



237th/238th Sessions
25-27 October 2022

Brussels, 11 August 2022.

ROLE OF CUSTOMS IN FRAGILE AND CONFLICT-AFFECTED SITUATIONS

(Item V on the Agenda)

SUMMARY

Purpose of document

This document presents the background of the work done by the WCO since 2016 on the role of Customs in fragile and conflict-affected situations and provides an update of the actions undertaken since the last session of the Permanent Technical Committee (PTC).

Action required of the PTC

The PTC is invited to:

- Take note of the publication of two documents by the Secretariat in June 2022, namely the Secretariat note on The Role of Customs in Fragile and Conflict Situations, and "Customs, Security and Fragility: Practices and Recommendations from the Experience of the North Africa, Near and Middle East Region"; and,
- Encourage the participation of Members in the global conference to be held in Abuja, Nigeria in the first quarter of 2023.

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Background

1. The Secretariat of the World Customs Organization (WCO) has been conducting research activities on the role of customs in fragile and conflict situations since 2016.
2. The term "fragile borders" is preferred to "fragile countries" which is used in other fora, to better capture the local and specific nature of situations of armed violence in land border areas. Moreover, some countries are not fragile but their border economy and security are impacted because they share borders with countries in fragile, conflict or post-conflict situations. As discussed in several WCO publications, Customs have a particular role to play in border areas affected by insecurity, being at the interface of security and economy. Security responses are not always appropriate and can degrade the relationship between border populations and the State.
3. Research activities were conducted with the support of many Members who hosted field missions, sometimes on several occasions, to undertake a national reflection, contribute to a better understanding and visibility of the interactions between the border economy and the border security, or to share their practices and organizational adaptations. These Members were directly affected by armed violence or shared a border with countries that were affected (Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Yemen).
4. The research outcomes have been disseminated through country reports, academic publications and publications with a wider audience including the *WCO News* magazine, workshops on technology solutions, as well as WCO workshops on related topics such as intelligence and data analytics, countering illicit trafficking of cultural heritage, communications in academic conferences and regular inclusion of this topic in the PICARD conference since 2016, and the organization of a mini-conference on GEOINT in 2019. Part of this work has contributed to the development of the regional training project in the Sahel by Members.
5. This research has been funded primarily by the Secretariat through the Government of Japan since 2016, as well as ad hoc funding from bilateral and international donors.
6. In April 2022, the Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) put the topic on its agenda as an Other Business item where the concepts and research outcomes were discussed. The PTC then agreed that the topic should benefit of a more substantial item at the next PTC meeting.
7. In June 2022, the Secretariat issued a publication containing the main outcomes of this research and the best practices observed in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with experiences from the West and Central Africa (WCA) region, as well as a Secretariat note discussing the role of Customs and the role of the WCO in fragile and conflict-affected situations¹.

¹ See the Secretariat note on The role of Customs in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations, <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2022/june/fragile-borders-the-role-of-customs-in-situations-of-conflict-and-fragility.aspx> and « Customs, Security and Fragility : practices and recommendations from

Update since the 235/236th sessions of the PTC and Way Forward

8. In June 2022, at the Policy Commission, it was announced that a global conference on fragile borders would be held in Nigeria in early 2023.
9. At this conference, the WCO Secretariat will propose an action plan to be discussed. This action plan will mainly follow five areas identified in the June 2022 publication on "Customs, Security and Fragility" which are developed in chapters addressing the following:
 - (i) building a high-level political advocacy on the role of Customs in land border areas affected by insecurity,
 - (ii) adapting the organization of the administration at the central and local levels (including the security of Customs buildings and interactions with other security actors),
 - (iii) equipping field staff appropriately without militarizing customs,
 - (iv) mobilizing economic and Customs data and intelligence for security purposes, and
 - (v) adapting training to generate a doctrine on State action in fragile borderlands and prepare Customs officers to cooperate with other security forces and carry out their own security missions.
10. Within this framework, the action plan will adapt existing WCO security programme building blocks (e.g., Programme Global Shield on countering Improvised Explosive Devices precursors, Small Arms and Light Weapons Project), and include input from other domains, such as Customs procedures for natural and man-made disasters, etc. to situations of fragility. New technical initiatives will have to be discussed, notably in the domain of personnel and facilities protection, including protection of detained and seized goods, and training, as well as the management and control of imports of humanitarian goods.
11. In accordance with the guidance expressed by the Policy Commission and Council in June 2002, this action plan will also include research activities exploring technical solutions that can support Customs in situations of fragility: first, the use of Customs data for security purposes, the development of GEOINT and use of drones in particular to optimize the field deployment of personnel in a secure manner. In line with the requests expressed during the Council, a second component will consist of extending the geographical spectrum of the topic to Europe and Latin America where Members are affected by armed violence in a different way than the countries of the Middle East and North of Africa (MENA) and West and Central Africa (WCA) regions, which are mainly subject to violent extremism.
12. The PTC is invited to:
 - Take note of the publication of two documents by the Secretariat in June 2022, namely the Secretariat note on The Role of Customs in Fragile and Conflict Situations, and "Customs, Security and Fragility: Practices and

the MENA region » http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/member/global/pdf/topics/research/wco_fragilityreport_en.pdf

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Recommendations from the Experience of the North Africa, Near and Middle East Region"; and,

- Encourage the participation of Members in the global conference to be held in Abuja, Nigeria in the first quarter of 2023.
