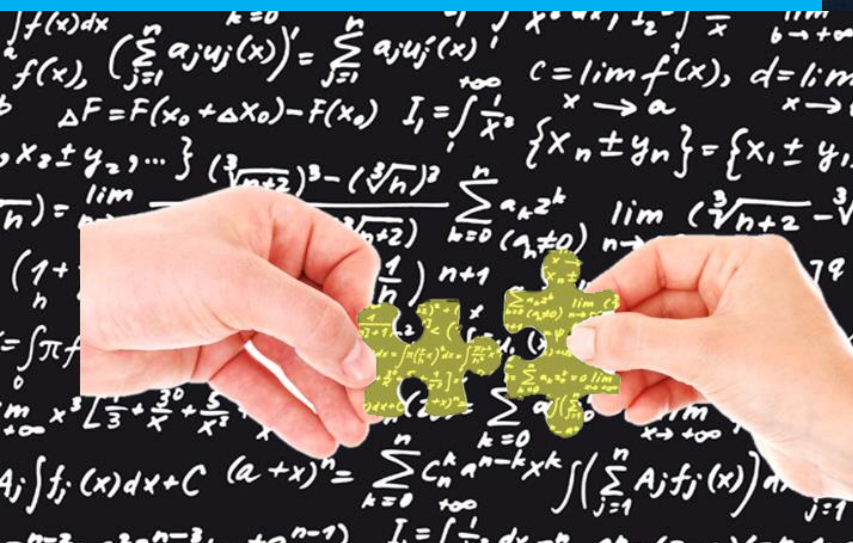




Trade facilitation in times of pandemic: practices from North and Central Asia



Yelena Vassilevskaya



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Trade facilitation in times of pandemic: practices from North and Central Asia

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and associated attempts to contain its spread have created unprecedented hurdles to international trade. This paper reviews trade facilitation measures implemented in North and Central Asia (NCA), including transport and trade finance facilitation. All NCA countries have sought to protect the public health by restricting movement of people (including across borders) and applying special sanitary regulations at border crossings. These have included requirements to sanitize trucks, protect customs officials, change drivers, and requiring COVID-19 tests from drivers. Such requirements continue to create significant logistical issues, with often insufficient facilities for drivers. Sanitary requirements have proved simpler to implement for rail freight, creating an advantage for countries with well-developed rail networks. A number of common patterns emerge from the efforts of NCA countries to facilitate trade and transit. First, all governments have formed intragovernmental bodies to coordinate their COVID-19 responses. However, these bodies often lack the competency, mandate or reach to implement effective trade facilitation measures. Second, countries have simplified customs procedures for essential goods, typically food and medical supplies. Some countries initially implemented restrictions on the export of essential goods, but these have since been lifted. Third, countries have attempted to compensate for logistical and border transit issues caused by special sanitary requirements by expanding infrastructure; and simplifying and digitizing procedures on both road and rail. Fourth, all NCA countries have created online outreach portals and attempted to digitize various government services. However, their success varies greatly depending on the existing state of their paperless trade systems and infrastructure. Trade digitalization can support social distancing, while increasing trade efficiency, and inform businesses (especially SMEs) on the rapidly evolving regulatory environment under COVID-19. It is therefore recommended for countries to accelerate trade digitalization efforts, including by joining the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.

Keywords: Trade Facilitation, COVID-19, North and Central Asia, Customs, Paperless Trade, Policy, Digital Trade, Trade digitalization

JEL Codes: F13, F55, I18

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1 Introduction

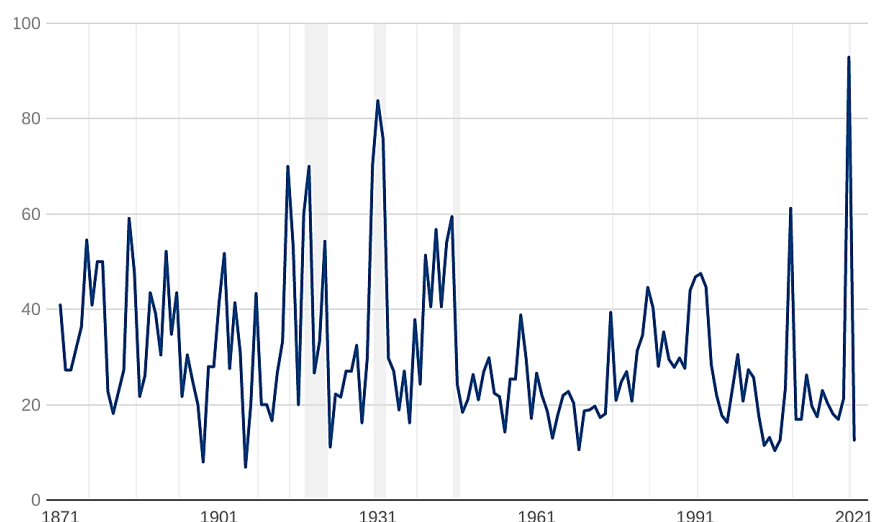
As stated in the United Nations framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19: “The COVID-19 pandemic is far more than a health crisis: it is affecting societies and economies at their core. While the impact of the pandemic will vary from country to country, it will most likely increase poverty and inequalities at a global scale, making achievement of Sustainable Development Goals even more urgent” (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2020).

The World Trade Organization (WTO) issued a press release assessing the extent of the decline in world trade in 2020 due to COVID-19 (WTO, 2020a), which states:

- World merchandise trade is set to plummet by between 13 and 32 per cent in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- A 2021 recovery in trade is expected, but that is dependent on the duration of the outbreak and the effectiveness of the policy responses;
- Nearly all regions will suffer double-digit declines in trade volumes in 2020, with exports from North America and Asia hit hardest;
- Trade will likely fall steeper in sectors with complex value chains, particularly electronics and automotive products;
- Services trade may be most directly affected by COVID-19 through transport and travel restrictions.

According to the World Bank, most countries expect a recession in 2020 (see figure 1). Looking at the speed with which the crisis has gripped the global economy, we can understand how deep the recession will be.

Figure 1: Share of economies in recession, 1871-2021



The proportion of economies with an annual contraction in per capita GDP. Shaded areas refer to global recessions. Data for 2020-21 are forecasts (World Bank, 2020).

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises are expected to suffer the most from COVID-19. The International Trade Centre (ITC) survey finds one in four small businesses in developing countries will close permanently due to the COVID-19 crisis (Borino and Rollo, 2020).

Under these dire circumstances, countries strive to contain the spread of COVID-19 infections, while implementing measures to mitigate social and economic consequences. Such measures include support for trade and simplifying customs procedures and logistics.

According to the WTO (2020b), around two-thirds of notifications made in response to COVID-19 by WTO members are related to standards and regulations (i.e. technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures). These have been notified by 27 members. For instance, to temporarily expedite and broaden access to personal protective equipment (PPE3), Brazil has eased its authorization requirements, while Canada loosened its bilingual labelling rules. Several members (including Argentina, Australia, Chile, Costa Rica, the European Union, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, the Russian Federation, South Africa and Taiwan Province of China) are accepting scanned copies or electronic SPS certificates, in light of the disruptions caused by COVID-19. Switzerland is relaxing certain food labelling requirements to deal with COVID-19-related supply shortages.

One of the most promising adaptations to the consequences and new constraints of operating under a pandemic is the sweeping development of paperless technology and

distance work in all industries and spheres of life, including international trade, customs and logistics. This will allow countries to reduce the amount of personal contacts while facilitating business processes and cutting associated costs.

A valuable source of information and tools to help countries benchmark and reduce the cost of trading across borders is the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation (United Nations TFS, 2019), which the United Nations Regional Commissions jointly conduct since 2015. The Survey currently covers 53 measures related to the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) in 128 economies around the globe, as well as emerging regional and global initiatives on paperless trade and e-trade, such as the recent Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.¹

This paper focuses on practices in trade facilitation in NCA region in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. NCA includes nine countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, the Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Special focus is placed on these countries' implementation of the measures included in the UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019. In addition, the scope of trade facilitation measures discussed here is expanded to include financial and other support for small and medium enterprises (SME), which has played an outsized role in COVID-19 response. Information used for this paper was collected from various open sources and stakeholder interviews.

Following an overview of the NCA situation in the next section, case studies for each of the countries are presented, noting that the situation is dynamic and countries in the region continue their efforts in identifying and implementing new measures for containing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to facilitate trade. Based on the analysis of measures taken by each country in the NCA region, conclusions are drawn as to which practices tended to be more successful, their potential as permanent trade facilitation measures and usefulness for other countries in containing the spread of the pandemic.

¹ The final treaty text was adopted by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific in May 2016. Five ESCAP member states (Armenia, Bangladesh, Cambodia, China and Islamic Republic of Iran) formally signed the Framework Agreement in 2017 (Lim, 2016). By September 2020, three countries have ratified /acceded to the treaty (Azerbaijan, Islamic Republic of Iran and the Philippines), while China has completed its internal process of ratification.

2 Situation of the NCA region countries

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global pandemic. From then, COVID-19 infections have continued their gradual spread across the NCA region. Table 1 presents data on infection cases as of 3 July 2020. At the time of writing this paper (July 2020), the number of COVID-19 cases is growing daily.

Table 1. COVID-19 cases in NCA (on 3 July 2020)

Country	Total cases	Total deaths	Total recovered	Active cases	Total Population
Armenia	27 320	469	15 484	11 367	2 963 283
Azerbaijan	18 684	228	10 425	8 031	10 139 513
Georgia	943	15	821	107	3 989 097
Kazakhstan	44 075	188	26 251	17 636	18 777 194
Kyrgyzstan	6 767	76	2 655	4 036	6 524 176
The Russian Federation	667 883	9 859	437 893	220 131	14 593 496
Tajikistan	6 058	52	469	1 316	9 536 933
Turkmenistan	no data	no data	no data	no data	6 031 187
Uzbekistan	9 199	27	6 034	3 138	33 469 623
Total in NCA region	753 609	10 445	484 548	254 395	
In the world	11 010 802	524 559	6 169 351	4 318 628	
Share of the region in the world, %	6.8%	2.0%	7.9%	5.9%	

Source: Worldometer, 2020

It must be noted that not all countries in the region admit to the existence of a pandemic. Turkmenistan, for instance, still denies the disease being present in the country, hence it does not provide statistical data on COVID-19 infections. Tajikistan has also long denied the pandemic, only making first mention of the virus on 17 April 2020, when the President posted the official message: “On measures adopted to prevent the penetration and spread of the COVID-19 in Tajikistan” on his website in the “news and events” section.²

² Accessed August 2020. Available at: <http://prezident.tj/en/node/22870>

Since the WHO declared a pandemic, countries across the world, including the majority of countries of NCA, have implemented a series of stringent measures to contain its spread, including compulsory self-isolation, quarantine, states of emergency, border closures, suspension of manufacturing facilities, limiting of airway traffic between countries and others.

Undoubtedly, the aftereffects of the pandemic and the restrictive measures taken by countries will have a negative impact on international trade indicators. Assuming that currently the volume of international trade has only decreased in certain countries of the region (refer to Table 2, which displays data on the volume of international trade in goods³), a further overall deterioration of the situation can be expected in the near future. According to many experts and political analysts, it will take the majority of countries from one to four years to overcome the impact of the pandemic and associated halt in the global economy, which is the largest on record. As mentioned before, according to the WTO's assessment, global trade in goods will suffer a sharp decline of 13 to 32 per cent due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 2. Trade in goods for the first quarter of 2020, million USD
(percentage change from previous year)**

	2019-Q1		2020-Q1	
	import	export	import	export
Armenia	1087(-3.0%)	544 (-8.4%)	1027 (-5.5%)	547 (0.6%)
Kazakhstan	6983 (-3.6%)	13314 (-4.3%)	7107 (1.8%)	13900 (4.4%)
Kyrgyzstan	1157 (-9.3%)	464 (18.7%)	904 (-21.9%)	460 (-0.9%)
The Russian Federation	55647 (-3.1%)	102621 (1.1%)	55719 (0.1%)	87770 (-14.5%)
World	4681000 (-2.6%)	4587000 (-2.4%)	4434000 (-5.3%)	4303000 (-6.2%)

Source: WTO Data, 2020

Comparing these results, it bears remembering that countries have varying capacities for responding to the pandemic based on several key factors:

- States are at different levels of economic development. Presumably, the less

³ At the time of finalizing this paper, statistics on the volume of trade in services for the first quarter of 2020 was not yet available.

developed countries would be the more affected by the consequences of the pandemic.

- Three countries (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) are in the process of accession to the WTO.
- Four countries (Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russian Federation) are members of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU),⁴ which includes a customs union between member states, as well as coordinated or single economic policies.
- Only two countries (Armenia and Azerbaijan) have signed the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2016).
- The degree of progress in the implementation of trade facilitation and paperless trade measures in the reviewed countries also varies (refer to United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, Annex I). Countries with more progress on this front arguably poses greater opportunities for adapting their economies to lockdowns and self-isolation while retaining efficiency and minimizing losses.
- The majority of NCA countries (excluding Russian Federation and Georgia) are landlocked, creating a significant hinderance to economic development and cross-border trade.
- Two of the countries in the region (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) have underdeveloped railway networks, resulting in an outsized reliance on roads for goods delivery.

All countries in the NCA region began taking measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 infections around mid-March 2020. These measures include:

For road transport:

- In the early stages, trucks entering a country (for import or transit) from areas with high COVID-19 risk were required to replace their drivers with local drivers (or the tractor unit had to be replaced). However, many carriers refused and road transport all but halted.
- Currently, in order to enter a country, drivers need to be tested for COVID-19. It

⁴ In total, the EAEU includes five countries, including Belarus.

typically takes two to three days to carry out a test and receive results. As most checkpoints are not equipped with board and lodging facilities or quarantine zones for the drivers to stay at, drivers are often forced to remain in their vehicles and rely on nearby catering establishments and stores. This increases the risk of infection for local communities.

As road cargo transportation is currently hindered by copious issues and delays, part of the cargo traffic has been shifted to rail. But this poses a challenge for countries with underdeveloped railway networks.

For air transport:

Passenger air traffic has mostly stopped. Most countries in the region have underdeveloped air cargo systems- instead relying on passenger airlines (or charter flights), substantially constraining air cargo transport in the current crisis.

Thus, logistics has become one of the major issues for international supply chains.

3 Case Study of Armenia on Trade Facilitation during COVID-19

3.1 Introduction

Analysing the situation in Armenia, it is worth noting that the political tensions between Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey create one of the most significant constraints to international trade in the sub-region. Armenia's borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey are closed due to tense political relations between the countries. For this reason, cargo transport can only be conducted via checkpoints on the borders with Georgia (three road and one rail checkpoint) and IR Iran (one road checkpoint) as well as by air.

In addition, current data as of early July 2020 indicates that Armenia has the highest rate of per capita COVID-19 infections in the NCA region.

Armenia has introduced several measures to protect public health, including declaring a state of emergency which temporary limits some rights and liberties, such as:

- Establishment a special procedure for the entry (exit) of citizens, vehicles, cargo at all checkpoints of Armenia.
- Prohibition on holding public assemblies and mass events or participating therein in the whole territory of the Republic of Armenia.
- Restrictions on certain types of economic activities and services (public catering facilities, multifunctional trade and entertainment centres), activities of educational institutions.

Also, organizations holding a license for medical assistance and medical services (irrespective of the form of ownership) shall provide medical assistance and medical services based on the instructions of the Ministry of Healthcare of the Republic of Armenia.

To inform the population about the nature of the symptoms of the disease and the requirements during the time of the lockdown, the website <https://covid19.gov.am> was set up. Apart from the information mentioned above, the website also contains core regulatory documents, information on measures for social and economic support with reference to regulations, as well as information about the members of the commandant's office. The site may also be used to apply for Government services. Hotlines, including online ones, are available. Apart from all the above, there are also dedicated webpages on the official websites of ministries and Government departments. The special mobile

application “COVID-19 Armenia” has also been created, which provides up-to-date quarantine requirements and other useful information. Thus, information about COVID-19 in Armenia is transparent and publicly available.

The restrictions on free movement, the special operating regime for border checkpoints and restrictions on certain types of activities have caused new barriers, including to international trade.

These trying times demand Armenia take measures to reduce the hurdles that have arisen in international trade, including measures on facilitating trade and the further implementation of paperless trade.

According the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, Armenia is ranked fifth out of the nine countries in the NCA region for achievements in digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures. Armenia has only fully implemented 11 of the 53 measures indicated in the survey (United Nations TFS, 2019).

3.2 Institutional Arrangements and Inter-agency Cooperation

On 30 January 2020, by the decision of Armenia’s Prime Minister, an interdepartmental commission for the coordination of actions to prevent the spread of the coronavirus chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister was set up.

At the 16 March 2020 ad-hoc meeting, the Government of Armenia adopted the Decision No. 298-N on declaring a state of emergency in the Republic of Armenia.⁵ In order to ensure efficient management during the state of emergency, a commandant’s office was established with the Deputy Prime Minister appointed as commandant. The commandant’s office is composed of heads of various ministries and Government departments, including the Minister of economy of Armenia and the Head of the State Revenue Committee. This indicates that the commandant’s office’s operating authority may include trade related issues. However, no specific information on this subject was found.

On 19 March 2020, the Government of Armenia developed a Programme of action on mitigating the social and economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic with a total funding amount of US\$ 300 million (2 per cent of the country’s GDP). The programme includes 21 plans of action, twelve of which comprise rendering social assistance to the

⁵ Available at: http://moj.am/storage/uploads/298voroshum_RU_24032020.pdf

population (refer to Annex II. Programmes of Armenia to address the social and economic impact of COVID-19). The social support measures encompass the most vulnerable population groups. However, if a beneficiary is eligible for multiple assistance packages, they may only select one.

Information about all of the social support measures may be found on the <https://covid19.gov.am> website (also at the <https://www.gov.am> website). Some social support services may be received via automated systems on the website <https://dimum.ssa.am>, links to which are provided on <https://covid19.gov.am>.

3.3 Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance

The Republic of Armenia is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU),⁶ which includes a customs union, as well as coordinated or single economic policies between the member states. This also means that special adjustments to customs clearance procedures must be coordinated between states. The Eurasian Economic Commission adopted a series of measures meant to deliver a prompt response to the COVID-19 (refer to Annex III). These measures are being implemented in Armenia and other EAEU countries.

At the same time, the WTO has not received any notifications from Armenia on the introduction of new rules or standards adopted in response to the pandemic (WTO, 2020c).

Measures for protection of customs staff, especially those deployed at customs checkpoints, have been implemented.⁷

In order to prevent the spread of the disease, customs authorities have been instructed to reorganize their activity (emphasizing minimal physical contacts), while still maintaining their uninterrupted operation.

The State Revenue Committee of Armenia (SRCA) has implemented a set of measures for ensuring round-the-clock operation of certain functional departments of the Customs service, including some units of the Information Security department.

⁶ Except Belarus, all EAEU members are also WTO members.

⁷ Armenia, State Revenue Committee (2020). Accessed July 2020. Available at: http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid_19/armenia_en.pdf?la=en

3.4 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

No measures facilitating cargo transport, such as priority lanes, guarantee programmes to ensure supply chain continuity, including those for transit traffic, were found.

At all checkpoints in Armenia, a special procedure has been introduced for the entry/exit of citizens, vehicles, goods:

- Exit of Armenian citizens through land border checkpoints shall be prohibited, except for drivers of freight vehicles.
- Entry of Armenian citizens and their families (including family members who are not citizens) shall be permitted. Entry of persons arriving to Armenia on an official visit shall be permitted.
- After the entry of persons into the territory of Armenia, a special examination for revealing symptoms of COVID-19 shall be immediately conducted. In cases where symptoms exist, hospitalization, isolation (self-isolation) and/or other restricting measures shall be implemented.

3.5 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

As stated above, the website (<https://covid19.gov.am>) and the mobile app (COVID-19 Armenia) were created to distribute information about COVID-19 to the population. Apart from this information, the website also contains some regulatory documents and information on measures of social and economic support with links to relevant regulatory documents and online services that can be used to apply for support measures.

Similar to other countries that have introduced restrictions to public catering and trade enterprises during the lockdown, Armenia has seen a sharp surge of online commerce. Online purchases, payments; courier delivery of food and other products have gained popularity.

Armenia's e-government website <https://www.e-gov.am> offers unusually many features for businesses and the general population compared to others in the region. These include electronic submission of tax reports, the Government Electronic Payment System, applying for an entry visa and others. With support from the EU, Armenia is currently also implementing an e-government service development project⁸.

⁸Available at: <https://ega.ee/ru/project/tsifrovye-uslugi-dlya-grazhdanin-armenii/>

To ensure uninterrupted provision of services to taxpayers in the context of the coronavirus spread, the State Revenue Committee has expanded its list of remotely accessible services. For instance, before, submitting reports and paying taxes required a visit to the bank or the use of e-banking platforms. As of now, all of these services are accessible via a single electronic system (<https://file-online.taxservice.am/pages/loginPage.jsf>) (Armenia, State Revenue Service, 2020).

3.6 Measures for Business Facilitation and Supporting SMEs

Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the President of Armenia has signed a draft law “On introducing amendments to the Tax code of the Republic of Armenia”, according to which, as of 21 April 2020, the penalty for overdue tax returns is reduced from 0.075 per cent to 0.04 per cent per day. This case study has not found any newly introduced tax deferrals.

As stated above, the Government of Armenia has developed a package of measures to mitigate the social and economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The programme comprises 21 actions, 9 of which are directly designed to support the economy (refer to Annex II. Programmes of Armenia to address the social and economic impact of COVID-19). Some of them are industry-specific, including some measures for agriculture (2nd Action).

The programme comprises various aspects of assistance: subsidizing interest rates, co-financing (incl. leasing), preferential loan terms, grants.

Armenia’s programmes for addressing the social and economic impact of COVID-19 include several measures for supporting businesses:

- *Action 1:* co-financing, refinancing and subsidizing of private trade organizations and solo entrepreneurs with good tax and credit rating (subsequently expanded to all recipients of Government assistance).
- *Action 2:* subsidizing loan interest rates for agricultural enterprises.
- *Action 3:* providing preferential loans for SMEs active in industries affected by the quarantine.
- *Actions 5, 10, 17, 18 and 21:* eligible enterprises may receive targeted grants for specific purposes.
- *Action 19:* envisions support for the IT projects comprising 75 per cent interest-free loans and 25% grants.

3.7 Trade Finance Facilitation

During the case study of Armenia, no mention of special measures for facilitating trade finance such as: corporate bond financing, consideration of large-scale procurement by the Government, providing access to trade loans or other measures was found.

3.8 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The Republic of Armenia is implementing several measures aimed at mitigating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially noteworthy is the level of detail and consistency of the *Programme of action on mitigating the social and economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic* adopted by the Armenian Government.

According to the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, Armenia has fully implemented 11 of the 53 measures depicted in the Survey.

A possible explanation for the failure to meet trade facilitation objectives is the absence of a National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body, which would coordinate trade facilitation (WTO TFA, 2020), including that related to paperless and online trade. Such an institution could substantially improve the country's ability to remedy the impact of the pandemic-related crisis on cross-border trade.

This type of national body would also help in future systematic implementation of the measures suggested by the WTO and the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless trade in Asia and the Pacific.

Armenia's programme to address the social and economic impact of COVID-19 also recommends providing for measures to support international trade in the context of the pandemic. A possible priority for Armenia is the establishment of a designated specialized electronic platform (portal) to support international trade, which could host contextualized information on measures of support and regulatory documents. It could also offer online consultations and other features. This platform would need to be linked to the COVID-19 and other Government websites.

Generally, Armenia could profit from catching up to other countries in the region in digitizing services for businesses and the general population. One of the foremost objectives should be the completion and deployment of the electronic customs declaring system as well as the successful implementation of the "single window".

4 Case Study of Azerbaijan on Trade Facilitation during COVID-19

4.1 Introduction

Azerbaijan is one of the countries in the NCA region to have signed the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-Border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific.⁹

A special quarantine regime was declared on 14 March 2020 and since then the quarantine was first eased only to be reinstated on 21 June 2020.

In the context of the pandemic, Azerbaijan has implemented the following measures to protect public health:

- Persons over 65 years old are prohibited from leaving their place of residence. Citizens of this category living solitarily shall receive certain social services.
- Entry into Baku, Sumqayit and Absheron district for vehicles is restricted, with exception for special purpose and cargo vehicles.
- Countrywide ban on inter-city passenger transportation of any kind except for Azeri citizens returning to Azerbaijan. Returning citizens are required to take a COVID-19 test, fill out a declaration specifying their current state of health, provide their address and contact information, as well as list the countries they have visited in the past 28 days.
- Use of the subway in Baku is restricted in favour of above-ground transport (new bus routes have been launched).
- Ban on public gatherings of over 10 people introduced with 2-meter social distance between persons recommended.
- Operations of public catering businesses are restricted. Trade centres and malls are closed.
- Grocery stores, pharmacies- including those located in malls, and other essential facilities operate as usual.
- Temporary salary increases introduced for medical workers participating in COVID-19 response measures.

On 1 May 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan approved

⁹ Azerbaijan signed the Agreement with an exception clause according to which the agreement's provisions for Azerbaijan do not apply to Armenia (United Nations Treaty Collection, 2016).

Resolution No. 161 “Rules of quarantine control in case of the infectious diseases transmitted in the airborne way in the territory of the Azerbaijan Republic”¹⁰, which lists new safety requirements during the lockdown, including those for cargo transportation.

The operational headquarters under the Cabinet of Ministers has created the <https://koronavirusinfo.az> information website, which mainly publishes information permitted behaviours during the quarantine regime (this information is only available in the Azeri language). The website also contains the resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan on the terms of the one-time allowance payment. Applications for receiving the one-time payment may be submitted via the e-government website of Azerbaijan – www.e-gov.az. Applying for certain types of Government assistance requires the user to also be registered on www.e-sosial.az.

The mobile application “e-doctor” has been created. Telephone hotlines with similar functions are also available.

Like other countries, Azerbaijan needs new measures aimed at supporting the economy and reducing the hurdles to international trade created by pandemic-related restrictions, especially in trade facilitation and the development of paperless trade.

4.2 Institutional Arrangements and Inter-Agency Cooperation

To counter the threat of COVID-19 to Azerbaijan, operational headquarters were established under the Cabinet of Ministers on 27 February 2020, for prompt implementation of preventive and emergency response measures. The operational headquarters consist of heads of respective state bodies and institutions. Moreover, in order to inform the population and prevent unfounded misinformation, hotlines have been established since 28 February 2020. On 30 January 2020 the Cabinet of Ministers has approved the “Action plan on preventing the spread of the new coronavirus in the Republic of Azerbaijan”.

However, the above document was not found on any of the country’s official websites. Information on whether the operational headquarters’ responsibilities include trade facilitation in times of the pandemic was not found either.

According to UNCTAD, Azerbaijan has established a Trade Facilitation Body. However, *the work of this Government body has been discontinued* (AZERPRO, 2013).

¹⁰Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://nk.gov.az/az/document/4400/>

On 19 March 2020, the Coronavirus Response Fund was established with an initial endowment of AZM 20 million (US\$ 11.7 million), from the Reserve Fund of the President of Azerbaijan. Since then, the Coronavirus Response Fund has been enlarged to a total of around US\$ 655 million.

4.3 Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance

In order to ensure the uninterrupted supply of the population with essential products and medicines, Azerbaijan introduced the following measures:

- Temporary removal of import duties on certain goods (in accordance with resolutions No. 84 and No.114 of the Cabinet of ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan).
- Temporary ban on export of certain medical supplies and medicinal drugs (in accordance with resolutions No. 42 and No.152 of the Cabinet of ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan).¹¹

Even though Azerbaijan is not yet a member of the WTO (it has expressed its intention to join), Azerbaijan notified the WTO Secretariat about the introduction of these measures (WTO, 2020c).

4.4 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

As mentioned before, operational headquarters, consisting of high-ranked officials of various state bodies, including representatives of the customs administration, was established under the Cabinet of Ministers. The operational headquarters developed an “Action plan on preventing the spread of the new coronavirus in the Republic of Azerbaijan”, for which the customs administration conducted the following actions:

- All customs border checkpoints operate in extensive mode.
- Based on agreements with neighbouring states, the decision has been temporarily applied to close the borders with Iran, the Russian Federation and Georgia.
- Goods imported from Iran or through the territory of Iran by road are transported to special terminals, located close to the customs border checkpoints.

¹¹Azerbaijan, Cabinet of Ministers (2020). “Resolution 42: On some normative legal acts relating to Land Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan”. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://nk.gov.az/ru/document/4269/>

- The medical service of the State customs committee of Azerbaijan has issued methodical recommendations on sanitary-hygienic behaviour of customs officers during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The customs checkpoint staff has been trained and should adhere to the prescribed regulations such as wearing protective masks, coveralls, goggles, gloves, etc.
- Disinfection barriers have been installed at all customs checkpoints; disinfection is carried out on a regular basis; and stationary and portable thermal imagers were installed. Specially designed and equipped isolation areas have been established at checkpoints, and persons with infectious disease symptoms are transferred to hospitals for further testing and examination.
- Arriving passengers fill out a declaration on the state of their health, their address and contact information as well as naming countries they have visited in the past 28 days. Those who have visited countries listed in the corresponding resolution of the operational headquarters in the past 28 days are isolated and transferred to hospitals for further testing and observation.
- Means for drivers to fulfil other countries' requirements for a COVID-19 test certificate to be granted entry have been arranged at the border checkpoints and within the premises of the port.
- Information exchange between the customs service and other respective Government agencies and departments is taking place on an ongoing basis.

In accordance with the resolution of the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, foreign national truck drivers can enter or transit through the territory of Azerbaijan with no special impediments.

Maritime transport (including transshipment of trucks and containers) is open and ongoing with certain restrictions in neighbouring countries (Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) under the following conditions:

- Turkmen ships headed for Turkmenistan may only be used by Turkmen truck drivers. Only trailers and semi-trailers may be loaded onto Turkmen ships.
- According to the agreement reached with Azerbaijan Railways CJSC, recompiling of railway consignment note for rail-ferry transportation is not required – instead, the railway consignment note can be re-used for ferry transportation to

Kazakhstan.

- All drivers must be tested in the quarantine zone in the port of Baku before loading. Entry into Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan is only allowed for drivers with certificates of negative test results. Test results are provided within six to eight hours of testing.
- In the port of Baku, truck drivers should wait for the vessel in the special yellow zones. They are provided with food during the time of waiting.

Road transport: all points of border crossing (with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, Georgia and Turkey) are open for road transport.

- In accordance with the decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, international freight drivers are eligible to receive *rest and catering areas free of charge*.
- Registering for visas via the “ASAN Visa” e-portal (<https://evisa.gov.az/>) is suspended due to the global pandemic.
- Freight and other vehicles are disinfected at checkpoints.
- Drivers of vehicles importing cargo into Azerbaijan undergo a medical examination and are either quarantined according to sanitary rules at their place of residence or must stay until their test results are received.
- Drivers of vehicles carrying out transit through the territory of Azerbaijan undergo a health check. Vehicles carrying cargo must move gently along their agreed route under escort until their destination. The vehicle should carry enough fuel to reach its destination. If the vehicle must refuel or otherwise stop, the drivers should adhere to current quarantine rules.

4.5 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

According to the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, Azerbaijan is the leader among NCA countries in achieving digital and sustainable trade facilitation. Azerbaijan has fully implemented 28 and partially implemented 12 of the 53 measures suggested in the Survey (United Nations TFS, 2019). Azerbaijan’s achievements in developing paperless trade are likely to have significantly eased the adaptation of the economy to the restrictions introduced during the pandemic. Azerbaijan’s e-government website is quite well developed (www.e-gov.az). It offers approximately 450 Government services for businesses and the general population (in

English and Azeri), including those of the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies (59 services), the State Customs Committee (13 services), the Ministry of Economy (106 services) and the Ministry of Agriculture (22 services). The platform has enabled the automation of services like submitting electronic customs declarations, receiving certificates of origin, quality and phytosanitary certificates, quarantine permits and other document approvals necessary for import and export operations.

One service worthy of special attention is the verification of authenticity of digitally signed documents, which is a service not featured on other countries' platforms. The Azeri e-government platform may offer other unique services. If this function can be used for the signing of a commercial contract, then it is worth studying in greater detail. The site does not offer a detailed description of the service.

Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine exactly which services were introduced during the time of the pandemic. What can be determined is that the process of applying to receive COVID-related social support by the population using the e-government websites has been automated at www.e-sosial.az.

Electronic submission of customs declarations and electronic receipt of some approval documents and permits have been automated on the website of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Especially worthy of notice is the service of "Applying for permanent use of the 'Green Corridor' clearance system", which is mainly used for clearance of perishable goods (Azerbaijan, State Customs Committee, 2020).

As in most countries that have introduced restrictions to activities of public catering and trade businesses, Azerbaijan has experienced a surge of online commerce in the quarantine period. Online purchases, payments as well as courier delivery of food and other products have gained popularity.

4.6 Measures for Business Facilitation and SME support

According to the "Order of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan No. 1950 dated 19 March 2020 "On a number of measures to reduce the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic and, consequently, sharp fluctuations in world energy and stock markets on the economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, macroeconomic stability, employment and entrepreneurship", the main lines of action on mitigating the consequences of the pandemic were identified. The Ministry of Economy issued the core document containing the main lines of activity and sectors that these programmes encompass, as well as

instruments used for economic growth and to support businesses. Currently, ten programmes have been defined, five of which are aimed at supporting businesses, namely:

1. A financial support programme of wage compensation for 304,000 employees in industries most affected by COVID-19 (with the aim of preventing further job losses).
2. A financial support programme for 292,000 individual (micro) entrepreneurs and workers in industries affected by COVID-19 (with the aim of preventing further job losses).
3. A tax benefit programme for industries affected by the pandemic:
 - Temporary tax cuts for microbusinesses employing the simplified taxation procedure.
 - Exemption of taxpayers from income tax to a certain extent and for a certain period.
 - Exemption of certain categories of taxpayers from VAT to a corresponding extent and for a certain period of time.
 - Extension of tax payment and tax filing deadlines.
 - In order to flexibly regulate and ensure the availability of food, medical and other essential goods to the population, the raw materials used for the production of said supplies shall be exempt from VAT.
 - And other measures.
4. A loan and guarantee programme of new bank loans to support businesses active in industries affected by the coronavirus pandemic (AZM 0.5 billion):
 - Government guarantees, covering 60 per cent of the new bank loans to the total amount of AZM 500 million.
 - Interest rates on guaranteed loans should not exceed 15 per cent, and the repayment period should not exceed three years.
 - Subsidizing half of the interest rate (7.5 per cent of the 15 per cent) on Government guaranteed loans.
 - Allocation of additional funds to the Entrepreneurship Development Fund.
5. A loan and guarantee programme to support the current loan portfolio of businesses active in industries affected by the coronavirus pandemic (AZM 1.0 billion).

The other five programmes are designed to support the general population.

Despite the declared intention to implement the above support programmes, no public references were found to indicate specific subsequent actions required to receive this

support.

All information regarding decisions made by the Government, ministries and Government departments is published on their respective websites. *A single source of information to inform the general population or entrepreneurs has not been established.*

4.7 Trade Finance Facilitation

During the case study of Azerbaijan, no mention of measures to facilitate trade finance such as: corporate bond financing, consideration of large-scale procurement by the Government, providing access to trade loans or other measures was found.

4.8 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The Republic of Azerbaijan is implementing a set of measures aimed at mitigating the consequences of the pandemic.

Azerbaijan is ranked highly among its fellow countries of North and Central Asia for paperless trade in the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, creating significant potential for a near-optimal response to the current crisis.

The Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan can be commended for its efforts in managing the work of border checkpoints. Drivers are provided with free meals and special rest areas during COVID-19 testing. Testing itself is provided within the port for outbound drivers exiting the country. If similar measures were to be implemented in other NCA countries, it would help reduce the time and cost of international freight as well as reduce the risk of carriers spreading COVID-19.

One of the promising practices in logistics facilitation implemented in Azerbaijan is the use of railway bills of lading for rail-sea combined transport. Using a single document eliminates the time otherwise needed for recompiling documents. Continuing this practice after the current crisis would be advisable.

Unfortunately, this case study has not found any specific measures for trade facilitation in Azerbaijan. One major reason for this could be the lack of an active National Trade Facilitation body. The resumption of this body's operation could substantially improve the country's ability to overcome the impact of COVID-related disruptions on cross-border trade.

One of the foremost objectives should be the implementation of the “single window” principle.

Azerbaijan's may make the establishment of a designated specialized electronic platform (portal) to support international trade and SMEs its next objective. This would host contextualized information on support measures and regulatory documents. It could also offer online consultations and other features. This platform would need to be linked to the COVID-focused and other relevant Government websites.

5 Case Study of Georgia on Trade Facilitation during COVID-19

5.1 Introduction

The first case of the coronavirus in Georgia was reported on 26 February 2020. Since then, the country has effectively implementing measures to counter the pandemic, such that Georgia now reports the fewest absolute and per capita COVID-19 cases and deaths in the region.

On 21 March 2020, the President of Georgia (Decree No. 1 of 21 March 2020) introduced a state of emergency (Zourabichvili, 2020). Pursuant to this decree, the Government of Georgia adopted the Decree No. 181 of 23 March 2020,¹² which outlines the necessary actions to counter the spread of COVID-19, including:

- International air, land and sea freight are put on hold for the duration of the state of emergency.
- Educational facilities are to switch to distance learning.
- A ban is introduced on all mass gatherings of over ten people including outdoors. Exceptions include gatherings of people at medical or Government institutions, in public transport (permit is necessary) and for construction works.
- Temporary ban on the sale of all goods (selling via delivery is allowed) except foodstuffs and pharmaceuticals.
- Cafes, restaurants etc. may only provide deliveries.
- At a later stage, a ban was introduced for people aged 70 and over to leave their homes (except when seeking medical assistance or buying food products).
- Other measures which were added to the Government's Decree No. 181¹³ by over 40 statutory documents (a consolidated document is not available).

The Government also deployed the *Contact Tracing and Clusters* system (StopCoV, 2020). In April, Georgia launched a new mobile application developed jointly with the Austrian NGO NOVID20, which enables users to obtain information on whether a person has come into contact with people who were confirmed to have had COVID-19 ("exposed persons"). To track "exposed persons", a regulation was put in place similar to those in European countries, according to which all customers of cafes and restaurants have to

¹² Ord. 181: "On the Approval of Measures to be Implemented in connection with the Prevention of the Spread of the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Georgia". Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/en/document/view/4830610?publication=0>

¹³ Most regulatory documents are available only in Georgian language.

provide their contact details to restaurant management.

People found to have been in contact with those infected were transferred to special quarantine zones located in hotels. 84 hotels were dedicated for use as quarantine zones (a total of 6500 rooms). The total number of quarantined persons amounted to 19,000. The Government allocated GEL 32,5 million (≈ US\$ 10.4 million) to cover quarantine zone expenses.

The Decree No. 1 of 21 March 2020 of the President prescribes particularly stringent measures to be imposed for violations of the state of emergency:

- For the first violation: fine of GEL 3000 (≈US\$ 1000) for natural persons and GEL 15000 (≈US\$ 5000) for legal persons.
- For a repeated violation: 3-year penal confinement for natural persons, or for businesses a fine and revocation of the right to operate.

On 31 March 2020, Georgia introduced a curfew (Decree No. 204 of 30 March 2020 of the Government of Georgia¹⁴), which prescribed: a ban on foot and transport traffic from 21:00 to 06:00, gradually putting on hold the activities of various businesses (before, only educational and public catering facilities were put on hold). The curfew lasted until 23 May 2020.

To inform the population about requirements and recommended actions during the state of emergency, the website www.stopcov.ge (also link www.stopcov.gov.ge) was set up. The website hosts Government hotline numbers and other useful information. A mobile application with similar functions was also deployed.

It is important to note that the website offers much more information than similar sites in other countries. For instance, the website hosts:

- Information on which services can be accessed remotely with related links, instructions and email addresses of relevant agencies.
- A Government report on COVID-19.
- An anti-crisis plan for the economy in video presentation format.
- Instructions on seeking assistance.

Information on COVID-19 in Georgia is transparent and made available to the public.

Like other countries, Georgia needs new measures aimed at supporting the economy and

¹⁴Decree 204: "On Approval of Measures to be Taken to Prevent the Spread of the New Coronavirus in Georgia Amending the Resolution №181 of the Government of Georgia of 23 March 2020". Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4840082?publication=0>

reducing the hurdles to international trade created by pandemic-related restrictions, especially in trade facilitation and the development of paperless trade.

5.2 Institutional Arrangements and Inter-Agency Cooperation

The message sent by Georgia to the WTO mentions the establishment of an Interagency Coordination Council on 23 January 2020, but no relevant governing document was found on the Legislative Herald of Georgia (<https://matsne.gov.ge/>). The Government Decree No. 110 of 13 February 2020 “On the approval of the status and composition of the Interagency Coordination Council of Georgia”, however, this institution has no relation to COVID-19 policy.¹⁵ Moreover, there is no dedicated website for this new Government body.

The Decree of the Government of Georgia No. 204 of 30 March 2020¹⁶ (Legislative Herald of Georgia, 2020e) established the creation of an operational headquarters led by the prime minister who was endowed with the responsibility of coordinating the state of emergency measures and oversight of the implementation of the Interagency Council’s instructions. The operational headquarters exercised its authority through local operational headquarters in the country’s different regions. Administrative and legal support to the operational headquarters was provided by the staff of the National Security Council.

No regulatory documents on the composition of the operational headquarters or its operational policies were found. No information related to its activity was found anywhere on the internet. Note that reviewing Georgia’s regulatory documents is complicated by most of them only being available in the Georgian language.

There are some reports posted on Government websites containing information on Georgia’s counter-pandemic measures (UNECE, 2020), but these reports bear no reference to the governing documents adopting said measures.

5.3 Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance

In 2014, Georgia and the EU signed an Association Agreement which, among other fields for cooperation, provides for developing trade relations. Georgia is also a member of the

¹⁵ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4798598?publication=0>

¹⁶ Decree no. 204: “On Approval of Measures to be Taken to Prevent the Spread of the New Coronavirus in Georgia Amending the Resolution №181 of the Government of Georgia of March 23, 2020”. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4840082?publication=0>

WTO.

Georgia has notified the WTO secretariat of its temporary export ban on several goods, such as diagnostic or laboratory reagents, medical masks, gloves, disinfectants etc. This ban lasted from 3 April to 10 May 2020 (WTO, 2020c).

The message sent by Georgia to the World Customs Organization (WCO) lists the following Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance measures:

- For imports only two documents- CMR (transport document) and commercial invoice are mandatory. For transiting cargo only CMR shall be submitted to customs. In both cases either originals or copies are acceptable.
- Due to Covid-19 the copy of origin certificate- EURO 1 can be submitted certified by the declarant with signature and stamp, in accordance with the requirements both electronically or in material form.
- Customs check points and clearance zones operate 24/7.
- A special information portal has been introduced with detailed information about customs operations and procedures (<https://www.rs.ge/6461#>).
- The number of physical inspections (both clearance and border inspections) has been reduced for imports/export and transit of goods.
- The Customs Department has implemented a number of changes in the customs risk management system, including “Risk Profiles Selectivity Percentage” – a temporary measure to support supply chains of essential goods and address the requirements of the Government measures during state of emergency.

5.4 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the Decree of the Government of Georgia No. 164 of 28 January 2020¹⁷ introduced special requirements for cargo transportation (to date, 38 more Government decrees were issued amending decree No. 164).

According to the newly introduced rules, customs formalities for international road, railway, air and marine cargo movement are conducted with no restrictions. Additionally, hygiene checks are applied to drivers/personnel involved in transporting the cargo across

¹⁷ Decree no. 164: “On the Approval of Measures to Prevent the Possible Spread of the Novel Coronavirus in Georgia and the Emergency Response Plan for Cases of Novel Coronavirus Disease”. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://matsne.gov.ge/ka/document/view/4821121?publication=38>

borders.

Cargo movement is available via all land/air/marine border crossing points 24/7.

In accordance with the International Health Regulations the driver shall be screened at the border and entry for those displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or fever are denied. In this case the driver/vehicle may be replaced or other measures taken.

Freight vehicles registered in a foreign country shall move through the territory of Georgia with the following conditions (UNECE, 2020):

- After completing the procedures at the customs checkpoint, they shall proceed immediately (non-stop) to the point of destination. Stops are allowed only at specially designated areas ("STOP POINT"), at the points for purchasing the compulsory civil liability insurance policy (<https://www.tpl.ge/en/salespoints>) and in the parking lots located near the customs checkpoint.
- At a STOP POINT, the driver has the right to stop off, refuel, purchase a road usage card, clean up and purchase items/food for personal use.
- In case of problems (vehicle malfunction, deterioration of health, etc.), the driver should contact the relevant services and stay in the car cabin until they arrive. For these purposes, it is necessary to dial 112 – the Emergency and Operative Response Centre of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia.

The truck must leave the territory of Georgia:

- In case of transit (except for moving from or to the customs checkpoint Kazbegi and exit by ferry) - within 24 hours after entering the country.
- In case of moving (except exit by ferry) from or to the customs checkpoint Kazbegi within 48 hours after entering the country.
- In case of exit by ferry in transit movement – within seven calendar days after entering the country.
- In other cases, within 48 hours after entering the country. However, in case that a cargo vehicle after importing and unloading goods in Georgia, is loaded with goods intended for export from Georgia, or if the entry and/or exit of trucks from Georgia is carried out using ferry transport – the vehicle will have seven calendar days after entering the country to exit.
- It is strongly recommended to only make non-cash payments (online payment, plastic cards, etc.) and to use personal protective equipment (medical masks, gloves etc.).

5.5 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

According to the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, Georgia is ranked third among the eight NCA countries in digital and sustainable trade facilitation. Georgia has fully implemented 27 and partially implemented 9 of the 53 measures suggested in the Survey (United Nations TFS, 2019). Georgia's achievements in developing paperless trade are likely to significantly ease the economic adaptation to COVID-related restrictions.

Despite no Digital Trade Facilitation Measures having been found, the country has successfully implemented a *Contact Tracing and Clusters* mobile app and a special information portal <https://www.rs.ge/6461#> providing detailed information about customs operations and procedures.

Georgia's e-government site is www.my.gov.ge. It appears advanced but navigating its services is complicated by information only being available in the Georgian language.

Georgia provides several customs services digitally, including *Electronic Customs Declaration* (redirects to <http://asycuda.rs.ge>) and *Advance Notification of Customs*. Obtaining a certificate of origin is possible on the Revenue Service website (www.rs.ge). However, it is worth mentioning that no significant changes have been made to this site in the past few years.

5.6 Measures for Business Facilitation and supporting SMEs

On 24 April 2020, the Prime Minister of Georgia presented the COVID-19 Anti-crisis Economic Plan (AEP), covering already implemented activities, as well as new measures going forward. Implementing the AEP will require GEL 3.4 billion.

As stated above, information on the AEP is available at www.stopcov.ge, where it is presented in video format. The media has also reported on the AEP, but no regulatory document has yet been approved for the plan. According the International Monetary Fund, as well as multiple international consulting agencies (Gakharia, 2020; Tacartkiladze and Khurodze, 2020), the plan addresses social support actions for both citizens and business, including:

Assistance plan for enterprises:

1. Automatic return of VAT, double return of VAT surplus without any additional procedures.

2. Commercial banks will receive long-term resources of GEL 600 million.
3. Additional GEL 500 million will be allocated to business for:
 - Credit portfolio of 2 billion issued with guarantee;
 - A 90 per cent guarantee for banks on new loans issued during the pandemic, and a 30 per cent guarantee on loan restructuring.
4. Co-funding conditions of the programme – Enterprise Georgia:
 - Co-funding period on loan/leasing will increase from 24 months to 36 months;
 - Amendment of the interest co-funding mechanisms;
 - Enlarged list of activities;
 - Lowered minimum range of loan/leasing;
 - Increase of working capital funding.
5. Tourism businesses will be exempt from profits tax – GEL 45 million (reflected in tax revenues).

Assistance to agriculture:

1. Grants of up to GEL 30,000.
2. Agricultural loans for annual crops.
3. Assisting amelioration activities – exemption from amelioration fee, relief from past years' debts.
4. Systemic registration of 1.2 million hectares during 3 consequent years.

The Government of Georgia is continually designing additional crisis measures for the various industries of the economy.

5.7 Trade Finance Facilitation

No specific measures to support trade finance were found during the case study of Georgia.

5.8 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Georgia is carrying out a set of holistic measures aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic. The Government's measures on preventing the spread of the infection have been timely, systemic and stringent, allowing the country to avoid major COVID-19 outbreaks. Georgia has also been successful in outlining anti-crisis measures and securing adequate funding for their implementation.

The Government of Georgia continues designing additional crisis measures for various sectors of the economy. It is apparent that Georgia will shortly need to further develop measures to facilitate trade and digitization.

6 Case Study of Kazakhstan on Trade Facilitation during COVID-19

6.1 Introduction

According to data from early July 2020, Kazakhstan is ranked second among NCA countries in total COVID-19 infections. A spike in late June was caused by a large number of new and asymptomatic cases being included in the statistics.

The Decree of the President of Kazakhstan No. 285 of 15 March 2020 on the “Introduction of a state of emergency in the Republic of Kazakhstan” was passed, introducing a state of emergency throughout the country from 16 March 2020. It initially lasted until 15 April but was extended twice until 11 May. During the state of emergency, a State Commission for Ensuring the State of Emergency under the president of Kazakhstan was established and vested with authority in accordance with the Law “On the state of emergency”.¹⁸

In accordance with the Decree of the President of Kazakhstan on the “Introduction of the state of emergency in the Republic of Kazakhstan”, the following temporary *measures to protect public health* and temporary restrictions were introduced¹⁹:

- The functioning of shopping and entertainment complexes, cinemas, theatres and other facilities involving mass gatherings has been temporarily put on hold.
- A prohibition on holding public events.
- A quarantine has been introduced, large-scale sanitary and epidemiological response measures were carried out involving agencies from the Ministry of Defence and Internal Affairs.
- Restrictions on entry and exit of the territory of Kazakhstan for all types of transport (except diplomatic staff and some other categories) were established.

The restrictions are currently being regulated by the Decree of the Chief State Sanitary Doctor of Kazakhstan No. 37-ПГБp of 22 May 2020 “On reinforcement of preventive measures against the coronavirus infection among the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (with amendments as of 15 June 2020)²⁰.

On 11 May 2020, the restrictions were partially lifted with some businesses being allowed

¹⁸ Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 387-II of 8 February, 2003 with amendments as of 25 May 2020

¹⁹ Joint order No. 53-НҚ of 17 March 2020 of the Minister of Trade and Integration of the Republic of Kazakhstan and No. 169 of 18 March 2020 of the Minister of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan (amended 22 March 2020)

²⁰ Accessed July 2020. Available at: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=36229297

to resume their activities. However, starting 6 July 2020, new restrictions were introduced due to the growth in COVID-19 cases.

To inform the population about requirements and recommended actions during the state of emergency, the website www.coronavirus2020.kz was set up. The website also contains phone numbers of the Ministry of Healthcare's hotlines and other useful information. *Information on COVID-19 in Kazakhstan is transparent and made available to the public.*

The introduction of restrictions on the free movement of people, a special regime of operation for checkpoints and restrictions on certain activities has caused new impediments, including those for international trade.

Kazakhstan is a member of the EAEU²¹, which establishes a customs union, as well as coordinated or single economic policies between member states. This also means that special adjustments to customs clearance procedures must be coordinated between these states.

The EAEU adopted a series of measures meant to deliver a prompt response to COVID-19, which are currently being implemented in Kazakhstan and other EAEU countries.

Kazakhstan has notified the WTO secretariat of six bans and quotas temporarily introduced due to the COVID pandemic, two of which already concluded in May 2020 (WTO, 2020c).

These trying times demand Kazakhstan take measures to smooth the hurdles that have arisen in international trade, including via measures on trade facilitation and further development of paperless trade.

According to the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, Kazakhstan is falling slightly behind Azerbaijan for certain indicators and is ranked fourth among NCA countries in *digital and sustainable trade facilitation*. Kazakhstan has fully implemented 17 and partially implemented another 17 of the 53 measures indicated in the survey (United Nations TFS, 2019).

6.2 Institutional Arrangements and Inter-Agency Cooperation

27 January, 2020, the Interdepartmental Commission on Preventing the Emergence and Spread of the Coronavirus chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister was established under

²¹ Except Belarus, all EAEU countries are WTO members

the Government of Kazakhstan. The commission is composed of all relevant Government bodies; and the regions and city Akimats²² of Almaty, Nur-Sultan and Shymkent²³. Operational headquarters have also been established in regional administrative centres.

On 23 March, 2020, Kazakhstan rolled out a massive KZT 4.4 trillion (US\$ 10 billion or 6 per cent of the country's GDP) anti-crisis package, which included measures on price regulation for essential goods and commodities, and targeted aid (Akorda, 2020). The package included lump-sum payments to the unemployed, a decreased VAT for foodstuffs and other fiscal measures designed to strengthen the healthcare sector and support business and employment (IMF, 2020).

Official documents relating to the state of emergency, decrees and decisions of Government departments can be found on the dedicated webpage of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan "Atameken" (Atameken, 2020a). Websites of some ministries and departments also have specially designed state of emergency-related webpages.

Core documents and sources of information on Kazakhstan's COVID-response measures can be found on the dedicated regulatory document website <https://online.zakon.kz>. A section has been created on this portal for hosting regulatory documents, which currently total 700 (See: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=34019096). Many of these documents have been reissued. These documents are systemized and there is a subsection called "Import/export of goods. International trade. Measures taken at EAEU level"²⁴.

Starting 11 May, the decision was made to reactivate some remote work. Every business seeking to resume its activities after the state of emergency has been lifted must acquire a permit. Depending on the involved business activities, some permits may be acquired automatically. Information regarding this topic can be found on the websites of each administrative unit, i.e. for Almaty it is <https://infoalmaty.kz/>. A number of business activity categories, however, require a special permit from the epidemiological service, which, per request of the business, conducts field inspections of businesses to check for compliance with sanitary requirements for the given activity.

As free movement was restricted during the state of emergency, a large number of

²² Akimat – regional executive body in Kazakhstan

²³ Order of the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan No. 10-p of 27 January, 2020

²⁴ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://online.zakon.kz/Lawyer/?m=s#cl=503661&sort=2>

institutions, including banks and Citizen Service Centres (CSC), switched to working remotely.

Despite many Government and banking services in Kazakhstan having previously been automated, during the state of emergency, many new online services were put in place for the population and businesses within a short timespan, which helped mitigate the impact of new restrictions.

6.3 Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance

Kazakhstan is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)²⁵, which includes a customs union, as well as coordinated or single economic policies between member states. This also means that special adjustments to customs clearance procedures must be coordinated between member states. The Eurasian Economic Commission adopted a series of measures meant to deliver a prompt response to COVID-19 (refer to Annex III), which are currently being implemented in Kazakhstan and other EAEU countries.

By the Order No. 111 of 2 April 2020 of the Minister of Agriculture of Kazakhstan, the export of certain foodstuffs (buckwheat, buckwheat groats, sugar, potatoes, sunflower seeds, and sunflower seed oil) is prohibited. This order also imposes quotas on the export of certain other goods categories. However, the order was cancelled on 26 May 2020²⁶.

Kazakhstan notified the WTO Secretariat (WTO, 2020c) of this temporary ban and restrictions on export.

The VAT for products included in the list of socially important foodstuffs²⁷ has been reduced from 12 per cent to 8 per cent for the period from 27 March to 1 October 2020.

To avoid unreasonable overpricing of socially important goods, the President of Kazakhstan issued the Order No. 287 of 16 March 2020 “On further measures of stabilizing the economy” to vest the Kazakh Government with the following rights:

- 1) To impose limitations on tariffs and prices on foodstuffs and other goods necessary for uninterrupted daily activities of the population and the functioning of the economy of Kazakhstan.
- 2) To set import and export regulations as necessary for the uninterrupted daily

²⁵ Except Belarus, all EAEU countries are WTO members.

²⁶ Order No.187 of 26 May 2020 of the Minister of Agriculture of the Republic of Kazakhstan

²⁷ List of goods defined by Decree No.145 of 1 March 2020 of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

activities of the population and the functioning of the economy of Kazakhstan.

For the purposes of the Order of the President, the Government of Kazakhstan adopted the following decrees:

- Decree No. 133 of 21 March 2020 of the Government of Kazakhstan: “On the procedure for establishment of ceiling prices for food and other products necessary for uninterrupted daily activities of the population and the functioning of the economy of Kazakhstan”²⁸.
- Decree No. 146 of 27 March 2020 of the of the Government of Kazakhstan: “On the approval of the regulations for import and export of goods necessary for uninterrupted daily activities of the population and the functioning of the economy of Kazakhstan” according to which customs duties for import and export of some types of goods may be changed²⁹.

Following the decisions made by the State Revenue Committee, the following measures were implemented (Kazakhstan, State Revenue Committee, 2020):

- The impact of the red channel procedure for 19 food items (sugar, meat, onions, milk, cabbage, carrots, flour, etc.) has been reduced.
- The main importers of socially essential goods are exempt from certain controls during customs clearance (physical examination of goods, customs inspection and control of the customs value of goods).
- The frequency of application of the “red and yellow channel” procedures at the border has been reduced.
- On-site customs (post-clearance) inspections scheduled but not started as of 16 March 2020 have been cancelled.
- Due to the introduction of an export ban on certain products (buckwheat, buckwheat groats, sugar, potatoes, sunflower seeds, sunflower oil), their export is blocked in the Customs IT system (“Astana-1”).
- The application of certain risk profiles that may affect the time of customs clearance for essential goods has been suspended.

Moreover, receiving the service: “Registration of fulfilment of obligations to pay customs

²⁸ Accessed July 2020. Available at: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=35694141#pos=3;-88

²⁹ Accessed July 2020. Available at: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=38056245

duties, taxes, special, antidumping and compensatory duties as well as ensuring the fulfilment of obligations by a legal entity, engaged in the fields of customs and/or authorized economic operator” on the platform www.egov.kz has been rapidly automated (E.gov, 2020). For transit by road, authorized economic operators and some other cases, the payment of customs duties and taxes is required.

6.4 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

In accordance with the Decree No. 155 of 30 March, 2020 of the Government of Kazakhstan³⁰, some automobile checkpoints along the Kazakhstani borders were temporarily closed. International freight traffic is only carried out through border checkpoints approved by this decree.

In order to contain the spread of COVID-19 and in accordance with the decision of the State Committee for the State of Emergency, automotive cargo trucks and their drivers may cross Kazakhstan’s state border unimpeded. However, they shall be subjected to sanitary and epidemiological controls.

The operation of the border checkpoints is brought into compliance with the requirements of the Decree of the Chief State Sanitary Doctor of Kazakhstan No. 37-ПГБр of 22 May, 2020 “On reinforcement of preventive measures against the coronavirus infection among the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan” (with amendments as of 15 June, 2020)³¹.

To facilitate the unhindered delivery of cargo despite measures aimed at reducing personal contact and switch among most organizations to remote operation, the Government rapidly automated its services (on the portal <https://elicense.kz>): “Permit for passage through the territory of a foreign state for Kazakhstani cargo carriers in accordance with international treaties ratified by the Republic of Kazakhstan”. The receipt of almost all approval documents necessary for international road freight has been automated.

Apart from the those mentioned above, several industry-specific measures are also being implemented. For example, the national railway company (“Kazakhstan Temir Zholy”, JSC) has cancelled various fees applied to consignors and freight forwarders when transporting cargo (Atameken, 2020b), including:

³⁰ Decree no. 155: “On the temporary closure of automobile checkpoints on certain sections of the State Border of the Republic of Kazakhstan”. Accessed July 2020. Available at: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=35668133#pos=5;-106

³¹ Accessed July 2020. Available at: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=36229297#pos=4;-88

- Penalty for non-fulfilment of applications for planned cargo shipping.
- Ten-fold storage fee for cargo with over 48 hours of idle time from the time of notification of the consignee of the cargo's arrival.
- Fee for using inventory fleet (common rolling stock) wagons and containers.
- Fee for switch engine mileage.

Consignors and freight forwarders shall be exempt from penalties, fees and charges to a total amount of over KZT 500 million.

Moreover, starting 1 April, 2020, Kaztemirtrans, JSC (affiliated company of Kazakhstan Temir Zholy, JSC), which obtained ownership of the privatized state wagon fleet, temporarily exempted its clients from charges for downtime when loading and unloading wagons on approach lines.

It is important to note that Kazakhstan has a fairly well-automated process for rail transport paperwork. Applications for transportation planning are submitted online. Also, starting from 2019, an electronic SMGS (Agreement on International Goods Transport by Rail, 1 November 1951), with electronic signature of documents, has been introduced. Thus, the shipper or freight forwarder can arrange railway transportation remotely, which not only simplifies the process, but also reduces the risk of spreading COVID-19.

6.5 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

According to information obtained during the Seminar on Trade Facilitation in Times of COVID-19, (which was held via videoconference under the authority of the UNECE on 6-7 July 2020,) Kazakhstan did established a National Trade Facilitation Committee during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is an interagency committee, consisting of representatives of involved Government agencies and the private sector. However, this information was not found on official sources. The website of the UNCTAD has not been updated on the matter either (United Nations CTAD, 2013). The establishment of such a Government body would significantly foster further steps in digital trade facilitation.

Still, Kazakhstan has managed to achieve some positive results in the domain of digital trade facilitation during the pandemic. Last year, the “single window” portal (<http://eokno.gov.kz>) was deployed. It is currently being actively developed in response to the pandemic. Currently, the platform offers the automated receipt of approximately 60 licenses and approval documents. Some other services have been automated as well – they include, for instance, the inclusion into customs registries of authorized economic

operators, bonded warehouse owners and registries for other subjects of customs activities (in accordance with the customs legislation) (a total of nine). The portal is linked to the “Astana-1” electronic customs declaration portals. A number of new customs and logistics services have been automated at www.egov.kz and www.elicense.kz (this was already mentioned in the case study on Kazakhstan).

In addition, like most countries to have introduced restrictions on public catering and trade businesses, Kazakhstan has experienced a surge of online commerce during the quarantine. Online purchases, payments as well as courier delivery of food and other products have gained popularity.

6.6 Measures for Business Facilitation and supporting SMEs

In accordance with the Order of the Minister of Labour and Social Protection of the population of Kazakhstan No. 110 of 26 March 2020 “On the approval of the rules of making social benefit payments to participants of the mandatory social insurance system and physical entities, receiving income via independent contractor agreements...” (with amendments as of 22 May 2020)³² certain categories of persons are eligible for a lump sum payment. Such categories include:

- Self-employed individuals and employees of small and medium enterprises on temporary unpaid leave.
- Employees of large enterprises on temporary unpaid leave operating in settlements where the quarantine regime was introduced.
- Persons engaged in private professional practice (notaries, private judicial enforcement agents and others).
- Employees of non-commercial legal entities on unpaid leave, except those of Government legal entities.

The social benefit lump sum payment is assigned once for the period of the state of emergency and is equal to one month’s minimum wage (KZT 42,500 ≈ US\$ 95 in 2020). If the state of emergency is prolonged, the payment is made once every month for its duration.

Applying for social benefit lump sum payments requires submitting the necessary documents, which is possible via:

³² Accessed July 2020. Available at: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=35672125

- Kazakhstan's e-government portal (<https://egov.kz>), which has a dedicated webpage for this purpose.
- Using a personal cellular connection device. In this case, information needed to process the decision is communicated via direct verbal dialogue with the applicant.
- Kazakhstan's Electronic labour exchange portal (www.enbek.kz).

The application for the social benefit payment is signed using a one-time password received via SMS. The social benefit payment is made to the applicant's bank account (bank card). If the applicant does not have a bank account, the funds are transferred to the applicant using their cellular network subscriber's personal number after verification of the user's identity.

In accordance with the order No. 28/2020 of 4 April 2020 of the Minister of Healthcare of Kazakhstan, salary increments are assigned to employees of healthcare institutions involved in epidemic countermeasures in the framework of containing the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. The salary increment rates are defined by said order relative to the employee's risk of contracting the disease.

By the Decree of the Prime Minister of Kazakhstan No. 55-p of 27 March 2020, Kazakhstan's "Employment Roadmap for 2020-2021" was approved. Its main objective is to create jobs and limit unemployment.

The programme is comprised of three main lines of action:

First line: *"Employment in the infrastructural development and housing and utilities sectors"*. Initiates various projects for reconstruction of social and cultural facilities, housing and utilities, municipal environment improvement, construction of hospitals and medical assistance and obstetric clinics in rural areas etc. Applying to participate in the programme is possible via the egov.kz e-government portal.

Second line: *"Incentivizing business initiative"*. This line of action involves preferential loans to private entrepreneurs to be used for projects that would improve the living environment of urban and rural settlements in the regions. Priority in distributing loans is given to private businesses involved in animal husbandry, crop production, agriculture or services that positively impact the economic and social development of a given settlement.

Third line: *"Facilitating employment through training and migration based on employer*

needs". Provides training and employment facilitation as well as improving workforce mobility.

The "Employment Roadmap for 2020-2021" includes over 6500 infrastructure projects and is meant to provide 255,000 people with jobs. According to plan, the implementation of these projects should lay the foundation for the creation of 100,000 new jobs in the future.

The "Enbek" State Programme for the Development of Productive Employment and Mass Entrepreneurship for 2017-2021 is continued, again with the aim of reducing unemployment.

In accordance with the Order No. 287 of 16 March 2020 of the President of Kazakhstan "On further measures of stabilizing the economy"³³ the Government of Kazakhstan has adopted a number of decrees on the implementation of measures aimed at stabilizing the economy.

Decree No. 141 of 27 March 2020 "On further measures of stabilizing the economy" on matters of tax policy states that:

- Until 1 October 2020, a VAT rate of 8 per cent is set for sale or import of goods included in the list of socially important foodstuffs.
- Until 31 December 2020 manufacturers of excisable goods in Kazakhstan are exempt from paying excise duties for gasoline (except aviation gasoline) and diesel fuel sold for export.
- For the duration of the year 2020, A coefficient of 0 is applied to property tax rates in the tourism, public catering and hospitalities sectors, held by legal entities and self-employed individuals.
- A deferral of tax, social and other mandatory taxes is introduced until 1 June 2020 for micro, small and medium enterprises.

According to Decree No.126 of 21 March 2020 of the Government of Kazakhstan "On measures of implementing the Order No. 287 of 16 March 2020 of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On further measures of stabilizing the economy" a coefficient of "0" is applied to the following tax rates until 31 December 2020 (Mamin, 2020):

1. Tax on property of legal entities and self-employed individuals for large trade facilities, shopping and entertainment facilities, cinemas, theatres, exhibitions and

³³ Accessed July 2020. Available at: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=33339772

health and fitness facilities.

2. Land tax on active agricultural land.
3. Individual income tax for self-employed individuals, employing the standard taxation procedure.

For taxpayers mentioned in subparagraphs 1) and 2) penalty accrual for overdue tax liabilities is temporarily halted until 15 August 2020. The deadline for tax report submission is extended to the third quarter of 2020.

According to Decree No. 224 of 20 April 2020 of the Government of Kazakhstan “On further measures of stabilizing the economy”³⁴ in the period from 1 April to 1 October, 2020, for persons engaged in private professional practice as well as micro, small and medium enterprises (included in the list) an adjusting coefficient of “0” is applied to the following tax and social payments: individual income tax, social tax, mandatory pension contributions, social contributions, contributions and deductions for mandatory social medical insurance (Online Zakon, 2020i).

Information on supporting measures for taxpayers during the COVID-19 state of emergency is compiled and presented on the website of the State Revenue Committee of the Ministry of Finance of Kazakhstan (<http://kgd.gov.kz/ru/covid-19>).

6.7 Trade Finance Facilitation

During this case study of Kazakhstan, no mention of measures to facilitate trade finance such as: corporate bond financing, consideration of large-scale procurement by the Government, providing access to trade loans or other measures was found.

6.8 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Kazakhstan's has responded to COVID-19 with a number of anti-crisis measures aimed at social support for the population and providing economic stability. Kazakhstan is implementing a large number of business support programmes, including those for small and medium enterprises.

The most successful pandemic response measures in Kazakhstan include the rapid implementation of online access to Government and banking services. In terms of logistics, the most significant measure is the automation of receipt of authorization

³⁴ Accessed July 2020. Available at: https://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=36689586#pos=1;-8

documents necessary to accommodate international road cargo transportation, as well as the confirmation of payment of customs duties and taxes required for road transit and some other types of activities that involve customs clearance. Further development of the “Single window” portal should also bring favourable results.

The establishment of a Trade Facilitation Committee in Kazakhstan comprised of representatives of various agencies and the private sector should also help the country achieve further progress in Trade facilitation and Paperless trade.

7 Case Study of Kyrgyzstan on Trade Facilitation during COVID-19

7.1 Introduction

By the Decree of the President of Kyrgyzstan (No. 55 of 24 March 2020), starting 25 March 2020³⁵, a state of emergency was introduced in the city of Bishkek in response to COVID-19. The state of emergency was extended from 30 April until 10 May of this year. Apart from Bishkek, a state of emergency was also introduced in other cities and regions of the country (the cities of Osh and Jalal-Abad and some districts of the Osh and Jalal-Abad regions). Pursuant to the decree, emergency measures, temporary restrictions to the rights and freedoms of the population and additional responsibilities were introduced in cities and districts under the state of emergency. Such measures included:

- A curfew.
- A temporary ban for certain citizens to leave their homes or places where they are undergoing medical observation or treatment.
- A ban on entertainment, sports and other mass events like strikes, meetings, rallies, street processions, demonstrations and protests.
- A ban on voluntary resignation of workers and employees except for dismissals for valid reasons.
- A quarantine and other sanitary and anti-epidemic measures.
- Monitoring of mass media if such media may be used to exacerbate the situation within areas where a state of emergency has been introduced.
- Restrictions on the movement of vehicles, including foreign-owned vehicles; carrying out vehicle inspections except on diplomatic service vehicles; as well as other measures.

In each city or district where a state of emergency was introduced, a commandant and a commandant's office are appointed, which are comprised mainly of the heads of military units, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the mayor's office. A special webpage (<http://mvd.gov.kg/comend/>) to host all the orders and instructions of the commandant's offices was created on the website of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Moreover, all relevant governing documents, including those related to the

³⁵ Decree no. 55: "On the introduction of a state of emergency on the territory of the city of Bishkek of the Kyrgyz Republic". Accessed July 2020. Available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/430160>

implementation of pandemic response measures are uploaded to the website of the “Central Legal Data Bank of the Kyrgyz Republic” (<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/>), created under the ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic.

On 11 May, Kyrgyzstan adopted temporary sanitary and epidemiological rules and regulations which prescribe the main sanitary requirements to businesses operating in the areas of services and manufacturing until the COVID-19 related epidemiological situation improves³⁶.

To maintain public awareness of the requirements and recommended actions during the coronavirus pandemic, a special website www.covid.kg was created. It contains telephone hotline numbers, contacts of medical institutions and other useful information.

Kyrgyzstan’s IT community jointly with the State Committee of Information Technology established an emergency headquarters to support the operation of the Republican anti-coronavirus headquarters. A telegram chat bot was created to inform the public of coronavirus-related issues (See: https://t.me/COVID19_KyrgyzstanBot). Also, the website www.hidoctor.kg was set up to offer online services like self-diagnosing, online consultations, scheduling doctor’s appointments and others.

A dedicated fund to support counter-coronavirus actions has been created. Making donations and submitting a request for food assistance can be done on the specially created site <https://help.covid.kg>. There is also a link to this site from the website of the Ministry of Labour and social protection of Kyrgyzstan (<https://mlsp.gov.kg/>).

Kyrgyzstan has an e-government portal which offers online services for the general population (only one service for businesses was found). No new pandemic-related services were added to the site.

7.2 Institutional Arrangements and Inter-Agency Cooperation

To coordinate Government agencies’ efforts in countering and preventing the spread of the coronavirus infection, by the Decree of the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan No. 136 of 5 March 2020³⁷, a republican headquarters headed by the first Deputy Prime Minister was established. The headquarters comprises heads of the Ministries of Health, Foreign

³⁶ See decree no. 244: “On additional measures to reduce the risks of the spread of coronavirus infection (COVID-19)”. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://www.gov.kg/en/npa/s/2450>

³⁷ Order no. 136: “COMPOSITION of the Republican headquarters for the implementation of economic measures aimed at minimizing the consequences of external shocks and stimulating economic development”. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/218075>

Affairs, Internal Affairs, Economy, Finance, Agriculture, the heads of law enforcement agencies, border and customs services and other Government bodies. However, no dedicated website containing information on the headquarters' activities was found.

7.3 Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance

Kyrgyzstan is a member of the EAEU³⁸, which includes a customs union, as well as coordinated or single economic policies between member states. This also means that special adjustments to customs clearance procedures must be coordinated between members. The Eurasian Economic Commission adopted a series of measures meant to deliver a prompt response to COVID-19 (refer to Annex III). These measures are being implemented in Kyrgyzstan and other EAEU countries.

Kyrgyzstan sent notifications to the WTO Secretariat (WTO, 2020c) of their implementation of a temporary (six months) ban in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on the export of:

- Medical supplies and medicinal drugs³⁹.
- Food products (e.g. wheat and meslin, wheat flour, cooking oil, rice, pasta, chicken eggs, sugar, iodized table salt, feed)⁴⁰.

Import of medical supplies and medical products included in the National list of essential medicines with no Government registration is temporarily permitted. The decision prescribing this permission was signed by the Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan⁴¹.

The Government of Kyrgyzstan has taken price regulation measures in relation to certain goods with social importance (essential food products and gasoline)⁴².

³⁸ Except Belarus, all EAEU countries are WTO members

³⁹As stated in resolution no. 57: "On the introduction of a temporary ban on the export of medicines and medical supplies from the Kyrgyz Republic", of February 2020. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/157481>

⁴⁰ See resolution no. 174: "On the introduction of a temporary ban on the export (export) of certain types of goods from the Kyrgyz Republic", of March 2020. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/157473>

⁴¹ See decree: "Temporarily, without state registration, the supply of vital medicines to the country is allowed". Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://www.gov.kg/ru/post/s/zhashoo-chn-maanil-dary-karazhattaryn-lkg-ubaktyluu-mamlekettik-kattoosuz-tashuuga-uruksat-berildi>

⁴² See resolution no. 155: "On the introduction of temporary state regulation of prices for certain types of socially significant goods" of March 2020. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/157469>

7.4 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

The message sent by Kyrgyzstan to the WCO states that due to the COVID-19 outbreak in China, all air, road and railway communication between Kyrgyzstan and China would be put on hold as of 23 January, 2020 (Kyrgyzstan, State Customs Service, 2020).

From 25 March 2020, road cargo transport across the Chinese-Kyrgyz national border was resumed. With the aim of preventing the spread of COVID-19 across the Chinese-Kyrgyz border, a special algorithm was approved, according to which Kyrgyz drivers pick up trailers arriving from China in a specially designated “neutral zone” located between the Kyrgyz and Chinese checkpoints. Before the vehicle leaves the checkpoint to set out towards the neutral zone, the sanitary and epidemiological service inspects the drivers’ general state of health (the driver’s temperature is measured). While in the neutral zone, drivers are not allowed to leave the truck cabin until hitching of the trailer has been completed and they have returned to the checkpoint. Drivers should also be provided with personal safety equipment (gloves, masks, disinfectants).

According to the media, a disinfection tunnel was installed by efforts of the local emergency service on the Bishkek – Naryn – Torugart road (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2020a).

Inspection measures for freight carriers entering Kyrgyzstan during the pandemic were intensified. Currently, all truck drivers crossing the border undergo “express testing” for COVID-19. In the case of a positive test result, the driver is placed under observation until the results of the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test results are available.

According to a message from the WCO and several other web sources, the State Customs service and other Government agencies have jointly approved special action protocols for the transferring of cargo across the border at checkpoints. However, statutory documents approving these protocols were not found during the case study.

According to an ESCAP paper, in Kyrgyzstan “a decision was made to cancel special permits for trucks and ensure their unhindered movement (ESCAP, 2020). A green corridor was organized for all freight vehicles that transport medicines and essential goods.

In order to help in the current situation with the pandemic, Kyrgyz Temir Zholu does not charge fees or penalties for storing cargo on the container site and on the wagon located at Kyrgyz Temir Zholu railway stations. The company also reduced the cost of transportation by rail for coal exporters by 30 per cent at a distance of up to 30 km for the

Southern branch of the State Enterprise “NK Kyrgyz Temir Zholu”.

7.5 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

According to the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, Kyrgyzstan is ranked last among the eight NCA countries for achievements in *digital and sustainable trade facilitation*. Kyrgyzstan has implemented only 17 and partially implemented 23 of the 53 measures suggested by the survey (United Nations TFS, 2019).

On 24 March of 2020, the Decree of the Government of Kyrgyzstan No. 98-r⁴³ was adopted, according to which funds in the amount of KGS 370.9 million (US\$ 4.8 million) were allocated for the 2020 implementation of the “Digital Kyrgyzstan 2019-2023” digital transformation concept and its roadmap. The concept was initially adopted by the decision of the Security Council of Kyrgyzstan No. 2 of 14 December 2018. The allocated funds are planned to be used to automate a number of Government services, including those in the areas of medicine, education, agriculture, implementation of electronic payments and other fields of concern. Many of these services will be linked up to the Tunduk system of interagency cooperation (<https://tunduk.gov.kg/>).

The Tunduk system is an information system allowing authorities and legal entities to exchange data necessary for the operation of Government services. Presumably, this information system is meant to become the country’s e-government website in the future. Currently, however, this portal’s development is not yet finished: the information is not systemized, and the portal is not intuitive or user friendly. Nevertheless, the function of applying for COVID-related social benefit payments was rapidly automated on this website.

It is also worth noting the Resolution No. 2020-П-14\17-4-(ПС) of 27 March 2020 of the Board of the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan which discusses proposals for developing digital payment technology in Kyrgyzstan for 2020-2022 (e, 2020).

7.6 Measures for Business Facilitation and supporting SMEs

In accordance with the Resolution № 3659-VI⁴⁴ of 1 April 2020 of the Supreme Council

⁴³ Order no. 98-r: “Distribution of funds for 2020 directed to the implementation of activities within the framework of the state program ‘Digital Economy’”. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/218026?cl=ru-ru>

⁴⁴ Resolution no. 3659-VI: “On measures to reduce negative socio-economic consequences in connection

of Kyrgyzstan:

1) The Kyrgyzstani Government is tasked with:

- Developing and adopting an anti-crisis programme.
- Developing a programme of preserving the banking system during the crisis period.
- Using diplomatic channels to apply to international organizations for aid in countering the spread of COVID-19 in the country.
- Developing and adopting a set of structural reforms to drastically improve the business environment in the country, including such measures as: establishing a fair justice system; radically simplifying tax administration and reducing the number of taxes; reforming the tax and customs services under guidance from the commission with involvement of business representatives and the civil society; making the transition to fully digital inspections of business; implementing cashless payments and goods tracking to reduce the informal economy.

2) The National bank of Kyrgyzstan is tasked with:

- Introducing credit holidays; reducing interest rates; providing deferrals on disbursed loans; suspending accrual of interest and late payment fees for the period of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic.
- Developing laws and regulations for commercial banks and non-bank financial lending institutions which make it mandatory to accept repayment of loans at the pre-crisis dollar exchange rate (as of 10 March 2020).

By the decree of the Supreme Council of Kyrgyzstan No. 3669-VI of 15 April 2020⁴⁵, the list of orders to the Government was expanded with the following tasks:

- To ensure unimpeded movement of freight carriers transporting agricultural crops, fuel products and lubricants, mineral fertilizer and chemicals as well as spare parts for agricultural machinery and components of equipment needed for

with currency inflation and the spread of coronavirus infection COVID-19". Accessed July 2020. Available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/87394>

⁴⁵ Resolution no. 3669-VI: "On ensuring food security, uninterrupted conduct of spring field work in 2020, as well as on measures to ensure proper working conditions and personal protective equipment for persons involved in the work to prevent the spread of coronavirus infection and on the establishment of additional guarantees and compensation for workers of medical organizations, law enforcement officers bodies and other law enforcement agencies in an emergency and state of emergency". Accessed July 2020. Available at: <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/87409>

spring season crop seeding.

- To take measures necessary to provide agricultural manufacturers with seeds, fuel and lubricants, mineral fertilizer and chemicals.
- To inform agricultural goods manufacturers about the requirements for receiving funds allocated by Kyrgyzstan for the preparation and carrying out of the spring season crop seeding.

Although the decisions have been made, the corresponding Government Resolutions on the approval of the anti-crisis programmes or the sequential implementation of the declared actions were not found.

7.7 Trade Finance Facilitation

No specific measures to support trade finance were found during the case study of Kyrgyzstan.

7.8 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The Minister of Economy of Kyrgyzstan informed the public of “expected performance in social and economic development of Kyrgyzstan in 2020 and the forecast for 2021” in his address of 18 May 2020 (Kyrgyzstan, Ministry of Economics, 2020). He stated that the country had been subject to an economic shock and claimed that the real growth rate has decreased by 3.8 per cent on the previous year.

The Government of Kyrgyzstan has designed prompt measures to limit the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and social stability. Among these measures, trade digitization should be made a priority. Accomplishing this and other allotted tasks should significantly mitigate the social and economic consequences of COVID-19 in Kyrgyzstan.

8 Case Study of the Russian Federation on Trade Facilitation during COVID-19

8.1 Introduction

The Russian Federation is currently among the top five countries globally in COVID-19 infections. Moreover, as of early July, 2020, the Russian Federation is ranked second among NCA countries for the highest number of COVID-19 cases and deaths by population. Approximately one third of all cases are in Moscow.

On 25 March 2020, the President of the Russian Federation issued the Decree No. 206⁴⁶, declaring a “paid weekend” meant to ensure disease control and prevention from 30 March to 3 April. Only medical facilities and organizations supplying the population with food and other essential products continued operating uninterrupted.

The restrictions were later extended until 30 April 2020, (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 239 of 2 April 2020⁴⁷) and the heads of the territorial entities of the Russian Federation⁴⁸ were tasked with the development and implementation of a set of regional restrictions and other measures, contingent on the epidemiological situation in their regions. The instructions put on hold certain organizations, in addition to prescribing:

- Restrictive measures including high alert mode and states of emergency in select territories.
- A special regime for foot and vehicle traffic for vehicles not engaged in interregional freight.

These measures were subsequently extended until 11 May (Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 294 of 28 April 2020⁴⁹). Afterwards, the President of the Russian Federation issued one more Decree (No. 316 of 11 May 2020⁵⁰) which assigned the senior Government officials of the Russian territorial entities to determine restrictive

⁴⁶ Accessed July 2020. Available at: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_348485/

⁴⁷ Decree no. 239: “About measures for ensuring sanitary and epidemiological well-being population in the territory of the Russian Federation in connection with the spread of new coronavirus infection (COVID-19)”. Accessed July 2020. Available at: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_349217/#dst100007

⁴⁸ According to the Russian Constitution, the Russian Federation consists of republics, krais, oblasts, cities of federal importance, an autonomous oblast and autonomous okrugs (total of 85), all of which are equal subjects of the Russian Federation

⁴⁹ Accessed July 2020. Available at: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_351539/#dst100007

⁵⁰ Accessed July 2020. Available at: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_352133/#dst0

measures (and their duration) based on “Recommended practices of determining a set of measures and indicators used for gradual lifting of restrictive measures for the duration of the epidemic spread of COVID-19”, approved by the chief state sanitary official of the Russian Federation on 8 May 2020⁵¹.

Thus, restrictive measures preventing the spread of COVID-19 in the Russian Federation differ depending on the epidemiological situation in each territorial entity. As Moscow was the region with the highest number of cases, the most stringent restrictive measures were also introduced there. However, most of these measures have been lifted by 13 July of this year.

In response to the pandemic and in the context of the restrictions introduced, Russia has developed a set of measures the foremost of which is information outreach.

According to the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, the Russian Federation is the leader among NCA countries for achievements in *digital and sustainable trade facilitation*. The Russian Federation was the most successful among NCA countries in developing the universal portal for pandemic-related information outreach (<https://стопкоронавирус.рф>)⁵² website offers the following comprehensive information in a user-friendly way:

- Information about the disease: symptoms, statistics, recommendations, news, contact information for the call centre and hotlines for each region, etc.
- “Social support” and “Business support” sections – 13 additional service menus each, containing: general information, links to statutory documents, online application forms or links to official websites for users to apply; an online service is also available.
- Link to the Federal Tax Service’s business support mechanism (<https://service.nalog.ru/covid19/>), where users can use their taxpayer code to find out what support they are eligible for with their enterprises or as sole entrepreneurs;.
- The following interactive presentations are available:
 - “Plan of remediating the economic impact of the new coronavirus infection”
 - “Tax support measures for businesses in the new environment”
 - All SME support measures – in the navigator of the Ministry of Economic

⁵¹ Accessed July 2020. Available at: http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_352125/#dst100004

⁵² The names of many Government sites in the Russian Federation are in Cyrillic script. If this link does not work, use the Punycode equivalent: <https://xn--80aesfpebagmblc0a.xn--p1ai/>

Development of the Russian Federation (redirects to <http://covid.economy.gov.ru/nko>)

- Links to core governing documents related to COVID-19.

The Russian Federation has been successful in promptly implementing the “Single Window COVID-19” portal.

The website of the Government of the Russian Federation also features a newly created section with interactive menus and presentations on counter-coronavirus and economic support measures (See: http://government.ru/support_measures/).

8.2 Institutional Arrangements and Inter-Agency Cooperation

The Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 285 of 14 March 2020⁵³ created a Coordination Council under the Government of the Russian Federation tasked with countering the spread of COVID-19. It is led by the Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation. The council comprises⁵⁴ the heads of ministries and Government agencies including the head of the Federal Customs Service, the Minister of Transport, the Minister of Industry and Trade and the Minister of Economic Development. The Council’s working body is the Communications Centre for the Coordination of Federal Governing Institutions, governing bodies of territorial entities of the Russian Federation and other bodies and organizations as well as informing the public of measures taken.

The website of the Government of the Russian Federation has a special section on the activities of the Coordination Council (See: <http://government.ru/department/554/events/>) which hosts news, events, decisions and regulatory documents related to the Council’s activities.

8.3 Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance

The Russian Federation is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)⁵⁵, which includes a customs union, as well as coordinated or single economic policies between member states. This also means that special adjustments to customs clearance

⁵³ Accessed July 2020. Available at:

<https://www.consultant.ru/cons/cgi/online.cgi?req=doc&base=LAW&n=348918&fld=134&dst=100001.0&rnd=0.4655109698980324#07267486192746775>

⁵⁴ Order no. 623-r: “Composition of the Coordination Council under the Government of the Russian Federation to combat the spread of a new coronavirus infection in the territory of the Russian Federation”. Accessed July 2020. Available at: <http://government.ru/info/39163/>

⁵⁵ Except Belarus, all EAEU countries are WTO members

procedures must be coordinated between members. The Eurasian Economic Commission adopted a series of measures meant to deliver a prompt response to COVID-19 (refer to Annex III). These measures are being implemented in the Russian Federation and other EAEU countries.

The Russian Federation sent notifications to the WTO Secretariat (WTO, 2020c) of a temporary ban and restrictions on exports in connection with the pandemic (a ban on the export of personal protective equipment, quotas for the export of wheat, rye, barley and corn), the duration of which has already concluded. The Russian Federation has also informed the WTO of its temporary decision to refrain from controlling the weight of vehicles (for one month until 25 April 2020) transporting both food and non-food products.

A simplified procedure for Government registration was put in place for 36 types of medical supplies considered low risk products (in terms of potential uses). The list is approved by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 299 of 18 March 2020. Moreover, certain categories of goods may also be sold without undergoing statutory registration⁵⁶. Some goods may be imported free of VAT, like: medical supplies (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 419 of 2 April 2020⁵⁷) and technological equipment (Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 372 of 30 April 2009⁵⁸). The VAT rate has also been reduced for certain goods (vegetables, rye, rice, buckwheat, baby formula, etc.).

According to The Russian Federation's message to the WCO⁵⁹, over 90 per cent of scheduled customs field inspections were cancelled. These inspections are currently reserved solely for severe violations.

8.4 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

Pursuant to the Decree No. 635-p of 15 March 2020 of the Government of the Russian Federation, from 18 March a temporary restriction on the entry of foreign nationals to the territory of the Russian Federation through land and river checkpoints was implemented. Exceptions are made for international freight truck drivers; crew of aircraft, sea and river

⁵⁶Accessed July 2020. Available at:

http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_348052/92d969e26a4326c5d02fa79b8f9cf4994ee5633b/

⁵⁷Accessed July 2020. Available at:

http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_349335/92d969e26a4326c5d02fa79b8f9cf4994ee5633b/

⁵⁸Accessed July 2020. Available at:

http://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_87496/92d969e26a4326c5d02fa79b8f9cf4994ee5633b/

⁵⁹Accessed July 2020. Available at: [http://www.wcoomd.org/-](http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid_19/russia_en.pdf?la=en)

[/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid_19/russia_en.pdf?la=en](http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/covid_19/russia_en.pdf?la=en)

vessels, international trains and locomotives of international railway communication; and certain other categories of persons.

Priority was given to trucks entering the customs control zone. The number of trucks and any forming queues are being monitored daily on all border checkpoints throughout the country. The website of the Russian Federal Customs Service now has an online service allowing users to check any checkpoint for congestion using an interactive menu.

Entry to some regions of the Russian Federation (for instance, Chita and Transbaikal Krai) is only granted to holders of a digital pass which can be obtained via the Government services web portal (<https://www.gosuslugi.ru/43708>). Transport operators planning on crossing the border with China in Primorsky Krai should apply for a place in the queue no later than two days before arrival at the border checkpoint on the official site: <http://listcovid.primorsky.ru/login>. The application should be filled out, printed and sent to the checkpoint's email address.

In accordance with the Decree of the Governor of Moscow Oblast No. 204-ПГ of 21 April 2020, freight traffic within the Moscow Oblast from 10 PM to 6 AM does not require a digital pass. Entry to Moscow city does not require a digital pass either. Entry to Moscow city during daytime hours is only allowed to those with a special permit.

On 25 May, the road checkpoint of Kani-Kurgan was opened in Amur Oblast (so far only for freight transport) with a planned throughput capacity of 190 trucks per day. The checkpoint is of modular construction. Construction of a permanent checkpoint is planned to be finished in 2022 with the new checkpoint planned to operate 24/7 and process passenger transport as well as freight.

JSC Russian Railways has temporarily lifted some charges and fees.

8.5 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

The Russian Federation has been paying due attention to information outreach during the pandemic. The Single Window COVID-19 portal was rapidly established and contains information on preventing the spread of COVID-19, as well as information on all social and economic support measures taken by the Government. Many online services rendering support to the public have also been created.

Like other countries that have introduced restrictions to public catering and trade enterprises, during the lockdown, the Russian Federation has seen a sharp surge of online commerce. Online purchases, payments as well as courier delivery of food and

other products have gained popularity.

The Russian Federation has a web portal for Government services (www.gosuslugi.ru), which offers automated access to a large number of Government services for the general public and businesses.

According to a message from the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation sent 15 June 2020⁶⁰, formerly sanctioned goods may now be transported by road and rail. This was made possible thanks to the launch of a Government system to track freight transport using GLONASS-based electronic navigation seals and authorizing the company “Centre for Development of Digital Platforms” as operator to carry out sealing. The system has been created as part of the implementation of the Russian President’s Decree No. 290 of 24 June 2019. Requirements for operators and the procedure for electronic sealing are outlined by the order No.13 of 14 January, 2020 of the Russian Ministry of Transport. The sealing and unsealing are carried out on 20 road and 10 rail checkpoints⁶¹.

The permission to transit sanctioned goods is meant to incentivize growth of container freight through the Russian Federation. The same mechanism is planned for implementation in Kazakhstan (the necessary amendments have already been made to the national legislation).

8.6 Measures for Business Facilitation and supporting SMEs

RUB 3 trillion (≈ US\$ 41.7 billion) has been allocated by the Government of the Russian Federation to aid businesses and the public. The following measures to support business were taken in response to the pandemic:

- *Moratorium on bankruptcy.* Applies to organizations in the most impacted industries (designated as all modes of transportation, tourism, hospitality, entertainment and recreation, etc. – a total of 11), as well as organizations included in the list of strategically important enterprises (1335 enterprises; the list is available at <https://data.economy.gov.ru>). Creditors may temporarily not apply for debtors’ bankruptcy. The applicability of this measure may be checked online at <https://service.nalog.ru/covid/>.
- *Moratorium on inspections of business* until 30 June 2020. Applicable to almost all businesses.

⁶⁰ Accessed August 2020. Available at: <https://www.mintrans.gov.ru/press-center/news/9635>

⁶¹ The list of checkpoints is approved by the Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No.1877 of 27 December 2019.

- *6-month loan holiday for business.* Applies to organizations included in the list of eleven most impacted industries. Eligibility for this benefit can be checked online.
- *Interest-free loans for salary pay outs* for organizations that are both included in the list of most impacted industries and that have been active for more than 1 year.
- *Reduction of insurance payments* for organizations and sole entrepreneurs included in the single registry of SMEs. The total amount of insurance payments is reduced from 30 per cent to 15 per cent. The rate of contributions to the Pension Fund shall be 10 per cent, and contributions to the Federal Compulsory Medical Insurance Fund shall be 5 per cent.
- *Three to six month tax holiday (depending on the type of tax):* a deferral for the payment of almost all taxes in the most impacted industries, and some taxes for all other entrepreneurs.
- *Aid to exporters.* Targeted consulting support and support in receiving financial aid is rendered through the Russian Export Centre (<https://www.exportcenter.ru/>). The Deposit Insurance Agency of Russia (<https://www.asv.org.ru/>) provides insurance products for commercial and political risks up to 90 per cent of the export contract value.
- *Non-repayable subsidies.* Small and medium enterprises from most impacted industries may receive direct financial aid from the Government. Entrepreneurs may receive RUB 12,130 per employee.
- *Prolongation of licenses.* Many types of business licenses are automatically prolonged for one year from 2020.
- *Aid to strategically important enterprises.* Preferential loans, tax deferrals, bankruptcy moratorium and other measures.
- *Uncollectable loans.* Loans for employee salary pay outs (for a maximum of six months and under the condition of the company's retaining 90 per cent of job positions) at a rate of 2 per cent with the possibility of loan write-off.

8.7 Trade Finance Facilitation

No specific measures to support trade finance were found during the case study of the Russian Federation.

8.8 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The Russian Federation is implementing holistic anti-crisis measures aimed at social support and economic stability. The Russian Federation has introduced a large number of business support schemes especially focusing on small and medium enterprises as well as industries most impacted by the crisis.

The Russian Federation was able to rapidly deploy the Single Window COVID-19 web portal, which may be the best of its kind among NCA countries in terms of content and functionality.

The list of successful measures may also include the use of new GLONASS-based electronic navigation seals to sanction the land transport of cargo across the territory of the Russian Federation. This new system will help cut down the time and cost of cargo transport between Europe and Asia, as well as extend the transport market capacity of the Russian Federation and neighbouring states.

9 Case Study of Tajikistan on Trade Facilitation during COVID-19

9.1 Introduction

For quite a long time Tajikistan has denied the existence of COVID-19 on its territory. On 17 April 2020, the Ministry of Health of Tajikistan stated that there were “no real grounds for introducing a quarantine in the country” (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2020b). However, today, according to certain sources, around 0.1 per cent of the country’s population are infected, with caseloads continuing to grow.

According to the media (Commonwealth of Independent States, 2020c), Tajikistan developed an emergency response programme to COVID-19 by the end of March, for the implementation of which the Tajikistan Government requested the support of international financial institutions. As explained by an authorized representative of the WHO in Tajikistan, the key provisions of this programme are the following:

- Informing the public about existing risks.
- Epidemiological surveillance.
- Control at border checkpoints.
- Investigation of cases of infection and prompt response.
- Oversight of the country’s laboratory diagnostic service (work in this department is ongoing).
- Disease prevention and control.
- Mitigating the negative impact of COVID-19 on the country’s economy.
- Other measures.

Nevertheless, the programme has never been published officially, or at least open sources contain no mention of it.

17 April 2020, the President of Tajikistan made an address in which he mentioned measures taken by the Government to counter the spread of COVID-19. On 5 June of this year, the Decree of the President of Tajikistan No. 1544 “On preventing the impact of the COVID-19 infectious disease on the social and economic spheres of the Republic of Tajikistan”⁶² which stipulates for a total of 27 measures of social and economic support in response to the pandemic.

To build public awareness about the symptoms of the disease and the requirements put

⁶²Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://tpp.tj/2020/06/10/ukaz-prezidenta-respubliki-tadzhikistan/>

in place during the quarantine, the consolidated website <https://covid.tj/> was created. The site mostly contains information on symptoms and guidance on prevention with some of the website's sections still not filled with content.

9.2 Institutional Arrangements and Inter-Agency Cooperation

The President's address of 17 April 2020 states that a Government response centre was established designed to consistently deal with all issues pertinent to ensuring public health safety and take action on preventing the spread of the disease. A statutory document on the creation of the response centre, however, was not found.

The message submitted by Tajikistan to the WCO (Tajikistan, Customs Service, 2020) states that the Coordination Working Group (CWG) includes all governmental bodies. There is also an Interagency Coordination Working Group (ICWG) monitoring the situation. However, no information was found to evidence the establishment or the functions of these bodies.

No website (or separate page on any of the ministries' sites) containing comprehensive information on measures undertaken in response to the pandemic was found.

Tajikistan has a dedicated website called the "Tajikistan Trade Portal" (www.tajtrade.tj) which contains information on international trade with links to related agencies and organizations. This website mentions the Trade Facilitation Coordination Committee (See: United Nations CTAD, 2013). However, information on measures taken in response to the pandemic was not found even on this dedicated website.

9.3 Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance

Tajikistan's message to the WCO also mentions that Tajikistan's customs authorities have introduced temporary export bans on certain goods but no governing document for this was found on the Customs Service sites (<http://tamognia.tj/>), the Tajikistan Trade Portal or any other official site. According to the media (ASIA-plus, 2020), this decision was made on 25 April 2020 and it prescribes a ban on the export of agricultural products (cereals, legumes, eggs and meat).

Pursuant to the President's decree No. 1544 of 6 June 2020⁶³, from 1 July to 1 September 2020, the import of materials used in manufacturing disinfectants, medicines and

⁶³ Available at: <https://tpp.tj/2020/06/10/ukaz-prezidenta-respubliki-tadzhikistan/>

protective wear are exempt from import duties (value added tax, excise taxes and duties). The same applies to equipment, tools, laboratory equipment and materials to be used for the diagnosis of the COVID-19 infectious disease.

As mentioned before, although Tajikistan is a member of the WTO, it has not sent any notifications to the WTO Secretariat concerning its introduction of any export restrictions or concessions for the import of certain goods (WTO, 2020c).

9.4 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

According to Protocol No.1k/25-2 of 16 March 2020 of the meeting of the President of Tajikistan on measures to preventing the spread of COVID-19, a special temporary procedure regulating international road cargo transportation was put in place on the territory of Tajikistan. This procedure prescribes that the entry of international freight vehicles (except trailers and semitrailers) is only allowed up to currently operating border terminals. Thereafter, the cargo is to be transferred to a truck or trailer (semitrailer) from Tajikistan and delivered by a Tajikistani tractor truck to the destination or transit point⁶⁴. The customs processing of the cargo, except for trailers and semitrailers transported by Tajikistani carriers to the destination, is carried out at the border terminals. The returning of international trailers and semitrailers is conducted under customs control up to the customs control zones at border checkpoints or border terminals.

On 9 June 2020, the temporary rules were changed⁶⁵ to allow the movement of international vehicles and their drivers to the final destination for up to five days, provided they have a “document from an authorized public health body confirming the driver has been tested for the COVID-19 coronavirus”.

Like other governing documents related to the COVID-19 response, the new operating policy documents for the checkpoints have not been published on official sources. An unofficial translation of these policies is available on the website of the Association of International Road Carriers of the Republic of Tajikistan “ABBAT” (national TIR operator).

Representatives of Tajikistan’s transport business regard the lack of accessible up-to-date information on policies and measures pertaining to road cargo transport as one of the most pressing issues.

⁶⁴ See: https://www.iru.org/apps/cms-filesystem-action?file=/flashinfo/Tajikistan_EN_6.04.pdf

⁶⁵ See: <https://www.iru.org/apps/cms-filesystem-action?file=/flashinfo/NEW%20-%20en%20-1.pdf>

9.5 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

According to the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, Tajikistan is ranked seventh of the eight NCA countries for achievements in *digital and sustainable trade facilitation*. It has fully implemented only 11 and partially implemented 13 of the 53 measures suggested in the Survey.

Despite the first mentions of creating an e-government portal dating back to 2003, the portal has not been created to this day.

There is an electronic portal for customs declarations (<https://portal.swcustoms.tj>), but upon closer inspection it is evident that not all customs declaration functions have been automated and the portal is in need of improvement.

Pursuant to the Decree of the President of Tajikistan No. 1544 of 5 June 2020⁶⁶, there are two pandemic response measures that relate to Digital Trade Facilitation:

- To reactivate the implementation of the e-government portal to provide for remote operation of Government agencies.
- To undertake measures leveraging electronic means of payment to facilitate payment for Government services, payment of fines and other mandatory Government charges.

Digital development, including that of international trade, in Tajikistan is constrained by the lack of high-quality internet access.

9.6 Measures for Business Facilitation and supporting SMEs

Pursuant to the Decree of the President of Tajikistan No. 1544 of 5 June 2020⁶⁷, the country plans to carry out the following measures for business facilitation:

- A tax break has been announced for tourist facilities, hotels, public catering organizations and some other businesses from 1 April to 1 September 2020. Accrual of surcharge for late payment of taxes for this period has also been suspended.
- SMEs who have fully suspended their activities due to the spread of COVID-19 are exempt from paying rent on Government property from 1 May to 1 August 2020.

⁶⁶ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://tpp.tj/2020/06/10/ukaz-prezidenta-respubliki-tadzhikistan/>

⁶⁷ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://tpp.tj/2020/06/10/ukaz-prezidenta-respubliki-tadzhikistan/>

- Tax penalties on entities that have failed to make their social tax payments on time are suspended from 1 May to 1 September 2020.
- From 1 May to 1 August 2020, sole entrepreneurs (from certain business categories) are exempt from all taxes.
- The income tax rate is reduced from 12 per cent to 6 per cent for income earned from bank deposits of natural persons.
- The “Entrepreneurship Support Fund under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan”, funded by the national budget, was to allocate preferentially loanable funds to manufacturers of foodstuffs and medical supplies, especially to women-entrepreneurs.
- To grant priority to domestic manufacturers during Government procurement of goods and services until the situation is normalized.

9.7 Trade Finance Facilitation

No specific measures to support trade finance were found during the case study of the Republic of Tajikistan.

9.8 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

The pressing need to develop digital and information platforms remains. The Decree of the President of Tajikistan No. 1544 “On preventing the impact of the COVID-19 infectious disease on the social and economic spheres of the Republic of Tajikistan” outlines two measures to tackle this problem: the creation of an e-government platform and the development of electronic payments.

Just solving these two issues could facilitate trade. Unfortunately, this governing document does not prescribe a deadline for the accomplishment of these objectives. Nor was it possible to find other relevant Government documents. Furthermore, there is no information on how these tasks shall be accomplished; the concept is not outlined; and the funds meant for their implementation are not defined.

10 Case Study of Turkmenistan on Trade Facilitation during COVID-19

10.1 Introduction

Turkmenistan is one of the few countries whose authorities are still denying any cases of COVID-19, even though the virus is present and growing in all neighbouring countries.

According to the media, despite the official position of there being no cases in the country, Turkmenistan is exercising massive preventive measures: in places of public gathering including bank branch offices, visitors are given wet wipes and are sprayed in the mouth with disinfectant. At train and bus stations and upon entrance to Ashkhabad, peoples' temperatures are being taken and city buses are treated with chlorine solution. An unknown disinfectant solution is used to wash bus stops.

It should be noted that the Turkmen authorities' approach to the issue has been undergoing changes – for instance, the press 8 July release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan (Commonwealth of Independent Nations, 2020d) stated that under guidance from the President of Turkmenistan a Government committee has been established and authorized to deal with organizational, legal, financial, technical and other issues, pertinent to countering the spread of COVID-19. An operational headquarters has been established to coordinate the actions of relevant Government bodies and is comprised of representatives of The Ministry of Health and Medical Industry, Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, the Border, Customs and Migration services and other agencies. The press release states that:

- On 22 May of this year, Turkmenistan has adopted the national Preparedness and Response Plan of Turkmenistan for Acute Infectious Disease.
- On 3 July 2020, the Plan of Operational Socio-Economic Measures in Turkmenistan to Counter the Coronavirus Pandemic was approved.
- Currently, Turkmenistan, jointly with United Nations agencies, is starting its development of a third national plan which encompasses the humanitarian component of measures taken by the country to counter the COVID-19 infection.

6 July 2020, a WHO public healthcare and epidemiology mission arrived in Turkmenistan

by the request of the Government. The team will be working in close collaboration with the country's health agencies to assess the risks and develop response mechanisms necessary to address the issue of COVID-19 (United Nations Press Release, 2020).

10.2 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

Despite the lack of comprehensive measures to counter the pandemic, Turkmenistan has taken protective measures at border checkpoints and in the Turkmenbashi port.

According to the official note of the Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan to the United Nations (UNECE, 2020), as part of the measures taken to prevent the entry and spread of COVID-19 into the territory of Turkmenistan, it was decided that starting from 24 March, 2020, the entry or transit of goods arriving into the country by road through the checkpoints "Garabogaz" and "Farap" on the state border of Turkmenistan will be carried out by Turkmen freight carriers. To minimize human contact, the trans-shipment of goods in trailers or semi-trailers from a foreign freight carrier to a Turkmen freight carrier will be carried out in specially designated places on the state border.

According to the media (Yandex, 2020), 20-meter-tall disinfection tunnels for trucks were planned on the Iran-Turkmenistan border. It was planned to involve other countries in this project as well, however this case study was unable to find any information on whether said equipment has been installed.

In addition, according to the Permanent Mission of Turkmenistan to the United Nations, from 24 March of this year, cargo of all types arriving at the Turkmenbashi International Seaport, including transit cargo, was to be sent by sea vessels in trailers and semitrailers without vehicles, drivers or persons accompanying the goods. International trailers and semitrailers could be left in designated areas in the port before 1 May.

Also, Turkmenistan recommended the active use of transportation of goods in containers and in railway cars, using multimodal transportation (by sea and land).

Rail transport continues to operate as before.

According to the media, from 16 June, the Azerbaijan Caspian Shipping Company has resumed container transport of container and dry cargo to and from the Azerbaijani port of Alyat to the Turkmen Turkmenbashi.

10.3 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

Analysis of the websites of the Government bodies of Turkmenistan and other sites has shown that the information contained therein is quite scarce and is not being updated. For example, the Customs Service website has not undergone any changes, as compared to previous studies conducted five and seven years ago. Moreover, almost all of Turkmenistan's regulatory documents in the areas of trade, customs and transport are available solely in the Turkmen language.

10.4 Concluding Remarks

Turkmenistan is not a member of the WTO and information on trade facilitation is all but non-existent. In addition, Turkmenistan is not a part of the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019. Besides that, the country flatly denies any cases of coronavirus infection and is therefore not implementing any pandemic response measures apart from those taken at the port and other border checkpoints. The current rules in effect substantially constrain road and sea cargo delivery to the country. Even though rail transport continues to operate as usual, there is a real threat of interruptions occurring in the provision of the population with essential products.

11 Case Study of Uzbekistan on Trade Facilitation during COVID-19

11.1 Introduction

As of early July 2020, Uzbekistan reports one of the best situations for COVID-19. The country has one of the smallest numbers of infection cases by population in NCA.

To prevent the spread of COVID-19, on 23 March of this year⁶⁸, the Cabinet of Ministers issued Resolution No. 176 introducing *measures to protect public health*, including:

- Regular flights between all countries of the world and Uzbekistan were put on hold.
- Entry to the territory of Uzbekistan through all ports of entry was banned for persons not in certain exempted categories.
- Persons entering Uzbekistan are placed under a 14-day mandatory quarantine or observation in a dedicated medical facility or home.
- Operation of all entertainment and public catering facilities was suspended.
- All public events were suspended.
- On-site education at all education facilities, including preschool was suspended.
- Entry to/exit from Tashkent was banned, with a few specified exceptions (such as cargo transportation). All persons entering or leaving Tashkent shall undergo medical control for symptoms of COVID-19.
- Requirement for mandatory disinfection treatment of all vehicles and cargo entering Uzbekistan (also for entry to Tashkent) from foreign states was introduced.
- Requirements on switching to online mode for Government services and other areas to the maximum possible extent were introduced.
- Two-month ban on shutting down internet access for nonpayers introduced.
- Requirements to carry out countrywide prevention and anti-epidemic measures introduced.

In accordance with Resolution No. ПП-4662 of 27 March 2020 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan⁶⁹, the State Tax Committee, State Customs Committee and Antimonopoly Committee are tasked with daily monitoring of medicine prices and

⁶⁸ Available in Uzbek only, <https://lex.uz/docs/4772484>

⁶⁹ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/4775998>

exercising stringent control to prevent unfounded overpricing and artificial scarcity.

To maintain public awareness of disease symptoms and quarantine requirements, the site <https://coronavirus.uz> was deployed and a universal call-centre established. In addition, special webpages were created on the site of the Ministry of Health to host COVID-19 related information. Especially noteworthy is the document: “National COVID-19 guidelines”⁷⁰, which provides comprehensive information for both patients and medical staff. Generally, information on COVID-19 is available to the public.

No online service to apply for a COVID-19 social benefit payment was found. No universal public webpage to comprehensively host information on all introduced COVID-19-related measures was found either. Nevertheless, Uzbekistan has a well-organized portal called the “National legal database of the Republic of Uzbekistan” (<https://lex.uz/>), where all relevant statutory documents can be found.

The restrictions introduced to the free movement of citizens, the special operating regime of checkpoints and restrictions on certain types of activity have created new barriers, including to international trade.

These trying times demand Uzbekistan take measures to reduce the hurdles that have arisen in international trade, including measures on facilitating trade and the further implementation of paperless trade.

According the United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, Uzbekistan is ranked sixth among NCA countries for achievements in digital and sustainable trade facilitation measures. Uzbekistan has fully implemented 22 and partially implemented 5 of the 53 measures indicated in the Survey (United Nations, Trade Facilitation Survey, 2019).

11.2 Institutional Arrangements and Inter-Agency Cooperation

19 March 2020, the President of Uzbekistan issued a Decree (No. УП-5969)⁷¹ “On priority measures to mitigate the negative impact on the economy of the coronavirus pandemic and global crisis”. One of the measures prescribed by this Decree is the establishment of an Anti-Crisis Commission (before, according to Decree No. P-5537 of 29 January, 2020 of the President of Uzbekistan, a Special Republican Commission was in force) led by the heads of the country’s ministries and agencies, including the Minister of Investments

⁷⁰ See: https://minzdrav.uz/openData/csv/nation_rukovodstvo_COVID-19.pdf

⁷¹ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4770763>

and International Trade of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the Minister of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Chairman of the State Customs Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Pursuant to the Decree No. УП-5969, for two months starting 22 March of this year, this commission was tasked with holding **daily** teleconferences for detailed discussion of the measures implemented in each region to counter the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the stable functioning of the economy. Based on meeting results, the commission was to make prompt decisions and provide daily reports on the situation throughout the country to the president.

The decree also prescribed the creation of an unincorporated Anti-Crisis Fund under the Ministry of Finance of the Republic of Uzbekistan to the amount of UZS 10 trillion (≈US\$ 980 million). These funds were predominantly meant to be allocated to:

- Financing measures for countering the spread of COVID-19.
- Supporting businesses and public employment.
- Expanding social support of the public.
- Ensuring the stable operation of all industries, and other economic objectives.

No dedicated website for the Republican Anti-crisis Commission was found.

11.3 Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance

Decree No. УП-5978 of 3 April 2020⁷² of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan eliminates customs duties and excise taxes for import of foodstuffs; medical and hygiene supplies; artificial respiration units; and building materials necessary for the construction of medical and quarantine facilities, to counter the coronavirus infection in accordance with a list provided by the decree.

Moreover, according to articles 297 and 299 of the Customs Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan⁷³, as well as articles 246 and 284 of the Tax Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan⁷⁴, goods imported with purposes of charity are exempt from customs duties.

Even though Uzbekistan is not yet a member of the WTO, and has only expressed the intention to join, Uzbekistan notified the WTO Secretariat (WTO, 2020c) about the introduction of these measures.

Pursuant to Decree No. УП-5969 (mentioned above) of the President of Uzbekistan, the

⁷² Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4780477>

⁷³ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/2876352>

⁷⁴ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4674893>

State Customs Committee, Ministry of Transport, State Security Service's border troops, Ministry of Health, the State Committee of Veterinary and Livestock Development, the "Uzstandard" agency and the State Plant Quarantine Inspection under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan were tasked with:

- Establishing an operational headquarter to ensure expedited cargo clearance through border customs posts, as well as the cargo's unimpeded customs processing and issuing of clearance documents for exported and imported goods.
- The implementation, starting 1 April 2020, of a mechanism for the accelerated customs clearance of foodstuffs, including the issue of clearance documents for such goods prior to their arrival in the Territory of Uzbekistan.

11.4 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

The State Customs Committee jointly with the Ministry of Health, the State Security Service, State Committee of Veterinary Medicine, State Committee for Tourism Development, State Committee on Ecology and the management of airports are taking the following measures to prevent the penetration of the coronavirus to the Republic of Uzbekistan:

- Freight vehicles are disinfected at checkpoints.
- If necessary, the trailer (or semitrailer) is hitched to a tractor truck confirmed to be clear of coronavirus.
- Providing relevant and up-to-date information and recommendations to entities engaged in foreign economic activities on the need to use rail transport (if possible) to transport cargo.
- Inspecting truck drivers in accordance with international medical and sanitary requirements and, upon detection of cursory symptoms, conducting immediate temporary isolation of such persons, as well as customs staff who were in contact with them, until further necessary action is taken.

By Decree No. УП-5969⁷⁵ issued 19 March 2020 by the President of Uzbekistan, the State Customs Committee is tasked with:

- Establishing an operational headquarters to ensure the expedited clearance and

⁷⁵ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4770763>

processing of export and import cargo at customs checkpoints. The operational headquarters is to include representatives of the Ministry of Transport, the Border Guard, State Security Service, Ministry of Health, State Committee of Veterinary and Livestock Development, the Uzstandard agency and State Plant Quarantine Inspection.

- The implementation, starting 1 April 2020, of a mechanism for expedited customs clearance of foodstuffs, including the issue of clearance documents for such goods prior to their arrival to the Territory of Uzbekistan.

A list of road checkpoints (a total of 11) at the borders with each neighbouring state was compiled, through which export and import cargo is transported. The indicated checkpoints operate 24/7.

According to a message from the Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Uzbekistan⁷⁶ (no official document was found), from 30 April of this year, Uzbekistan has put in place special regulations for the transport of export cargo during the pandemic, prescribing the following:

- All trucks arriving into Uzbekistan will be directed to special parking areas close to the border crossing points, where the drivers will be tested for COVID-19. The vehicles and their drivers will remain in those special parking areas until the test results are available:
 - If the COVID-19 test is negative, the transportation according to the confirmed route will be authorized to continue. Drivers must wear protective suits, disposable masks and gloves.
 - In the case of a positive test result, the driver will be taken to a medical facility in accordance with regulations, and the co-driver, if present, will be transferred to a quarantine facility.
- After the complete disinfection of the motor vehicle, the transport operation may continue with another driver (who is not associated with the consignor or consignee of the transport operation concerned), or the goods carried may be transferred to another motor vehicle under customs control. In the case of a new driver, the obligations related to the delivery of goods under customs control remain applicable to this driver.
- Foreign drivers entering Uzbekistan to deliver goods must leave the territory within

⁷⁶ See: <http://mintrans.uz/ru/news/avtotransportda-halqaro-yuk-tashuvlarini-amalga-oshiruvchi-millij-va-horizhij-hajdovchilar-diqqatiga>

ten days of delivery. If they must collect goods for their return trip during that time, they are obliged to wait at the closest designated parking area. These loading areas have strict quarantine and social distancing rules. Drivers are not allowed to leave this area until loading is complete.

The following situations are considered a violation of the quarantine rules by the driver:

- Deviation from the planned route.
- Failure to wear the protective suits, masks or gloves.
- Failure to comply with the time set for repatriation.
- Lack of necessary transport documents (driving license, clearance documents, certificates, international transport permits).

On 5 June 2020, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued the Decree No. УП-6005 “On Reforming of Customs Administration and Enhancement of Activities of Bodies of the State Customs Service of the Republic of Uzbekistan”⁷⁷, which approved the reform of customs administration and the enhancement of the efficiency of Uzbekistan’s State Customs Service for the period of 2020-2023, as well as the implementation of a roadmap for a number of customs facilitation measures such as:

- Uzbekistan’s joining the revised Kyoto convention on the simplification and harmonization of Customs procedures (3 February, 2006).
- The establishment of a risk management system.
- Taking action to facilitate Uzbekistan’s joining the “E-TIR” automated information system.
- Further improvement of eligibility criteria and specific simplifications measures provided to authorized economic operators.
- Implementing a procedure reducing the processing time of one customs declaration from three days to one day depending on risk level.
- Other measures to enhance the efficiency of Customs authorities.

Uzbekistan Railways has developed a software for processing and providing preliminary electronic information to customs authorities for goods transported by rail. In addition, Uzbek Railways extended until the end of 2020 a 30 per cent discount on the transportation of all goods transported through Uzbekistan to the south of Kyrgyzstan and in the opposite direction (ESCAP, 2020).

⁷⁷ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/4844619>

11.5 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

Currently, Uzbekistan has implemented the “single window” customs information system portal (<http://singlewindow.uz>), which offers, among others, the following functions:

- Electronic declaration of goods.
- Preliminary electronic notification of customs authorities.
- Notification of payment of customs fees for transporting international goods (as a comparison, Kazakhstan has only implemented this service this year).
- Receiving information on cargo imported to the Republic of Uzbekistan by road or rail.
- Reference information.
- Online customs tariff calculator (redirects user to <http://tarif.customs.uz>).

The majority of services on the <http://singlewindow.uz> portal redirect the user to the Single portal of interactive state services (www.my.gov.uz), which offers functional electronic state services for the general public as well as a number of services for businesses (including customs declaration). Apart from the services found on <http://singlewindow.uz>, the site www.my.gov.uz also features such services as:

- Submitting information on foreign trade contracts to the Single electronic information system of foreign trade operations.
- Issuance of certificates of origin for goods exported and re-exported from Uzbekistan.

These portals, however, are not fully compliant with Recommendation No. 33, United Nations/CEFACT (Recommendations and Guidelines on the Establishment of Single Window). For instance, obtaining clearance documents necessary for customs clearance from various ministries and agencies is not possible on this portal. For this reason, 3 April 2019, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan issued Resolution No. ПП-4297 “On measures to further improve administrative procedures of foreign economic activities”⁷⁸, according to which the Single window customs information system is to be fully implemented by 1 January, 2021. This would deliver the Recommendation No. 33, United Nations/CEFACT.

The implementation roadmap for the concept of reforming customs administration and the enhancement of the efficiency of Uzbekistan’s State Customs Service for the period

⁷⁸ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/docs/4302719>

of 2020-2023 contains measures on digitizing the work of the customs service. These include:

- The development and deployment of the “E-TRANZIT” automated information system.
- Test mode deployment of a system to track goods and vehicles using electronic seals.
- Developing and deploying the “TIF QATNASHCHISINING SHAXSIY KABINETI” system, which would enable electronic exchange of documents and/or data between customs authorities and entities engaged in foreign trade.
- Implementing the single window customs information system on border customs checkpoints.
- Developing and deploying the “AVTOMATLASHTIRILGAN TARZDA CHIQARIB YUBORISH” automated information system, which in turn would provide for step-by-step implementation of a system enabling automatic processing of low risk (green channel) cargo declarations (bills of entry).
- Implementing a system that would enable the processing of a customs inspections act using a mobile app.
- Development and implementation of the TIFBOSQICHMA-BOSQICH information platform, which would provide information of all procedures, time and financial cost for foreign economic activity.

11.6 Measures for Business Facilitation and supporting SMEs

Decree No. 5969 of 19 March 2020⁷⁹ of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan approved several major counter-pandemic measures, including the decision on establishing the Anti-Crisis Fund tasked with:

- 1) Supporting businesses and employment of the public by:
 - Extended provision of guarantees and compensations to cover interest expenses primarily for loans issued for manufacturing, procurement and sale of essential consumer goods by the State Fund for Supporting Entrepreneurship Development (no information on this measure was found on the Fund’s website: <http://statefund.uz/>).
 - Implementing additional infrastructural projects (notably construction of

⁷⁹ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4770763>

utility lines) to boost economic activity and employment in various (especially small industry) regions of Uzbekistan.

2) Ensuring the stable functioning of the various industries of the economy by:

- Providing Government assistance to strategically important enterprises by issuing Government guaranteed interest-free liquidity loans for repaying debts and covering essential spending.
- Partially compensating transportation expenses of businesses engaged in foreign trade.
- Additionally, supporting industries most exposed to the negative impact of the pandemic, in addition to commercial banks in cases of deterioration in the quality of the loan portfolio.

In addition, the above Decree prescribes that:

3) In the time from 1 April to 1 October 2020:

- To reduce the minimum social tax payment for sole entrepreneurs down to half a basic calculation unit per month.
- To decrease the charge for alcohol wholesalers from 5 per cent to 3 per cent.
- To reduce the current fee for the right of public catering enterprises to sell alcohol at retail by 25 per cent.

4) From 1 April to 1 July 2020, to suspend the accrual and payment of the tourist (hotel) fees.

5) To reduce tax rates for agricultural irrigation-scale water resource use by 50 per cent of the currently effective rates for the year 2020.

6) To provide a six month interest-free deferral for payment of property, land and water resource use taxes.

7) To suspend tax audits of businesses until 1 January 2021.

8) To provide a deferral for payment of debt under credit to a total amount of UZS 5 trillion (≈US\$ 490 million) without accrual of penalty charges for some industries (hospitality, tourism, logistics and others).

A number of business support measures were also prescribed by Decree No. УП-5978 of 3 April 2020 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Additional Measures of Support of the Population, Industries of the Economy and Subjects of Entrepreneurship

for the period of the coronavirus pandemic”.

11.7 Trade Finance Facilitation

It is evident that the Government of Uzbekistan is paying due attention to foreign trade during the pandemic. For example, the *Republican Anti-crisis Commission* (approved by Decree No. 5969 of 19 March 2020 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan⁸⁰) includes the Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade, the Minister of Transport and the Chairman of the Customs Committee of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

Moreover, Decree No. 5969 of 19 March 2020 of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan has introduced several trade facilitation measures, including those for Trade Finance Facilitation, such as:

- The export of goods without having made the indemnity payment when there are existing overdue receivables is allowed, if the amount of overdue receivables does not exceed 10 per cent of the total value of goods exported during the reporting year. The previously introduced requirement for indemnity payment impeded the export process. Perhaps, the lifting of this requirement during the pandemic might lead the Government to realize the requirement’s excessive nature for export deals.
- For 2020, one-time import operations of technological equipment and raw materials in exchange for redemption of overdue receivables for foreign trade operations are allowed. It is not quite clear exactly how this mechanism works, but it is obviously designed to facilitate import.
- Until 1 October 2020, the imposition of penalties for foreign trade related overdue receivables is temporarily suspended.
- Agreeing with the Uzbek Central Bank’s suggestion of providing revolving loans to commercial banks to finance their working capital.

11.8 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Uzbekistan is implementing a series of measures aimed at mitigating the impact of the pandemic, for which the Government has allocated significant funding.

⁸⁰ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4770763>

The Decree No. УП-5969 of 19 March 2020 of the President of Uzbekistan “On priority measures to mitigate the negative impact on the economy of the coronavirus pandemic and global crisis” and the Decree No. УП-6005 of 5 June 2020 “On Reforming of Customs Administration and Enhancement of Activities of Bodies of the State Customs Service of the Republic of Uzbekistan”⁸¹ indicate that the Government is paying special attention to Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation.

At the same time, one-year prior, the Resolution No. 4297 of 3 April 2019 was adopted, specifying plans for launching the “Single window” in accordance with United Nations/CEFACT recommendations by 1 January, 2021. However, no information from the media was found to evidence any further developments of this plan. In addition, some of the digitalization measures appear poorly designed. For example, the purpose of developing an information platform providing for the exchange of e-documents between the customs authorities and businesses is not clear, considering that implementing a comprehensive “Single window” is also part of the plan.

The Government of Uzbekistan has planned many measures aimed at supporting the economy and business, as well as social and medical protection of the public. In the event of timely delivery on all objectives outlined in the documents listed above, Uzbekistan would have a sound chance of overcoming this crisis with minimized losses.

⁸¹ Accessed July 2020. Available at: <https://lex.uz/uz/docs/4844619>

12 Summary of Measures Taken in the Sub-Region

12.1 Introduction

This paper outlines measures taken by NCA countries in response to COVID-19. Turkmenistan has not admitted to any cases of coronavirus in the country, thus the Turkmen authorities are solely implementing measures to prevent the penetration and spread of the virus.

The primary actions taken by the eight NCA states were measures to protect public health. All of them have restricted mass gatherings, and closed cafes and malls. Some states introduced restrictions to the operation of mass transit systems and free movement, especially that of the elderly. Most businesses had to switch to working remotely while large-scale anti-epidemic measures were carried out. Despite Turkmenistan's denial of the presence of COVID-19 on their territory, the country also conducts some internal measures aimed at protecting public health.

Many states in the region have introduced a state of emergency or quarantine regime.

Georgia has been the most efficient in its actions on public health protection- now reporting the fewest corona cases in the region.

All countries have introduced restrictions on international border crossings while at the same time maintaining freight traffic. However, such freight is subject to special regulations designed to prevent the penetration of the virus.

Every state in the region has created an outreach portal to inform the public of the rules and recommended conduct during the pandemic.

Some states were also successful in distributing information on social assistance measures: rapidly deploying mechanisms that allowed the public to apply for these social benefits online. Several states use these web portals to host information on measures of economic support and COVID-related regulatory documents. The Russian Federation has proven to be the most efficient in this domain having successfully implemented a "Single window COVID-19" portal.

12.2 Institutional Arrangements and Inter-Agency Cooperation

All NCA countries have established governing bodies to coordinate, develop and exercise pandemic response measures. These newly created bodies generally comprised the

heads of ministries and Government agencies, including customs authorities, ministries (committees) of transport, ministries of trade. Every country has established a sequence for interagency cooperation.

However, not all countries have managed to deploy user-friendly information portals where the public could be easily informed of that body's actions. Considering the rapid pace at which government decisions are being made and amended during the pandemic, the lack of an easily accessible source of up-to-date information acts as a substantial constraint for business and the general public.

12.3 Simplification of Customs Procedures and Expedited Clearance

Most countries have implemented the following measures in response to the pandemic:

- Removing customs duties for medical supplies, foodstuffs and other essential products.
- Reducing or removed VAT for import of certain goods - mostly medical supplies.
- Introducing regulations to facilitate the import of goods necessary to prevent and mitigate the impact of COVID-19. This usually involves facilitating customs procedures and expedited clearance for specified strategic goods.
- Some countries temporarily restricted or banned the export of some products and commodities for periods of one to two months. This mostly related to foodstuffs.

Most states notified the WTO secretariat of new regulations and measures.

EAEU member states have simplified the issuance procedure for "type A" certificates of origin. An electronic version of this certificate may be used for customs declaration purposes for a period of six months.

12.4 Transport, Logistics and Transit Facilitation

To avoid introducing the virus from other countries, all of the states have put in place special regulations at road checkpoints which generally involve the following:

- A limited number of checkpoints are used for cargo transportation (each country compiled a list of checkpoints and coordinated it with neighbouring states).
- Initially, when crossing borders foreign drivers or tractor trucks were replaced with local ones at specially designated areas. Only the foreign trailer or half trailer continued on to the final destination. Later, most states allowed foreign drivers with

negative test results to proceed to the destination, while prescribing that the drivers only stop (for refuelling, rest, etc.) at specially designated areas. Drivers generally wait up to two days for test results. That said, most countries' checkpoints do not yet have adequate rest or meal facilities, leaving drivers to tend to themselves which inevitably increases the risk of spreading the disease. Only Azerbaijan has arranged areas of rest and catering for international drivers.

The newly introduced regulations imposed significant constraints on road freight transportation, increasing both the time and cost of cargo delivery.

Procedures at railway checkpoints were not substantially amended, hence countries with relatively developed railway networks recommended carriers and freight forwarders to switch from road to rail for their freight operations. Meanwhile, countries with less developed railroad systems were faced with greater difficulties maintaining supply chains, including for vital goods.

EAEU countries decided to establish "green corridors" (introducing uniform sanitary requirements, marking routes on the map, identifying truck stop and driver rest area locations, etc. in each EAEU country) for the import of vital goods. Perhaps, this experience may somehow be adapted to all the countries in the region.

Some states in the region implemented measures facilitating railway freight transport. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation have temporarily lifted certain fees arising during rail transport of cargo.

Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation have enabled online processing of rail cargo transport which reduces human contact and saves time.

Azerbaijan has allowed the use of railway bills for rail-sea combined transport during the pandemic.

Uzbekistan Railways has extended its 30 per cent discount on the transportation of all cargo through Uzbekistan to the South of Kyrgyzstan and in the opposite direction until the end of the year 2020.

12.5 Digital Trade Facilitation Measures

Only two NCA countries (Armenia and Azerbaijan) have signed the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific (United Nations, Treaty Collection, 2016). The degree of progress in the implementation of trade

facilitation and paperless trade measures in the reviewed countries also varies (refer to United Nations Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019 in Annex I).

Some countries in the region either have no electronic government service platform (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan) or their e-government website needs improvement (Armenia). Several states have either not yet implemented electronic declaration of goods or an Electronic Single Window System, or these systems need significant improvement.

The countries have been able to promptly automate access to certain government services (mainly applying for social benefits). Various websites have also been used to enable business to apply for economic aid.

Uzbekistan Railways has developed a software for processing and providing preliminary electronic information to customs authorities for goods transported by rail.

Kazakhstan has been able to rapidly automate the issuance of permits for Kazakhstani carriers to move across the territory of a foreign state (in accordance with international agreements currently in effect and ratified by Kazakhstan).

Armenia has created a mobile app for submitting tax reports and paying taxes online. According to the latest information, a similar mobile app has also been launched in Kazakhstan for some banks.

The Russian Federation has used its new GLONASS-based electronic navigation seals to track cargo, enabling the transit of sanctioned goods by road and rail.

Uzbekistan has taken several steps aimed at digitizing customs procedures.

12.6 Measures for Business Facilitation and supporting SMEs

All states have developed and implemented measures to support business. These measures mostly include tax holidays; lifting of fines; preferential loans; and subsidies for enterprises and sole entrepreneurs of certain categories.

12.7 Trade Finance Facilitation

None of the NCA countries have been found to be implementing any trade finance facilitation measures. Some targeted measures are being taken in Uzbekistan, but they mostly involve financial aid to exporters.

13 Recommendations and Conclusion

Data on COVID-19 response measures taken by NCA countries presented in this paper shows that all countries (except Turkmenistan, which denies the existence of cases in its country) taking holistic measures which are in line with the five pillars of the United Nations framework for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19, namely:

1. Ensuring that essential health services are still available and protecting health systems.
2. Helping people cope with adversity through social protection and basic services.
3. Protecting jobs, supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, and informal sector workers through economic response and recovery programmes.
4. Guiding the necessary surge in fiscal and financial stimulus to make macroeconomic policies work for the most vulnerable and strengthening multilateral and regional responses.
5. Promoting social cohesion and investing in community-led resilience and response systems.

The priorities and profoundness of the measures taken by the countries depend on economic and political factors, as well as the pre-pandemic level of economic development among other factors. Initially, all states focused on containing the spread of the coronavirus and taking social and economic steps.

Research has revealed that countries with developed paperless technology have more opportunities to adapt their economies to the new challenges of a contactless environment and reducing the costs of pandemic response measures. Countries ranked high on the Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation generally managed to swiftly implement new electronic services and automate their government services, which reduces the amount of human contact and hence infection while at the same time simplifying the procedure of receiving said services. Whilst initially countries mostly focused on automating services for business and the population, now the countries will be faced with having to make a breakthrough in digitizing their logistics and trade.

Restrictions that the states were obliged to put in place to counter the spread of COVID-19 have mostly impacted cargo transportation, especially road. International trade may not be contemplated separately from issues of logistics. For this reason, it appears appropriate to include measures for digitizing international freight, namely the deployment and use by states of e-CMR, e-TIR, e-SMGS and similar documents into the Global

Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation.

Automating the issuance of permits for drivers to enter the country (as done by Kazakhstan) also seems to be an effective step.

According to the Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation 2019, NCA countries as a whole have implemented the fewest measures in the “Towards Cross-Border Paperless Trade” group. The pandemic may provide an impetus to streamline the exchange of customs data, certificates and other documentation.

Copious numbers of new decisions, rules and regulatory documents are being created and approved during the pandemic. According to business stakeholders, up-to-date relevant information on the new regulations and requirements put in place by a given country are often extremely difficult to find. This substantially constrains international trade and logistics. For this reason, countries which have not yet established a National Trade Facilitation Committee should do so, in addition to elaborating how these bodies may be leveraged to streamline intercountry exchange of data on recent changes to the fields of trade and logistics.

In addition, it is advisable for countries that have not yet signed the Framework Agreement on Facilitation of Cross-border Paperless Trade in Asia and the Pacific to consider again the merits of this agreement in this new context.

Annex I. United Nations global survey on trade facilitation and paperless trade 2019

Figure 2 (Annex I)

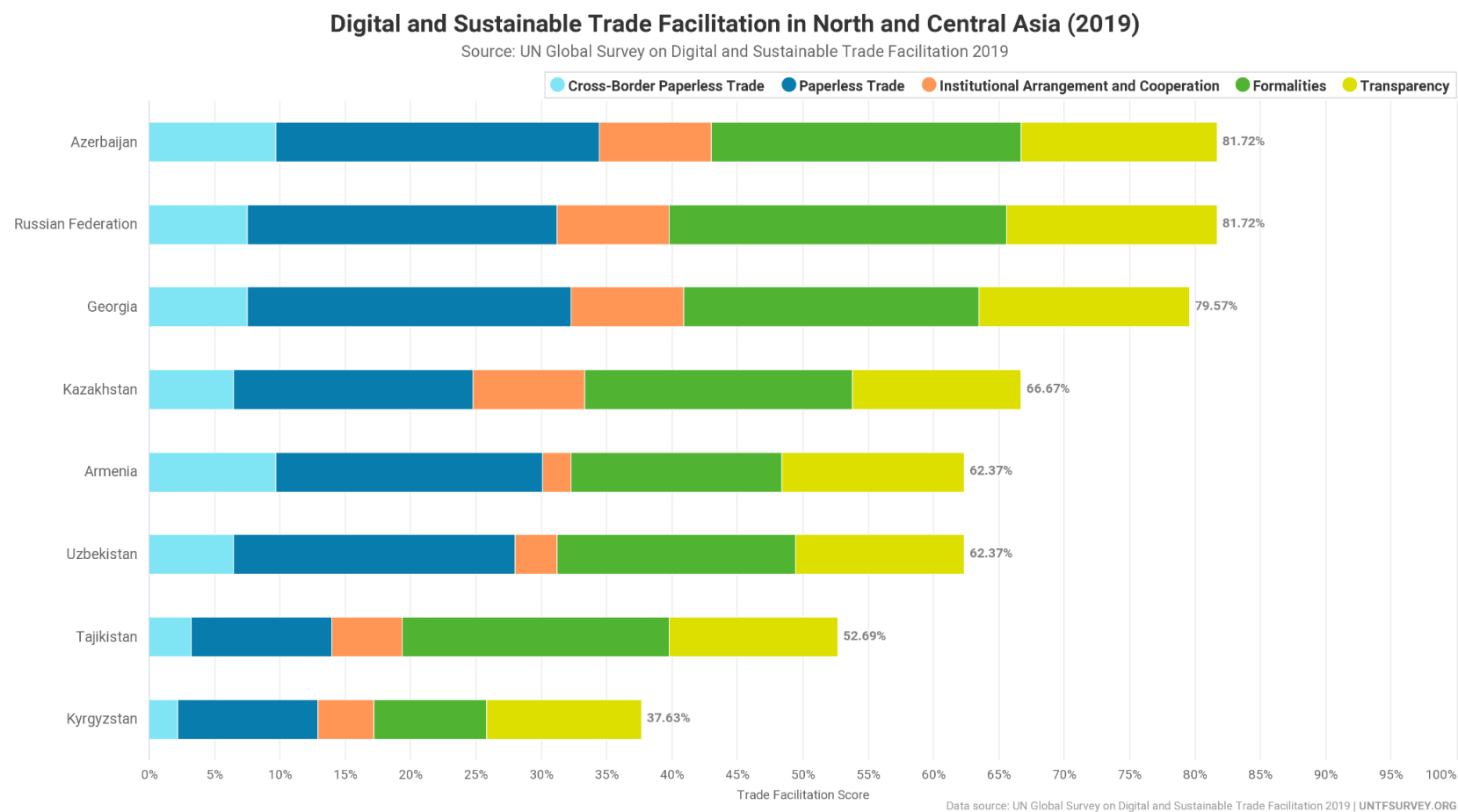


Table 3: (Annex I) Trade facilitation score of North and Central Asian countries (2019)

MEASURES OF TRADE FACILITATION AND PAPERLESS TRADE		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Russian Federation	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
GENERAL TRADE FACILITATION MEASURES									
1	National Trade Facilitation Committee or similar body	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented
2	Publication of existing import-export regulations on the internet	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
3	Stakeholders' consultation on new draft regulations (prior to their finalization)	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
4	Advance publication/notification of new trade-related regulations before their implementation	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented
5	Advance ruling on tariff classification and origin of imported goods	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented
6	Risk management	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
7	Pre-arrival processing	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Planning stage	Fully implemented
8	Post-clearance audits	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Planning stage
9	Independent appeal mechanism	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented
10	Separation of Release from final determination of customs duties, taxes, fees and charges	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented
11	Establishment and publication of average release times	Planning stage	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Planning stage	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
12	Trade facilitation measures for authorized operators	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Planning stage
13	Expedited shipments	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented
14	Acceptance of copies of original supporting documents required for import, export or transit formalities	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented
Paperless Trade Facilitation									
1	Automated Customs System	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented

MEASURES OF TRADE FACILITATION AND PAPERLESS TRADE		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Russian Federation	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
2	Internet connection available to Customs and other trade control agencies	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented
3	Electronic Single Window System	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Planning stage	Partially implemented
4	Electronic submission of Customs declarations	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
5	Electronic application and issuance of import and export permit	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented
6	Electronic Submission of Sea Cargo Manifests	Not available	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Not available	Not available	Fully implemented	Not available	Not available
7	Electronic Submission of Air Cargo Manifests	Not implemented	Planning stage	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented
8	Electronic application and issuance of Preferential Certificate of Origin	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Do not know
9	E-Payment of Customs Duties and Fees	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Planning stage	Fully implemented
10	Electronic Application for Customs Refunds	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Do not know
Towards Cross-Border Paperless Trade									
1	Laws and regulations for electronic transactions	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
2	Recognised certification authority	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Do not know
3	Electronic exchange of Customs Declaration	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Planning stage	Fully implemented
4	Electronic exchange of Certificate of Origin	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Planning stage	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Do not know
5	Electronic exchange of Sanitary & Phyto-Sanitary Certificate	Planning stage	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Do not know
6	Paperless collection of payment from a documentary letter of credit	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Do not know	Not implemented	Do not know
Border Agency Cooperation									
1	National legislative framework and/or institutional arrangements for border agencies cooperation	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented

MEASURES OF TRADE FACILITATION AND PAPERLESS TRADE		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Russian Federation	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
2	Government agencies delegating controls to Customs authorities	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented
3	Alignment of working days and hours with neighbouring countries at border crossings	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Planning stage
4	Alignment of formalities and procedures with neighbouring countries at border crossings	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented
SME-related Facilitation Measures									
1	Trade-related information measures for SMEs*	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented
2	SMEs in AEO scheme*	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Planning stage	Planning stage	Not implemented	Not implemented	Planning stage
3	SMEs access Single Window*:	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented
4	SMEs in National Trade Facilitation Committee*	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Planning stage	Not implemented	Do not know	Partially implemented	Do not know
5	Other special measures for SMEs*	Not implemented	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Partially implemented
Agriculture-related Facilitation Measures									
1	Testing and laboratory facilities available to meet SPS of main trading partners*:	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Partially implemented
2	National standards and accreditation bodies to facilitate compliance with SPS *	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Partially implemented	Partially implemented	Do not know	Do not know	Partially implemented
3	Electronic application and issuance of SPS certificates*	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Planning stage	Do not know	Do not know	Not implemented
4	Special treatment for perishable goods*	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented
Women-related Facilitation Measures									
1	Trade facilitation policy/strategy incorporates special consideration of female traders*	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Planning stage	Not implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Fully implemented
2	Trade facilitation measures aimed at female traders*	Planning stage	Planning stage	Not implemented	Planning stage	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Planning stage	Do not know
3	Female membership in the National Trade Facilitation Committee*	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Do not know
Trade Finance-related Facilitation Measures									

MEASURES OF TRADE FACILITATION AND PAPERLESS TRADE		Armenia	Azerbaijan	Georgia	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Russian Federation	Tajikistan	Uzbekistan
1	Single window facilitates traders to access to finance*	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Not implemented	Do not know
2	Banks allow electronic exchange of data between trading partners*	Partially implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Fully implemented	Not implemented	Do not know	Not implemented	Do not know
3	Variety of trade finance services available *	Do not know	Not implemented	Do not know	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Partially implemented	Not implemented	Do not know
TOTAL									
Fully implemented		11	28	27	17	1	26	11	22
Partially implemented		21	12	9	17	23	9	13	5
Planning stage		6	2	4	8	2		5	4
Not implemented		9	7	8	6	22	9	17	5
Not available		1			1	1		1	1
Do not know		1		1			5	2	12

*) Not included in calculation of the trade facilitation score.

Annex II. Programmes of Armenia to address the social and economic impact of COVID-19

Sources:¹

	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
THE 1ST PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 1) Category of measures: economic Link to a more detailed description ² Link to the Decree (only in Armenian) ³	<p>Any private commercial organization or individual entrepreneur that has worked in the Republic of Armenia for at least the last year and has a good credit and tax history has the opportunity to use 3 types of state support: co-financing, refinancing or subsidizing of targeted loans. The assistance is used for the following 6 purposes: payment of wages to employees, payment of taxes and fees, purchase or import of raw materials, import of equipment and materials, payment for services, import of food products.</p> <p>Under the instrument of support, one business entity is provided with up to AMD 500 million. The maximum amount of co-financing or refinancing is AMD 250 million. The maximum actual annual interest rate on loans will vary from 0 per cent to 6 per cent, depending on the support tool used.</p>
THE 2ND PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 2) Category of measures: economic Link to a more detailed description ⁴ Link to the Decree (only in Armenian) ⁵	<p>In accordance with the 2nd package of measures, all the interest rates for loans provided in the agricultural sector and for agricultural leasing programs for all business entities were reset to 0%, which means that the Government will completely subsidize interest rates of agricultural loans. It is noteworthy that with the aim of development of agricultural cooperatives, loans with 0% interest rates were established as well; in addition to the above, state co-financing of from 10 to 70 percent is also offered, depending on the purpose of the loan.</p> <p>In case of loans provided to pork and poultry production sectors, in addition to loans with 0% interest rate, there is an opportunity for a 30% co-financing mechanism aimed at reducing risks for the banks, meanwhile promoting the development of the above mentioned agricultural activities. In the case of microloans provided to natural entities operating in the agricultural sector, 0% interest rate was established either.</p>
THE 3RD PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 3) Category of measures: economic Link to a more detailed description ⁶ Available online services ⁷	<p>Within the framework of the 3rd package of measures, support will be provided to business entities with an annual turnover ranging from AMD 24 million to AMD 500 million, which operate in any of the following sectors: processing industry, accommodation and public catering, transportation and storage services, tourism services, private kindergartens, sporting activities (sports clubs, swimming pools), entertainment and other types of leisure activities, construction of buildings, civil construction, specialized construction activities and other service sectors.</p> <p>This Action envisages provision of support to business entities with a condition that a personal guarantee from the owner or other individual/individuals participating in the management of the organization is submitted. The processes of sorting out and selecting beneficiaries will be carried out by the Investment Support Centre according to a simplified procedure. The loan under this support mechanism shall be provided to cover only the allowed types of expenses, for a period of up to 36 months. The interest rate for the first two years will be 0%, while in the third year it will equal 12% annually.</p>
THE 4TH PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 4) Category of measures: social Link to a more detailed description ⁸	<p>Within the framework of the 4th package of measures, support will be provided to families with children under the age of 14 facing social and economic difficulties caused by the challenges in the labour market as a result of Covid-19 outbreak. The support is provided in the form of a one-off monetary assistance in the amount of the minimum monthly salary (AMD 68,000) for each minor child.</p>

¹ https://covid19.gov.am/ru/business_and_coronavirus, <https://www.gov.am/>

² https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Covid-19/1%20-en.pdf

³ <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=141400>

⁴ https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Covid-19/2-en.pdf

⁵ <https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?docid=141401>

⁶ https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Covid-19/3%20-en.pdf

⁷ <http://www.isc.am/hy>

⁸ https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Covid-19/4-en.pdf

Available online services (only in Armenian) ⁹	
THE 5th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 5) Category of measures: economic Link to a more detailed description ¹⁰	<p>Business entities, which have consistently employed from two to 50 persons, are eligible for receiving a lump sum state grant in the amount of around 16-50 percent of the payroll fund of the entity.</p> <p>In accordance with the 5th package of measures approved by the Government, such grants shall be provided to all those business entities, which have consistently maintained from 2 to 50 paid employees within the period from 1 January, 2020 to 1 April, 2020 and the actual payroll of these entities has not decreased during the aforementioned period.</p> <p>The grant amount will be approximately 16-50 percent of the total remuneration fund of an entity.</p>
THE 6th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 6) Category of measures: social Link to a more detailed description ¹¹ Available online services ¹²	<p>Beneficiaries of the 6th package of measures approved by the Government are those natural entities, who have been in registered employment in the private sector at least within the period from 1 January, 2020 to 13 March, 2020 constantly, but have been dismissed from job within the period from 13 March, 2020 to 30 March, 2020.</p> <p>The support is provided in the form of a one-off monetary assistance in the amount of the minimum monthly salary (AMD 68,000).</p>
THE 7th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 7) Category of measures: social Link to a more detailed description ¹³ Available online services ¹⁴	<p>The 7th package of measures approved by Government is aimed at supporting pregnant women facing social difficulties caused by the challenges in the labour market as a result of Covid-19 outbreak. Beneficiaries of this package of measures are those pregnant women, who are registered in medical institutions and have no paid employment as of 30 March 2020, are not individual entrepreneurs or have a micro-enterprise which is a beneficiary to the 10th package of support measures.</p> <p>Beneficiaries of this package of measures shall be provided with support in the form of a one-off monetary assistance in the amount of AMD 100,000.</p>
THE 8th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 8) Category of measures: social Link to a more detailed description ¹⁵ Available online for receiving services ¹⁶	<p>Within the framework of the 8th package of measures approved by the Government, it is envisaged to support individuals and individual entrepreneurs in the areas of the private sector most affected as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak. Employees in maternity or childcare leave are also eligible for this support measure. Among the programmes addressing social impact of the outbreak, the 8th package of measures covers the largest number of benefactors (around 100,000 persons), since all the beneficiaries are registered employees. Employees are considered a Beneficiary in case they were paid employees in the Affected areas within the period from 13 March, 2020 to 30 March, 2020. Registered employees who are on leave for the care of a child up to 3 years old and who are registered as individual entrepreneurs in the Affected areas are also eligible for the support provided in the frame of this programme. The list of Affected areas includes: hotel and guesthouse services; public catering services; tourism services; hairdressing services and beauty salons; retail trade services, including sales and purchases organized in trade centres or other trade points; route transport services; pre-school education and private kindergartens; sports clubs or swimming pools; entertainment and other types of leisure activities.</p> <p>The amount of the one-off monetary support depends upon the salary amount or, in case of individual entrepreneurs, the turnover amount, and may not exceed AMD 136,000.</p>
THE 9th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 9) Category of measures: social Link to a more detailed description ¹⁷	<p>For the 9th package of support measures, the following are considered as eligible beneficiaries: families with children under 18 years of age in which none of the parents/ guardians or the single parent/ guardian of the child had a registered job as of 12 March 2020, and have not been accepted for temporary or permanent registered employment within the period from 12 March to 31 March 2020. Families, in which one of the parents has no registered job, and the other parent is on a leave for the care of a child, are</p>

⁹ <https://dimum.ssa.am/index.php?r=application%2F Covid4>

¹⁰ https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Covid-19/5-en.pdf

¹¹ https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Covid-19/6-en.pdf

¹² <https://dimum.ssa.am/index.php?r=application%2F Covid6>

¹³ https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Covid-19/7en.pdf

¹⁴ <https://dimum.ssa.am/index.php?r=application%2F Covid7>

¹⁵ https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Covid-19/8-en.pdf

¹⁶ <https://dimum.ssa.am/index.php?r=application%2F Covid8>

¹⁷ https://www.gov.am/u_files/file/Covid-19/9-en.pdf

	<p>Preservation of Wildlife and Cultural Heritage.</p> <p>The amount of support is the remuneration so received</p>
<p>THE 16th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 16)</p> <p>Category of measures: social</p>	<p>Beneficiaries: utility subscribers (natural gas, electricity, drinking water and (or) drainage service). Form of support: lump-sum assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 30% of the amount due for natural gas and electricity consumed in February 2020; – 50% of the amount due for electricity consumed in February 2020 by the residents of non-gasified settlements, – 50% of the amount due for drinking water (or) drainage service provided in March 2020. <p>Basic conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Natural gas bill worth AMD 30 001-40 000 for February, 2020; – Electricity bill worth 10 001-25 000 for February, 2020; – Drinking water bill and / or drainage service fee of up to AMD 3000 in March, 2020.
<p>THE 17th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 17)</p> <p>Category of measures: economic</p>	<p>Target: high-tech industry</p> <p>Beneficiaries: Business entities that meet the criteria specified in the RA Law on State Support in the Sphere of Information Technologies, Form of assistance: one-time grant to successful entrepreneurs</p> <p>Basic conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – As of the day of submitting the application, the beneficiaries did not have overdue tax and credit obligations during the last 12 months. – As of the day of submitting the application, the beneficiaries had not received a grant from the High-Tech Ministry during the last 12 months. – Beneficiaries should have been registered in Armenia over the past two years as manufacturers, or registered in Armenia for more than 2 years in case of services; <p>Or technology companies that will attract documented and approved investments</p>
<p>THE 18th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 18)</p> <p>Category of measures: economic</p>	<p>Target: Effective job support,</p> <p>Beneficiary: such economic entities registered in the Republic of Armenia that had 2 to 100 employees in the period from 1 February, 2020 to 30 April, 2020;</p> <p>Form of Support: one-time grant;</p> <p>Basic Terms and Conditions: the actual income fund calculated by the mentioned economic entities has not decreased during the mentioned period, or the decrease has made no more than 5%.</p> <p>The State Revenue Committee shall notify the economic entity that it is a programme beneficiary, after which the economic entity submits an application to the State Revenue Committee.</p>
<p>THE 19th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 19)</p> <p>Category of measures: economic</p>	<p>Target: support for competitive business ideas, entrepreneurial ideas developed by beneficiaries seeking to start a business from scratch, promotion of innovative business plans</p> <p>Beneficiary: Armenia-registered economic entity or individual entrepreneur</p> <p>Form of Support: 75% of financial resources are provided as interest-free loans with a maturity of 8 years, 25% as grants.</p> <p>Basic Terms and Conditions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – compliance with the criteria established by the RA Law on State Support for Small and Medium Enterprises, – good tax and credit record during the 12 months preceding the day of submission, – involvement in the regions of Armenia, – the applicant has not benefited from the Investment Support Centre Foundation's startup support facilities; – for at least 24 months before the date of application, the applicant has benefited from the Investment Support Centre Foundation's innovative development support facility. <p>Applications to be filed with the Investment Support Centre of the Ministry of Economy²⁴</p>
<p>THE 20th PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 20)</p>	<p>Beneficiaries: persons who from 1 March to 15 June were employed in the spheres specified below (employees under civil law contract) or sole</p>

²⁴ <https://www.mineconomy.am/>

<p>Category of measures: social</p> <p>Available online for receiving services (only in Armenian)²⁵</p>	<p>proprietors: 1) Hotel and hostel services; 2) Public catering services; 3) Tourism services; 4) Pre-school education (private kindergartens); 5) Sporting activities (sports clubs, swimming pools); 6) Entertainment and other leisure activities; 7) Cinema houses and cinematographic activities; 8) Activities in the field of photography; 9) Rental of cars and other items; 10) Educational activities in the field of culture, music, sports, dance; 11) Activities in organizing creative, artistic and ceremonial performances; 12) Casino activities;</p> <p>Form of assistance: lump-sum assistance in the amount of the minimum wage</p> <p>Basic conditions: Beneficiaries should have been in working or civil relationships with the employer in the affected area for at least 1 day during the established period (including where the employer has been terminated or ceased operations as of 15 June 2020).</p> <p>In case the employer is operating in several areas (one or more of which are included in the affected areas), support is provided if the share of activities in the affected areas is at least 40%. Moreover, in this case assistance shall be provided to all employees of such an employer.</p>
<p>THE 21st PACKAGE OF MEASURES (or Action 21)</p> <p>Category of measures: economic</p>	<p>Target: Effective job support</p> <p>Beneficiary: Business entities with 2 to 100 employees as of 1 March 2020 through 31 May 2020</p> <p>Form of assistance: one-time grant, in the amount of the salary of every 5th employee,</p> <p>Methodology for calculating the amount of support has been developed</p>

²⁵ <https://dimum.ssa.am/index.php?r=application%2F covid20>

Annex III. The measures taken within the EAEU in the customs sphere in response to the pandemic

The Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC) adopted a series of measures meant to deliver a prompt response to the spread of COVID-19, including the Decision No. 6 of 10 April 2020 of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council²⁶ “On measures undertaken within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) aimed at ensuring economic stability in the context of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic”²⁷, which stipulates for the establishment of a EAEU “green corridors” (Unified sanitary requirements were established, delivery routes and truck stops were defined in each EAEU country)²⁸ for the import of critical goods (by p. 1.3 of the Decision No. 6), including:

- Temporary removal of import duties on critically important goods.
- Facilitation of customs procedures for the import of critical goods (including automated registration of bills of entry, the involvement of authorized economic operators into the process of import of said goods in order to ensure the extensive use of the facilitations, assigning a low risk level to entities specializing in handling of critical goods).
- Assigning top priority to customs operations related to goods critical for the prevention and remediation of the impact of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic in accordance with paragraph 1 of Article 81 of the Customs Code of the Eurasian Economic Union

At the same time, by the Decision No. 6 of 10 April 2020 of the Eurasian Intergovernmental Council, provides for the possibility of introduction of temporary restrictions on export of critical goods to third countries (by p.1.4).

A list of medical supplies necessary in preventing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a list of critical food products, the import of which is temporarily exempted from customs duties (Decisions No. 21 of 16 March 2020, No. 33 and 34 of 3 April 2020 of the Council of the Eurasian Economic Commission) have been approved.

A list of food commodities, on which a *temporary* export ban for export outside of EAEU territory is imposed, has been approved (Decisions No. 41 of 21 March 2020 and No. 43

²⁶ https://docs.eaeunion.org/docs/ru-ru/01425377/ico_16042020_6

²⁷ Also, Decision No. 11 of 25.03.2020 and other documents, see overview <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/nae/news/Pages/10-04-2020-1.aspx>

²⁸ <http://www.eurasiancommission.org/ru/covid-19/Pages/green.aspx>

of 31 March 2020 of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission).

Products and commodities used in efforts to prevent the spread of the coronavirus disease, which are included in the list of goods approved by the Decision of the Council of the EEC No. 21 of 16 March 2020 (rev. 27 May 2020) bearing an approval of designated use from an authorized healthcare institution, do not require:

- Submission of a certificate of state registration (for goods included in the EAEU list of goods, subject to epidemiological surveillance).
- Confirmation of compliance with measures of technical regulation mandatorily required by the Customs Union (Decision No. 294 of 25 December 2012 of the Board of the Eurasian Economic Commission).

An authorized healthcare institution still exercises control over the designated use of said goods.

The procedure for issuing certificates of origin (type «A») is also temporary simplified for developing and less developed countries. The adopted decision allows the use of a paper or electronic copy of the above-mentioned document for a period of 6 months and allows for the non-submission of the original certificate during the declaration (Decision No.36 of 3 April 2020 of the Council of the EEC).

Annex IV. ABBREVIATIONS/ACRONYMS

Exchange rate 1:US\$ (July, 2020)		
US\$	Unit of currency – US Dollar	/
AZN	Unit of currency – Azerbaijani Manat	0.59
AMD	Unit of currency – Armenian Dram	0.0021
GEL	Unit of currency – Georgian lari	0.33
KGS	Unit of currency – Kyrgyzstani Som	0.013
KZT	Unit of currency – Kazakhstan Tenge	0.0025
RUB	Unit of currency – Russian Ruble	0.014
TJS	Unit of currency – Tajikistani Somoni	0.097
TMT	Unit of currency – Turkmenistan Manat	0.29
UZS	Unit of currency – Uzbekistani So'm	0.000098

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