

# Transport and Trade Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics: Contactless, Seamless and Collaborative United Nations Solutions

9 INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE



## Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation: Global Report 2021

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



## Fostering regional cooperation to preserve transport and trade connectivity

### CHALLENGE

Unprecedented measures to halt the spread of COVID-19 through lockdowns, travel restrictions and social distancing disrupted land, sea and air cargo, affecting international transport and logistics services and trade routes, resulting in soaring trade and transport costs around the globe.

Border agencies faced the challenge of expediting imports, exports and transit, while ensuring epidemic prevention and providing adequate customs clearance and compliance controls of goods and transport personnel. Disruptions associated with the pandemic are giving rise to a plethora of legal issues affecting traders and transport providers (e.g., delays and performance failure, liability for breach of contract, frustration/force majeure). The rise of unilateral and coordinated restrictions or easing of lockdowns also jeopardized the progress in economic integration and transport and trade connectivity, weakening global, regional and sectoral cooperation mechanisms at the time when they are needed the most.

### TOWARDS A SOLUTION

Cognizant of the unprecedented connectivity challenges caused by the pandemic, the project "Transport and trade connectivity in the age of pandemics: Contactless, seamless and collaborative United Nations solutions" was created. Implemented by six United Nations agencies, ECE, ESCAP, UNCTAD, ECA, ECLAC and ESCWA, and supported by UNDESA, the project equipped governments with the means to adopt common approaches to address pandemic-related trade and transport challenges across global and regional supply chains that had the potential to reverse progress made in the Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 17 (partnerships).

### PROJECT NAME

Transport and Trade Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics: Contactless, Seamless and Collaborative United Nations Solutions

### NOMINATED BY

United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)

### COUNTRIES/REGIONS/TERRITORIES

Global

### SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS TARGET(S)

1.1, 2.b, 3.8, 5.5, 8.2, 8.3, 9.1, 14.2

### SUPPORTED BY

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA)

### IMPLEMENTING ENTITIES

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), ESCAP, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

### PROJECT STATUS

Completed

### PROJECT PERIOD

May 2020 – June 2022

### LINK

<https://unttc.org/>



To that end, the project focused on implementing United Nations solutions to immediately help governments (targeting customs, other border agencies and port authorities) and the business community worldwide to keep transport networks and borders operational to facilitate the flow of goods and services, while containing the further spread of the COVID-19 virus. Project activities centred around United Nations standards, guidelines, metrics, tools and methodologies clustered into three broad groups of solutions: contactless (digital trade and transport), seamless (trade facilitation) and collaborative (regional and sectoral cooperation). While the first two clusters heavily relied on global norms and standards for trade and transport facilitation, the third fostered regional and sectoral cooperation, ensuring that regional specificities and challenges were highlighted and addressed.

Given the unprecedented scale of the connectivity disruptions and experiences, the project used surveys, existing professional networks and all project meetings to solicit input and feedback from the project beneficiaries. The project was developed in stages, starting with data collection and analytical work and progressing towards capacity building.

This was the first United Nations-wide project in trade and transport connectivity bringing together ESCAP and UNCTAD with four other United Nations regional commissions (those for Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Asia). This approach ensured both global reach and regional presence, international cooperation and exchange of knowledge and good practices from all over the world.

The project facilitated South-South exchanges covering transport issues. It supported ten ASEAN Member States to review their COVID-19 responses in transport and identify best practices to be adopted as regional guidelines: “COVID-19 Response and Recovery Guidelines for Resilient and Sustainable International Road Freight Transport Connectivity in ASEAN.” The study resulted in the identification of crisis response provisions in regional, subregional and bilateral transport agreements that could be incorporated into existing and future transport agreements of ESCAP Member States. The analytical and capacity building work of ESCAP on smart transport solutions along the Asian Highway Network prompted similar capacity building initiatives for countries that are members of the African Highway Network.

In the area of trade, the project supported adding a component on trade facilitation in times of crisis to the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation, to support evidence-based policymaking for sustainable and resilient trade facilitation, including overcoming trade disruptions caused by pandemic and crisis. Additional readiness assessments were conducted for cross-border paperless trade, identifying gaps and good practices, and contributing to regional discussions for advancing cross-border paperless trade for efficient trade procedures. The project supported the Global Initiative on Model Provisions for Trade in Times of Crisis and Pandemic in Regional and Other Trade Agreements (IMP), including production of a handbook

exploring options for provisions that could be used in regional trade agreements to better guide how trade could be conducted during future crises; the handbook was distributed at global and regional dialogues, including the WTO Public Forum in September 2021 and the Global Course on Negotiating Regional Trade Agreements for Trade in Times of Crisis and Pandemic.

The sustainability of these initiatives has been ensured through mainstreaming the results of the project and follow-up activities into the ESCAP intergovernmental processes on regional trade and transport cooperation. This includes the Fourth Ministerial Conference on Transport held in Bangkok and online from 14 to 17 December 2021 and its outcome documents, the ministerial declaration and the new Regional Action Programme on Sustainable Transport Development (2022-2026), and the 7th Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation, held in April 2022, setting the foundation for the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. The project established a joint portal ([unttc.org](http://unttc.org)) to disseminate the results and the best practices of the project. The portal will be jointly maintained by ESCAP, UNCTAD and other regional commissions.

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