In June 2020, as part of its response to the COVID-19 pandemic and with the financial support of the Government of Japan, the World Customs Organization (WCO) launched the “Project to Improve the Capacity of Developing Countries’ Customs Administrations to Respond to the Impact of COVID-19”, also known as the WCO COVID-19 Project.

The overall purpose of this initiative is to ensure the security, stability and continuity of global supply chains, while facilitating and expediting the supply of emergency relief goods by enhancing Customs’ disaster preparedness worldwide.

As key players in the business and trade arenas, Customs administrations are on the frontline of disaster relief operations and have to facilitate and expedite the movement of relief and essential goods in a timely and efficient way, thus ensuring the stability and continuity of global supply chains during disruptive events.
ACTIVITIES

The Project is providing support to WCO Members in three different ways:

01 via capacity building activities,

02 through the provision of the Mobile App and IT equipment, and

03 by developing and disseminating new tools such as the WCO Guidelines on Disaster Management and Supply Chain Continuity, the Self-Assessment Checklist, and the WCO Guide to Stress Tests.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The Project delivers capacity building activities tailored to the needs of WCO Members at national, sub-regional and regional level, including workshops, training and simulation exercises (SimEx). In carrying out its mission, the WCO cooperates closely with other partner International Organizations and agencies involved in the field of humanitarian aid and disaster relief. The COVID-19 Project makes sure it involves stakeholders in its activities, thereby fostering synergies and productive cooperation. To date, more than 100 WCO Members from five of the WCO regions have benefitted from the opportunities offered by the Project. An e-learning module on the role of SimEx in enhancing Customs’ operational readiness to respond to disruptive events has also been developed by the Project. The module is aimed at helping Members learn about designing and planning SimEx.

WCO Guidelines on Disaster Management and Supply Chain Continuity together with other tools

The Guidelines have been built upon existing WCO instruments and tools so as to provide a set of guiding principles and recommended practices covering the three phases of the disaster management cycle: preparedness, response and recovery. In order to further assist Customs administrations in evaluating their readiness to face future disruptive events, the WCO COVID-19 Project recently produced an ad-hoc Self-Assessment Checklist which is annexed to the Guidelines.

One of the latest additions to the Project tools is the WCO Guide to Stress Tests: design, implement and test plans for business continuity and enhanced resilience.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT

Considering the recent global health crisis, the WCO encourages the use of electronic Customs declarations alongside other measures to maintain social distancing and facilitate international trade. Minimizing physical contact between Customs officers and inbound air passengers at the border and entry points and facilitating Customs procedures by promoting e-declarations is of the upmost importance to foster safe and secure flows of passengers in airports. The COVID-19 Project Team provides technical support to beneficiary countries in the form of a passenger Customs e-declaration Mobile App for completing e-declaration data and submitting it via a QR code reader to Customs.