

Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation in the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA)

Based on the United Nations Global Survey
on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation **2023**



ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission
for Asia and the Pacific



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and Sustainable Trade Facilitation**

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The report was prepared by ESCAP. Lang Sun, Chorthip Utoktham, and Silvère Dernouh, under the guidance of Soo Hyun Kim and the overall supervision of Yann Duval, all from the Trade, Investment and Innovation Division (TIID) of ESCAP, provided the data analysis for SPECA, collected as part of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023. Nichapat Saropala formatted the report and Arom Sanguanyuang created the cover design.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Reducing trade costs is crucial for enabling economies to effectively participate in regional and global value chains and promote growth and sustainable development. However, the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis continues to impede international trade, with geopolitical conflicts creating new supply chain disruptions and high inflation, increasing trade costs and uncertainties. This has added further pressure to already high trade costs worldwide. Given this situation, trade facilitation assumes a pivotal role, facilitating more efficient and transparent trade procedures, thus reducing the vulnerability of global supply chains and overall trade costs. Consequently, the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and regional initiatives have focused on trade digitalization, such as the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, offering guidance on measures that should be considered for implementation.

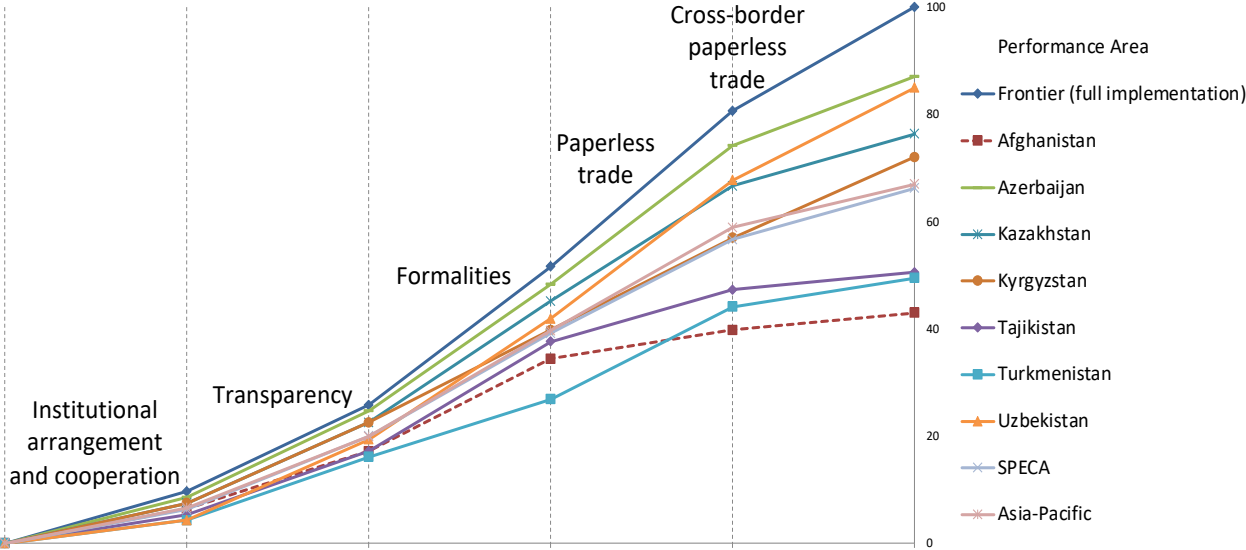
This report unveils the findings of the 2023 United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, focusing on the progress made in trade facilitation across the 7 United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) countries. The report offers a comprehensive analysis of 60 trade facilitation measures, categorized into four groups – “General Trade Facilitation”, “Digital Trade Facilitation”, “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” and “Other Trade Facilitation.” Furthermore, these groups of measures encompass 11 sub-groups, including both binding and non-binding measures of the WTO TFA. They also include measures related to digital and sustainable trade. The report brings to light the following key findings:

- Based on the set of 31 general and digital trade facilitation measures, SPECA countries achieved an average implementation rate of 66%, which is about the same level as the Asia-Pacific region's average implementation rate of 67%.
- The implementation of general and digital trade facilitation measures varies considerably from one SPECA country to another. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are leading the subregion with implementation rates of 87% and 85%, respectively. On the other hand, there is still room for improvement for Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan falling behind the regional and subregional averages.
- The average implementation rate has witnessed a rise, climbing from 63% in 2021 to 69% in 2023, based on 6 common countries. Uzbekistan is the country with the highest increase, with an implementation rate going from 62% to 85% in 2023 (23 percentage points increase).

- SPECA countries made the most significant progress in implementing measures related to ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis and pandemic’ and ‘women in trade facilitation’ between 2021 and 2023, with increases of 18 percentage points and 14 percentage points, respectively.
- “Digital Trade Facilitation” related measures have shown improvement in implementation between 2021 and 2023, with 'paperless trade facilitation' measures implementation level increasing from 55% to 60% and 'cross-border paperless trade' rising from 42% to 53%. However, the SPECA average implementation rate of the 'paperless trade facilitation' measures is 6 percentage points lower than the Asia-Pacific's average. Also, although the average implementation rate of 'cross-border paperless trade' in SPECA region is higher than the average of the Asia-Pacific region, it is one of the two least implemented sub-groups in the SPECA countries. This leaves ample space for policy intervention on continuous and further advancement in the area of “Digital Trade Facilitation.”
- Measures under the “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group show varied degrees of implementation level. It is noteworthy that the implementation rate for the ‘women in trade facilitation’ measures stands at 70%, significantly higher than those of global and regional averages. However, the adoption of measures to support SMEs remains limited.
- The implementation of measures related to ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ is relatively high, with an implementation rate of 67%, surpassing the average in the Asia-Pacific region standing at 60%. Notably, the SPECA countries have relatively well-implemented measures related to coordination between agencies and countries as well as planning for future crises.

The report highlights that significant trade cost reductions could be achieved through the implementation of paperless and cross-border paperless trade measures, surpassing the impact of conventional trade facilitation measures. Full implementation of binding and non-binding measures outlined in the WTO TFA could lead to a reduction in trade costs to about 7%. Going Beyond, the adoption of digital trade facilitation measures, facilitating seamless electronic exchange of trade data and documents across borders, has the potential to significantly reduce trade costs by more than 15% for SPECA in a full implementation scenario. The Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific offers further opportunities for SPECA countries to promote their own initiatives and solutions as well as support the further advancement of their national Single Windows and ensure interoperability across borders.

Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, available at untfsurvey.org, 2023.

Note: The figure shows global cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores for different regions in the five sub-groups of trade facilitation measures included in the Survey. Scores are based on the equally weighted implementation of 31 trade facilitation measures, but the number of measures varies in the five sub-groups. Full implementation of all measures = 100.

This report should be read in conjunction with the Global and the upcoming Asia-Pacific regional report on the results of the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023, available at <https://untfsurvey.org/>.

КРАТКИЙ ОБЗОР

Для эффективного участия в региональных и глобальных цепочках создания стоимости и обеспечения экономического роста и устойчивого развития экономикам необходимо снижать торговые издержки. Однако, последствия кризиса, обусловленного распространением коронавирусной инфекции (COVID-19), продолжают оказывать сдерживающее влияние на международную торговлю, а геополитические конфликты приводят к разрыву цепочек поставок и высокой инфляции, что увеличивает торговые издержки и повышает неопределенность. Это приводит к дальнейшему усугублению ситуации в мире, где торговые издержки и так довольно высоки. В сложившейся ситуации меры по упрощению процедур торговли могут сыграть ключевую роль, создав условия для реализации более эффективных и прозрачных процедур торговли и, таким образом, снизив уязвимость глобальных цепочек поставок и сократив совокупные торговые издержки. В данном контексте «Соглашение ВТО об упрощении процедур торговли» и ряд региональных инициатив в сфере безбумажной и цифровой торговли, среди которых, например, «Рамочное соглашение об упрощении процедур трансграничной безбумажной торговли в Азиатско-тихоокеанском регионе» содержат рекомендации, которые могут быть полезными при разработке и внедрении соответствующих мер.

В данном отчете приведены выводы "Глобального исследования ООН по вопросам упрощения процедур торговли с использованием цифровых и устойчивых технологий 2023" в отношении прогресса, достигнутого семью странами-участницами Специальной программы ООН для экономик Центральной Азии (СПЕКА) в реализации мер по упрощению процедур торговли. В отчете представлен анализ степени реализации 60 мер по упрощению процедур торговли, которые разделены на четыре группы: «Меры по упрощению процедур торговли», «Упрощение процедур торговли с использованием цифровых технологий», «Упрощение процедур торговли и устойчивое развитие», и «Прочие меры по упрощению процедур торговли». Меры этих четырех групп, среди которых, в том числе, обязательные и необязательные для реализации меры «Соглашения ВТО об упрощении процедур торговли», далее разбиты на 11 подгрупп. Среди них также есть меры, имеющие отношение к цифровизации торговых процедур и к реализации принципов устойчивого развития в торговле. Ниже приведены наиболее важные выводы данного исследования:

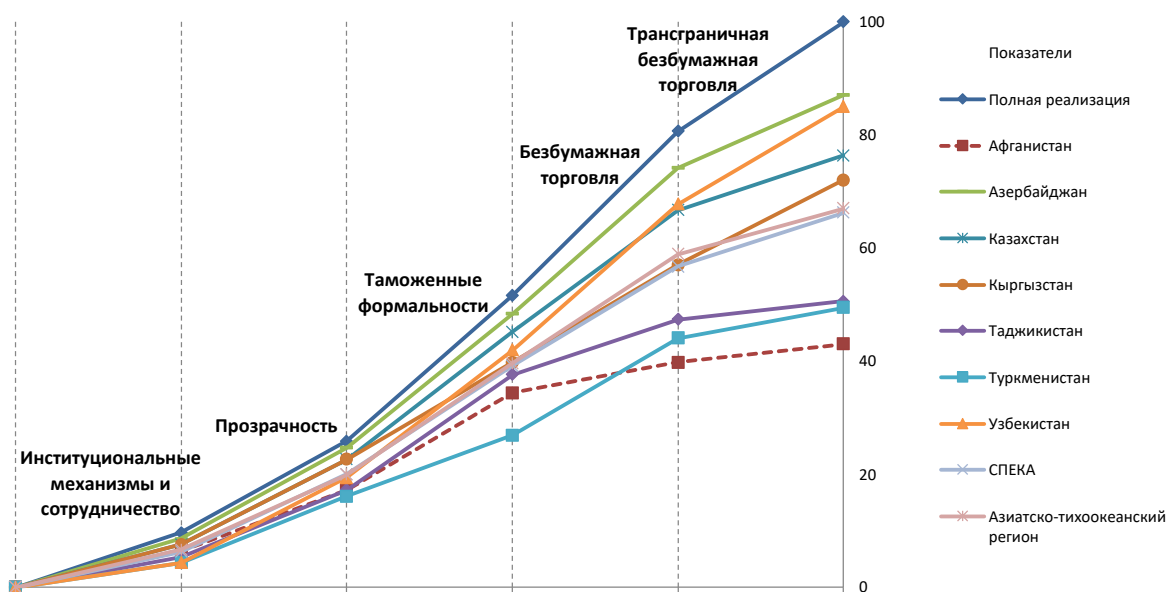
- В странах СПЕКА средняя степень реализации мер, вошедших в группы «Меры по упрощению процедур торговли» и «Упрощение процедур торговли с использованием цифровых технологий» (всего 31 мера), составила 66%, что соответствует среднему уровню реализации этого набора мер в Азиатско-тихоокеанском регионе (67%).
- Степени реализации указанных выше групп мер по упрощению процедур торговли существенно варьируются в странах СПЕКА. В Азербайджане и Узбекистане реализация этих мер достигла 87% и 85% соответственно, в то время как степень реализации этих мер в Афганистане, Таджикистане и Туркменистане ниже средних показателей Азиатско-тихоокеанского региона и субрегиона СПЕКА.
- В группе шести стран субрегиона СПЕКА, вошедших в исследование и в 2021, и в 2023 годах, средняя степень реализации мер выросла с 63% в 2021 году до 69% в 2023 году. Наибольший рост степени реализации данных мер был отмечен в Узбекистане: с 62% в 2021 году до 85% в 2023 году (рост на 23 процентных пункта).
- Наибольшего прогресса в период с 2021 по 2023 год страны СПЕКА достигли в реализации мер подгрупп «Упрощение процедур торговли в период чрезвычайных ситуаций» и «Представление интересов женщин-предпринимателей при реализации мер по упрощению процедур торговли»: на 18 и 14 процентных пунктов соответственно.
- В период с 2021 по 2023 год был достигнут прогресс в реализации мер группы «Упрощение процедур торговли с использованием цифровых технологий»: степень реализации мер подгруппы «Безбумажная торговля» возросла с 55% до 60%, а степень реализации мер категории «Трансграничная безбумажная торговля» возросла с 42% до 53%. При этом, однако, темп повышения степени реализации мер подгруппы «Безбумажная торговля» в субрегионе СПЕКА на 6 процентных пунктов ниже, чем в среднем в Азиатско-тихоокеанском регионе. И хотя в среднем степень реализации мер подгруппы «Трансграничная безбумажная торговля» в субрегионе СПЕКА выше, чем в среднем в Азиатско-тихоокеанском регионе, эта категория относится к двум из наименее реализованных подгрупп в субрегионе. Это свидетельствует о существенном потенциале внедрения мер группы «Упрощение процедур торговли с использованием цифровых технологий» в субрегионе.
- Степени реализации мер группы «Упрощение процедур торговли и устойчивое развитие» заметно варьируются. Стоит отметить, что меры подгруппы «Представление интересов женщин-предпринимателей при реализации мер по упрощению процедур торговли» реализованы в

субрегиона на 70%, что существенно выше средних показателей по миру и в регионе. При этом внедрение мер по поддержке средних и малых предприятий очень ограничено.

- Степень реализации мер подгруппы «Меры по упрощению процедур торговли в период чрезвычайных ситуаций» довольно высокая: 67%, что выше среднего значения данного показателя для Азиатско-тихоокеанского региона. Стоит отметить, что страны СПЕКА достигли существенного прогресса в реализации мер в сфере координации действий между национальными ведомствами, а также в сфере планирования на случай будущих чрезвычайных ситуаций.

В исследовании подчеркивается, что существенное снижение торговых издержек может быть достигнуто за счет реализации мер безбумажной и трансграничной безбумажной торговли: реализация этих мер может дать более значительный эффект, чем реализация традиционного набора мер по упрощению процедур торговли. Полная реализация обязательных и необязательных мер, вошедших в «Соглашение ВТО об упрощении процедур торговли», может привести к снижению торговых издержек на 7%. При этом полное внедрение всех мер по цифровизации торговых процедур, способствующих беспрепятственному трансграничному обмену торговыми данными и документами, может обеспечить снижение торговых издержек в субрегионе СПЕКА более, чем на 15%. В данном контексте «Рамочное соглашение об упрощении процедур трансграничной безбумажной торговли в Азиатско-тихоокеанском регионе» может стать удобной платформой, в рамках которой страны СПЕКА могут внедрять свои собственные инициативы и решения, а также осуществлять дальнейшее развитие национальных систем «единого окна» и повышать их трансграничную совместимость.

Прогресс в реализации мер по упрощению процедур торговли



Источник: Глобальное исследование ООН по вопросам упрощения процедур торговли с использованием цифровых и устойчивых технологий 2023 (доступно для скачивания на сайте <https://untfsurvey.org/>).

Примечание: на графике отражены кумулятивные значения коэффициентов степени реализации мер по упрощению процедур торговли, вошедших в пять подгрупп исследования, в отдельных экономиках субрегиона, в субрегионе СПЕКА и в Азиатско-тихоокеанском регионе. При расчёте средних коэффициентов всем мерам были присвоены одинаковые веса (всего 31 мера), при этом в каждой подгруппе количество вошедших мер разное. Максимальное возможное значение коэффициента в случае полной реализации всех мер = 100.

Данный отчет рекомендуется рассматривать в контексте выводов глобального и регионального отчетов, составленных на основе "Глобального исследования ООН по вопросам упрощения процедур торговли с использованием цифровых и устойчивых технологий 2023", которые доступны для скачивания на сайте <https://untfsurvey.org/>.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AEO	Authorized Economic Operator
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CPTA	Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific
ECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
ECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
ESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
LDC	Least Developed Country
LLDC	Landlocked Developing Country
NCA	North and Central Asia
NTFC	National Trade Facilitation Committee
OCO	Oceania Customs Organization
PIDEs	Pacific Island Developing Economies
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement
UN/CEFACT	United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNNEXT	United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport for Asia and the Pacific
UNRC	United Nations Regional Commission
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and objective

It is widely recognized that reducing trade costs plays a crucial role in facilitating the active engagement of economies in regional and global value chains, thereby ensuring that trade remains as a main engine of growth and sustainable development. As shown in table 1, based on the latest data from the ESCAP-World Bank Trade Cost Database, comprehensive non-tariff trade costs between the SPECA economies (141% tariff-equivalent) are still significantly higher than the costs of trading goods among the three largest economies in European Union (42% tariff-equivalent) or those between China, the Republic of Korea and Japan (58% tariff equivalent).

The aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis continues to impede international trade, with geopolitical conflicts creating new supply chain disruptions, and inflation increasing trade costs and uncertainties. Although global merchandise trade volumes exhibited a resilient rebound following the pandemic, trade growth faltered in 2022, with slow growth expected to persist throughout 2023, at 0.8% according to the latest WTO estimate¹. However, trade facilitation measures play a crucial role in mitigating these challenges by enhancing efficiency through streamlined and digitalized processes. By implementing effective trade facilitation strategies, unnecessary costs can be reduced, helping to counter the trend of increasing trade costs.

In general, significant progress has been made in reducing trade costs by eliminating or lowering tariffs during the past few decades. Studies indicate that non-tariff measures can contribute up to twice as much to trade costs compared with ordinary Customs tariffs. Hence, to achieve additional trade cost reductions, it is imperative to tackle non-tariff barriers, such as inadequate transportation, logistics infrastructure and services as well as complex regulatory procedures and documentation. In this context, this report presents a comprehensive overview of the results from the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023 for the countries of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA). Furthermore, potential impacts of implementing trade facilitation measures in SPECA are assessed based on a trade cost model.

¹ See WTO Global Trade Outlook and Statistics (Update: October 2023): https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/gtos_updt_oct23_e.pdf

Table 1. Intra- and extra-regional comprehensive trade costs in the Asia-Pacific region

Region	ASEAN-4	East Asia-3	Pacific Islands Developing Economies	SAARC-3	SPECA-5	AUS-NZL	Europe-3
ASEAN-4	74.9% (-0.6%)	78.6% (3.2%)	298.8% (8.0%)	129.6% (2.9%)	389.3% (1.0%)	104.0% (4.7%)	105.3% (-0.2%)
East Asia-3	78.6% (3.2%)	58.0% (10.0%)	201.2% (-21.5%)	129.3% (5.4%)	216.1% (9.8%)	89.6% (4.4%)	85.6% (1.0%)
Pacific Islands Developing Economies	298.8% (8.0%)	201.2% (-21.5%)	89.6% (-19.9%)	361.4% (6.8%)	N/A N/A	102.3% (7.1%)	312.1% (0.2%)
SAARC-3	129.6% (2.9%)	129.3% (5.4%)	361.4% (6.8%)	160.7% (37.6%)	294.3% (-0.6%)	139.2% (2.3%)	117.4% (3.6%)
SPECA-5	389.3% (1.0%)	216.1% (9.8%)	N/A N/A	294.3% (-0.6%)	141.1% (1.2%)	456.4% (5.5%)	210.0% (5.0%)
AUS-NZL	104.0% (4.7%)	89.6% (4.4%)	102.3% (7.1%)	139.2% (2.3%)	456.4% (5.5%)	52.8% (0.8%)	103.0% (-3.5%)
Europe-3	105.3% (-0.2%)	85.6% (1.0%)	312.1% (0.2%)	117.4% (3.6%)	210.0% (5.0%)	103.0% (-3.5%)	41.8% (-2.7%)
USA	84.4% (-2.1%)	66.3% (3.9%)	183.0% (-6.4%)	111.7% (-0.2%)	274.9% (13.0%)	97.7% (-1.6%)	65.6% (-2.0%)

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

Note: Trade costs may be interpreted as tariff equivalents. Percentage changes in trade costs between 2010-2015 and 2016-2021 are shown in parentheses.

ASEAN-4: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand; East Asia-3: China, Japan, Republic of Korea; Europe-3: Germany, France, United Kingdom; SAARC-3: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka; Pacific Island developing economies: Fiji, Samoa; SPECA-5: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan.

1.2. Survey instrument and methodology

The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2023 (hereafter called “the Survey”) builds upon the original instrument (formerly known as the Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation). It was prepared according to the final list of commitments included in the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and supplemented by forward-looking measures that are sought to be implemented under the United Nations treaty – the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (CPTA) – and those supporting inclusive and sustainable trade.

The 2023 Survey covers 60 trade facilitation measures commonly used by five United Nations Regional Commissions (UNRCs). The 60 measures are classified into four groups and 11 sub-groups (annex 2). The first group, “General Trade Facilitation,” includes many WTO TFA measures with subgroups of ‘transparency,’ ‘formalities,’ ‘institutional arrangement and cooperation’ and ‘transit facilitation.’ The second group, “Digital Trade Facilitation” measures, includes ‘paperless trade’ and ‘cross-border paperless trade.’ The third group of “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” measures includes ‘trade facilitation for SMEs,’ ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ and ‘women in trade facilitation’ sub-groups. The fourth group “Other Trade Facilitation” comes with two sub-groups: ‘trade finance facilitation’ and ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis.’ In addition, two measures are pilot tested in 2023, namely ‘trade facilitation for e-commerce’ and ‘trade facilitation and wildlife protection.’

The overall scope of the Survey goes beyond the measures included in the WTO TFA. Most paperless trade measures, particularly for cross-border paperless trade, are not specifically featured in the WTO TFA. However, their inclusion in many cases would support better implementation of the TFA and in digital form.

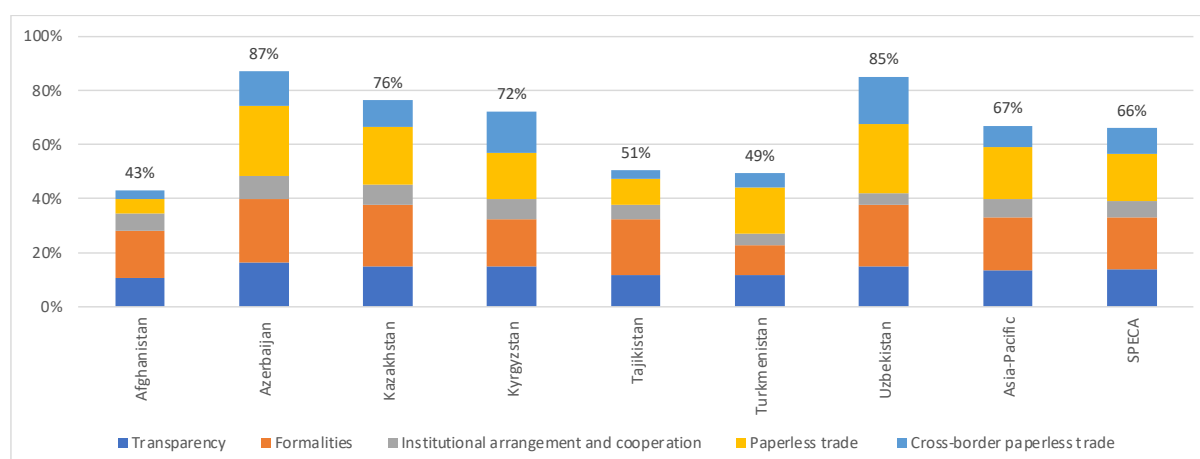
Most “Sustainable Trade Facilitation” group measures are not specifically included in the WTO TFA, except for some of the ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ measures. The “Other Trade Facilitation” group is added with considerations of trade finance’s role in facilitating trade flows, the challenges posed by crisis situations to the global trade and supply chain (especially COVID-19), as well as with the rising importance of cross-border e-commerce and the increasing need to combat illegal wildlife trade.

ESCAP adopted a three-step approach to developing the dataset (annex 3). Data was collected between January and July 2023. Based on the data collected, each of the trade facilitation measures included in the Survey was rated as “fully implemented,” “partially implemented,” “on a pilot basis,” “not implemented” or “don’t know.” Definitions for each stage are provided in annex 4. A score of 3, 2, 1 or zero was assigned to each of the four implementation stages to calculate implementation rates for individual measures across countries, regions, or groupings. All SPECA countries are included in this report, namely: Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Country groupings used in the analysis are detailed in annex 1 and shown in figure 2. Further details and examples on the calculation of implementation rates are available online.

2. Trade facilitation implementation: Overview

When it comes to 31 trade facilitation measures from 5 sub-groups under “General” and “Digital Trade Facilitation” (figure 1), the average rate standing at 66% in SPECA countries appears to be in the range of the regional average of 67% observed in Asia-Pacific region. But SPECA countries exhibit varying degrees of implementation with the lead of Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan achieving implementation rates of 87% and 85%, respectively. Moreover, Kazakhstan has achieved a commendable implementation rate of 76%, while Kyrgyzstan follows closely with a rate of 72%. On the other hand, there is still room for improvement for Tajikistan (51%), Turkmenistan (49%) and Afghanistan (43%), which have implementation rates below the regional and subregional average (66%).

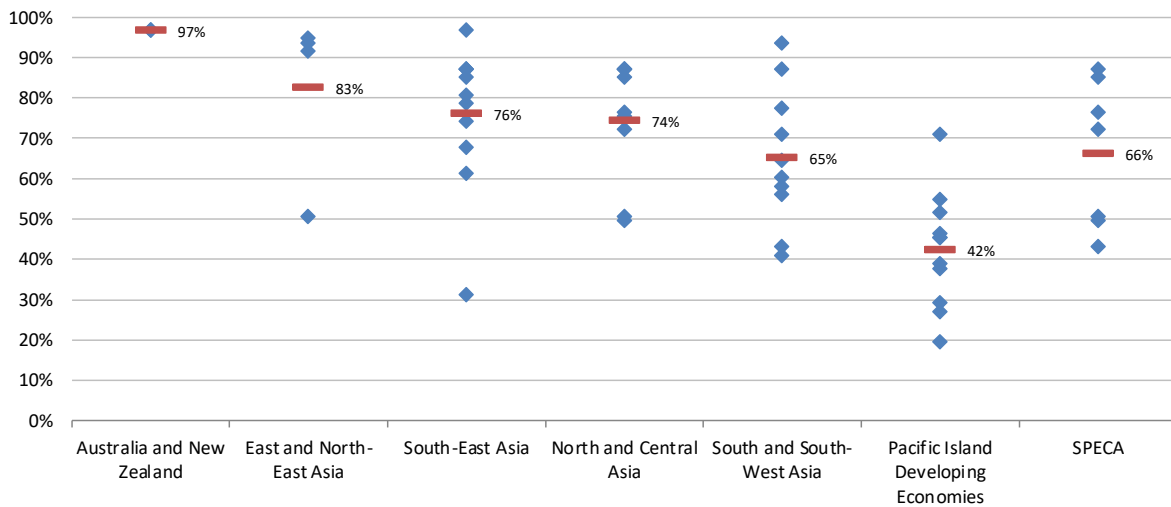
Figure 1. Overall implementation of trade facilitation measures in SPECA countries



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

When comparing SPECA's average implementation rate of these 31 trade facilitation measures with other subregions, the data reveals room for improvement, with a rate of 66% (figure 2). SPECA countries' level of implementation ranks only fifth, after Australia and New Zealand (97%), East and North-East Asia (83%), South-East Asia (76%), and North and Central Asia (74%).

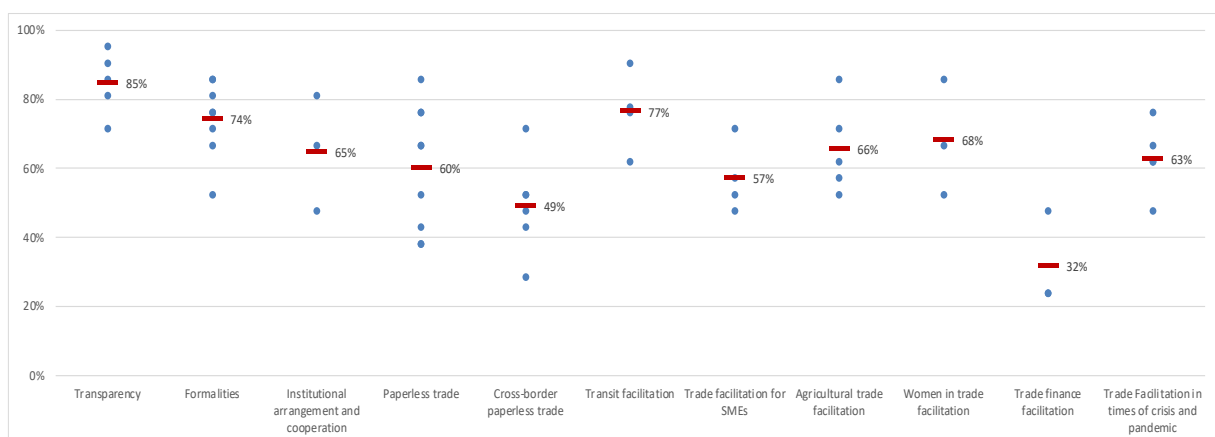
Figure 2. Trade facilitation implementation in Asia-Pacific subregions including SPECA



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

While progress has been made in various areas, there is still room for improvement. Indeed, when it comes to ‘trade finance facilitation’ and ‘cross-border paperless trade’ the implementation rates stand at 32% and 49% respectively, making them the least implemented sub-groups covered in the Survey (figure 3). Recognizing the importance of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, concerted efforts are necessary to enhance the participation and contribution of SMEs in trade facilitation as well as promote seamless electronic trade across borders throughout the SPECA region.

Figure 3. Implementation of different sub-groups of trade facilitation measures by SPECA countries



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

2.1. Most and least implemented trade facilitation measures

Table 2 offers insights into the implementation status of trade facilitation measures within each sub-group assessed in the Survey. In the ‘transparency’ sub-group, the measure ‘stakeholders’ consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)’ stands out as the most implemented. On the other hand, the least implemented measure is ‘single window facilitates traders access to finance’ from the ‘trade finance facilitation’ sub-group. This indicates the need for improvement in fostering the implementation of single window in initiatives pertaining to trade finance.

Table 2. Most- and least-implemented measures in each sub-group of trade facilitation measures by SPECA countries

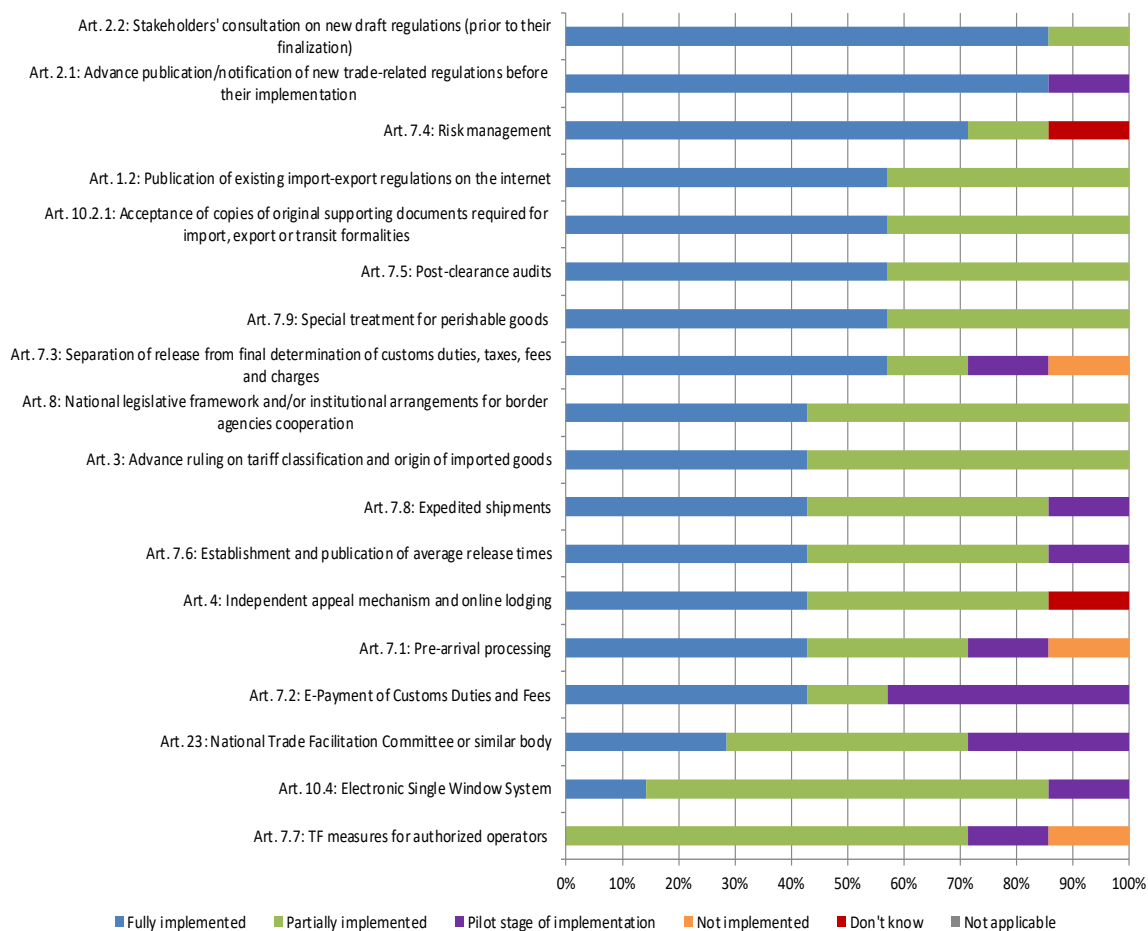
Category	Most implemented (% of countries)		Least implemented (% of countries)	
	Measure	Implemented fully, partially and on a pilot basis (%) / Full implementation (%)	Measure	Implemented fully, partially and on a pilot basis (%) / Full implementation (%)
Transparency	Stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)	100.0 / 85.7	Independent appeal mechanism and online lodging	85.7 / 42.9
Formalities	Acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities; post-clearance audits	100.0 / 57.1	TF measures for authorized operators	85.7 / 0.0
Institutional arrangement and cooperation	National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation	100.0 / 42.9	Government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities	57.1 / 28.6
Paperless trade	Automated Customs System; Electronic submission of Customs declarations	100.0 / 42.9	Electronic application and issuance of Preferential Certificate of Origin	57.1 / 28.6
Cross-border paperless trade	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	100.0 / 14.3	Electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin	57.1 / 0.0
Transit facilitation	Supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation	100.0 / 71.4	Cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit	85.7 / 28.6
Trade facilitation in SME policy framework for SMEs	Trade-related information measures for SMEs	100.0 / 28.6	SMEs access Single Window	71.4 / 28.6
Trade facilitation and agricultural trade facilitation	Special treatment for perishable goods	100.0 / 57.1	Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates	85.7 / 14.3

Women in trade facilitation	TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade	100.0 / 57.1	Women membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies	85.7 / 28.6
Trade finance facilitation	Variety of trade finance services available	71.4 / 14.3	Single window facilitates traders access to finance; Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance	28.6 / 14.3
Trade Facilitation in times of crisis and pandemic	Agency in place to manage TF in times of crises and emergencies	100.0 / 42.9	Additional trade facilitation measures to facilitate trade in times of emergencies	71.4 / 28.6

Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 4 illustrates the extent of implementation of measures directly aligned with the requirements of the WTO TFA, as indicated by the data gathered during the Survey. These findings closely align with the information conveyed by countries through official notifications to the WTO. Among the SPECA countries, the measure with the highest implementation rate is 'stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization).' It is noteworthy that 86% of SPECA countries have fully implemented these measures, while the remaining 14% have partially implemented them. The 'trade facilitation measures for authorized operators' is the least implemented with none of the SPECA countries have fully adopted this measure. Meanwhile, 71% have partially implemented it and 14% of the countries have yet to implement it.

Figure 4. Level of implementation of WTO TFA-related measures (excluding transit) by SPECA countries



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

2.2. Progress in implementation between 2021-2023

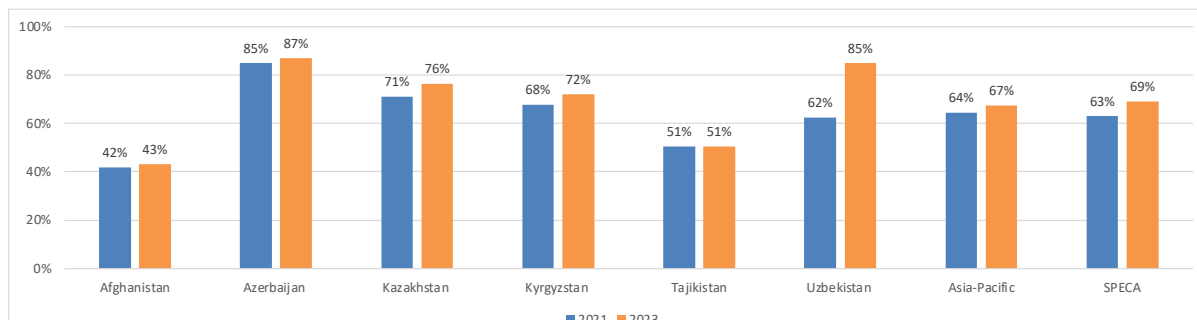
Some progress has been made in the implementation of trade facilitation measures within SPECA from 2021 to 2023.² The average implementation rate has witnessed a rise, climbing from 63% in 2021 to 69% in 2023, based on 6 common countries (figure 5). Notably, Uzbekistan has achieved the highest progress, with its implementation rate soaring by nearly 23 percentage points, from 62% in 2021 to 85% in 2023, followed by Kazakhstan (from 71% in 2021 to 76% in 2023) and Kyrgyzstan (from 68% in 2021 to 72% in 2023).

The significant progress in Uzbekistan can be attributed to the country's comprehensive efforts in recent years to facilitate trade. One example is the launch of

² A total of 7 SPECA countries participated in the 2023 Survey, of which 6 countries also participated in the 2021 Survey. Only countries covered in both Surveys are analyzed to assess progress in the implementation of trade facilitation measures over the previous two years in order to make the samples comparable.

Uzbekistan's trade portal in 2022—a collaborative initiative with the Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade and the State Customs Committee, ensuring transparency in cross-border trade formalities.

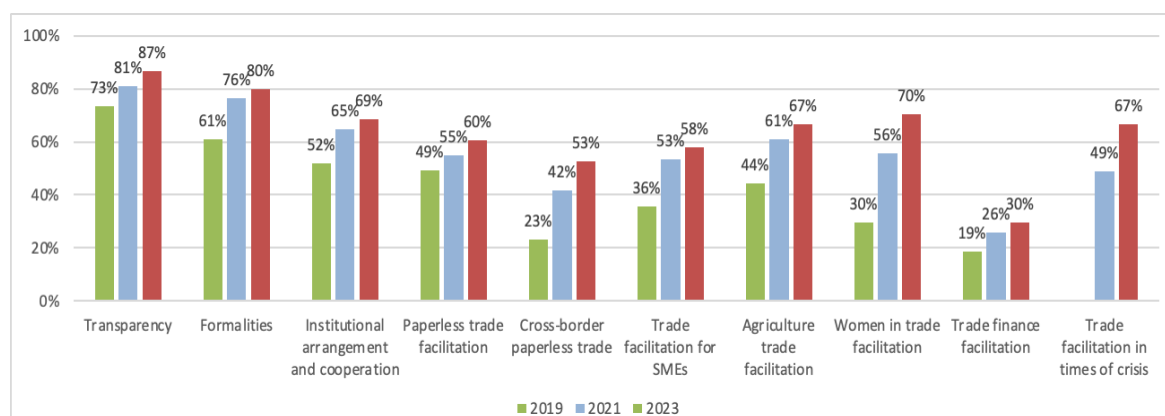
Figure 5. Trade facilitation implementation by SPECA countries between 2021 and 2023



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [unfpa.org/untsurvey.org](https://unfpa.org/untsurvey)

Figure 6 shows the improvement between the 2019 and 2023 survey years according to the sub-groups of trade facilitation measures for SPECA countries. It shows a steady rise in implementation rates, although the increase is more moderate between 2021 and 2023 than between 2019 and 2021, with 3 and 12 percentage point increase, respectively. In 2023, progress has been made compared with 2021 across all measures with the most impressive progress in improving 'trade facilitation in times of crisis and pandemic' with an increase of 18 percentage points. Moreover, significant progress has also been made in 2023 under “Digital Trade Facilitation” and “Sustainable Trade Facilitation,” notably for 'women in trade facilitation' and 'cross-border paperless trade' measures with increases of 14 and 11 percentage points, respectively, compared to 2021.

Figure 6. Average implementation of different sub-groups of trade facilitation measures by SPECA countries between 2021 and 2023



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfpa.org/untsurvey.org

3. Implementation of trade facilitation measures: A closer look

3.1. Transparency

'Transparency' comprises five measures related to Articles 1 to 5 of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and GATT Article X on "Publication and Administration of Trade Regulations". In this sub-group, the SPECA countries achieve an average implementation level of 85%, slightly surpassing the Asia-Pacific average of 83%. In particular, the subregional implementation rate for the measure 'stakeholders' consultations on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)' stands at an impressive 95%. Additionally, the measure 'advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation' boasts a commendable implementation rate of 90%, and 'publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet' follows closely with a strong 86% implementation rate (figure 7).

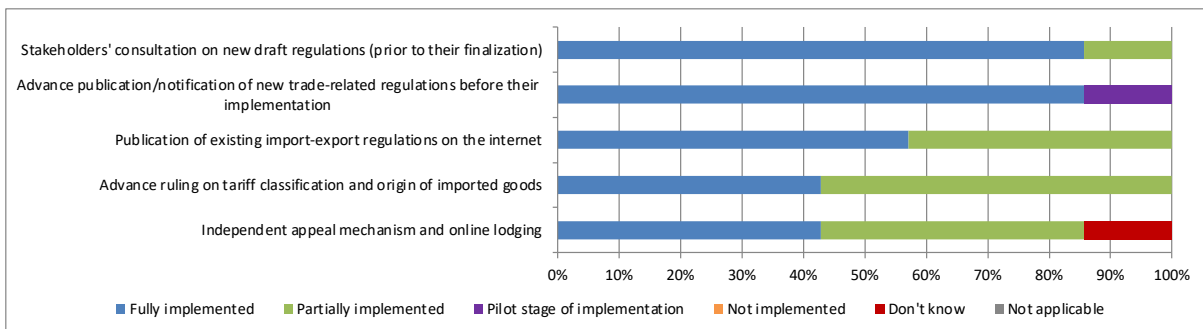
In addition, figure 8 illustrates that measures under 'transparency' are implemented to various degrees in the SPECA subregion. The measures 'stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)' and 'advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation' have been fully implemented by 86% of SPECA countries. For the measure 'publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet', it has been fully or partially implemented by all SPECA countries, but only 57% of countries fully implemented it. For the two least implemented measures, 'independent appeal mechanism and online lodging' and 'advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods', they have been fully implemented by 43% of the SPECA countries.

Figure 7. State of implementation of 'transparency' by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [untdsurvey.org](https://untdp.org/untsurvey)

Figure 8. State of implementation of 'transparency' in SPECA



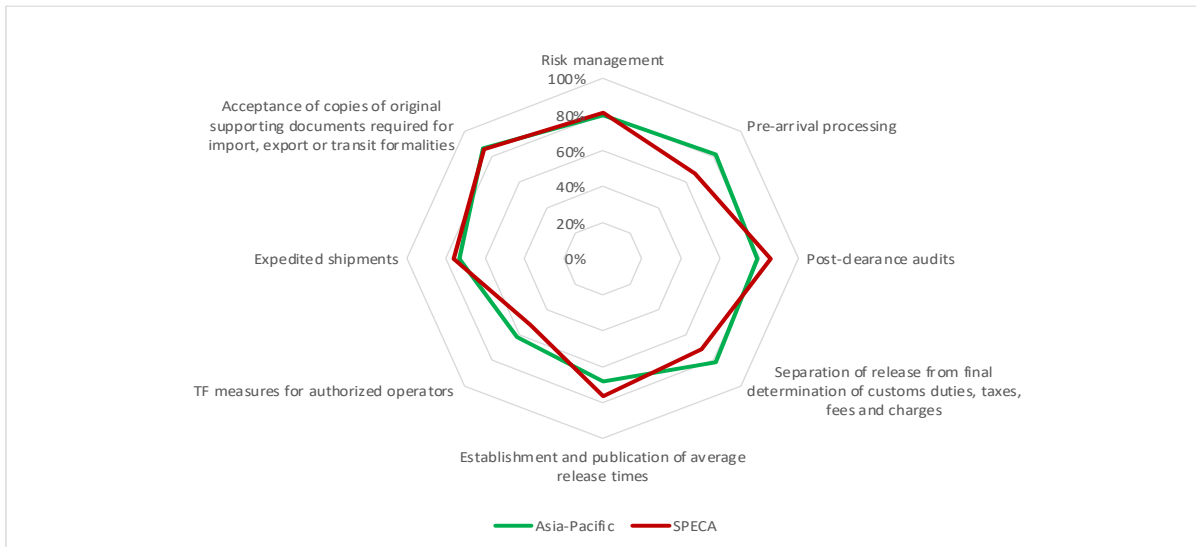
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [untdsurvey.org](https://untdp.org/untsurvey)

3.2. Formalities

The 'formalities' sub-group encompasses eight general trade facilitation measures that aim to streamline trade procedures, aligning with the requirements outlined in Articles 6-10 of the WTO TFA and GATT Article VIII on "Release and Clearance of Goods". In 2023, the implementation rate for all measures within the 'formalities' category stands at 74%, closely aligned with the regional average of Asia and the Pacific, which is 76%. The measures with the highest implementation rate in the subregion are the 'acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities' and 'post-clearance audits' reaching an implementation rate of 86%, followed by 'risk management' with 81%. Furthermore, the subregional implementation rates for 'establishment and publication of average release times' and 'expedited shipments' have achieved a commendable 76% (figure 9).

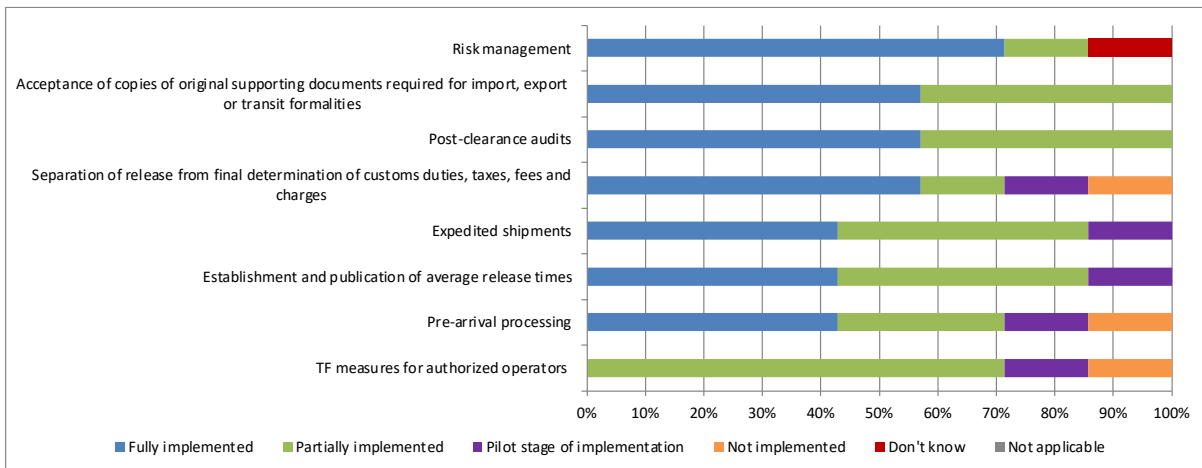
Among all the measures, 'risk management' exhibits the highest full implementation rate at 71%. Moreover, 57% of SPECA countries have at least fully implemented the measures 'acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities', 'post-clearance audits' and 'separation of Release from final determination of Customs duties, taxes, fees and charges.' Another group of three measures have been implemented by 43% of SPECA countries, namely 'expedited shipments', 'establishment and publication of average release times' and 'pre-arrival processing'. Finally, the measure 'TF measures for authorized operators' has not been fully implemented by any SPECA country, only partially by 71% of them (figure 10).

Figure 9. State of implementation of 'formalities' by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 10. State of implementation of trade 'formalities' in SPECA



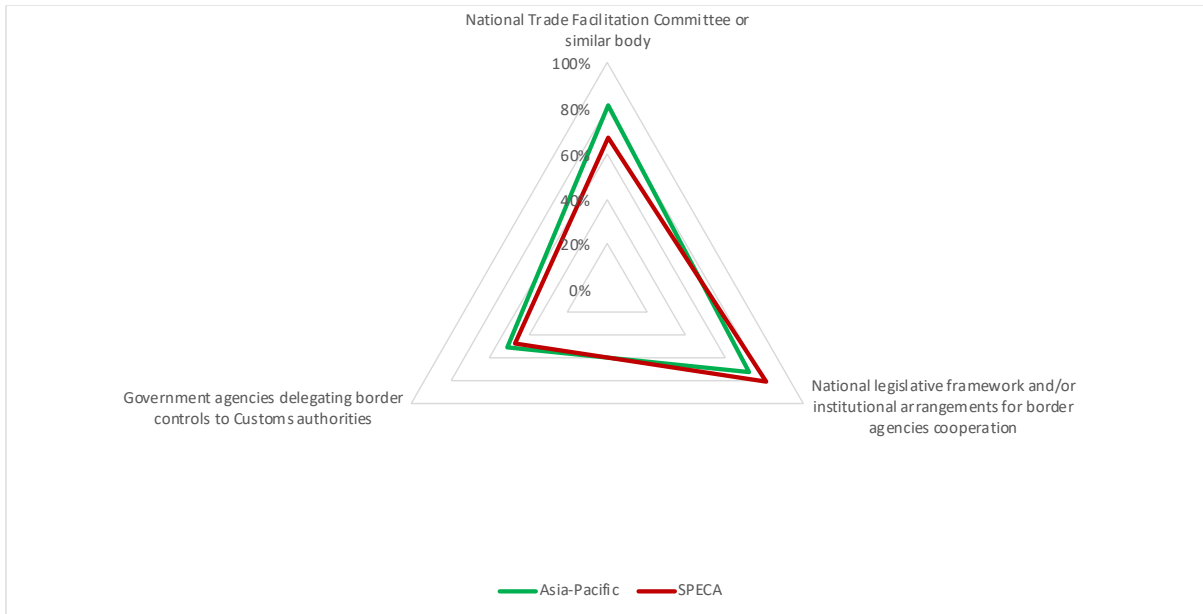
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

3.3. Institutional arrangement and cooperation

The 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' category comprises three trade facilitation measures. These measures revolve around the longstanding recommendation to establish a national trade facilitation body that promotes coordination and cooperation among government agencies and other stakeholders involved in trade facilitation activities. In addition, all three measures are specified in various articles of the WTO TFA. In SPECA, the implementation rate of these measures stands at 65%, slightly below the regional average in the Asia-Pacific region (68%).

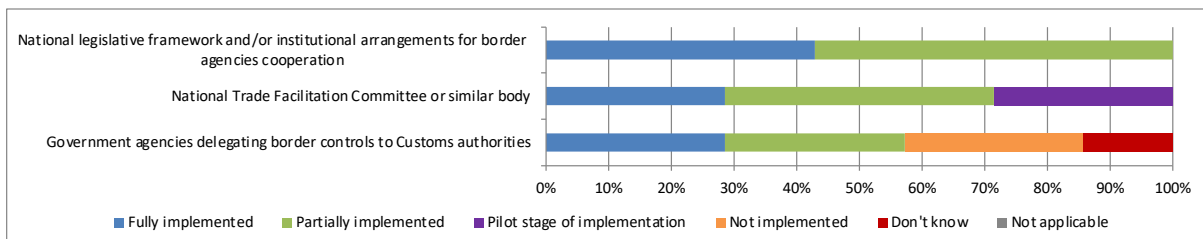
Figure 11 illustrates the varying state of implementation for each measure within this sub-group. The measure with the highest implementation rate is the 'national legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation,' exceeding 80%. The implementation rate for the 'National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body' is 67%, which is close to the regional average of the Asia-Pacific region. On the other hand, 43% of countries in this subregion have yet to implement the measure of 'government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities', or are not aware whether this measures has been implemented, making it the least implemented measure within this sub-group (figure 12).

Figure 11. State of implementation of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 12. State of implementation of 'institutional arrangement and cooperation' measures for trade facilitation in SPECA



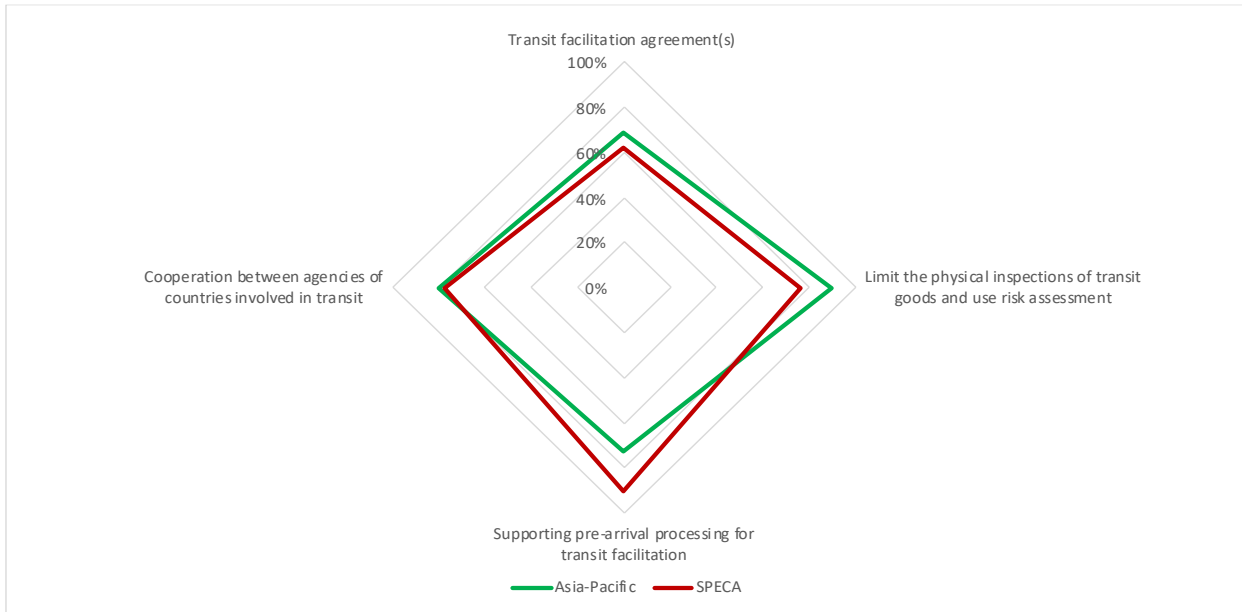
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

3.4. Transit facilitation

Three trade facilitation measures surveyed pertain to ‘transit facilitation’ and are aligned with WTO TFA Article 11 on “Freedom of Transit.” These measures aim to simplify the formalities associated with transit traffic, enabling seamless transportation of goods through one or multiple transit countries. They hold particular significance for landlocked developing countries, as their goods often pass through neighbouring territories for transit. In the subregion, the implementation level of ‘transit facilitation’ stands at approximately 77%, mirroring the Asia-Pacific regional average of 78%.

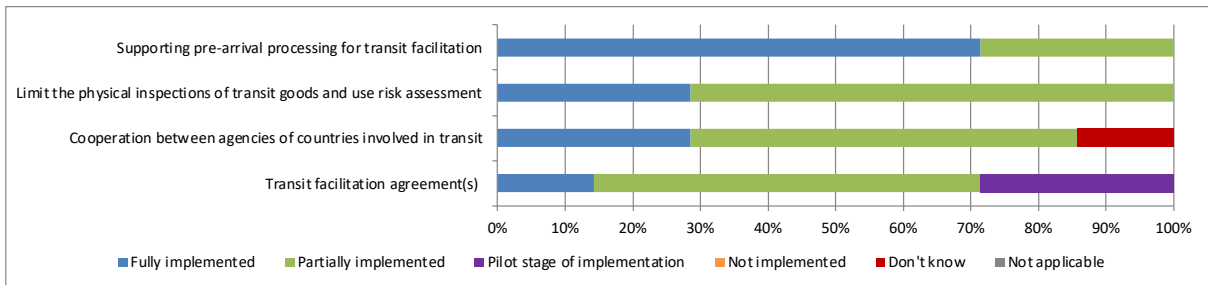
Among these measures, ‘supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation’ achieves the highest implementation rate (90%, fully implemented by 71% of countries), followed by ‘cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit’ (78%, fully implemented by 28% of countries) and ‘limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment’ (76%, fully implemented by 28% of countries). The measure ‘transit facilitation agreement(s)’ remains the least implemented with an implementation rate standing at 62%, with only 14% of SPECA countries having fully implemented it (figures 13 and 14).

Figure 13. State of implementation of 'transit facilitation' by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 14. State of implementation of 'transit facilitation' in SPECA



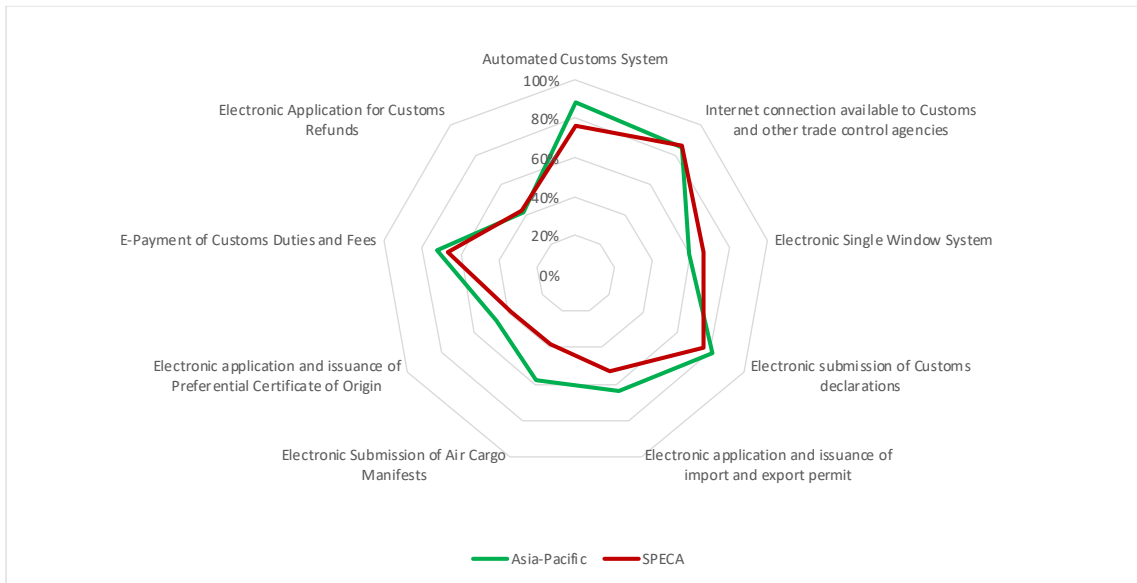
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

3.5. Paperless trade

Nine trade facilitation measures surveyed are categorized in the 'paperless trade' sub-group. These measures involve the utilization of modern information and communications technologies (ICT) in trade procedures, ranging from basic Internet connectivity at border crossings to comprehensive electronic Single Window systems. Many of these measures align with the provisions outlined in the WTO TFA. In the subregion, the implementation level of 'paperless trade' stands at 60%, lower than the Asia-Pacific regional average of 66%.

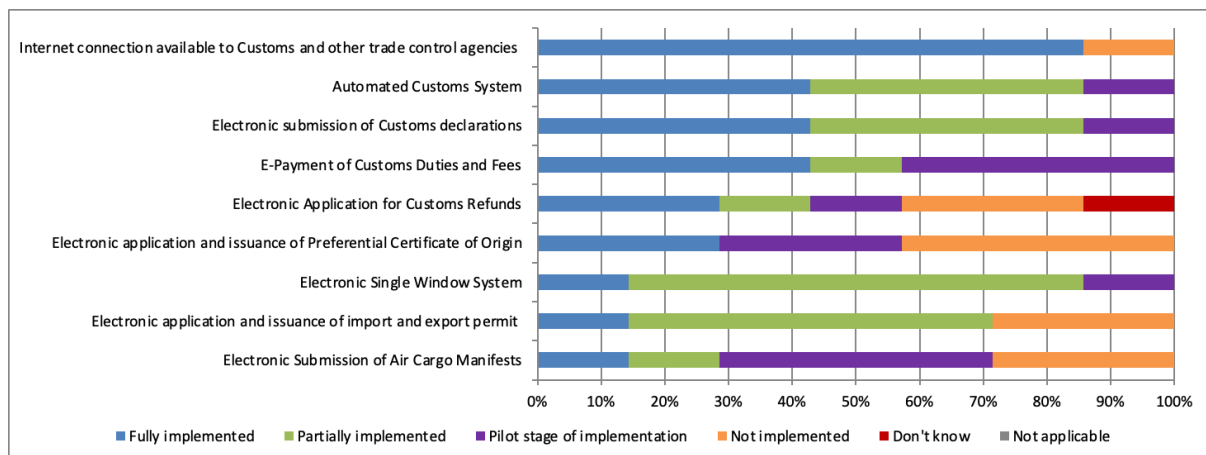
It is important to note that while the TFA encourages economies to implement such measures, it does not impose them as mandatory requirements. Consequently, there is a significant disparity in the implementation rates of the 'paperless trade' measures, ranging from 38% to 86%. As depicted in figure 15, 'electronic single window system' reached 86% implementation rate, the highest level in this sub-group. It is closely followed by the measures related to the 'automated Customs system' and 'electronic submission of Customs declarations' that achieved an implementation rate of 76%. Conversely, the measures with the lowest implementation rate are 'electronic submission of air cargo manifests' and 'Electronic application and issuance of Preferential Certificate of Origin,' with implementation rates of 38%. Only 14% of the countries in SPECA have fully implemented these two measures, while implementation has not yet commenced in 28% of the SPECA countries (figure 16).

Figure 15. State of implementation of 'paperless trade' by SPECA benchmarking



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unftsurvey.org

Figure 16. State of implementation of 'paperless trade' in SPECA



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unftsurvey.org

3.6. Cross-border paperless trade

The category of 'cross-border paperless trade' encompasses six measures aimed at facilitating the exchange and recognition of trade-related data and documents. Two fundamental measures in this category include the establishment of 'laws and regulations for electronic transactions' and 'recognized certification authority'. These measures serve as essential foundations for enabling the secure exchange of trade-related information within a country and across the entire international supply chain. In SPECA, the average implementation rates of these two measures stand at 71% and 48% respectively. The remaining four measures focus on implementing systems that facilitate the actual exchange of trade-related data and documents across borders, eliminating the need for physical paper documents. In SPECA, the implementation rate of 'cross-border paperless trade' stands at 49% and surpasses the Asia-Pacific regional average, but still has significant room to improve, being one of the two least implemented sub-group (figure 17).

Figure 18 illustrates that 'laws and regulations for electronic transactions' and 'electronic exchange of customs declaration' have been implemented by all SPECA countries, either fully, partially, or as pilot stage of implementation, making them the most frequently implemented measures.

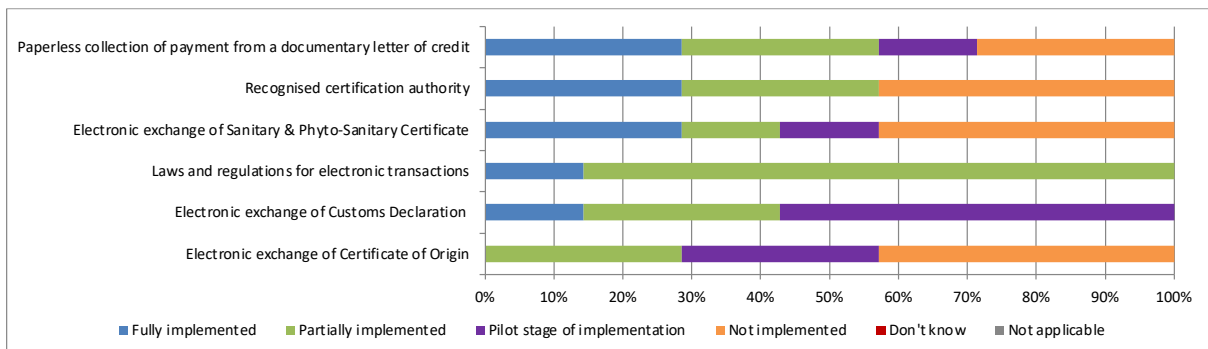
Moreover, 43% of the countries have not started to implement the measures 'electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin,' 'electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary Certificate,' and 'recognized certification authority' yet.

Figure 17. State of implementation of 'cross-border paperless trade' by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 18. State of implementation of 'cross-border paperless trade' in SPECA



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

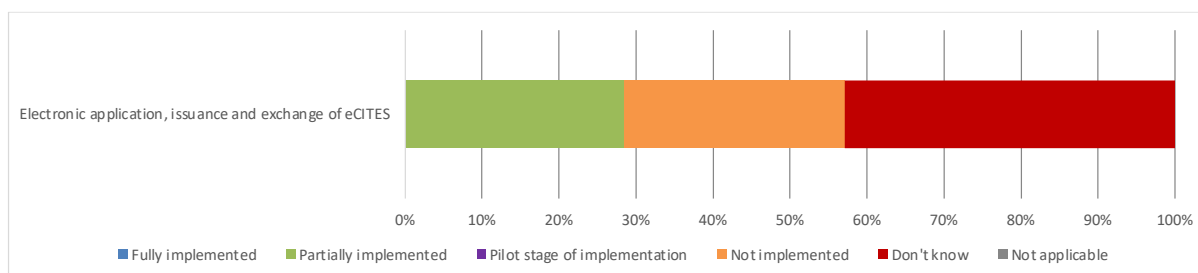
In addition to the need to advance paperless and cross-border paperless trade in SPECA countries overall, with the greater emphasis on sustainable trade, implementation of paperless and cross-border paperless trade facilitation measures could lead to making trade more sustainable and climate-smart (box 1).

Box 1. Climate-smart trade facilitation

Climate-smart trade facilitation would refer to trade facilitation measures that aim to make trade greener, in line with Goal 13 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on climate action. Digitalization is one key element in the green trade transition. The 2021 Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report highlighted the need for an acceleration of climate-smart trade solutions.³ Paperless and cross-border paperless trade measures can have positive impacts on protecting the environment and making trade more sustainable by reducing GHG emissions, both from embodied carbon emissions in paper production, and in the emissions from transporting physical documents. An ESCAP study undertaken in May 2021 estimated that by fully digitalizing regulatory procedures around trade, between 32 and 86 kg of CO₂ equivalents could be saved per end-to-end transaction.⁴ One example of climate-smart trade facilitation utilizing trade digitalization is the Electronic permits of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, known as CITES. It is an agreement between Governments that aims to ensure that international trade in wild animals and plant specimens are regulated for the protection of those species. Electronic permits (eCITES) are an emerging digital solution for improving the implementation of the CITES Convention by simplifying the compliance procedure for trade in these goods. It is also being used as a means of combatting illegal trade.

In the 2023 Survey, the pilot-tested measures, 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection', addressed the implementation of the CITES electronic permit system (eCITES). It is noted that SPECA Member States have a low level of implementation rate eCITES permits (figure 19).

Figure 19. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation and wildlife protection' in SPECA



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

³ Asia-Pacific Trade and investment Report 2021: Accelerating Climate-Smart Trade and Investment for Sustainable Development, available at <https://www.unescap.org/kp/APTIR2021>

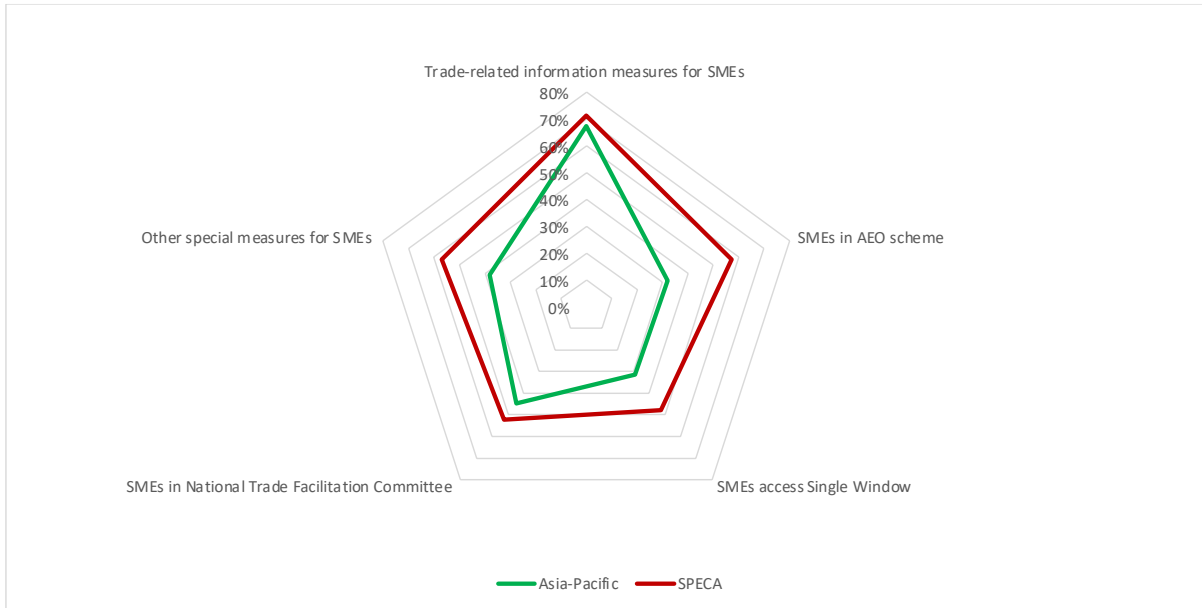
⁵ United Nations, 2023, Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: Global Report 2023

3.7. Trade facilitation for SMEs

In the Asia-Pacific region, there is considerable variation in the level of implementation of all five measures in 'trade facilitation for SMEs,' as indicated in figure 20. The average implementation rate of these measures in SPECA countries is 57%, which is higher than regional average of 43%. Moreover, SPECA countries exhibit a higher level of implementation on each one of the five measures studied, compared to the Asia-Pacific region.

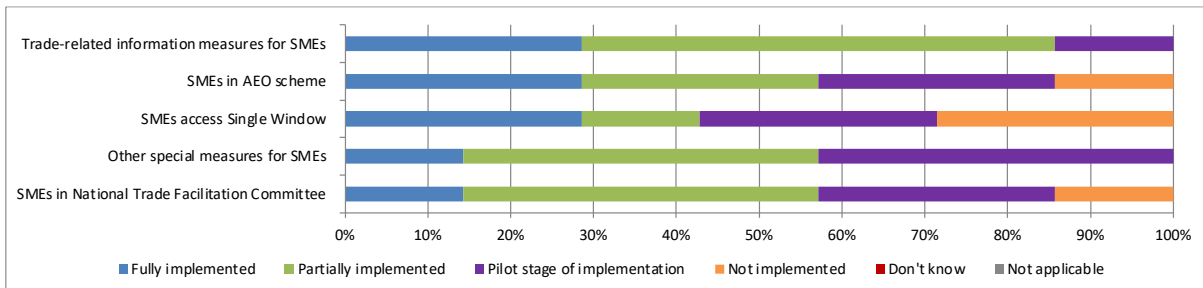
It is worth noting that all SPECA countries have implemented 'trade-related information measures for SMEs,' either fully, partially or on a pilot stage with an average implementation rate of 71%. Two other sets of measures, 'SMEs in AEO scheme' and 'other special measures for SMEs,' also show strong implementation rates of 57%, much higher than the regional average. When it comes to measures for 'SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee,' apart from an implementation rate above the regional average with 52%, it is noticeable that 86% of SPECA countries have implemented these measures either fully, partially or on a pilot stage. The least implemented measure is 'SMEs access to Single Window,' which is not implemented in 28% of the countries and has an average implementation rate of 48%, as shown in figure 21. The upward trend in the use of e-commerce in the global economy could present opportunities for SMEs to connect to global supply chains but measures specific to SMEs as well as to supporting e-commerce would need to be further enhanced (box 2).

Figure 20. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Figure 21. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation for SMEs' in SPECA



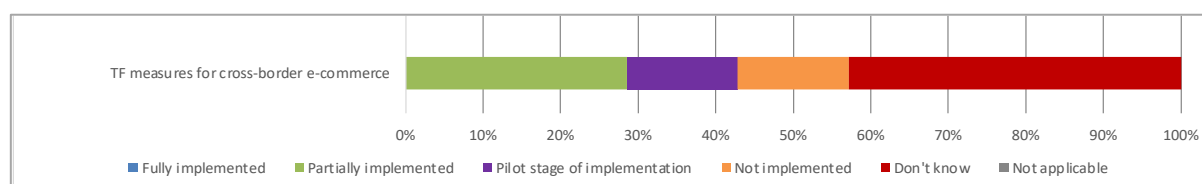
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

Box 2. Trade Facilitation for e-commerce and SMEs

Electronic commerce (e-commerce) accounts for a significant proportion of business transactions among ASEAN countries and is an increasingly important element in international trade. An ongoing challenge in this space is to harmonize regulations governing e-commerce across nations; although progress has been made, regulations governing e-commerce have not kept pace with the rapid expansion of e-commercial transactions.

In the 2023 Survey, the pilot-tested ‘trade facilitation for e-commerce’ measure reflects whether countries have implemented a national strategy on cross-border e-commerce and a *de minimis* regime. It is observed that only 28% of SPECA Member States have partially implemented them, with 15% on a pilot stage (figure 22). This highlights the need for significant improvements, not only for the areas indicated in the measure but also in a broader context for the overall e-commerce environment. These improvements are crucial for enhancing overall “Digital Trade Facilitation” and ensuring its positive impact on sustainable trade.

Figure 22. State of implementation of ‘trade facilitation for e-commerce’ in SPECA

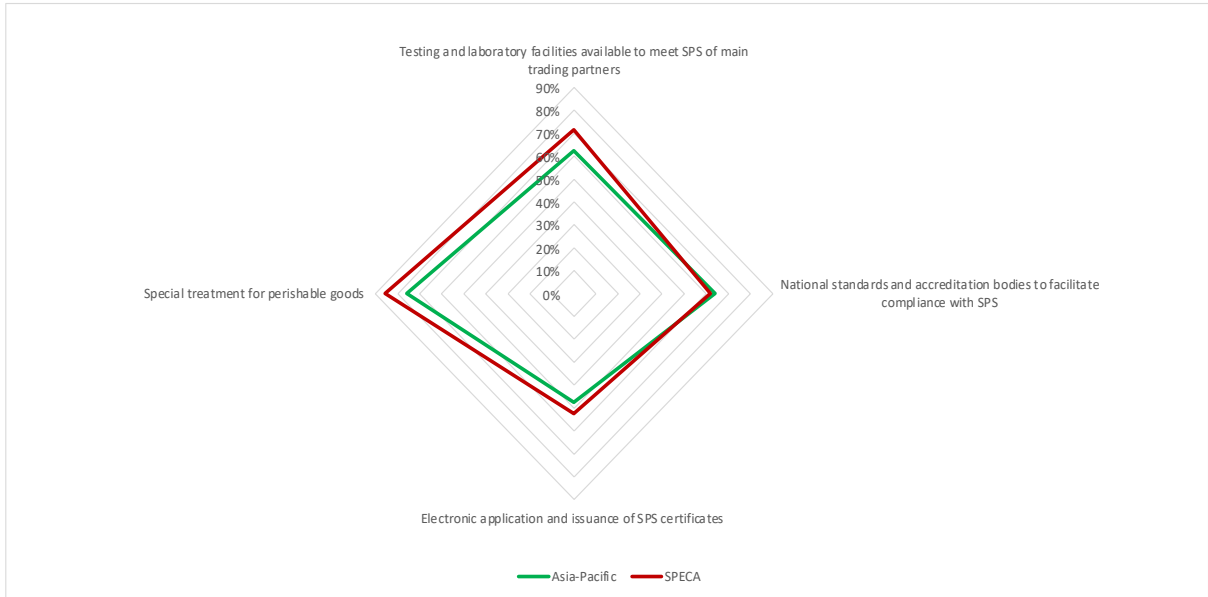


Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at untfsurvey.org

3.8. Agricultural Trade Facilitation

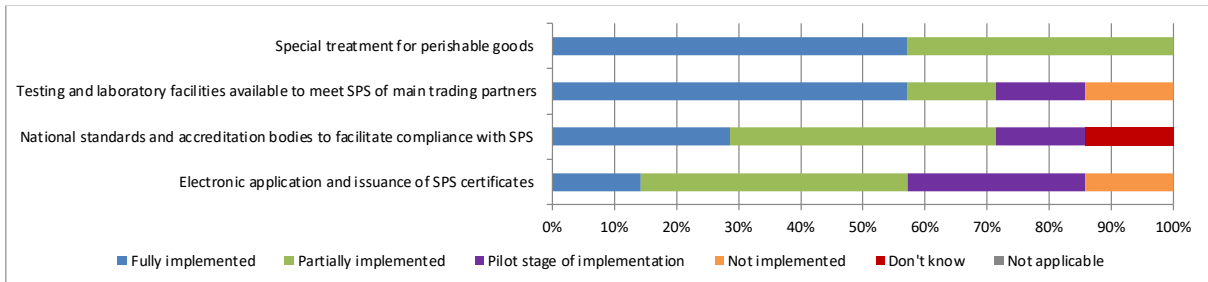
The implementation rate of ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ in the SPECA subregion stands at 68%, higher than the Asia-Pacific average of 62%. The measure ‘special treatment for perishable goods’ has the highest implementation rate of 86%, followed by the measure ‘testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS requirements of main trading partners,’ which stands at 71% (figure 23). Following closely is the presence of ‘national standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS’ with an implementation rate of 62%. The measure with the lowest implementation rate in this sub-group is the ‘electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates’ with a subregional implementation rate of 52%. Implementation of this measure is often incomplete, and only 14% of countries within the subregion have fully implemented it (figure 24).

Figure 23. State of implementation of ‘agricultural trade facilitation’ by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

Figure 24. State of implementation of 'agricultural trade facilitation' in SPECA



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

3.9. Women in Trade Facilitation

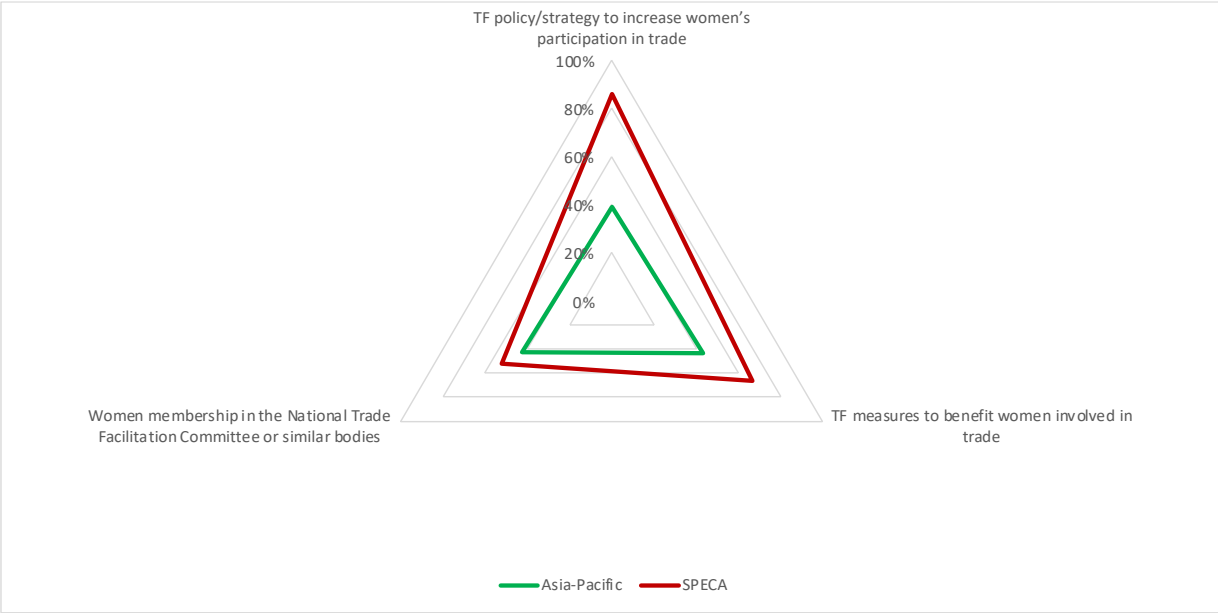
The implementation level of the three 'women in trade facilitation' measures in SPECA countries stands at 68%. This is much higher than the average in the Asia-Pacific region (42%), indicating that gender equality has been integrated into various policy initiatives and the specific concerns of women traders regarding trade facilitation addressed to some extent in SPECA countries.

The measure with the highest implementation rate is the 'TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade,' which stands at 86%, well above the average in the Asia-Pacific region (39%). Moreover, the implementation rates for the other two measures in this category, 'TF measures to benefit women involved in trade' and 'women's membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies,' reach commendable scores with 67% and 52% respectively (figure 25).

All SPECA countries have introduced 'TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade' and 'TF measures to benefit women involved in trade' at least as a pilot stage. These measures include having a designated gender focal point in relevant border agencies, promoting gender-balanced participation in training and providing specialized training for women engaged in trade. Moreover, 'women membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies' has been implemented by 86% of the SPECA countries, and 43% of countries have fully or partially implemented this measure (figure 26).

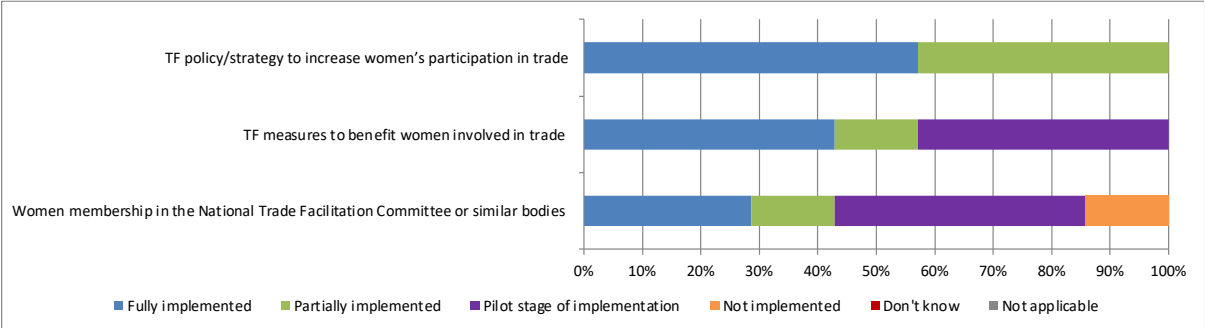
Several regional and national efforts are noted in this regard. In 2018, the Thematic Working Group on Gender and SDGs was formed, addressing gender and economic matters, sharing effective approaches to integrate gender into economic policies, initiating national projects, and fostering connections with other areas of SPECA activities. Kazakhstan is actively working to enhance gender representation in companies with state participation, aiming for a 30% female presence in management bodies. Additionally, Kazakhstan is fostering women's entrepreneurship through financial and non-financial support measures, including "interest rate subsidy" and "loan guarantee" instruments, contributing to advancing women's participation in trade and business facilitation. Also, as part of Turkmenistan's plan and efforts to accede to the WTO, there are initiatives to support women-led businesses in integrating into global and regional value chains, foster a gender-inclusive environment, and assist women policymakers. In Uzbekistan, under a project "Enhancing Economic Opportunities for Rural Women," efforts are undertaken to boost economic prospects for marginalized rural women within designated areas by focusing on skills development and enhancing their access to finance and markets.

Figure 25. State of implementation of 'women in trade facilitation' by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [untdc.org](https://untdc.org/untdc-survey)

Figure 26. State of implementation of "women in trade facilitation" in SPECA



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [untdc.org](https://untdc.org/untdc-survey)

3.10. Trade finance facilitation

In SPECA countries, among all the sub-group of measures, 'Trade finance facilitation' has the lowest implementation rate of 32%. The most widely implemented measure is 'variety of trade finance services available,' with 71% of countries reporting at least a pilot stage of implementation. However, the rates of implementation for measures such as 'Single Window facilitates traders access to finance and 'authorities engaged in

blockchain-based supply chain projects covering trade finance' are relatively low, both standing at 24%, below the Asia-Pacific regional average of 18% and observed in a very small number of countries (28%) as fully or partially Implemented (figures 27 and 28).

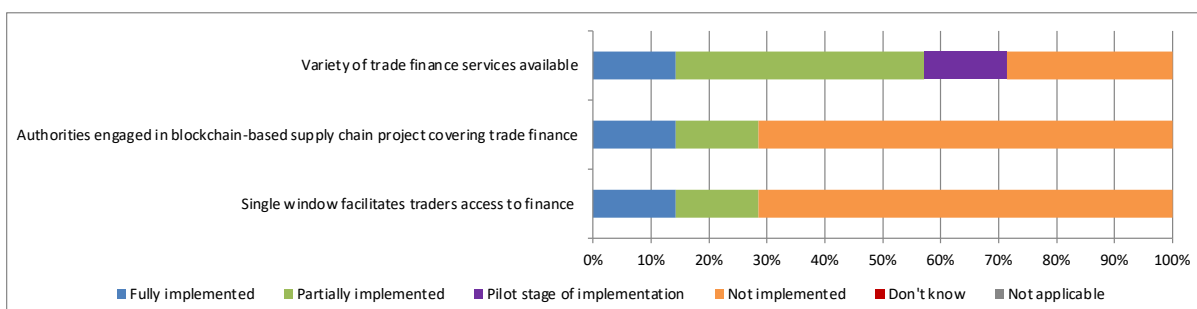
It is worth noting that data collection on this topic during the survey proved to be challenging. For example, there was a lack of evidence regarding the implementation of Single Window features that facilitate traders' access to finance, as indicated by trade facilitation experts and officials who provided or validated the survey responses. This suggests a general unfamiliarity with trade finance among these stakeholders. Traditional trade facilitation actors, including Customs and Government Ministries responsible for trade, may perceive financing and payment procedures in international trade transactions as beyond their scope of work. However, considering the interconnectedness of goods and financial flows, the results highlight the necessity for enhanced coordination and cooperation with stakeholders involved in developing financial and payment services.

Figure 27. State of implementation of 'trade finance facilitation' by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [untsurvey.org](https://untdp.org/untsurvey)

Figure 28. State of implementation of 'trade finance facilitation' in SPECA



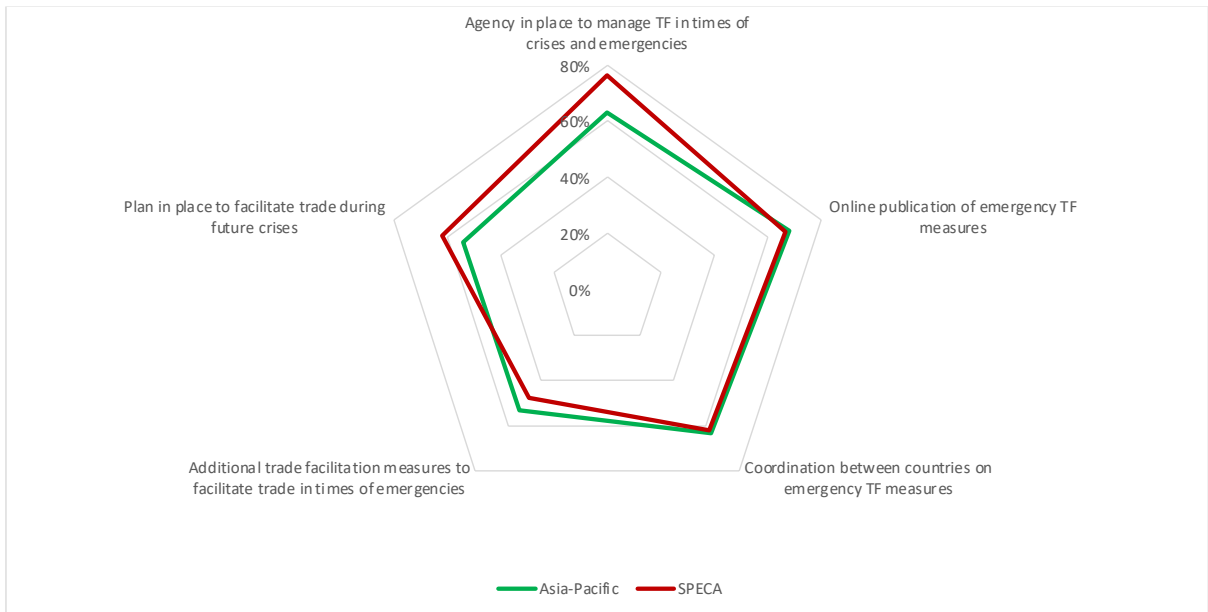
Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at [untsurvey.org](https://untdp.org/untsurvey)

3.11 Trade facilitation in times of crisis

In the 2021 Survey, a new category called ‘trade facilitation measures in times of crisis’ was introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the 2023 Survey continued to include measures addressing both immediate crisis responses and long-term resilient strategies. SPECA has achieved an implementation level of 63% in this sub-group, slightly surpassing the average in the Asia-Pacific region (60%). Among all measures in this sub-group, the measure ‘agency in place to manage TF in times of crises and emergencies’ has the highest implementation rate at 76% and has been fully or partially implemented by 86% of SPECA countries. It is followed by ‘online publication of emergency TF measures,’ with a subregional implementation rate of 67% (figures 29 and 30).

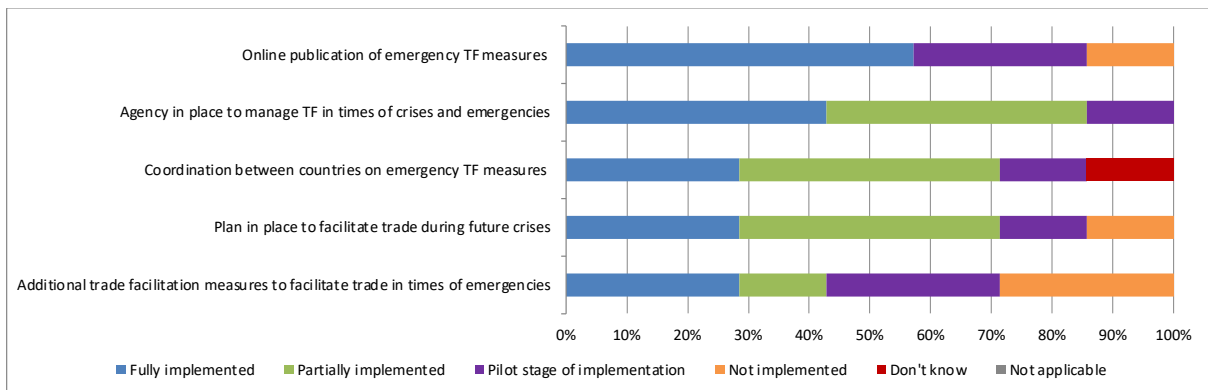
To address the challenges posed by restrictive measures, it is crucial to enhance cooperation between countries to prevent trade tensions from escalating and ensure the uninterrupted flow of essential goods in supply chains. For the ‘coordination between countries on emergency TF measures’ and for the ‘plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises,’ SPECA countries have had higher implementation rate than the average of the Asia-Pacific region, with over 71% of the countries having fully or partially implemented these measures (figures 29 and 30).

Figure 29. State of implementation of ‘trade facilitation in times of crisis’ by SPECA benchmarking Asia-Pacific



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

Figure 30. State of implementation of 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' in SPECA



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unfssurvey.org

4. Assessing the impact of trade facilitation in SPECA

To assess the potential impact of the implementation of trade facilitation measures in SPECA, a trade cost model has been formulated as a function of trade facilitation implementation rates based on the Survey data. This is in addition to other traditional trade cost factors such as natural geographic factors (distance, “landlockedness” and contiguity), cultural and historical distance (e.g., common official language and/or former colonial relationships), the presence of regional trade agreements and maritime connectivity. The model is based on United Nations (2023)⁵ by capturing the changes in trade costs resulting from the implementation of trade facilitation measures by each country. The overall trade cost reductions expected in SPECA from the implementation of three sets of trade facilitation measures are shown in table 3. The first set of trade facilitation measures is limited to the implementation of WTO TFA binding measures only. The second set of measures includes all binding and non-binding WTO TFA measures included in the Survey. The final and most ambitious set is a WTO TFA+ set of measures, including digital implementation of TFA measures and cross-border paperless trade. For each set of measures, the average changes in trade cost achieved if all SPECA countries at least partially implement all measures, or if they all fully implement all measures, are calculated.

Table 3. Expected trade cost reduction from alternative trade facilitation reforms

SPECA: trade costs model	WTO TFA (binding only)		WTO TFA (binding + non-binding)		WTO TFA+ (binding + non-binding + other paperless and cross-border paperless trade)	
	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
Model 1						
Overall trade facilitation	-1.18%	-4.30%	-1.79%	-6.75%	-7.92%	-15.25%
Model 2						
General trade facilitation measures	-0.98%	-3.26%	-1.13%	-4.33%	-1.43%	-4.86%
Digital trade facilitation measures	-	-	-0.71%	-1.73%	-6.63%	-10.01%

Source: United Nations ESCAP, based on data from www.unfssurvey.org and ESCAP/World Bank Trade Cost database. Note:

There are no digital trade facilitation measures that are classified as WTO TFA binding measures.

WTO TFA = World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement.

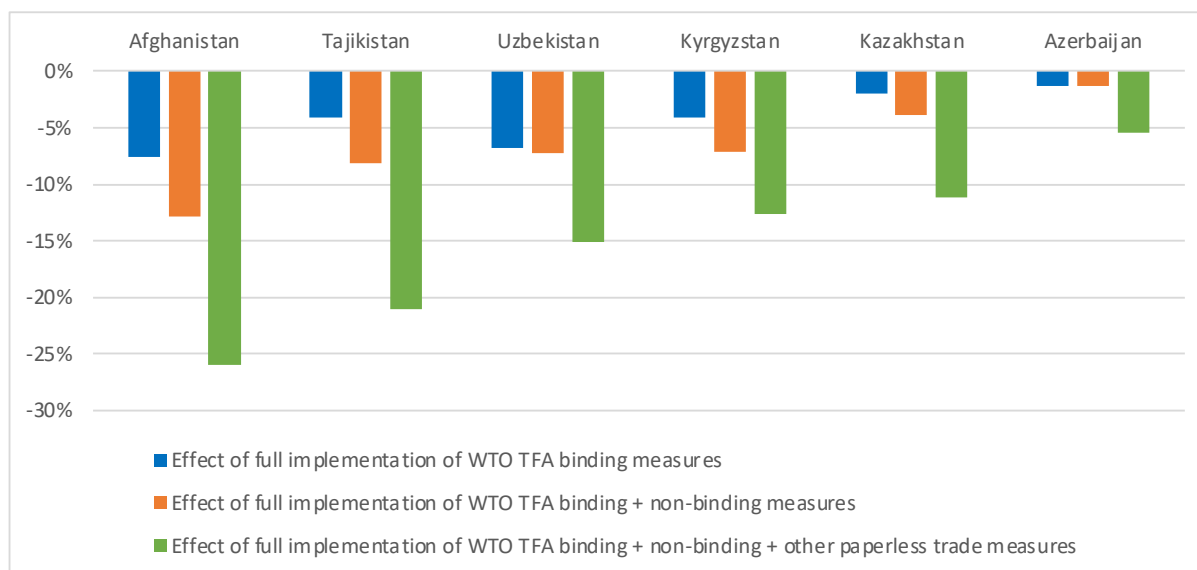
Two main findings emerge from this impact analysis. First, complying with WTO TFA by implementing binding measures can only slightly reduce trade costs. Full implementation of binding measures in the overall trade facilitation model results in a

⁵ United Nations, 2023, Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: Global Report 2023

decrease in trade costs of about 4%, while full implementation of all measures (both binding and non-binding) results in nearly a 7% reduction. Second, the paperless implementation of the TFA measures, together with enabling the seamless electronic exchange of trade data and documents across borders, will help to significantly reduce trade costs by almost 15% for SPECA as a whole. The results of model 2 also suggest that most of the trade cost reductions are associated with digital trade facilitation measures rather than conventional trade facilitation measures.

SPECA economies will reap significant benefits from accelerating the implementation of trade facilitation. As shown in figure 31, the full implementation of the three different sets of trade facilitation measures results in trade cost reductions for these six SPECA economies. As expected, the trade cost reductions are much larger when cross-border paperless trade is achieved. However, achieving such trade cost reductions will require closer cooperation between economies on developing interoperable paperless trade systems, as envisaged in the CPTA.

Figure 31. Impact of trade facilitation implementation on trade costs of SPECA economies

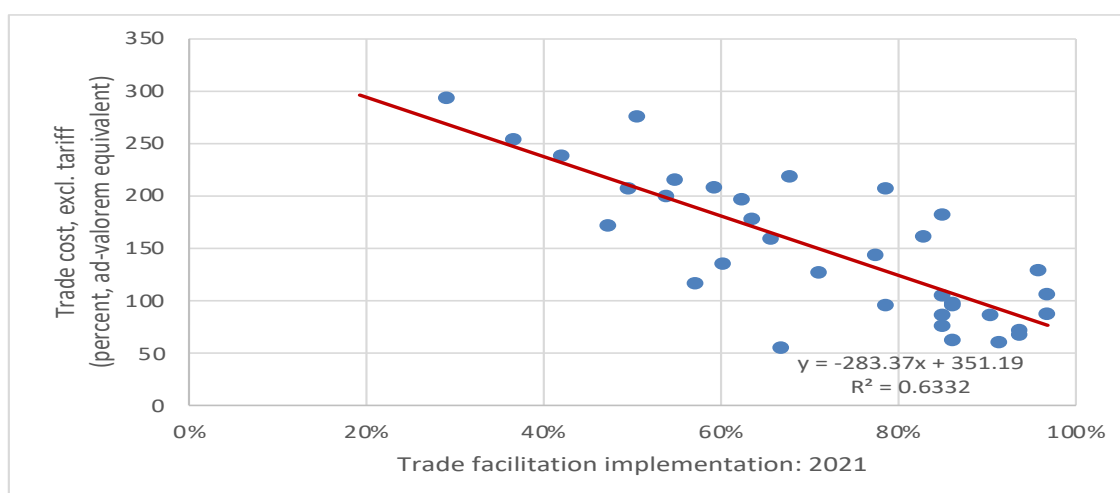


Source: United Nations ESCAP, based on data from www.unfcsurvey.org and ESCAP/World Bank Trade Cost database

5. Conclusion and the way forward

This report presents data on the implementation of a set of 60 trade facilitation measures from 7 SPECA countries and 40 other economies across the Asia-Pacific region. The Survey, serving as the basis of the report, not only covers general trade facilitation measures, as outlined in the WTO TFA, but also digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures and beyond. Figure 32 confirms the strong relationship between the cost of international trade in the Asia-Pacific countries and their level of trade facilitation implementation.

Figure 32. Trade facilitation implementation and trade costs of Asia-Pacific economies



Source: UN Trade Facilitation Survey and ESCAP/World Bank Trade Cost.

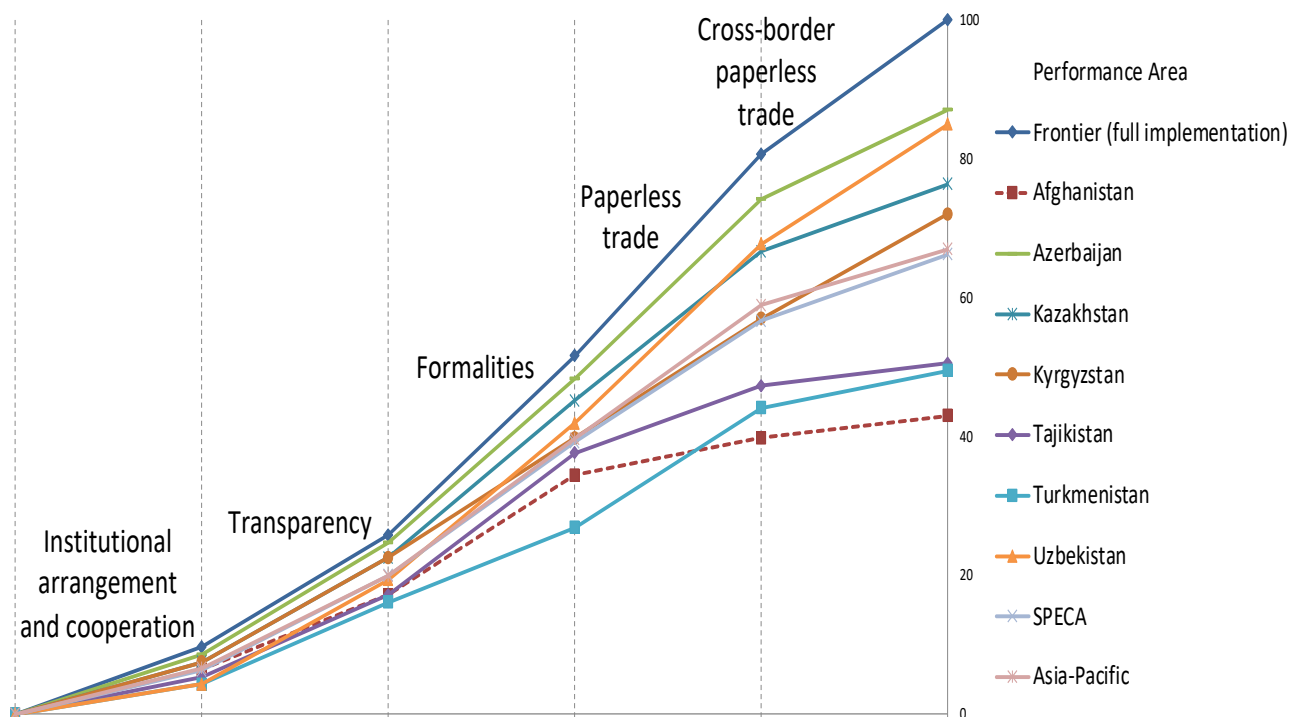
Based on the set of 31 general and digital trade facilitation measures, the Survey reveals an average implementation rate of 66% in SPECA, close to the Asia-Pacific regional average implementation rate, which stands at 67%.

The Survey results reveal that in the SPECA subregion, most countries have implemented some measures to improve transparency and simplify trade-related costs and procedures, either fully or partially. However, the 'paperless trade' subgroup shows a rather low implementation rate of 60%, with significant disparity among measures. On one hand, SPECA countries developed advanced national paperless systems facilitating the electronic exchange of data and documents between government agencies and businesses, including electronic single window system and automated Customs systems. On the other hand, electronic submission and issuance of key documents such as air cargo manifesto and Preferential Certificate of Origin

have not been well implemented. In terms of cross-border paperless trade, there has been a notable increase of 11 percentage points compared with 2021, indicating significant progress, especially in the implementation of 'electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary Certificate' and 'recognized certification authority' during the past two years, however, still significant room to improve, with being one of the two least sub-group of measures.

To further advance trade facilitation, figure 33 illustrates the implementation of trade facilitation as a step-by-step process. Trade facilitation begins with establishing the 'institutional arrangement' to prioritize and coordinate trade facilitation measures. The next step is to enhance 'transparency' by widely sharing information on existing laws, regulations, and procedures, and engaging in negotiations with stakeholders when developing new ones. The third step involves designing and implementing simplified and efficient trade 'formalities.' Initially, these re-engineered and streamlined processes may rely on paper documents, but they can be further improved through the use of ICT and 'paperless trade' systems. The ultimate step is to enable the exchange of electronic trade data and documents among traders, governments, and service providers within national systems such as the Single Window, allowing stakeholders in partner countries to access the necessary information to expedite the movement of goods and reduce overall trade costs.

Figure 33. Moving up the trade facilitation ladder towards seamless international supply chains



Source: The UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, 2023. Available at unftsurvey.org

Note: Figure 33 shows global cumulative trade facilitation implementation scores for different regions for five sub-groups of trade facilitation measures included in the Survey. The scores are based on the equally weighted implementation of 31 trade facilitation measures, but the number of measures varies in each of the five sub-groups. Full implementation of all measures = 100.

Moving forward, it is crucial for SPECA countries to expedite the advancement of digital trade facilitation. The impact analysis of trade facilitation measures on SPECA trade costs strongly emphasizes the necessity of implementing paperless trade and establishing seamless electronic exchange of trade data and documents between SPECA and its trading partners. An ambitious trade digitalization strategy is projected to reduce trade costs by more than 15%, whereas achieving basic compliance with the WTO TFA would only result in a reduction of around 7% in trade costs. In this regard, the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific complements the WTO TFA, and it provides a supportive platform for ESCAP Member States to facilitate the electronic exchange of cross-border trade-related data and documents for those who have not yet implemented such mechanisms. Therefore, all SPECA countries are encouraged to become a party to the treaty as soon as possible and promote harmonization of trade facilitation measures across the Asia-Pacific region.

Regarding “Sustainable Trade Facilitation,” the adoption of inclusive measures to support SMEs remains limited. SMEs hold significant importance in the global

economy and digital trade, yet the availability of trade facilitation measures tailored to their needs is inadequate. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance the capacity of SMEs and integrate proper supportive measures for SMEs into trade facilitation policy making process to achieve sustainable trade facilitation. Considering their pivotal role in fostering sustainable and inclusive economic development, trade facilitation strategies should be designed holistically and inclusively.

On the other hand, it is encouraging to note that SPECA countries have high implementation level for women in trade facilitation' measures at 68%, significantly surpassing the Asia-Pacific regional average of 42%. Also, a significant increase was noted, by 14 percentage points compared to 2021. This accomplishment highlights the efforts put into the integration of gender equality into various policy initiatives, addressing the specific concerns of women traders regarding trade facilitation. Further improvements can be achieved by providing support to guide women traders in understanding trade procedures, establishing guidelines for standards bodies to ensure equitable representation of both genders' interests, and encouraging women's active participation and decision-making in trade facilitation and standards-related activities such as in the National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFCs), which could yield substantial benefits.

A better understanding and collaboration among trade finance and facilitation agencies is also necessary to ensure the integration of trade finance and payment instruments into trade facilitation implementation strategies, including Single Window development plans. Furthermore, results of the 'trade facilitation in times of crisis' sub-group show that countries are beginning to take note of the importance of long-term measures for building resiliency to pandemics and other crises. As countries move towards inclusive and sustainable development, it is crucial for SPECA countries to prioritize sustainable and resilient trade facilitation measures and foster collaborative efforts to embrace forward-looking trade facilitation policies that benefit all stakeholders. By doing so, SPECA can pave the way for a sustainable and prosperous future in the subregion, while simultaneously working towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. This includes the current climate crisis, in which trade facilitation certainly has a mitigating role to play.⁶

⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, (2021. Asia-Pacific trade and investment report 2021: accelerating climate-smart trade and investment for sustainable development. Available at <https://www.unescap.org/kp/APTIR2021>.

Annexes

Annex 1. List of participating countries

Country	Subregion
Afghanistan	South and South-West Asia
Armenia	North and Central Asia
Australia	Australia-New Zealand
Azerbaijan	North and Central Asia
Bangladesh	South and South-West Asia
Bhutan	South and South-West Asia
Brunei Darussalam	South-East Asia
Cambodia	South-East Asia
China	East and North-East Asia
Fiji	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Georgia	North and Central Asia
India	South and South-West Asia
Indonesia	South-East Asia
Islamic Republic of Iran	South and South-West Asia
Japan	East and North-East Asia
Kazakhstan	North and Central Asia
Kiribati	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Kyrgyzstan	North and Central Asia
Lao PDR	South-East Asia
Malaysia	South-East Asia
Maldives	South and South-West Asia
Micronesia	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Mongolia	East and North-East Asia
Myanmar	South-East Asia
Nauru	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Nepal	South and South-West Asia
New Zealand	Australia-New Zealand
Pakistan	South and South-West Asia
Palau	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Papua New Guinea	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Philippines	South-East Asia
Republic of Korea	East and North-East Asia
Russian Federation	North and Central Asia
Samoa	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Singapore	South-East Asia
Solomon Islands	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Sri Lanka	South and South-West Asia

Tajikistan	North and Central Asia
Thailand	South-East Asia
Timor Leste	South-East Asia
Tonga	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Turkey	South and South-West Asia
Turkmenistan	North and Central Asia
Tuvalu	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Uzbekistan	North and Central Asia
Vanuatu	Pacific Islands Developing Economies
Viet Nam	South-East Asia

Note: SPECA countries are highlighted.

Annex 2. Grouping of trade facilitation measures and correspondence with TFA articles

Groups	Subgroups	Measures	Relevant TFA Articles
General Trade Facilitation	Transparency	Publication of existing import-export regulations on the Internet	1.2
		Stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)	2.2
		Advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation	2.1
		Advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods	3
		Independent appeal mechanism	4
	Formalities	Risk management	7.4
		Pre-arrival processing	7.1
		Post-clearance audits	7.5
		Separation of Release from final determination of Customs duties, taxes, fees, and charges	7.3
		Establishment and publication of average release times	7.6
		TF measures for authorized operators	7.7
		Expedited shipments	7.8

		Acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities	10.2.1
	Institutional arrangement and cooperation	National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body	23
		National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation	8
		Government agencies delegating border controls to Customs authorities	
		Alignment of working days and hours with neighbouring countries at border crossings	8.2(a)
		Alignment of formalities and procedures with neighbouring countries at border crossings	8.2(b)
	Transit	Transit facilitation agreement(s)	
		Limit the physical inspections of transit goods and use risk assessment	10.5
		Supporting pre-arrival processing for transit facilitation	11.9
		Cooperation between agencies of countries involved in transit	11.16
Digital Trade Facilitation	Paperless trade	Automated Customs System	
		Internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies	
		Electronic Single Window System	10.4
		Electronic submission of Customs Declarations	
		Electronic application and issuance of import and export permit	
		Electronic submission of Sea Cargo Manifests	
		Electronic Submission of Air Cargo Manifests	

		Electronic application and issuance of Preferential Certificate of Origin	
		E-Payment of Customs Duties and Fees	7.2
		Electronic Application for Customs Refunds	
	Cross-border paperless trade	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	
		Recognized certification authority	
		Electronic exchange of Customs Declaration	
		Electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin	
		Electronic exchange of Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary Certificate	
		Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit	
	Sustainable Trade Facilitation	Trade facilitation in SME policy framework	Trade-related information measures for SMEs
SMEs in AEO scheme			
SMEs access Single Window			
SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee			
Other special measures for SMEs			
Agricultural trade facilitation		Testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS of main trading partners	7.9
		National standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS	
		Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates	
		Special treatment for perishable goods	
Women in trade facilitation		TF policy/strategy to increase women's participation in trade	
		TF measures to benefit women involved in trade	

		Women's membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar bodies	
Other Trade Facilitation	Trade finance facilitation	Single Window facilitates traders access to finance	
		Authorities engaged in blockchain-based supply chain project covering trade finance	
		Variety of trade finance services available	
	Trade facilitation in times of crisis	Agency in place to manage trade facilitation in times of crises and emergencies	
		Online publication of emergency trade facilitation measures	
		Coordination between countries on emergency trade facilitation measures	
		Additional trade facilitation measures to facilitate trade in times of emergencies	
		Plan in place to facilitate trade during future crises	
	Trade facilitation for e-commerce	Trade facilitation measures for cross-border e-commerce	
	Trade facilitation and wildlife protection	Electronic exchange of CITES permits/certificates	

Annex 3. A three-step approach for data collection and validation

<p>Data submission by experts</p>	<p>The survey instrument was sent by the ESCAP Secretariat to trade facilitation experts (in Governments, the private sector and academia) in Asia-Pacific countries to gather preliminary information. The questionnaire was also made publicly available online and disseminated with the support of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) and the United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport for Asia and the Pacific (UNNExT). In some cases, the questionnaire was also sent to relevant national trade facilitation authorities or agencies as well as regional trade facilitation partners or organizations, such as the Asia Development Bank (ADB), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Institute, the Oceania Customs Organization (OCO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). This first step took place essentially between January and May 2023.</p>
<p>Data verification by the UNRCs Secretariat</p>	<p>The ESCAP Secretariat cross-checked the data collected in Step 1. Desk research and data sharing among UNRCs and survey partners were carried out to further check the accuracy of data. Face-to-face or telephone interviews with key informants were arranged to gather additional information when needed. The outcome of Step 2 was a consistent set of responses per country.</p> <p>Step 2 took place between January and May 2023.</p>
<p>Data validation by national Governments</p>	<p>Step 3 took place between May and July 2023. The ESCAP Secretariat sent the completed questionnaire to each national Government to ensure that each country had the opportunity to review the dataset and provide any additional information. The feedback results from national Governments were incorporated in order to finalize the dataset.</p>

Annex 4: Definition of each stage of implementation

Stage of implementation	Coding/Scoring
<p>Full Implementation: The trade facilitation measure implemented is in full compliance with commonly-accepted international standards, recommendations and conventions such as the Revised Kyoto Convention, UN/CEFACT Recommendations or the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA); it is implemented in law and in practice; it is available to essentially all relevant stakeholders nationwide, and supported by adequate legal and institutional frameworks as well as adequate infrastructure and financial and human resources. A TFA provision included in the commitments given under Notifications of Category A may generally be considered as a measure, which is fully implemented by the country, with a caveat that the provision will be implemented by a Least-Developed Country (LDC) member within one year of the TFA agreement coming into force. If a country registers a positive response for all sub questions concerning a given trade facilitation measure, that measure should be considered fully implemented.</p>	3
<p>Partial Implementation: A measure is considered to be partially implemented if at least one of the following is true: (1) the trade facilitation measure is in partial - but not in full - compliance with commonly-accepted international standards, recommendations and conventions; (2) the country is still in the process of rolling out the implementation of the measure; (3) the measure is being used but on an unsustainable, short-term or ad-hoc basis; (4) the measure is implemented in some – but not all – targeted locations (such as key border crossing stations); or (5) some – but not all – targeted stakeholders are fully involved.</p>	2
<p>Pilot Stage of Implementation: A measure is considered to be at the pilot stage of implementation if, in addition to meeting the general attributes of partial implementation, it is available only to a very small portion of the intended stakeholder group (or at a certain location) and/or is being implemented on a trial basis. When a new trade facilitation measure is at the pilot stage of implementation, the old measure is often continuously used in parallel to ensure that the service is still provided even when there has been a disruption with the new measure. This stage of implementation also includes relevant rehearsals and preparation for the full implementation.</p>	1
<p>Not implemented: A measure has not been implemented at this stage. However, this stage may still include initiatives or efforts towards implementation of the measure. For example, under this stage, (pre)feasibility studies or planning for the implementation can be carried out, and consultation with stakeholders on the implementation may be arranged.</p>	0