



Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

5th meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group
on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation

Bangkok, 12 and 13 March 2019

Item 2 of the provisional agenda*

**Report on progress made on the implementation of the
Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border
Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific**

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Note by the secretariat

Summary

The present document is a report on progress made on the implementation of the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific. The secretariat has continued to provide capacity-building and technical assistance support to its member States that are interested in becoming parties to the Framework Agreement. Azerbaijan acceded to the Agreement in March 2018. Five ESCAP member States that signed the Agreement by September 2017 continued their efforts to complete the domestic ratification process. Other member States are in the process of completing their domestic procedures for becoming parties to the Agreement through accession.

I. Progress made

1. Since the 4th meeting of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation, held in March 2018, the secretariat has been providing support to its member States that are interested in becoming parties to the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific, including through advocacy and capacity-building support. The secretariat facilitated the participation of more than 100 officials from interested countries in several capacity-building training events and workshops, including (a) the Capacity-building Workshop on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation: Implications of Emerging Technologies, held in Bangkok on 21 and 23 March 2018; (b) the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Asia-

* ESCAP/PTA/IISG/2019/L.1.

Pacific Research and Training Network on Trade and International Institute for Trade and Development regional workshop on trade facilitation for sustainable development, held in Bangkok from 7 to 10 August 2018; (c) the fourth United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific masterclass on licenses, permits, certificates and other regulatory requirements in a single window environment, held in Cheon-an, Republic of Korea, from 5 to 14 November 2018; and (d) the Forum on Trade Digitalization for Sustainable Regional Integration, to be held in Bangkok on 14 and 15 March 2019.

2. The secretariat increased its capacity-building support to the developing countries that had already signed the Framework Agreement. The secretariat supported the participation of two officials from Armenia, three from Bangladesh, three from Cambodia and one from the Islamic Republic of Iran to the fourth United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific masterclass, a 10-day intensive capacity-building training class on the implementation of single window systems and related paperless trade systems, which was co-organized with the World Customs Organization.

3. As part of its advocacy work on trade facilitation and cross-border paperless trade, the secretariat made presentations on the Framework Agreement at several regional and subregional events that it organized. These events included (a) the Asian Development Bank (ADB)-ESCAP-World Trade Organization International Conference on Promoting Connectivity for an Inclusive Asia and the Pacific, held in Tashkent on 27 and 28 June 2018; (b) the ADB-ESCAP workshop on promoting e-commerce in Asia and the Pacific: a holistic approach, held in Bangkok on 27 and 28 August 2018; (c) the twelfth session of the Working Group on Trade of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 19 September 2018; (d) the International Seminar on Trade Facilitation in North-East Asia – Cross-border Paperless Trade: In Support of Reinvigorating Trade, held in Kemerovo, Russian Federation, on 4 December 2018; and (e) the capacity-building workshop on the facilitation of international railway transport to support intraregional and interregional trade, held in Bangkok on 18 and 19 December 2018.

4. The secretariat has also supported the implementation of the Framework Agreement and the promotion of cross-border paperless trade through the United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific, a regional expert network.¹ The secretariat organized an extended United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific Advisory Group meeting on cross-border paperless trade facilitation in Bangkok from 30 October to 1 November 2018. Regional experts were invited to work on selected legal and technical items related to cross-border paperless trade, with a view to using them as input for the Legal and Technical Working Groups of the Interim Intergovernmental Steering Group on Cross-border Paperless Trade Facilitation work on supporting documents of the draft road map for the implementation of substantive provisions of the Framework Agreement. The secretariat is also developing a cross-border paperless trade database.

5. The secretariat has also established, as part of the United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific, the Task Force on Cross-border Electronic Data Exchange for North-East Asia

¹ See <https://unnex.unescap.org/unnex>.

to help stakeholders working to improve their readiness to exchange trade-related data electronically across borders for better regulatory compliance and improved trade facilitation. The Task Force is currently composed of government officials from China, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation, who are working together on the harmonization of trade processes and designing feasible options for cross-border electronic data exchange through proof of concept.

6. The secretariat also continued to conduct research and analysis related to the Framework Agreement. It published a new study on advancing single window systems on the basis of lessons learned from successful implementation cases in the region² as well as a practical guide on cross-border interoperability of single window systems,³ with the support of the United Nations Network of Experts for Paperless Trade and Transport in Asia and the Pacific. The secretariat collaborated with the Policy Support Unit of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the ADB Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Programme and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, among others, to prepare and/or disseminate analyses of paperless trade implementation by their members, based on the most recent data available from the ESCAP-led United Nations Global Survey on Trade Facilitation and Paperless Trade Implementation 2017.⁴ The secretariat, in cooperation with other regional commissions, initiated data collection for updating the Global Survey in January 2019.

7. Azerbaijan acceded to the Framework Agreement in March 2018, becoming the first party to it. Five ESCAP member States that signed the Agreement by September 2017, namely Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China and the Islamic Republic of Iran, continued their efforts to complete the domestic ratification process. Other member States are in the process of completing their domestic procedures for becoming parties to the Agreement through accession. The Agreement will enter into force once five member States have ratified or acceded to it.⁵

8. Several ESCAP member States have provided funding to the secretariat to support facilitation of cross-border paperless trade and implementation of the Framework Agreement. The Government of the Republic of Korea renewed its support in 2016 to a dedicated trust fund in ESCAP and committed to further increasing funding in the next phase (2019 onward). The Government of the Russian Federation funded a capacity-building project on single window systems interoperability in Central Asia and another on pilot testing of cross-border paperless data exchange in North-East Asia. The Government of China funded a project on conducting legal and technical readiness assessments on cross-border paperless trade in selected countries, namely Armenia, Mongolia, Myanmar and Uzbekistan, along the corridors of the Belt and Road Initiative. In addition, the Enhanced Integrated Framework also provided funding for a project on conducting legal and technical readiness assessments on cross-border paperless trade in selected least developed countries, namely Bangladesh, Cambodia, Nepal and Timor-Leste.

² *Single Window for Trade Facilitation: Regional Best Practices and Future Development* (Bangkok, 2018).

³ *Cross-border Single Window Interoperability: A Managerial Guide* (Bangkok, 2018).

⁴ Data and reports are available at <http://untfsurvey.org/>.

⁵ See www.unescap.org/resources/framework-agreement-facilitation-cross-border-paperless-trade-asia-and-pacific.

II. Issues for consideration by the Steering Group

9. The Steering Group may wish to consider taking the following actions:

(a) Noting the progress made since its 4th meeting and encouraging its members to proactively support their Governments in becoming parties to the Framework Agreement as soon as possible;

(b) Expressing its appreciation for the trust fund and projects on the facilitation of cross-border paperless trade established by the Governments of China, the Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation and calling upon other members to consider also contributing financially or in kind to the implementation of the Agreement;

(c) Discussing ways to accelerate and promote accession to and ratification of the Agreement by as many countries as possible, so as to maximize its benefits and impact.
