



30 January 2024

(24-0736)

Page: 1/10

**Council for Trade in Goods
Committee on Trade Facilitation**

**SUMMARY OF THE COMPENDIUM OF THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF COVID-19 RESPONSES
PROVIDED BY MEMBERS AND OBSERVERS TO THE
COMMITTEE ON TRADE FACILITATION¹**

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. In accordance with the decision reached in the Trade Facilitation Committee (CTF, the Committee), agreed to by Members through a silent procedure on 9 April 2021, and with the mandate received in document [G/TFA/W/31/Rev.4](#), the Secretariat compiled a compendium document of the contributions of COVID-19 responses provided by Members and Observers to the CTF) in document [G/TFA/W/40 and its revisions](#).

1.2. The compendium report was structured similarly to the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA). For each provision, the report presented the COVID-19 related trade facilitation measures taken and reported by the Members to the Committee, including the challenges and difficulties addressed, if mentioned in the contribution. The reported measures under each article were identified strictly in accordance with the information provided by Members. In those cases where reported information was not identified as specifically related to any provision, the measures reported are included under a section "Other TF-related COVID-19 measures", as stipulated in document [G/TFA/W/31/Rev.4](#), paragraph 7.

1.3. The information was sourced from the presentations made and written statements submitted by Members and international organizations to the Committee. The presentations and written statements were considered at the following Committee meetings: 30 September 2020 (informal meeting), [21-22 October 2020](#), [26-27 January 2021](#), and [3 March 2021](#). The information was also sourced from TFA notifications circulated to Members in the document series [G/TFA/N/](#).² All information sources are available on the [Trade Facilitation Agreement Database Website](#).³

1.4. Following the request by the Chairperson of the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG) that the Chairpersons of the CTG subsidiary bodies prepare a report on the activities undertaken by their committee in the context of the pandemic ([JOB/CTG/18](#)), the Chairperson of the CTF submitted a report under his own responsibility ([G/TFA/L/1475; G/TFA/W/89](#)) which highlighted the Committee's work with regard to the production of the compendium document.

1.5. As a follow-up to this report, the Committee, at an informal meeting of the CTF on 26 July 2023 ([JOB/TF/235](#)), requested the Secretariat to draft a summary of the compendium document under four thematic headings: "Publication and Availability of Information"; "Release and Clearance of Goods"; "Formalities connected with Importation, Exportation and Transit", and "Other Reported Trade Facilitation-related Measures".

1.6. This summary, which is a general consolidated overview of the measures taken by the Members and Observers identified in [G/TFA/W/31/Rev.4](#), was prepared by the Secretariat in response to the request.

¹ At the meeting of the Committee on Trade Facilitation of 3-5 October, the Chair invited delegations to submit any additional comments to document [G/TFA/W/97/Rev.1](#) by 30 October with a view to adopting the report and submitting it to the CTG. No comments were received by the deadline and the document is therefore considered to be adopted.

² At the request of Members at the Committee on Trade Facilitation meeting on [22-23 June 2021](#).

³ <https://tfadatabase.org/trade-facilitation-committee/experience-sharing/topic/13>.

2 PUBLICATION AND AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION

2.1 Publication of COVID-19 measures

2.1. Notices and circulars related to trade facilitation measures such as deferred payments and extended time frames for customs duties were issued. Instructions for the importation of essential inputs for COVID-19 management and information notes for economic operators were also provided. Various online resources for traders were established with dedicated COVID-19 response information and were regularly updated.

2.2 Enquiry Points

2.2. Contact points were established to expedite customs clearance, including designating officers to different customs zones.

2.3 Dialogue and coordination

2.3. There was increased dialogue between industry and governments to foster collaboration and problem-solving.

2.4 TFA Transparency Notifications

2.4. WTO Members submitted updated transparency notifications to the CTF, including links to information regarding import, export, and transit measures to mitigate COVID-19's impact.

2.5 Preparation of Guidelines

2.5. Various guidelines were prepared to address specific challenges. These included guidance on Customs issues related to the COVID-19 emergency, protocols for the importation and sale of used textiles and shoes, guidelines for the implementation of Green Lanes to streamline transportation, guidelines for facilitating air cargo operations, and guidelines for border management measures to protect public health and ensure the availability of essential goods and services.

3 RELEASE AND CLEARANCE OF GOODS

3.1 Prioritizing Clearance

3.1. Customs authorities prioritized the clearance of critical goods essential for combating COVID-19, ensuring their swift processing and delivery. Goods were prioritized based on HS Classification, with a specific focus on expediting the clearance of critical items essential for addressing the COVID-19 crisis.

3.2 Pre-arrival Processing

3.2. In order to expedite customs procedures and minimize border delays, an option was introduced to complete customs formalities before the arrival of lorries, with goods only being stopped at the border in necessary cases.

3.3 Reengineering of fees and charges

3.3. Customs authorities implemented measures such as deferring scheduled fees and charges for a specified period, granting refunds or reductions in certain customs fees, and waiving detention charges on containers which were delayed due to lockdown measures. Major ports also waived penalties, demurrage, and charges for delays caused by lockdown-related issues.

3.4 Extension of deadlines

3.4. Measures to extend the time-limit for filing appeals, furnishing returns, or complying with customs regulations were implemented; surcharges for late declarations were eliminated; and the

emergency period/lockdown days were excluded from the calculation of bonded warehouse storage and goods-abandonment periods.

3.5 Postponement of Deposits

3.5. The deadline for importers facing significant financial hardship to deposit estimated duties, taxes, and fees was temporarily postponed.

3.6 Risk Management

3.6. Risk analysis focused on critical items during the emergency, and businesses with low-risk profiles received streamlined clearance processes. Temporary measures were introduced to manage risks to human, animal, and plant health in periods of disruption to control systems. Document screening and inspection visits were omitted in the issuance of certificates of origin.

3.7 Authorized Operators

3.7. Economic operators were given the opportunity to postpone customs declarations. Communications were sent to all Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) entities via email, and the expiration of AEO certificates was extended by several weeks during the lockdown.

3.8 Green Lanes

3.8. Green lanes in road traffic were established for specific categories of goods, including medical products, foodstuffs, mail, fuels, and packaging materials. These lanes, set up at certain border crossings, were maintained to ensure the smooth flow of essential goods.

4 FORMALITIES CONNECTED WITH IMPORTATION, EXPORTATION AND TRANSIT

4.1 Digitalization

4.1. Physical documentation was suspended in favour of electronic communication. Digital strategies were embraced, utilizing email for submissions, supporting digital signatures, and other applications. The digital registration of importers/exporters, remote handling of vehicle-related applications, and extension of electronic submission of veterinary health certificates were implemented.

4.2 Electronic Payment

4.2. E-payment methods were encouraged for services with reduced office hours. In some cases, all payments had to be made online or through deferred accounts.

4.3 E-Invoicing

4.3. E-invoicing systems were implemented, enhancing the efficiency of trade-related financial transactions.

4.4 Acceptance of Copies

4.4. Customs authorities accepted scanned and emailed copies of various documents, including health certificates, export certificates, and certificates of origin. Copies were also accepted through single windows, contributing to a more streamlined process.

4.5 Single Window

4.5. Single window systems were utilized to simplify procedures, facilitate advance processing, and provide information on high-priority goods.

4.6 Extension of Validity

4.6. Various deadline extensions were granted, including the extension of Letters of Intent for setting up Inland Customs Depots/Container Freight Stations and the extension of agricultural practices certification.

4.7 Elimination of Surcharge

4.7. Surcharges for late declarations were eliminated to ease the burden on traders.

4.8 Special Protocols

4.8. Special protocols were introduced for expedited clearance, including the implementation of a 24/7 custom clearance facility and prioritization of customs clearance for essential goods and relief items. Procedures for safety products were simplified, including the relaxation of storage periods for bonded goods and the introduction of simplified import and export declaration forms for essential inputs and relief goods.

4.9 Penalties

4.9. Grace periods were introduced for late-accounting penalties, and the period for submitting corrections following trade compliance verifications was extended.

4.10 Import Licensing Requirements

4.10. Temporary elimination of import licensing requirements was implemented for certain products, reducing administrative burdens on traders.

4.11 Border Management

4.11. Flexibilities were introduced around border management, with a focus on cooperation between border agencies, extension of working hours, and streamlined procedural formalities.

5 OTHER REPORTED TRADE FACILITATION-RELATED MEASURES

5.1 Suspension of Import Taxes

5.1. Import taxes were temporarily suspended, providing relief to importers and reducing the financial burden during the crisis.

5.2 VAT Tax Suspension

5.2. A specific category of goods was exempted from Value Added Tax (VAT) upon importation, ensuring the affordability of critical items.

5.3 Tariff Removal and Exemptions

5.3. Tariffs were removed from a wide range of medical supplies crucial for the COVID-19 response, as well as certain personal protective equipment. This elimination of tariffs aimed to encourage the importation of vital healthcare resources.

5.4 Export Bans

5.4. In order to secure an adequate domestic supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), some Members imposed export bans on these items. Additionally, a plurilateral declaration among certain WTO Members committed to refraining from imposing export restrictions, including non-tariff barriers (NTBs), and expedited and facilitated the flow and transit of these products in line with Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) obligations.

6 OTHER REGULATORY ADJUSTMENTS

6.1. Several other regulatory adjustments were made to ensure the smooth movement of goods. These adjustments included a temporary regulation allowing the transport of goods during non-standard hours on roads with customs offices, thereby enhancing logistics flexibility.

6.2. The provisional clearance of goods imported under free trade agreements, even without the production of original certificates of origin, was carried out.

6.3. In order to address administrative challenges, a provision was introduced that enabled the submission of undertakings on plain paper in cases where obtaining stamp papers for customs bonds was difficult.

ANNEX

Summary of actions taken in response to COVID-19 responses reported by Members to the Committee on Trade Facilitation

PUBLICATION AND AVAILABILITY OF INFORMATION

Trade Facilitation Measure	Actions Taken
Publication	<p>The following publications were issued:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government Notices and Circulars related to trade facilitating measures being introduced , including deferral of payments and extension of trim frames for payment of customs duties. • Instructions for the importation (including donations) of essential inputs for the management, diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19. • An information note for economic operators.
Information available through the internet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of a webpage for interest groups, including a webpage available to all plant protection organizations (NPPOs) to verify and obtain directly from the SAG certification system an image of all original data from phytosanitary certificate. • Establishment of a COVID-19 response page and regularly updating it, including for traders. • Implementation of a Customs Operational Centre for Crisis Management to supervise, monitor and guide the customs procedures. • Increase in the availability of trade-related information on websites and through enquiry points. • Communication to economic operators available on website.
Enquiry points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment of contact points to speed up customs clearance. • Designation of an officer in each Customs Zone as enquiry point for any issue pertaining to clearance of cargo.
Dialogues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased dialogue between industry and Governments
Notification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Submission by WTO Members of updated transparency notifications to the Committee on Trade Facilitation to include updated links to information regarding import/export/transit measures to mitigate COVID.
Preparation of guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preparation of guidance on Customs issues related to the COVID-19 emergency. • Preparation of a protocol providing best practices on the importation and sale of used textiles and used shoes and how the supply chain operators conduct their operations. • Preparation of guidelines on the implementation of Green Lanes. • Guidelines were provided on facilitating Air Cargo Operations. • Guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure availability of goods and essential services.

RELEASE AND CLEARANCE OF GOODS

Trade Facilitation Measure	Actions Taken
Overall clearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritized clearance of critical goods used for fighting COVID-19.
Pre-arrival processing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of the possibility of completing customs formalities before the lorries' arrival so that consignments of goods are stopped at the border only in certain necessary cases.
Electronic payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> E-payment encouraged for services with reduced office hours. For some Members, all payments had to be made online or on deferred accounts.
E-invoicing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implemented by Member(s).
Separation of release from Final Determination of Customs duties, taxes, fees and charges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deferral of scheduled fees and charges for Customs' clearance of imported and exported goods for a specified period of time. Refund/reduction//deferral/exemption from certain customs fees. Waiving of detention charges on containers held up for reasons attributable to lockdown measures. Waiving by all major ports of penalties, demurrage, charges, fee, rental on any port user (traders, Shipping Lines, concessionaries, licensees, etc.) for any delay in berthing, loading/unloading operations or evacuation/arrival of cargo for reasons resulting from lockdown. Waiving by Customs airports of demurrage charges at a certain level. Extension of time limit for filing of appeal, furnishing of return, or any other compliance under the Customs Act or Customs Tariff Act. Elimination of surcharge for late declaration. The number of days covering the emergency period/lockdown would not be included in the calculation of the number of days goods were kept at the bonded warehouse for any purpose, nor in the period of time after which goods are declared abandoned. Postponed the deadline for importers of record with a significant financial hardship to deposit certain estimated duties, taxes, and fees. Elimination of surcharge for late declaration. The number of days covering the emergency period/lockdown would not be included in the calculation of the number of days goods were kept at the bonded warehouse for any purpose, nor in the period of time after which goods are declared abandoned. Postponed the deadline for importers of record with a significant financial hardship to deposit certain estimated duties, taxes, and fees. Temporary postponement of the deadline for importers of record with a significant financial hardship to deposit certain estimated duties, taxes, and fees.
Risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk analysis focused on items of key importance during the emergency. Analysis of businesses with low-risk profiles was carried out to speed up clearance of their goods. Introduction of temporary measures to contain risks to human, animal and plant health and animal welfare during certain serious disruptions of control systems. Strengthening of risk management to prioritize clearance of imports and exports of low-risk critical supplies. Omission of document screening and inspection visits in the process of issuing certificates of origin.
Authorized Operators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of a temporary regulation giving the opportunity to economic operators to postpone the completion of customs declarations.

Trade Facilitation Measure	Actions Taken
Green lanes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications to all AEO entities were sent communications over email. • Extension of several weeks of AEO certificates expiring in the early days of the lockdown. • Use of green lanes in road traffic for certain categories of goods such as medical products, foodstuffs, mail, fuels, and packaging material and machine parts for the medical and food industries). The "green lanes" set up at certain border crossings for important goods were maintained.
Prioritizing of clearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization of transit, release and clearance of goods according to HS Classification. • Prioritization of clearance of critical goods used for fighting COVID-19.
import licensing requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary elimination of import licensing requirements on certain products.

FORMALITIES CONNECTED WITH IMPORTATION, EXPORTATION AND TRANSIT

Trade Facilitation Measure	Actions Taken
Formalities and documentation requirements - Digital strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of email to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➢ make submissions to the Customs Directorate. ➢ Provide support where digital signatures were involved, support was provided via email. ➢ Submission of applications. • Digital registration of importers/exporters, inclusion of administrators and access authorization. • Remote handling of vehicle related applications. • Extension of the interim guidance for the electronic submission of veterinary health certificates for shipment clearance. • Suspension of physical receipt of documentation and all administrative procedures before the relevant Ministry was conducted by electronic means of communication. • Introduction of a digital system that simplified export procedures at border customs offices. The customs declarant selects the export customs declaration and may export consignments selected as "free" without carrying out additional customs formalities. • Use of instant messaging function to send documents, applications and requests directly to Customs to accelerate and simplify the process. • Attention and processing of matters related to the clearance of goods, through digital means. • Presentation and issuance of documents, including certificates of origin for exports, through electronic means. • Extension of validity of Letters of Intent issued to various promoters for setting up of Inland Customs Depots/Container Freight Stations due to expire during lockdown period for a specified period of time.
Formalities and documentation requirements - Other measures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of surcharge for late declaration. • Exclusion of the number of days covering the emergency period/lockdown in the calculation of the number of days goods were kept at the bonded warehouse for any purpose, nor in the period of time after which goods are declared abandoned. • Extension of certain agricultural practices certification. • Introduction of temporary criteria for the import of products for in vitro diagnostics. • Introduction of temporary regulation giving an exception from the plant health regulation section 19 on import certificates.

Trade Facilitation Measure	Actions Taken
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No requirement of import licence for importers of surgical masks, particulate respirators do not require an importer's licence from health authority. Instead, importers only need to notify their intention to import. • Extension of automated clearance of Bills of Entry to all Customs formation. • Introduction of contactless customs – using a Customs Electronic Gateway. • Online issuance of health certificates and of certificates for certain exports. • Use of video conference for personal hearings with respect to any proceeding under the relevant Customs Act and online submission of all documents for personal hearings through official emails. • Suspension of legal terms, deadlines, the receipt of documents and reports, procedures, actions, proceedings, initiation, substantiation and resolution of administrative procedures, notifications, requests for reports or documents and means of challenge, as well as any administrative act requested from the relevant public servants. • Extension of time limit for filing of appeal, furnishing of return, or any other compliance under the Customs Act or Customs Tariff Act. • Extension of time limits for customs procedures, including those for payment of customs duties in certain cases. • Acceptance of delay in filing import declarations and waive late filing fees in genuine cases. • For Customs Brokers - accept a delay in filing import declarations and waive late filing fees in genuine cases.
Acceptance of copies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearing consignments based on an emailed copy of a health certificate. • Acceptance of scanned copies of export certificates and certificates of origin. • extended temporary alternative arrangements to the use of original paper import certificate requirements for a range of imported plant-based, animal, biological and animal-based goods. • Copies accepted through single windows. • Submission by traders of electronic copies of supporting documents for processing of air/sea cargo in PDF format. • Online initiative creating a new process for providing electronic copies of release documents to Customs. • Special protocols to expedite the import of products and by-products of plant origin that require the presentation of an original Phytosanitary Certificate. • Allowing provisional clearance of goods imported under free trade agreements without production of original certificate of origin. • Certificates of origin, certificates of eligibility for textile goods and clothing (TPL) and certificates of quota delivered through the website designed by the Ministry of Economy. • Exchange of scanned certificates via e-mail between the economic operator and the customs office. • Exchange of certificates by post. • Creation of an online initiative for a new process for providing electronic copies of release documents to Customs.
Single window	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single window used to simplify procedures to release high priority goods; to carry out advance processing, and together with trade information portals to provide information.
Border management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of flexibilities in border management. • Requirement of submitting different types of customs bond was dispensed with. Importers/exporters and their authorized Customs Brokers can submit undertaking on plain paper. • Border agency cooperation to facilitate the import of critical suppliers (including medical supplies). • Extending border agency working hours.

Trade Facilitation Measure	Actions Taken
Simplification of customs procedures for safety products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamlining of procedural formalities between and across border agencies [customs, bureau of standards, port authorities, SPS authorities]. Relaxation of the storage period of bonded goods in duty-free shops. simplified import declaration for expedited processing and clearance of essential inputs for the management, diagnosis and treatment of COVID-19. Simplified import and export declaration forms for relief goods relating to countermeasures to the COVID. Prioritization of customs clearance for relief goods relating to countermeasures to the COVID-19 and other goods that require an urgent clearance to maintain the lifeline.
Special protocols for expediting clearance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementation of 24/7 custom clearance facility at all custom formations. All customs formations to show greater sensitivity in dealing with cargo from affected areas. Special protocols to expedite the clearance of the following goods: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supplies donated to the Ministry of Health. Goods (import) in accordance with the rule for simplified procedure for imports made by the Ministry of Health and decentralized agencies of the Health Sector. Perishable goods, medicines, and health products or other essential goods.
Penalties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of a grace period for late accounting penalties. Extension of the period for submitting corrections following a trade compliance verification where errors were found.

OTHER REPORTED TRADE FACILITATION-RELATED MEASURES

Trade Facilitation Measure	Actions Taken
Suspension of collection of all import taxes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspension of VAT tax on the importation of specific classified goods.
Removal/exemptions of tariffs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal of tariffs on a range of medical supplies needed for the COVID-19 response and on certain personal protective equipment.
Export ban	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ban on the export of certain personal protective equipment (PPE). As part of a plurilateral declaration between some members, there was a commitment not to impose export restrictions; including commitments on NTBs, plus commitments to expedite and facilitate the flow and transit of these products consistent with TFA obligations.
Other regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary regulation allowing the transport during opening hours of goods that were transported outside opening hours on roads where there was a customs office. Provisional clearance of goods imported under free trade agreements without production of original certificate of origin. Facility to submit an undertaking on plain paper where difficulties were experienced in obtaining stamp papers for the submission of customs bonds.