



Message from the World Customs Organization International Customs Day 2022

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Traditionally, every year, the Customs community comes together on 26 January to mark International Customs Day. This day of celebration is a unique opportunity for WCO Members, the WCO Secretariat and global Customs' partners to reflect on a particular theme and to act upon it.

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

Over the years, digital technology has evolved rapidly and Customs can now tap into data from other government agencies, commercially available databases, and open-source information platforms such as digitized global public records and multilingual news sources.

The extent to which data can be used effectively depends on various factors surrounding data ethics, including privacy, commercial secrecy and legal issues regarding the use of data by Customs and Tax administrations, and the importance assigned to innovation in public administrations.

To build data ecosystems, or consolidate existing ones, the following enabling actions may be considered:

- establishing formal data governance to ensure the relevance, accuracy and timeliness of data;
- making use of the standards developed by the WCO and other institutions regarding data format and data exchange;
- providing appropriate management of data to ensure that the right people have access to the right data, and that data protection regulations are respected; and,
- adopting progressive approaches, such as data analytics, to collect and successfully exploit data to drive decision-making.

A robust data culture empowers people to ask questions, challenge ideas and rely on detailed insights, not just intuition or instinct, to make decisions.

In order to nurture a data-driven culture, administrations need to enhance the data-literacy of their staff - in other words, their ability to interpret and analyze data accurately.

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Customs administrations should integrate data science into their curriculums for newly recruited officers and participate in the development of distance learning courses to familiarize Customs officers with the collection and analysis of data in order to forge a data-driven culture. Staff also need to understand the bigger picture, namely the impact of Customs on the effective protection of society, trade facilitation and fair revenue collection.

On the other hand, Customs administrations are invited to consider leveraging data in their relationships with other actors along the supply chain, as well as making data available to the public and academia as a means of enhancing transparency, stimulating the production of knowledge and enabling dialogue with civil society.

Sharing data analysis with other government agencies increases the role and visibility of Customs in policy-making and in obtaining necessary resources, including donor funding. Disseminating Customs data and information in society is part of governments' response to the general demand for open governance.

To support Customs administrations, the WCO Secretariat has placed data-related topics on the agendas of several committees and working groups, organized awareness-raising seminars, developed e-learning modules, drafted a Capacity Building Framework for Data Analytics which was adopted by the WCO Council in December 2020, issued practical publications and published articles in the WCO News Magazine.

Moreover, a community of experts has been established, under the name of BACUDA (BAnd of CUstoms Data Analysts), which brings together Customs and data scientists with the objective of developing data analytics methodologies.

The Secretariat will continue to investigate ways to collect and share data on Customs administrations with a view to enhancing the way it delivers capacity building, and will continue to undertake data-driven assessments and work with international experts to respond to assistance requests.

More measures will be presented in the WCO Data Strategy that the WCO Secretariat is currently working on. The ambition will be to make data a vernacular language among Customs administrations and between the WCO Secretariat and WCO Members. The road ahead is not an easy one, there will inevitably be challenges along the way, but as we have learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Customs community is united, stronger and more resilient in the face of adversity.

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WCO Secretary General
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