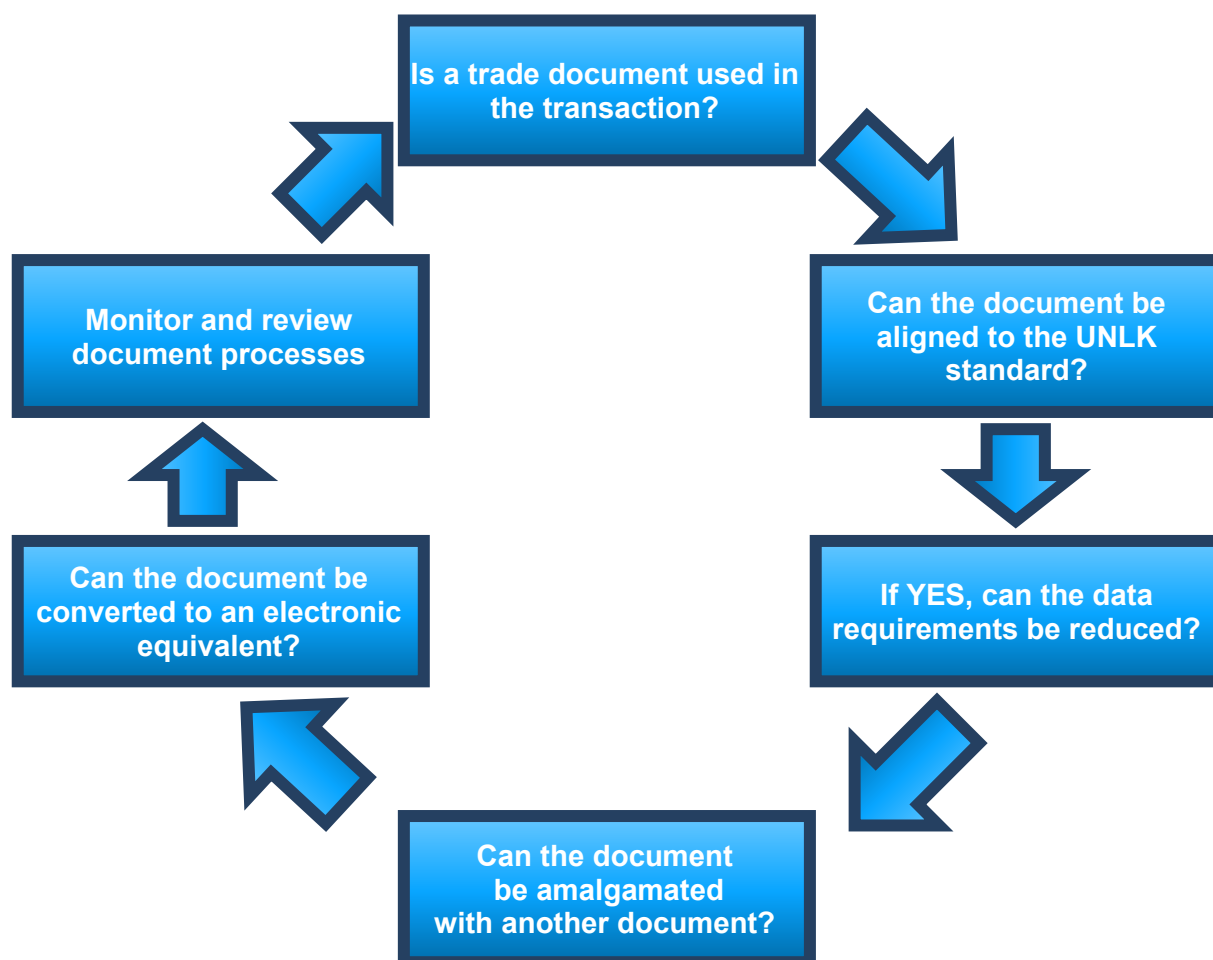
#### **What is it?**

Document simplification and harmonization is a process whereby documents related to cross-border trade, in paper or electronic form, are collected, reviewed, harmonized (in terms of layout and semantic content) and aligned with international standards, such as the UN/CEFACT standards. This process systematically questions the necessity, complexity and redundancy of documentary and data requirements.

#### **The role of the NTFB**

An NTFB can be a platform for discussing problems and developing solutions for streamlining documentary formalities. It can also be a platform for analysing and aligning documents with international standards.

Figure 3: Document review cycle



Source: UNECE Recommendation No. 1: UN Layout Key for Trade Documents.

### How is it done?

A review of documentary procedures may be carried out as a stand-alone assessment or at regular intervals. UN/CEFACT recommends the use of a standard approach for the review process, as defined in UNECE Recommendation No. 1: UN Layout Key for Trade Documents (UNLK). Figure 3 illustrates a mechanism for reviewing and updating documents to be aligned with international standards.<sup>15</sup>

Ideally, the review process consists of the following steps: i) identification of the documentary requirements, ii) analysis of the format and content and alignment to such standards as the UNLK and the Code lists, iii) amalgamation of the document with other documents and iv) where possible, the conversion of a paper document into an electronic equivalent, after proper business process analysis and re-engineering are carried out.

<sup>15</sup> This process was cited, for example, in the UNESCAP–UNECE UNNExT Guide for the Design of Aligned Trade Forms for Paperless Trade.

The review process results in a rationalized set of trade documents aligned with internationally recognized standards, such as the UNLK, the United Nations Trade Data Element Directory (UNTDED) and the UNECE Code List Recommendations.

### **Available UN/CEFACT tools**

UNECE Recommendation No. 1: UN Layout Key for Trade Documents (UNLK), developed in UNECE and subsequently adopted as ISO 6422, is the most important reference for document simplification and harmonization.

The UNLK was developed in 1965 to promote visual harmonization of paper trade and transport documents by defining the layout of documents, the presentation of data therein (where possible using internationally approved codes, such as the UN/CEFACT Code list Recommendations) and standards for data elements. The concept of this standard was to align the various document formats to this single format by using the UNLK-based model form to design derived trade documents to be used in a country or industry sector-specific context. Although developed for paper-based trade documents, the UNLK remains valid for electronic documents, in particular with regard to the electronic visual on a screen, the use of recognized international codes in the document and the rendition of electronic data in a printed paper document.<sup>16</sup>

The UNLK is effectively applied together with the UNTDED and the UNECE Code List Recommendations for the definition of data elements and the use of coded information in UNLK-aligned trade documents.

The UNTDED is a library of data elements that UN/CEFACT has developed and maintains. It defines data elements for all types of trade documents in a non-technical, syntax-neutral manner. Each UNTDED element consists of a data element tag in the form of a four-digit number, a name (informative) and a description. This standard was subsequently adopted as ISO standard ISO7273.

The UNECE Code List Recommendations, also developed and maintained by UN/CEFACT, provide internationally used codes to represent data elements in trade and transport forms, including the UN/LOCODE for Trade and Transport Locations (ports and other locations), the Abbreviation for INCOTERMS, and codes for representing names of countries, currencies, units of weight and the like.

### *Data simplification and harmonization*

#### **What is it?**

Data simplification and harmonization is an effective four-step process to capture, define, analyze and reconcile the data elements used in a cross-border trade transaction or a process or business area thereof. The objective is to eliminate redundancies and duplication of data requirements. The ultimate goal is to define a standard set of data to meet all governmental information requirements related to import, export and transit. A logical next step, after defining a standard data set, is to develop electronic documents based on aligned paper documents. Data harmonization is indispensable, for example, for the proper establishment of such trade facilitation tools as a Single Window for export, import and transit clearance.

#### **The role of the NTFB**

An NTFB can be a catalyst for projects to simplify and harmonize data and data exchange.

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<sup>16</sup> In 2017, UNECE Recommendation No. 1 was updated to cover the use of the UNLK for electronic versions of trade documents and covers aspects of developing electronic document equivalents.

## How is this done?

Data simplification and harmonization follow a stepwise approach, from capturing information requirements to reconciling the defined and analysed trade data into a rationalized data set (as defined in the four-step model of data harmonization in UN/CEFACT Recommendation No. 34).

The starting point is a list of data in documents managed by regulatory agencies (see chapter 2). In the phase called “capture” in UNECE Recommendation No. 34, all data elements from these documents are collected. Experts identify and discuss the semantic definitions of the data elements in the respective documents (“define”) and discuss and resolve any differences in names, definitions and codes or distinguish between elements that may have been given the same names, definitions or codes (“analyse”). In the final step, they attribute common names, definitions and coding for common data elements (“reconcile”). If necessary, new data elements are defined, coded and registered in the standard data directories and libraries.

The challenge is to define, semantically and unambiguously, a multitude of data elements from different sources and documents. It is also important to compare existing data element definitions with those in international standards (e.g. the UNTDED or CCL) and align them. An illustration of this process and the results can be found in UNECE Recommendation No. 34. Six data elements used by various agencies in the United States were brought together into one, using the relevant name, definition and code in the UNTDED.

A data element must have a name, defined in accordance with clear naming rules; it must have a clear description, a format of representation, an understanding of its usage (context), and coding that follows clear rules. The use of international standards and data element directories developed by UN/CEFACT facilitates the task of data definition. It also ensures data compatibility among government reporting requirements and enables governments to exchange and share information.

### Available UN/CEFACT tools

As noted, UNECE Recommendation No. 34: *Data Simplification and Standardization for International Trade* provides a description of the four steps that can be applied for the design of a data harmonization process.

Several UN/CEFACT standards may be applied as a basis for the definition of data elements, notably the UN Trade Data Elements Directory (UNTDED), UN/CEFACT libraries for UN/EDIFACT, the UN Core Components Library (CCL) and the UN/CEFACT RDMs:

The UNTDED is an internationally accepted standard repository for the semantics of trade data elements used in international trade.

The CCL is a standard business semantic library developed, maintained and updated regularly by UN/CEFACT.<sup>17</sup> It is intended to provide common definitions in their business context for a broad range of domains involved in the international supply chain. These definitions can be incorporated in a data model. The CCL encompasses about 20,000 data elements from the entire supply chain. The fundamental principle of this library is enshrined in the Core Components Technical Specification (CCTS).

The UNTDED and the CCL are the basis of RDMs for electronic trade data exchange, such as those created by UN/CEFACT (discussed further below). A data model represents a harmonized data structure across domains (e.g. Customs) and provides interoperability between trading partners in various procedures, in

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<sup>17</sup> For the latest version of the CCL, see [http://www.unece.org/cefact/codesfortrade/uncccl/ccl\\_index.html](http://www.unece.org/cefact/codesfortrade/uncccl/ccl_index.html).



business-to-business (B2B), business-to-government (B2G), government-to-business (G2B) and government-to-government (G2G) exchanges. It can be used as a reference for defining a business document, in which the document elements and relationships are identified and harmonized. Once a data model has been developed, it is easier to provide document standards and profile data exchange structures by following a specific syntax.

Data models can provide a bridge between business experts and technical implementers. A business expert develops a guide for a customized data model, whereas technical implementers use a guide to create technical specifications such as XML schemas, XML usage documentation and Schematron validation rules, as well as support for JSON API specifications. The latter can be used to create blockchains that support supply chains.

### *Standardization of electronic trade information exchange*

Developing an electronic document and data exchange structure is a technical area of work that usually is carried out by subject matter experts using dedicated data mapping software. This subsection only introduces currently available tools.

#### **What is it?**

Standardization of electronic trade information exchange is the process of developing electronic documents and relevant data models as a basis for electronic data exchange using syntax formats such as UN/EDIFACT, XML or JSON API. The objective is to foster the harmonization of data sharing, using the global UN/CEFACT semantic standards and reference data models, for harmonized and standardized electronic information exchange in international transport, trade and logistics.

#### **Available UN/CEFACT tools**

The main UN/CEFACT standards in this area are published at <http://www.unece.org/uncefact/mainstandards.html>. The process of developing standards for the digitalization of trade and transport data and document exchange follows the concept of alignment to an overarching BSP reference model as a common denominator for seamless data exchange among sectors and processes. In this sense, harmonization among processes has a central place in the work of UN/CEFACT on standards for trade facilitation and electronic business.

Preparing an electronic exchange structure for data elements or for electronic document equivalents entails mapping the data elements to international standards, such as UNTDED or CCL, which that can be used by developers of concrete solutions (e.g. electronic documents) from a specific syntax for data interchange, such as UN/EDIFACT or XML. The results of the mapping and development of the electronic exchange structure can be exported to a concrete product such as a Single Window system or a digital corridor. Applying an existing reference data model (RDM), such as those published by UN/CEFACT, can simplify the development of electronic data exchange structures while enhancing interoperability. The UN/CEFACT Reference Data Model Guideline explains how to apply and update an RDM.

An RDM provides a standard means for describing, categorizing and sharing data. It contains data descriptions, data content, rules of data sharing and a data exchange structure. It is a subset of the CCL that represents only the information pertinent to a specific area of activities, such as transport or Customs. UN/CEFACT has developed and published two domain-specific RDMs, the Multi-Modal Transport RDM (MMTRDM) and the Supply Chain RDM (SCRDM), which are mapped against specific areas of the BSP

reference model and the BSP RDM that maintains the linkage between them. These RDMs can be downloaded and used for mapping national data sets (e.g. for a specific document or process) to the RDM and producing the corresponding electronic data exchange structures.

UN/CEFACT is working on delivering a standard data set for a digitalized transport corridor, comprising data used in transport and logistics documents, certificates and licenses in selected multimodal transport corridors. Such a standard data set can be used, for example, by freight forwarders for collecting and preparing all the data for a consignment to be sent along a corridor. If necessary, relevant data can be fed into a concrete document to be used in either an electronic or a paper version in compliance with the legal regime (convention, protocol, agreement or other) underlying the procedures of using this document. A standard data set may be organized into a data model, following a recognized practice of data modelling using UN/CEFACT RDMs. A digital corridor data model could be a subset of UN/CEFACT's Multimodal Transport Reference Data Model (MMTRDM) and others of its RDMs. This is a way to achieve the desired interoperability among modes of transport and sectors in the digital corridor. Because the UN/CEFACT tools are aligned to data exchange in the regulatory domain – for example, to the World Customs Organization (WCO) Data Model or the European Union's Customs Data Model – this approach will allow for a seamless exchange between the digital corridor and the regulatory agencies, which have to exercise required regulatory controls.

UN/CEFACT has developed standards for electronic equivalents of commonly used trade documents which are based on data harmonization and can provide the basis for interoperability between documents and sectors, such as the phytosanitary certificate (the eCERT standard), the quality certificate (eQuality), the eCMR Consignment Note, several cross-industry documents and smart container information ([www.unece.org/uncefact/mainstandards.html](http://www.unece.org/uncefact/mainstandards.html)).

Each of these standards includes

- A business requirement specification (BRS) (a UN/CEFACT-specific business process analysis), which explains the business processes that the standard supports
- A data requirement specification mapping (RSM) - a data model of the message that explains the data fields used in it
- A set of XML schemas that specify the structure of the message for electronic exchange of the certificates.

Other international organizations have developed standards for documents and related business processes, such as the CITES permit (Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora Secretariat) and the air waybill (International Air Transport Association). In the context of the UN Development Account (UNDA) COVID-19 connectivity response project, UNECE and UN/CEFACT experts are working on delivering a package of standards to support interoperability between documents that accompany goods transported by different modes. These standards cover transport, logistics and other documents such as packing lists, booking confirmations, and documents accompanying goods transported by different modes of transport, such as bills of lading, consignment notes and additional documents, such as wagon lists (for more information, see section 4.3).

## *Setting up a Single Window for export, import and transit clearance*

### **What is this?**

One of the most advanced trade facilitation tools is the Single Window for export, import and transit clearance. According to *UNECE Recommendation No. 33: Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a Single Window*, updated in 2020, a Single Window is “a facility providing trade facilitation that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single-entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements. Individual data elements should only be submitted once electronically”. The objective of implementing a Single Window is to provide an advanced tool for trade facilitation, not just another IT tool.

UN/CEFACT and UNECE have done pioneering work in conceptualizing and disseminating knowledge about the Single Window concept. UN/CEFACT has developed and adopted four Recommendations (33–36) directly linked to the development of a Single Window, as well as several others on related concepts.

UN/CEFACT distinguishes a Single Window from related tools in international trade, for example, from the so called Single Submission Portal (SSP) defined as an “access point that allows traders to exchange information, in a standard format and related to a specific activity, with relevant parties including government agencies”. Examples include a port community system and a trade portal.<sup>18</sup> SSPs cover B2B processes such as contracting for transport, logistics and financial services. They often facilitate regulatory processes through B2G information exchange, in cooperation with or within the context of a Single Window, if one exists. By contrast, a Single Window focuses on the exchange of information related to regulatory processes in international trade, both B2G and G2G.

### **The role of an NTFB**

An NTFB may be tasked with or at least participate in stakeholder consultations for the development of the concept and feasibility study underpinning a Single Window. In the development phase, an NTFB may participate in the project management group that oversees implementation. It also may carry out technical work, such as simplifying documents and data or conducting legal review and making recommendations on legal changes, as mandated by the project management group. In the operational phase, an NTFB may be involved in ongoing performance evaluation and may constitute a platform for user feedback.

### **How is this done?**

Setting up a Single Window for trade is both a political reform process and a results-oriented project that includes the development of an IT solution. Establishment of a Single Window follows a process where subsequent activities build on the achievement of previous ones. The starting point is the development of a concept or briefing note that leads to a political decision and a feasibility study before implementation and production of an IT solution is undertaken.

An established Single Window requires maintenance, performance monitoring and improvement as well as upscaling of services. Single Window facilities are usually established in several phases, starting with a few

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<sup>18</sup> *UNECE Recommendation No. 37 Single Submission Portal, 2019 (ECE/TRADE/CEFACT/2019/6)*.

business processes and regulatory agencies and integrating others later. Other approaches, such as pilot or single-phase projects, are also possible but are much rarer.

### **UN/CEFACT tools**

UN/CEFACT has produced four Recommendations on the Single Window for export, import and transit clearance that can be used as guidance in the process of setting up a Single Window.

UNECE Recommendation No. 33: *Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a Single Window* presents the concept and its application to trade facilitation, including practical implications such as the business model and the implementation process, as well as challenges and risks. It focuses on the political reform process and contains practical guidance for the design and planning process. The process of establishing and operating a Single Window involves setting up a project management group and a task force for implementation. Practice shows that NTFBs can provide useful advice and experience in this process.

UNECE Recommendation No. 34: *Data Simplification and Standardization for International Trade* suggests a process for data harmonization that enables all participating agencies and private sector stakeholders to use the same definitions and codes; that is, to enable their IT systems to “speak the same language” for the exchange of data.

UNECE Recommendation No. 35: *Establishing a Legal Framework for an International Trade Single Window* can be used as a checklist to ensure the legal enabling environment for a Single Window is in place. It includes changes required in laws and regulations that cover aspects such as privacy and data protection, electronic signature and exchange of documents.

UNECE Recommendation No. 36: *Single Window Interoperability* focuses on cross-border data exchange between national Single Window mechanisms, based on four pillars: interoperability of standards for data exchange, operational interoperability, legal interoperability and business process interoperability.

Business process analysis, document and data simplification, harmonization and standardization are activities of the process of setting up a Single Window. Relevant UN/CEFACT tools applying to these activities are also useful in providing guidance in this process.

### *Drafting a trade facilitation strategy*

#### **What is this?**

A trade facilitation reform strategy is a managerial instrument to plan and carry out trade facilitation reforms and to galvanize support for them. It commonly is a written document that goes by names such as roadmap or master plan, that sets out improvement goals and the resources to meet these goals. Drawing up the strategy normally involves several steps to describe the existing (“as is”) situation for implementing defined trade facilitation measures, the desired (“to be”) situation, and what must be done (a plan of actions) to reach the desired situation. It is a process of formulating a vision, setting improvement goals, planning related activities, establishing expected results and implementing a monitoring framework.

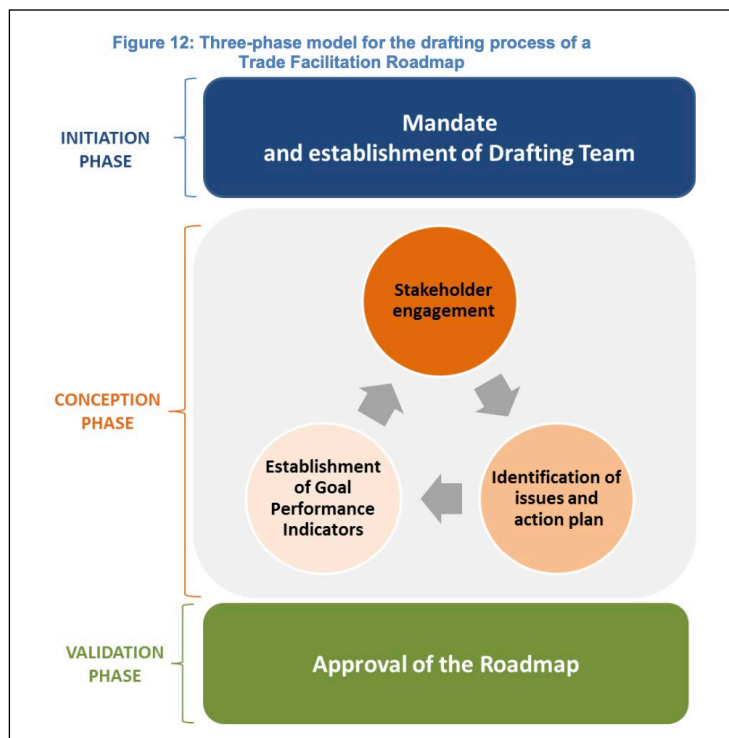
Typically, an NTFB is responsible for coordinating trade facilitation reform and does so on the basis of a strategy and work programme. UNECE recommends that the NTFB develop a strategy that embeds reform activities in the overall trade policy framework and presents a cross-government approach to trade facilitation. In conjunction with such a high-level strategy, the NTFB can adopt its work programme. It

guides the implementation of the concrete measures to facilitate and simplify trade. It details activities to be carried out in a precise time frame, identifies required resources and allocates responsibilities for their implementation.

### How is this done?

Following the [UNECE Guide to Drafting a National Trade Facilitation Roadmap](#), a trade facilitation strategy is developed in three phases (figures 4 and 5). A dedicated team of appointed experts carries out the research, analysis, consultation and drafting. The strategy should be developed in partnership with the private sector to ensure that it is needs-based. The final document is presented to the NTFB for endorsement.

Figure 4: Steps to drawing up a trade facilitation roadmap



Source: [UNECE Guide to Drafting a National Trade Facilitation Roadmap](#).

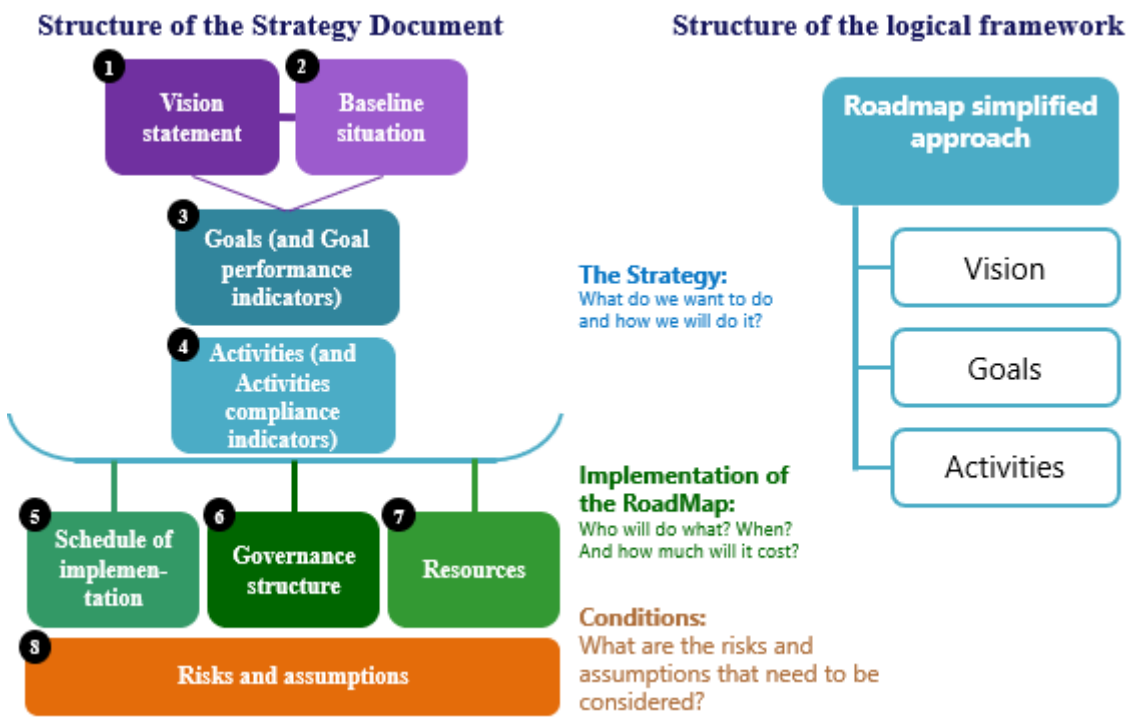
An NTFB can be the entity that is responsible for and coordinates development of the strategy and monitoring of the execution. Other instruments, such as a gap analysis based on the WTO TFA needs assessment may be used as part of the process. The objectives of a national trade facilitation strategy should include achieving compliance with the legal provisions of the TFA, yet should go far beyond to cover trade facilitation reform measures throughout the supply chain.

### Available UN/CEFACT tools

[UNECE Recommendation No. 42: Establishing a National Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism](#) can be used as a basis to establish national benchmarking and monitoring mechanisms for measuring and assessing progress in trade and transport facilitation.

UNECE Recommendation No. 41: *Public-Private Partnerships in Trade Facilitation* provides guidance on the choice of options for delivering concrete trade facilitation projects. They may be delivered using a public-private partnership (PPP) mechanism. Recommendation No. 41 provides guidance on models as well as the risks and benefits of a PPP, and presents steps and assessments to carry out when studying a PPP delivery option for a particular service.

Figure 5: How to design and implement a national trade facilitation strategy



Source: UNECE Guide to Drafting a National Trade Facilitation Roadmap.

## Recommendations

During and after the COVID-19 pandemic it is important that NTFBs participate in and, if possible, coordinate the development of a response to the business and trade regulatory impacts. In this context and with a view to fostering digitalization, the development of trade facilitation and e-business solutions on the basis of international standards, such as UN/CEFACT's recommendations, standards and technical specifications, is a priority. NTFBs must integrate this new focus at the strategic, operational and technical levels of their activities as they carry out technical work to develop solutions and participate in international trade facilitation efforts, including standard-setting efforts.

### *Steps to take*

UNECE Recommendation No. 4 recommends a three-layered structure for NTFBs, consisting of a bureau, a plenary and working groups, all served by a Secretariat. The bureau and the permanent staff of the NTFB are tasked with the strategic and operational work, supported by all members of the NTFB. The technical work related to document simplification and harmonization is carried out in dedicated working groups that are set up to fulfil specific assignments over a set period of time. Such working groups can be regular standing groups or ad hoc ones.

In the pandemic context, the NTFB can form a dedicated strategy team of selected experts and permanent staff to formulate a strategic response to the challenge. This group may be tasked with preparing a brief on implementing a range of trade facilitation measures and electronic business solutions for policy-makers and other stakeholders. The brief should be clear and focused, highlighting the benefits, costs and risks of possible actions. Such a brief is required in order to obtain political support and buy-in from the main stakeholders and decision-makers to launch or maintain the implementation of trade facilitation, including trade facilitation standards, at the national level.

In addition to the strategic work, the NTFB can initiate technical work by forming several technical working groups, comprising both NTFB and outside experts.

1. A document alignment working group would deal with the inventory of documents (in paper or electronic equivalents) used in selected areas of the cross-border supply chain. For more information on UN/CEFACT tools that can be applied, including UNECE's Recommendation No. 1, see section 3.2. The first task would be to create an inventory of current documents, by collecting copies and classifying them into logical groups (families of documents). This could be followed by an iterative review process, as outlined above.
2. A data harmonization and standardization working group would be tasked with analysis of data requirements, identification of data elements and development of data sets, in order to allow for the reuse of data in different documents and processes throughout the entire supply chain by all actors and for electronic exchange with other countries. This working group should be an interagency expert group. See section 3.3 for more information on UN/CEFACT tools that can be applied, including UNECE's Recommendation No. 34, which can provide the methodological basis for the work of this group, and other tools like the UN/CEFACT semantic standards, such as the Core Components Library (CCL) and the UN Trade Data Elements Directory (UNTDED), which provide the semantic standard anchor for mapping and aligning data elements, and UN/CEFACT RDMs. The mapping results are the basis for the work on data harmonization and document alignment.

3. A business process analysis (BPA) working group could create an inventory of trade procedures and business processes and produce recommendations for reengineering these processes. For tools that can be used, see section 3.1. This inventory would be done with the objective of streamlining processes for export and import of concrete products, implementation of such trade facilitation instruments as the Single Window or overall reform of border-crossing procedures. BPA activities are also carried out in the framework of other projects and may cover only selected parts of the BSP model or a specific mode of transport, location or product group. Ideally, the BPA working group would integrate and coordinate project-driven BPAs to ensure ownership, avoid duplication and reuse the mapping of data elements. Key instruments to use in this process are the UNNEXT Guide to Business Process Analysis, UNECE Recommendation No. 18 and UNECE Recommendation No. 14. The BSP model underpins Recommendation No. 18 and is a useful reference model for any BPA.
4. A legal working group can help regulatory agencies and the business community assess the readiness of the country's legal framework for implementing trade facilitation and e-business solutions, including new technologies and business processes. This framework includes such aspects as confidentiality of data, the legal equivalence of paper and electronic documents, legal arrangements between stakeholders (both public and private) for implementing trade facilitation measures and instruments, and work on the analysis as well as suggestions for improvement of relevant regulations. Experts in this working group may also propose legal changes to accommodate reengineered business processes as well as prepare interagency agreements for sharing information and implementing trade facilitation instruments, and bilateral agreements for exchange of electronic documents.

### *General recommendations*

With the accumulation of expertise in trade facilitation and the implementation of UN/CEFACT standards, NTFBs can undertake a variety of concrete activities:

#### Train government officials and MSME representatives

NTFBs can organize training for government officials and the business community, notably for MSMEs, on standards and tools or packages of standards and tools, such as the eCMR or the whole package of multimodal transport and logistics document equivalents. As standardized digitalization of trade and transport gains ground, the need for such activities will become even clearer.

#### Participate in the development of innovative trade facilitation tools

NTFBs can participate in or catalyze the development of concrete tools for trade facilitation and electronic business, especially for use by MSMEs in the post-pandemic situation. Government officials and private sector representatives would need such tools to get more information on non-tariff measures, up-to-date information on the situation at border crossings and tools that enable them to integrate into digitalized information flows, digital corridors, and the like. NTFBs can help in such endeavours.

#### Participate in setting international standards

In their role as national facilitators for the national implementation of global, regional and sectoral standards for trade facilitation, NTFBs may participate in the development and maintenance of international standards, as per the provisions of Article 10.3 of the WTO TFA (see next section on how to participate in UN/CEFACT activities). NTFBs should work, for example, with national focal points on implementing and updating the use of the UN/LOCODE code list by the respective country or territory.



These focal points coordinate and interact with all agencies and businesses, which use the UN/LOCODE or would like to see a change of entries in the UN/LOCODE.

#### Organize interagency and public-private seminars

NTFBs can organize interagency and public-private seminars to advance the implementation of trade facilitation measures, notably the use of international standards, on both the national and the regional levels. Bringing together the regulatory agencies and the business community to analyse and propose solutions remains a basic function of NTFBs in the post-pandemic context, and this would involve collaboration on the use of international standards in that context.

#### Organize regional NTFB events

NTFBs can organize or participate in regional events and initiatives, bringing together the NTFBs in a region to discuss and suggest solutions for harmonizing measures in response to the COVID-19 crisis, border-crossing procedures, and implementation of UN/CEFACT standards for information exchange. Many of those standards and standardized documents require commitment and some form of agreement between countries that use them. NTFBs may take a proactive role in these activities by cooperating regionally. The forms of such cooperation may range from bilateral meetings (e.g. at a border crossing) to regional events on concrete topics, regional projects or even a more formal association of NTFBs in a region.

#### Participate in trade facilitation projects run by international development partners

Working with international development partners on projects focused on trade facilitation and electronic business has been a major resource for NTFBs for years. Such projects are also a major source of support for the implementation of international standards, in particular UN/CEFACT standards. NTFBs should support the inclusion in these projects of activities for implementing harmonized international standards for trade information exchange. Paradoxically, the COVID-19 crisis has provided a window of opportunity for stakeholders in trade and transport to understand the importance of implementing harmonized standards for trade data exchange beyond limited corporate, institutional or national interests, and NTFBs should build on that understanding.

#### *Collaborating with UN/CEFACT*

The TFA encourages WTO Members to use relevant international standards and take part in their preparation and periodic review (TFA Article 10.3). Participation in the UN/CEFACT process of setting standards and developing best-practice recommendations for trade facilitation and e-business is open to any UN Member State and its nominated experts. Participation in these activities confers the advantage of first-hand knowledge of the standards and best-practice recommendations for their further implementation. Representatives of NTFBs have often been leading figures in the development of UN/CEFACT standards, recommendations and other tools.

The UN/CEFACT deliverables are freely available to users from the public and the private sector. Even without participating in the standard-setting process of UN/CEFACT Governments can choose to implement the standards. Developing and transition economies may benefit from the help of international projects that foster trade facilitation. UNECE Member States with economies in transition can also benefit from the UNECE advisory services.

#### UN/CEFACT structure

The structure of UN/CEFACT consists of a plenary and a bureau. Regional rapporteurs are nominated for certain regions. The Plenary convenes at least once a year with delegations from interested UN Member States, as well as intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations. The Plenary elects the Bureau, which consists of a chair and at least four vice chairs, for a period of three years. UNECE provides secretariat resources to support UN/CEFACT and the implementation of its programme of work.

UN/CEFACT activities are structured in programme development areas (PDA), each supported by several domain leaders and focal points and led by a UN/CEFACT vice chair. PDAs bring together experts to undertake projects that are within the scope of the Centre's bi-annual work programme adopted by the Plenary. Current PDAs are International Trade Procedures, International Supply Chain, Regulatory and eGovernment, Sectoral, and Methodology and Technology.

#### Participation in UN/CEFACT activities

UN/CEFACT has global membership and its members are experts from intergovernmental organizations, individual countries' authorities and from the business community. Any UN Member State can participate in the UN/CEFACT work on developing standards and best-practice recommendations by nominating a Head of Delegation, who represents the Member State, participates in the UN/CEFACT Plenary, elects Bureau members and, last but not least, can nominate experts to participate in UN/CEFACT activities. Nominations of Heads of Delegations are made in writing through the country's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in Geneva or the responsible ministry.

Experts can register to participate as independent volunteer experts in their own right, without representing any special interests of their countries, institutions or companies. They must be approved by a Head of Delegation. In the past, NTFBs have been a major source of expert nominations, and we suggest that this practice be reinforced in the future.

#### *UNDA COVID-19 Connectivity Project: Implementing a package of standards for documents accompanying goods transported by various modes of transport*

In the framework of a 2020–2021 multiagency UN Development Account project on COVID-19 connectivity response, UNECE undertook to provide a package of standards supporting interoperability between documents accompanying goods transported by different modes. This interoperability stems from alignment to the semantic standards (business requirement specifications, data subsets, XSD schemas, JSON API specifications, and so on) and the reference data models (RDMs) of UN/CEFACT. As of January 2021, the UNECE continues to work step by step on delivering the following package of standards for electronic document equivalents accompanying goods in multimodal digital data exchange:

- Standards for documents that already exist and are updated for use, such as the eCMR road consignment note, cross-industry documents, eCERT agricultural certificates and other documents (available at [www.unece.org/uncefact/mainstandards.html](http://www.unece.org/uncefact/mainstandards.html)).
- Standards for logistics and other documents (finalized in October 2020):
  - Provisional booking
  - Firm booking
  - Booking confirmation
  - Shipping instructions
  - Waybill
  - Status report
  - Status request

- Packing list
- RASFF (Rapid Alert for Security of Food and Feed)
- Standards for key documents accompanying goods transported by different modes (to be finalized by January–February 2021):
  - Maritime waybill
  - Inland water transport document: “bill of lading” or the consignment note under the Convention on the Carriage of Goods by Inland Waterways (CMNI)
  - CIM/SMGS and SMGS railway consignment notes
  - CIM/SMGS wagon list
  - Invoice for Customs
  - eCERT agricultural certificates with revised implementation guidelines, as well as schemas and subsets, aligned to the UN/CEFACT BSP RDM
  - Certificate of origin

UNECE promotes the implementation of this concept and standards through capacity-building seminars, subregional cooperation online events and pilot projects, e.g. on the bill of lading of the International Federation of Freight Forwarder Associations (FIATA) or the Black Sea–Baltic Sea digital corridor project. In the UNDA project, UNECE cooperates with other organizations to implement the package of standards for electronic data and document exchange.

## Related Documents

- *UN/CEFACT Reference Data Model Guideline, 2016 (CEFACT – BP/SCRDM – P1030 /2016/BP05 15 December 2016*
- *UN/CEFACT Supply Chain Reference Data Model Business Requirement Specification, Version 1.0 (CEFACT/15DEC/2016)*
- *UN/CEFACT BUY-SHIP-PAY Reference Data Model Business Requirement Specification, Version 1.0 July 2019*
- *UN/CEFACT Multi Modal Transport Reference Data Model, Public Draft v 1.0, March 2018*
- *UN/CEFACT White Paper Pandemic Crisis Trade-Related Response*
- *UNECE Guide to Drafting a National Trade Facilitation Roadmap, 2015 (ECE/TRADE/420)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 1: United National Layout Key for Trade Documents, 2017(ECE/TRADE/432)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 4: National Trade Facilitation Bodies 2015, (ECE/TRADE/425)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 14: Authentication of Trade Documents, 2014, (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2014/6)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 18: Facilitation Measures related to International Trade Procedures, 2002 (ECE/TRADE/271)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 33, 2020 Edition: Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a Single Window, 2020 (ECE/TRADE/352/Rev.1)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 34: Data Simplification and Standardization for International Trade, 2013 (ECE/TRADE/400)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 35: Establishing a Legal Framework for International Trade Single Window, 2013 (ECE/TRADE/401)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 36: Single Window Interoperability, 2017 (ECE/TRADE431)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 41: Public-Private Partnership in Trade Facilitation, 2017 (ECE/TRADE/430)*
- *UNECE Recommendation No. 42: Trade and Transport Facilitation Monitoring Mechanism, 2017 (ECE/TRADE 437)*
- *UNESCAP UNNExT UNECE Business Process Analysis Guide to Simplify Trade Procedures (updated 2012) (ST/ESCAP/2558)*
- *UNESCAP UNNExT UNECE Data Harmonization and Modelling Guide for Single Window Environment (ST/ESCAP/2619)*
- *UNESCAP UNNExT UNECE Guide for the Design of Aligned Trade Forms for Paperless Trade, 2012 (ECE/TRADE/372)*
- *UNESCAP UNNExT UNECE handbook for policymakers and project managers: Implementing UN/CEFACT e-Business Standards in Agricultural Trade*