



PERMANENT TECHNICAL  
COMMITTEE

PC0703Ea

-  
237<sup>th</sup>/238<sup>th</sup> Sessions

-  
24 – 28 October 2022

Brussels, 30 August 2022

## **ROLE OF CUSTOMS IN MITIGATING THE EFFECTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**Update on the progress of the COVID-19 Project, especially regarding the development of a “Stress Test Tool” for Customs administrations**

**(Item VII on the Agenda)**

**(“C” Item on the Agenda)**

### **SUMMARY**

#### **Purpose of document**

The purpose of this document is to provide the Permanent Technical Committee (PTC) with an update on the work progress achieved by the COVID-19 Project, especially regarding the development of a “stress test” tool for Customs administrations.

#### **Actions required of the PTC**

The PTC is kindly invited to:

- take note of the information provided in this document about the progress achieved by the WCO COVID-19 Project since the Spring 2022 PTC sessions;
- examine and discuss the “stress test” tool and, if appropriate, endorse it; and
- provide guidance on the way forward.

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### **I. Background**

1. The COVID-19 Project, funded by the Government of Japan, was launched in June 2020 as part of the WCO’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It aims to improve the capacity of Customs administrations in developing and least developed countries to

deal with disruptive scenarios such as COVID-19, other infectious diseases and natural disasters. The Project had three main components: developing WCO Guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity, delivering capacity building activities, and providing IT equipment/solutions.

2. Over the past two years, the Project has finalized and subsequently updated the Guidelines on disaster management and supply chain continuity, delivered 16 capacity building activities at the regional, sub-regional and national levels in 5 WCO regions, and has been responsible for providing three Members - namely Cameroon, Madagascar and Benin - with a Mobile App and related IT equipment for the submission of Customs declarations by inbound passengers that will help limit physical contact between those passengers and Customs personnel at entry points.
3. The COVID-19 Project was scheduled to come to an end in June 2022, but at the WCO's request the Government of Japan agreed to a one-year, no-cost extension to allow more support to be provided to WCO Members in order to enhance their preparedness to face any future disruptive event efficiently.
4. In order to further assist Customs administrations in enhancing their preparedness, a "stress test" tool has been developed. This tool will allow Customs administrations to learn about the establishment of business continuity and contingency plans, and to test and validate these plans during simulation exercises to ascertain that their procedures, systems and personnel are ready to ensure the continuity of operations in the event of any disruption.
5. This document provides an update on the progress achieved by the COVID-19 Project since the last PTC sessions, and will be presented to the PTC at its upcoming sessions along with the "stress test" tool for Customs administrations.

## **II. Intersessional developments**

### **1. Capacity building**

6. Since the 235<sup>th</sup>/236<sup>th</sup> PTC Sessions, held in April 2022, the COVID-19 Project Team has organized four workshops as detailed below:

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Region</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Status</b>
National workshop to assist Haiti Customs in improving its capacity to process relief consignments	AMS	23-26 May	Delivered (in person)
National workshop to assist in improving Cameroon Customs' capacity to face disruptive events	WCA	1-3 June	Delivered (in person)
National workshop to assess Tonga's response to the volcanic eruption and tsunami	A/P	17-18 August	Delivered (virtual)
Regional workshop for Asia-Pacific region on disaster management and supply chain continuity: sharing experiences and lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic	A/P	11-13 May	Delivered (virtual)

7. In September the Project will organize an in-person national workshop for Tonga, to assist Customs with the drafting of Standard Operating Procedures for the clearance of relief consignments and with a scenario-based discussion to enhance the preparedness of Customs and other stakeholders to respond to future disasters.
8. The Project has developed an e-learning module that will help Customs administrations to organize and run simulation exercises to test their procedures and systems and enhance the readiness of Customs staff. The module is available, in English and French, on the CLiKC! platform.

## **2. Development of a “stress test” tool**

9. Concepts such as business continuity management, business continuity plans, contingency plans, simulation exercises, stress tests and preparedness were unknown to many Customs administrations before the COVID-19 crisis, and for some administrations this continues to be the case. For this reason, the Project has developed a “stress test” tool that will help Customs to develop business continuity plans in the future and test the validity of such plans using different techniques and scenarios.
10. The “stress test” tool will be enriched at a later stage by including Members’ best practices related to the development of business continuity plans and the organization of stress tests. The “stress test” tool is appended to this document.

## **3. Procurement of Mobile App and IT equipment**

11. The COVID-19 Project has been responsible for providing three WCO Members (Benin, Cameroon and Madagascar) with a Mobile App and related IT equipment for the submission of Customs declarations by inbound passengers that will help limit physical contact between those passengers and Customs personnel at entry points. After the development of the Mobile App was finalized, it was immediately released in two countries. The necessary equipment has been purchased and shipped to the three countries concerned.

## **III. Possible way forward**

12. The COVID-19 Project will continue to assist interested WCO Members by delivering capacity building activities at the national level. The Project will also provide the Mobile App and related equipment to two additional Members, namely Nigeria and Tonga.

## **IV. Conclusion**

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