



PERMANENT TECHNICAL
COMMITTEE

PC0559Ea

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225th/226th Sessions

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Brussels, 30 September 2019.

TIME RELEASE STUDY (TRS)

**Update on the cooperation between the WCO and the World Bank Group
on the use of the TRS Software**

(Item V.b on the Agenda)

I. Introduction

1. The WCO Time Release Study is a strategic and internationally recognized tool to measure the actual time required for the release and/or clearance of goods, primarily from the time of arrival until the physical release of cargo, with a view to finding bottlenecks in the trade flow process and taking necessary measures to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of border procedures.
2. The tool provides several benefits for WCO Members and their respective government, such as opportunities for expansion of national productivity, leading to the improvement of the country's international competitiveness in the global market. It also supports the government's macroeconomic initiatives through growth and development by strengthening efficiency and effectiveness of Customs and other cross-border regulatory agencies.
3. With the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA) entering into force, which specifically mentions the WCO TRS as a tool for Members to measure and publish average release time of goods, this tool is being increasingly used by countries to fulfill their obligations under Article 7.6 of the WTO TFA.
4. In this context, it is important to note that, apart from the WCO, international actors such as World Bank Group (WBG) are notably supporting countries' commitments and efforts toward boosting trade facilitation through implementation of global facilitation instruments, particularly TRS, and they have demonstrated willingness for granting financial aids and other forms of assistance for countries to carry out TRS in a more efficient and effective manner.

5. Noting the commitment of WBG in supporting WCO Members to better conducting TRS on a periodic basis, the WCO has been engaging and cooperating with the World Bank in this area.

II. TRS outcomes related to the cooperation between the WCO and World Bank Group

6. The WCO and the WBG believe that having a strategic and dynamic partnership between two Organizations will strengthen capacities of Customs Administrations and other relevant stakeholders in conducting TRS, based on their needs and priorities. This will not only raise the profile of both Organizations, but it should also enhance global trade without jeopardizing other Customs missions and goals. The cooperation between the WCO and the WBG has been progressively moving forward, and some of the concrete outcomes include the following :

- Coordination in delivering technical assistance

7. Based on the needs expressed by Members, the WCO has been providing them with necessary capacity building and technical assistance support. However, in some instances Members also liaise with the WBG in order to receive financial and technical assistance covering different trade facilitation initiatives, including in the area of conducting TRS, leading to potential duplication and, at times, fragmented approaches.
8. To avoid such a scenario, the WCO and the WBG have agreed to have regular consultations at the technical level, when one of the two Organizations becomes aware that a TRS technical assistance has been requested to both Organizations. In such a case, beneficiary Members are informed of the coordination between the two Organizations and potential synergies. Through this coordination, efforts are made to offer joint technical assistance or to agree that only one Organization supports the Member until the end of a TRS cycle or project.
9. As more and more Members are now prepared to publish their TRS reports in the public domain, the coordination in delivering technical assistance also provides an opportunity for both Organizations to share Members' TRS reports with each other, subject to the consent of those Members.

- Allowing restricted utilization of the WCO TRS Software by WBG Consultants

10. At the request of the WCO Member that intends to, or is in the process of, conducting a TRS with the financial assistance of WBG, the WCO has been granting the opportunity for WBG consultants to use the WCO TRS Software. in a restricted manner and on a case-to-case basis.
11. Passwords and usernames to be attributed to a country conducting a TRS are also shared with the assigned WBG consultants, after the approval of the Member concerned. Although the WCO TRS Software serves as platform to be used by all the WCO Members, it is important to highlight that the passwords and usernames only give opportunity for one country and consultant (s) to have access to only that part of the Software, which relates to the Member.

- Joint work aimed at updating the WCO TRS software

12. The WCO and the WBG are also exploring opportunities to carry out update of the TRS Software by joining resources and expertise, taking into account new imperatives and technological advances. This scope envisages for both Organizations to organize joint meetings to share opportunities and challenges related to TRS at national, regional and multilateral levels, especially with regard to the use of the WCO TRS software.
13. To that end, the first joint workshop was organized from 9 to 10 September 2019 at the WCO headquarters. It brought together WCO TRS Technical and Operational Advisers (ToAs), the WCO Secretariat, representatives/consultants from the WBG and IT experts to discuss and identify specific areas for the potential update of the TRS Software.
14. The workshop, based on the new elements included in the recent version of the TRS Guide – version 3, discussed and listed several aspects that could be included in the new version of the WCO TRS Software. This included greater use of modern technologies in data collection, collation and analysis for improving the TRS process (e.g. electronic processing systems, Single Windows, smart phones, RFID seals, and GPS-enabled track and trace technologies), automating business process mapping, and enhancing data analytics capabilities.
15. Furthermore, it was indicated that a standardized set of data collecting points (e.g. arrival of cargo, move to warehouse, release etc.) should be determined for harmonized application of TRS and coming up with globally comparable outcomes.
16. The Secretariat will provide the PTC delegates with an oral update on the progress of this collaborative activity.

III. **Action required**

17. The PTC delegates are invited to :
 - discuss and take note of the joint work and ongoing cooperation between the WCO and WBG in the area of TRS;
 - take note that the envisaged comprehensive process that the WCO and the WBG have initiated to update the WCO TRS software and provide any guidance, as appropriate; and
 - encourage Members and stakeholders to continue carrying out TRS taking into account their working experiences and lessons learned.
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