



Permanent Technical Committee

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241<sup>st</sup>/242<sup>nd</sup> Sessions

-  
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## TRANSIT

### **WCO's support for Landlocked Developing Countries**

#### **(Item IX on the Agenda)**

#### SUMMARY

##### Purpose of document

The purpose of this document is to report on recent WCO activities in support of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) for Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) for the Decade 2014 – 2024, and to provide an overview of the preparatory process for the Third United Nations Conference on LLDCs to be held in June 2024 in Kigali, Rwanda.

##### Action required of the Permanent Technical Committee

The Permanent Technical Committee is invited to:

- take note of the progress achieved in the area of transit and in particular the support to LLDCs;
- provide guidance on the WCO's input to the preparatory process and outcome document of the Third UN Conference on LLDCs.

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## **I. Introduction**

1. The international community develops and implements action-oriented programmes aimed at addressing the special needs and complex challenges faced by the 32 Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) since 2003, when the Almaty Programme of Action was adopted at the International Ministerial Conference on Transit Transport Cooperation held in Almaty, Kazakhstan on 28-29 August 2003. The second action-oriented programme for LLDCs, the Vienna Programme of Action (VPoA) for LLDCs for the Decade 2014 – 2024, was adopted at the Second United

Nations (UN) Conference on LLDCs held in Vienna, Austria from 3 to 5 November 2014. The VPoA contains six priority areas of fundamental transit policy issues, infrastructure development and maintenance, international trade and trade facilitation, regional integration and cooperation, structural economic transformation, and means of implementation. The implementation of the VPoA aims to contribute to an enhanced rate of sustainable and inclusive growth and socio-economic development, which can support the eradication of poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, thus having an impact towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. The World Customs Organization (WCO) contributes to the implementation of the special programmes of action for LLDCs from the outset, believing that LLDCs, together with Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Economies (SIEs), should be the major beneficiaries of trade and transport facilitation efforts. The WCO is a member of the Inter-Agency Consultative Group (IACG) on the follow-up and implementation of the VPoA, and the Secretariat takes part in all meetings of the Group. Moreover, the WCO provides formal reports to serve as input to the annual reports of the UN Secretary-General on the implementation of the VPoA.
3. Furthermore, the text of the Agreement on Trade Facilitation of the World Trade Organization (WTO TFA) was adopted in Bali, Indonesia in December 2013 and the Agreement entered into force on 22 February 2017. The WTO TFA contains a number of provisions related to the movement, release and clearance of goods in transit, among which Article 11 *Freedom of transit*. The WCO provides capacity-building support on transit to requesting Members, both LLDCs and transit developing countries, through the WCO Mercator Programme.
4. Regular progress reports have been provided and discussions held in that regard at the WCO Working Group on the WTO TFA and the Permanent Technical Committee (PTC), whereas the most recent progress report was presented to the PTC in October 2022.

## **II. Intersessional progress**

5. In February 2023, the WCO was invited to provide input to the UN Secretary-General's 10-year assessment report on the implementation of the VPoA. The WCO submitted its report on 24 April 2023, outlining progress in three broad areas: i) Setting standard for simplified and harmonized border procedures; ii) Progress in capacity building delivery in the period 2014-2023; and iii) Partnerships for implementation of the VPoA.
6. In terms of standard setting, the WCO reported that, between November 2014 and April 2023, eight LLDCs have acceded to the Revised Kyoto Convention (RKC), thus bringing the number of LLDCs that are RKC Contracting Parties to 23 (72% of the LLDCs). The WCO report also contained details about the Transit Handbook launched in November 2014 at the Second UN Conference on LLDCs, the Transit Guidelines launched in July 2017 at the WCO Global Transit Conference, the Compendium of best practices in the area of transit of June 2020, and the Railway Guidance of June 2022. In addition, the WCO reported on its contribution to the update of the One-Stop Border Post (OSBP) Sourcebook, the third edition of which was published in June 2022, as well as on its efforts towards mitigating the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and towards achieving gender equality and diversity in Customs.
7. In the capacity building area, the WCO report included details on two global accreditation workshops on transit held in March 2016 and March 2019, the delivery between February 2015 and May 2022 of 17 regional and sub-regional workshops and three national workshops on transit, as well as the support provided to Members in

West Africa for interconnectivity of Customs IT systems (through the Programme d'Appui au Commerce et à l'Intégration Régionale (PACIR) and the Système Interconnecté pour la Gestion des Marchandises en Transit (SIGMAT) Project). Furthermore, the WCO provided details on the e-learning courses on transit available on the CLiKC! platform, as well as reported on the capacity-building support provided to LLDCs in a broad range of Customs-related areas, other than transit.

8. In terms of partnerships for implementation of the VPoA, the WCO report included details on events dealing with fundamental transit policy issues and trade facilitation for LLDCs to which the WCO has contributed through the participation of the WCO Secretary General and experts from the Secretariat. Through this section of the report, the WCO underscored the key role of simplified and harmonized Customs procedures for facilitating trade in LLDCs and transit developing countries and enhancing Members' economic competitiveness. The report also emphasized the importance of digital connectivity, in particular the automation of Customs processes and the interconnectivity of IT systems and solutions, and highlighted good practices such as the Regional Electronic Cargo Tracking System (RECTS) deployed in Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the initiative for interconnectivity of Customs IT systems in West Africa.
9. The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) has published the inputs to the 10-year assessment report on the implementation of the VPoA submitted by the WCO and other members of the IACG on the follow-up and implementation of the VPoA. These reports can be consulted at the following link: <https://www.un.org/ohrlls/content/un-inter-agency-work-lldcs>.
10. For the purposes of the present progress report, it is worth highlighting that, since August 2022, the WCO Secretary General has participated in the Annual Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Ministers of LLDCs held on 22 September 2022 at the UN Headquarters in New York, the EU-Central Asia Connectivity Conference held on 18 November 2022 in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, a Multilateral meeting on the simplification of Customs procedures along the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor) held on 14-15 March 2023 in Baku, Azerbaijan, and in the International Road Transport Conference held on 13 September 2023 in Tashkent, Uzbekistan.
11. As reported previously, during the first periodic review of TFA implementation, the WTO Trade Facilitation Committee (TFC) decided to include a dedicated session to discuss transit issues of landlocked country members in its spring meeting for four years from April 2022. The 12<sup>th</sup> WTO Ministerial Conference also instructed the TFC to hold a dedicated session on transit issues annually until the next review of the TFA. Thus, in June 2023, the WTO organized a Workshop on Transit for Landlocked Developing and Transit WTO Members and a Dedicated Session on Transit under the WTO TFC. The WCO Secretariat contributed to both events.
12. Through various exchanges and during the June 2023 meeting of the IACG on the follow-up and implementation of the VPoA, OHRLLS informed the participating international and regional organizations of the modalities of the preparatory process for the Third UN Conference on LLDCs that will be held from 18 to 22 June 2024 in Kigali, Rwanda. The preparatory process includes three regional preparatory meetings, respectively for the Africa region (with 16 LLDCs), the Euro-Asia region (with 14 LLDCs) and the Latin America region (with 2 LLDCs), a half-day dedicated thematic event to be organized in the second half of 2023 by the President of the UN General Assembly and the President of the UN Economic and Social Council to provide substantive input to the Conference, meetings of the intergovernmental preparatory committee to be held in February and April 2024, and a High-level event of the UN

system and other relevant international and regional organizations to be held during the Conference with a view to ensuring full mobilization of the UN system in support of the LLDCs. A number of pre-conference and side events will be organized by UN agencies and other relevant international and regional organizations prior to and during the Conference, whereas all IACG members are encouraged to hold such events to support the preparatory process for the next programme of action for LLDCs.

13. With regard to the outcome document of the Third UN Conference on LLDCs, it should be noted that the Government of Botswana, in its capacity as the current Chair of the Group of LLDCs, will be coordinating the final draft of the outcome document summarizing the inputs from the three regional preparatory meetings. The latter were held on 29-30 May 2023 in Gaborone, Botswana, on 27-28 July 2023 in Asuncion, Paraguay and on 22-23 August 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand, whereas the WCO participated in the Africa and Euro-Asia meetings and advocated the key role of efficient and harmonized border procedures, being the “soft infrastructure” that complements the hard infrastructure at borders and along transit corridors.
14. All three regional outcome documents highlight, *inter alia*, the importance of efficient implementation by LLDCs and transit countries of agreements and initiatives that promote trade facilitation, such as the WTO TFA and the WCO RKC; the importance of effective and efficient transit transport corridors that are the backbone of transportation networks; the need to improve transit, and the need for innovative approaches to treat in a holistic manner the issues of transit, transport and trade facilitation; as well as the need to enhance LLDCs’ efforts to integrate into e-commerce. This comes along a strong focus on the need for enhanced Official Development Assistance (ODA), Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and enhanced financial and technical support in the form of impactful projects and capacity building in various areas, including hard infrastructure development, energy efficiency, structural economic transformation, innovation and technology deployment.
15. Details on the Third UN Conference on LLDCs, including the above-mentioned preparatory and thematic events can be consulted on the dedicated web-page hosted by OHRLLS at the following link: <https://www.un.org/en/landlocked>.
16. In terms of possible pre-conference events to be organized by the WCO to support the preparatory process for the Third UN Conference on LLDCs, it should be noted that the Corporate Plan for financial year 2023/2024 includes a regional workshop for the WCO West and Central Africa (WCA) region on transit interconnectivity and the use of regional transit guarantees, with funding provided by the Customs Cooperation Fund of Japan (CCF Japan). As a first step in the preparations for the delivery of the workshop, the Secretariat needs to identify a host country in the WCA region.

### III. **Action required**

17. The PTC is invited to :
    - take note of the progress achieved in the area of transit and in particular the support to LLDCs;
    - provide guidance on the WCO’s input to the preparatory process and outcome document of the Third UN Conference on LLDCs.
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