



ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

EGM on Trade and Transport Facilitation in ESCWA region Dubai, 10-11 April 2013

Information Note

Within the context of multilateral and bilateral trade agreements, trade facilitation remains a crucial instrument for increasing gains from trade liberalization through better access to foreign markets. Simplification, harmonization, standardization and modernization of trade procedures are included in programs of many international and regional organizations with a view to reducing technical barriers to trade.

Considering its complexity, trade facilitation is one of the great challenges facing developing countries which prevent them from participating significantly in the global trade system. Although there are a number of strategies and actions that have been taken by countries to reduce customs tariffs, promote regional integration and improve trade systems, trade logistics remain an issue of concern. Trade logistics include a range of services and processes related to moving goods from one country to another, such as customs and administrative procedures, shipment operations and the quality of transport and information technology infrastructure.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) has taken a number of initiatives to support member countries in reducing technical barriers to trade through targeted actions such as the development of the International Transport System in the Arab Mashreq- ITSAM and its various components as well as a number of activities in the area of implementing Single Window for trade operations. However, trade logistics remain a core element for policy action in the countries of the region despite the significant progress already achieved by some in terms of reducing costs. The Arab region needs to incorporate trade logistics issues in their National Plans as well as in their trade policies and strategies.

In this regard, ESCWA is organizing an Expert Group Meeting (EGM) on Trade and Transport Facilitation in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates during the period 10-11 April 2013.

A. Objectives of the meeting

Among other things, the meeting aims at discussing issues related to trade logistics including customs procedures, technical investigations, transport, freight forwarding, technology and communications and their impact on trade expansion and growth in the region with a view to boosting intra/extra trade. Non Tariff Measures (NTMs), including technical barriers to trade, on exports to selected countries and/or regions will also be presented and discussed. The meeting will provide a forum for exchanging experiences and sharing good practices.

B. Agenda

The main themes of the EGM include:

- **Arab Trade: Trends, Opportunities and Challenges.**

A number of papers and presentations will be delivered and discussed under this theme illustrating evidence on the barriers to trade in terms of NTMs, including technical barriers to trade.

- **Reducing Technical Barriers to Trade: Benefits and Options.**

Papers and presentation under this theme will focus on and discuss good practices and quantitative analysis with a view to identifying options for reducing technical barriers to trade and their implication on trade creation.

- **Transport and Trade Logistics in the Region.**

This theme covers presentations related to the identification and costing of technical barriers to trade in the Arab region through field surveys on selected countries and economic sectors.

- **Strategies and Policy Recommendations.**

Wrapping up, this session will summarize the pertinent conclusions and recommendations emanating from the discussions during the previous sessions and develop policy recommendations to reduce technical barriers to trade in order to facilitate intraregional Arab trade and with key partners.

C. Participation and registration

The meeting will be attended by national experts from Ministries of Trade, Ministries of Transport, Ministries of Finance, as well as directorates of customs. Experts from international organizations such as World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the World Customs Organization (WCO), the World Bank, the International Trade Center (ITC), the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) among others will be invited to participate and contribute to the work programme of the meeting. Representatives from regional organizations and groupings such as the League of Arab States (LAS), The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), as well as Arab Funds and Institutions will also be invited to participate and contribute to this meeting..

Representatives of international business associations and chambers of commerce concerned with trade facilitation will also be invited.

D. Documentation, methods of work and official languages

The working languages are English and Arabic. Simultaneous interpretation will be available to and from both languages. Delegates nominated by their countries to participate in the EGM will be requested to prepare short **country papers** on their experience in Trade Facilitation, as well as initiatives and actions undertaken to reduce the corresponding negative impact of technical barriers to trade on trade flows.

Documents and papers related to the meeting will be made available subsequently on the meeting web page on ESCWA's web site at the following address:

<http://www.escwa.un.org/divisions/main.asp?division=edgd>

E. Travel arrangements

- The meeting will take place in the Dubai. The exact venue will be communicated shortly.
- Participants should contact the UAE Embassy in their respective countries to arrange for their entry visa.
- Member countries are encouraged to nominate more than one expert from concerned national institutions such as Ministries of Trade and Industry, Ministries of Finance and Ministries of Transport. However, ESCWA will cover the participation of **one expert from each member country**. Other participants are expected to attend at their own expenses.
- Nominated participants are requested to fill a nomination form which is available on the ESCWA website and send a copy of their passport in order to finalize the administrative arrangements concerning their travel to: Ms. Thana El-Habta at : elhabta@un.org

F. Correspondence

All correspondences related to the meeting should be addressed to:

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