



Transport and Trade Connectivity in the Age of Pandemics



Objective: To implement UN solutions on trade and connectivity, including standards, tools, methodologies and policy recommendations, with immediate effect and helping governments, including Customs and other border agencies, ports authorities and broader logistics industry stakeholders, and the business community worldwide, to keep transport and borders operational to facilitate the international flow of goods, while containing further spread of COVID-19.

Challenges posed to trade and connectivity by COVID-19: Restrictions on free movements of transport workers have disrupted land, sea and air cargo, affecting international transport and logistics services as well as trade routes – resulting in soaring trade costs. In addition, disruptions associated with the pandemic are giving rise to a plethora of legal issues affecting traders across the globe (e.g. delays and performance failure, liability for breach of contract), the effects of which may lead to extensive business losses and bankruptcies at a massive scale, as well as overwhelm courts and legal systems. The rise of unilateral and coordinated restrictions or easing of lockdowns also jeopardize the progress in economic integration and transport and trade connectivity, weakening the global, regional and sectoral cooperation mechanisms at the time when they are needed the most.

Demand from Member States: The project design was based on demand from 120 countries – spanning Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Europe and the Arab regions – and through global, regional and national programmes.

Project components: The joint project brings together UNCTAD, the UN focal point for trade and development, and the five UN Regional Commissions (ECA, ECE, ECLAC, ESCAP and ESCWA), thereby ensuring both global reach and regional presence, international cooperation, and exchange of knowledge and good practices from all over the world. The project will address three areas of transport and trade affected by the COVID-19 crisis:

- 1) Reducing physical contacts among the participants of international trade and transport operations*
- 2) Ensuring that new safety and health requirements do not affect the fluidity of cross-border trade and international transport operations*
- 3) Pursuing collaborative rather than unilateral solutions on trade and transport response to the pandemic*

Project activities will include:

- ECE Sustainable Transport Division, with the help of ESCWA and other Commissions, will implement the interconnection required between the eTIR international system to ensure secure exchange of data between national Customs systems.
- ECE will cooperate with ESCAP, ECLAC, UNCTAD and other Regional Commissions to implement UN/CEFACT standards to promote more efficient and standardized electronic data and document exchange.
- UNCTAD will implement the ASYCUDA solutions to enhance coordination and cooperation between Customs and eligible organizations, assist in the quick identification of goods needed to combat the effects of COVID-19 and other natural disasters and establish guidelines to prioritize and fast-track the customs clearance of essential supplies.
- Regional Commissions, including ESCAP, will facilitate the delivery of expert legal analysis, advice and technical guidance to policymakers at national, regional and international levels, as well as SME traders, shippers, and consignees, particularly in developing countries to assist them in addressing some of the key commercial law implications of the COVID-19 crisis.
- To promote strengthened regional cooperation, ECLAC will deliver a sub-regional strategy for better Caribbean connectivity and intra-islands flows; policy recommendations on addressing legal, technical, policy, technological concerns of new technologies in transport; and a regional strategic framework on cutting edge technological logistics systems.
- ESCWA will strengthen the capacity of Arab countries to make use of trade financing instruments and strategies to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on Arab exports and enterprises.