

**World Customs Organization**  
**Progress made in implementing the Vienna Programme of Action in the period**  
**March 2021 – March 2022**

The World Customs Organization (WCO) gratefully acknowledges the long-standing and fruitful cooperation that exists between the Organization, the United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) and other development partners. The WCO has contributed to improving transit systems for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) by setting standards for simplified and harmonized border procedures, delivering capacity building projects and enhancing cooperation and coordination with other development partners.

## **I. Progress in standard setting**

### **(1) Accessions to the WCO Revised Kyoto Convention**

The International Convention on the Simplification and Harmonization of Customs Procedures, as amended, widely known as the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC), is the blueprint for modern and efficient Customs procedures in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The RKC promotes trade facilitation and effective controls through its legal provisions that detail the application of simple, effective and predictable Customs procedures. Since the last WCO progress report, two LLDCs (Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) acceded to the RKC, thus bringing the number of LLDCs that are RKC Contracting parties to 23 (72% of the LLDCs).

### **(2) Harmonization of Customs transit procedures in railway transportation**

Responding to the accelerated development of railway transport corridors, the WCO is undertaking work aimed at the harmonization of Customs procedures in railway transportation, including the following issues:

- Development of Guidelines for establishing an international postal rail transport service, in cooperation with the Universal Postal Union;
- Possibility of harmonizing data elements to be used for Customs transit procedures by rail in cooperation with the relevant international organizations related to railways, based on the WCO Data Model (e.g. data element name, definition, common code);
- Possibility of introducing passenger controls in rail travel, utilizing advance passenger data;
- Development of the WCO Railway Guidance, to be published in June 2022, based on WCO Members best practices collected via field studies and workshops; and
- Capacity Building activities in the form of six regional workshops, starting with the WCO Asia/Pacific Region in May 2022, to enhance implementation of simplified and improved Customs procedures in railway transportation supported by modern Customs techniques.

### **(3) Update of the One-Stop Border Post Sourcebook**

The WCO takes part in the ongoing work to develop the third edition of the One-Stop Border Post (OSBP) Sourcebook, along with development partners such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), as well as Regional Economic Communities (RECs), such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA). The OSBP Sourcebook is a comprehensive guide for practitioners who would like to explore the launch of OSBP projects. The third edition of the tool is scheduled to be published in June 2022.

### **(4) Mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic**

Since the World Health Organization (WHO) categorized the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as a pandemic on 11 March 2020, the WCO has been working relentlessly to support the Customs administrations worldwide in their efforts to facilitate the cross-border movement of relief and essential supplies, support the economy and sustain the supply chain continuity, as well as protect the Customs staff and the society.

In the reporting period, the WCO developed or updated the following tools and guidance material:

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the Secretariat Note on the [Role of Customs in facilitating and securing the cross-border movement of situationally critical medicines and vaccines](#) was issued in May 2021;

- The WCO [Guidelines on Disaster Management and Supply Chain Continuity](#) were approved by the Council in June 2021;
- A [Joint Indicative List of Critical COVID-19 Vaccine Inputs](#) was developed jointly with the World Trade Organization (WTO) and other stakeholders and published in July 2021;
- In February 2022, the WCO updated the Harmonised System (HS) classification reference lists for [medical supplies](#), [priority medicines](#), [medical substances](#), and [vaccines and related equipment](#) to reflect the amendments to the HS 2022 edition.

### **(5) Gender equality and diversity**

The WCO continues its efforts to promote gender equality and diversity in Customs and has launched a number of initiatives and tools in this regard. Among the most important ones are the [Gender Equality Organizational Assessment Tool](#) (GEOAT), which is a self-assessment tool that helps Customs administrations to address gender equality in different areas, the [Declaration on Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs](#) that advocates for more gender responsiveness and inclusiveness in Customs, and the [Compendium of Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs](#), which covers, among others, practices from LLDCs. Another key tool is the Blended Training Package including two dedicated e-learning modules on how to advance gender equality and inclusion, which are available in the WCO CLiKC! Platform.

During the reporting period, the WCO officially launched its Network for Gender Equality and Diversity in Customs, providing a platform to share inspirational practices of persons driving change on this agenda. The Network was launched through a virtual global conference held on 8 March 2022, on the occasion of International Women’s Day.

## **II. Progress in capacity building delivery 2021-2022**

The WCO continues to deliver capacity building, technical assistance, and training to requesting Customs administrations to assist them with reform and modernization. A number of LLDCs continue to benefit from the Organization’s expertise and experience in Customs technical assistance and capacity building. Its network of accredited experts and comprehensive donor engagement mechanisms have enabled the WCO to continue to provide tailor-made support for effective trade facilitation and ensuring security of the global supply chain.

### **(1) Capacity-building and awareness-raising events in the area of Transit**

In July 2021, the WCO contributed to a capacity building activity organized by UNCTAD for national transit coordinators in Central Asia. The workshop was attended by representatives of the Customs administrations and Ministries of Trade of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

In September 2021, the WCO participated in a session themed “Facilitating transit and transport operation in crisis situation: Lessons learned from COVID-19” organized by the Permanent Mission of Mongolia in Geneva, in its capacity as the Chair of the LLDC Group in Geneva, in the framework of the 2021 Public Forum of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

On 4 November 2021, the WCO Secretary General spoke at a LLDCs Ministerial Meeting themed “Towards sustainable, resilient COVID-19 recovery: Bridging the LLDCs’ trade gap”. The meeting was convened by the Government of Mongolia and Coordinator of the LLDC Group in Geneva, the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Global Chair of LLDCs, and UN-OHRLLS with the objective to prepare the LLDC Group’s input into the 12<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference.

### **(2) Support for West and Central Africa on interconnectivity of transit systems**

Interconnectivity of Customs systems to manage transit regimes between them is a priority for the Customs administrations in West and Central Africa, but also for economic operators, international institutions and development partners working in this region. The objective of interconnectivity is to secure, simplify and speed up the flow of commercial goods in transit, especially those coming from seaports and destined for the land-locked countries.

From 2013 to 2018, the work on Customs systems interconnectivity progressed under the leadership of the WCO and ECOWAS and under Côte d'Ivoire's EU funded Programme d'Appui au Commerce et à l'Intégration Régionale (PACIR). This project made available expertise and financial resources for the elaboration of functional and technical specifications for transit interconnectivity and involved Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Mali and Senegal.

After several years of design and development, the interconnectivity of transit systems is becoming a reality in West Africa. In March 2019, the Customs administrations of Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire were the first to interconnect and manage their cross-border road transit operations as part of the Système Interconnecté pour la Gestion des Marchandises en Transit (SIGMAT) Project. In 2020, Benin, Niger and Togo connected to SIGMAT and started managing their common road transits operations. In 2021, Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire developed automated processes to manage rail transit movements between these countries with SIGMAT. Mali and Senegal are finalizing their tests and should be connected to SIGMAT in due course. The SIGMAT Project is being implemented with the technical and financial support of several development partners, including the WCO.

The implementation of Customs systems interconnectivity and computerized transit management will support the Members in West and Central Africa to implement the RKC, the WTO TFA and the Agreement Establishing the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

### **(3) Other Capacity Building activities for LLDCs**

The WCO provides technical assistance and Capacity Building support to the Member Customs administrations of LLDCs in a broad range of Customs-related areas, other than transit.

The WCO launched its Mercator Programme in June 2014 to ensure uniform implementation of the WTO TFA, using the WCO instruments and tools as most of the TFA provisions relate to Customs. The "tailor-made" track of the Mercator Programme focuses on meeting Members' needs, including those of LLDCs. The "tailor-made" track includes needs assessments, strategic planning and implementation, followed by monitoring and evaluation. Tailor-made assistance may come in the form of multi-year Mercator Programme plans or support for implementing specific TFA articles as part of on-going reform and modernization efforts. Moreover, the support includes establishing National Committees on Trade Facilitation (NCTFs), action planning, technical assistance in specific areas, etc.

The WCO implements numerous programmes and projects that involve, inter alia, Capacity Building support to LLDCs. A non-exhaustive list would include the UNODC-WCO Container Control Programme, the COVID-19 Project funded by Japan, the ESA Regional Project funded by Finland, the WCO/JICA Joint Project on Trade Facilitation and Master Trainer Programme, the WCO-Norad Anti-Corruption and Integrity Promotion (A-CIP) Programme, the HMRC-WCO-UNCTAD TFA Capacity Building Programme, the UK FCO-WCO Middle Income Countries (MIC) Trade Facilitation Programme, the WCO-SECO Global Trade Facilitation Programme (GTFP), the Sida-WCO Trade Facilitation and Customs Modernization Programme and the EU-WCO Programme for Harmonized System in Africa.

## **III. Other relevant considerations**

### **(1) WCO theme for 2022**

The WCO theme for the year 2022 is "Scaling up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem". Thus, throughout 2022, the Customs community will be focusing on how to operate in a fully digital environment and create an operating model that captures and exploits data from across the trade ecosystem.