



Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)**REPORT****REGIONAL TRAINING WORKSHOP ON “REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT
OF A SINGLE WINDOW FOR TRADE PROCEDURES
AND FORMALITIES IN THE ESCWA REGION”
BEIRUT, 3-4 MARCH 2011****Summary**

The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized a Regional Training Workshop on “Requirements for the Establishment of a Single Window for Trade Procedures and Formalities in the ESCWA Region” in cooperation with the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Center and the League of Arab States on 3 and 4 March 2011 in the United Nations House in Beirut. The workshop sought to do the following: promote knowledge of the single window system and its usefulness and relation to trade facilitation; build the capacity of member countries on international recommendations and standards; and present and discuss national experiences and challenges and exchange experiences between ESCWA member countries.

There were 35 participants representing customs administrations, ministries of interior, finance, planning and trade, investment institutions from the region, experts from regional and international organizations including WTO, ECE, UNCTAD, the International Trade Center, the League Arab States, the Islamic Bank for Development, the Saudi Fund for Development and the private sector.¹

During the workshop, participants made a number of recommendations to member countries and to ESCWA.

¹ Booz & Company and Crown Agents are active in the region in the field of single window and trade facilitation.

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Introduction

1. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) organized a regional workshop on the “Requirements for the Establishment of a Single Window for Trade Procedures and Formalities in the ESCWA Region” in cooperation with the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Center and the League of Arab States on 3 and 4 March 2011 in the United Nations House in Beirut.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The participants issued the following recommendations to member countries:

(a) To conduct procedures and initiatives to establish and activate a single window system to decrease the time and cost of trade formalities;

(b) To take advantage of single window initiatives and recommendations of the Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business of ECE (UN/CEFACT), specifically recommendation 33 establishing a single window, recommendation 34 on data simplification and standardization for international trade and recommendation 35 on establishing a legal framework for international trade single window;

(c) To take international standards into consideration when applying a single window;

(d) To increase coordination and efficient participation in the ongoing negotiations of the draft of the WTO trade facilitation convention. It is expected that the revised version of this convention will be completed in April 2011 (eighth draft);

(e) To activate the role of the private sector in facilitating and simplifying trade procedures through national trade facilitation commissions. Participants noted the importance of the private sector in participating in the establishment of a single window;

(f) To establish a national mechanism for coordination and cooperation between stakeholders of the public and private sectors to participate in establishing and activating a single window system;

g. To continue e-government initiatives and activate e-government to achieve goals that support the networking of institutions and ministries.

3. The participants issued the following recommendations to ESCWA

(a) To prepare a draft of suggested terms of reference that specify the responsibilities of a regional working group for the application of a single window system at the national/regional level and present the draft for discussion and adoption at the seventh session of the Technical Committee on Liberalization of Foreign Trade, Economic Globalization and Financing for Development of the Economic Development and Globalization Division of ESCWA, to be held in October 2011;

(b) To offer technical support to member countries, particularly the least developed countries that would like to establish and activate a single window for trade;

(c) To continue holding training sessions at the national and regional levels in cooperation and coordination with other United Nations organizations and international economic conglomerates working in this field;

(d) To create a webpage within the website of ESCWA to provide documents and information related to single window applications and post links to corresponding pages of international and regional

organizations such as ECE and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN);

(e) To provide member countries and Arab organizations with the newest practices other countries have adopted in the field of single window applications;

(f) To conduct, in cooperation and coordination with member countries, an evaluation of the status of information and communication technology and e-government, as related to single window trade facilitation and all operations it includes.

II. TOPICS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

4. The agenda of the workshop included five axes that focused on the following topics: (a) single window concepts and international standards; (b) single window initiatives and applications; (c) requirements to establish a single window for trade; (d) preparations to establish a single window; and (e) conclusion and recommendations.

A. FIRST SESSION: SINGLE-WINDOW CONCEPTS

5. During the first session, participants presented and discussed the following topics: recommendations and international standards on establishing a single window; the role and efficiency of a single window in facilitating trade; and documents and trade procedures and data harmonization. Additionally, the results of a survey prepared by ESCWA on the initiatives of establishing a single window were reviewed.

6. The first presentation focused on recommendations and international standards and identified the most important recommendations prepared by ECE: recommendation 33 on establishing a single window; recommendation 34 on data simplification and standardization for international trade; and recommendation 35 on establishing a legal framework for international trade.

7. Recommendation 33 included a definition of the single window system, benefits of establishing and implementing this system to facilitate trade operations, practical steps in planning and implementing single windows and international standards and main factors to establish an effective system for it. Recommendation 34 on data simplification and standardization for international trade included a way to collect, define and match data and the importance of using international standards and information technology in gathering data. The most important part of recommendation 35 is the requirement to establish the legal framework for the single window to facilitate the movement of goods between countries. The session included a presentation of UN/CEFACT² and its activities to support and activate the establishment of a single window system to facilitate trade.

8. The next presentation highlighted WTO negotiations on facilitating trade and establishing a single window, and presented “version number (7)”³ under item number (10) of the negotiations. During the discussions, member countries were encouraged to participate in negotiations of this item to reach a final text that serves the aspirations and goals of countries of the region concerning the establishment of a single window to facilitate the operations and procedures of trade.

9. The paper on trade documents and harmonization of data included the main goals of single window systems. The goals are to decrease the number and size of trade documents, to avoid repeated or redundant data submission for a single shipment of goods and to establish a single data entry point to improve data and statistics quality.

² <http://www.unece.org/cefact/index.htm>.

³ TN/TF/W/165/Rev.7.

10. The first session also included a presentation of the results of the survey that ESCWA sent to member countries concerning their initiative on establishing a single window system. Six countries filled in the survey and sent it to ESCWA: Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and the Sudan.

11. Participants discussed the quality of documents on commercial operations, customs documents such as shipment policies and bills of lading, invoices, truck papers and permits, documents on logistic procedures and transport, finance, insurance and inspection. Participants concluded that establishing a single window system will save time and reduce the effort required to obtain documents to complete any commercial transaction to import and export merchandise.

B. SECOND SESSION: SINGLE WINDOW INITIATIVES AND APPLICATIONS

12. Three working papers were discussed during this session: the goals and tasks of establishing a single window; single window applications in the ESCWA region; and the administrative role of participants in establishing a single window. The session included a round-table discussion of issues of interest for member countries on establishing and activating a single window system.

13. The first paper presented single window systems as a means to allow all parties that participate in international trade to use unified documents and information through a single entry point in order to meet all organizational requirements on import, export and transit. The concerned parties include customs administrations, transport and logistics and ports authorities, financial institutions, banks and insurance. The paper also outlined a road map to establish the single window system to facilitate and simplify commercial procedures, starting with planning, specifying stakeholders, generating stakeholder buy-in, obtaining funding for all implementation phases, specifying a model for the system, designing a database and finally changing laws if need be to establish the system. The paper contained a detailed explanation of every step of implementing a single window system and specified the goals, purposes and usefulness of every step.

14. The next presentation focused on applications of the establishment of a single window in Oman, which is being implemented by the General Administration of Customs in partnership with Booz & Company. To clarify the status of Oman in cross-border trade and business, the presentation provided indicators that are prepared and issued annually by the World Bank. These indicators showed that, owing to the multiplicity of procedures, occasional redundancy and the large number of documents required to complete each commercial shipment, Oman was ranked last. To improve its foreign trade, Oman began to implement a project to develop its customs sector in partnership with Booz & Company. One of the main goals of the project was to establish and implement a single window to facilitate import and export procedures for all stakeholders and to establish a complete modern customs system that meets global standards and trends and the standards and recommendations of international organizations such as WTO and the World Customs Organization (WCO). The presentation provided details on all steps of the project that are expected to be achieved during the next two years.

15. There was a presentation on the parties that contribute to the success of single window systems, including customs administration, trade, transport, storage, logistics offices, banks and insurance companies.

16. The session included a round-table discussion on the role and importance of the private sector in establishing a single window, the importance of coordination between different concerned parties, training, the role of ESCWA in national capacity-building and providing technical support to member countries, especially least developed countries. Involving the private sector in all steps of establishing a single window system is very important to guarantee the success and efficiency of the system, and a mechanism for coordination between national institutions is needed to establish an efficient single window system. The leading role of ESCWA in organizing training workshops and providing technical support was also highlighted.

C. THIRD SESSION: REQUIREMENTS TO ESTABLISH A SINGLE WINDOW FOR TRADE

17. During this session, working papers were presented with a focus on the main factors of establishing a single window, conditions and requirements to establish a single window, the application framework of single window systems and legal issues.

18. The first presentation highlighted the importance of specifying needs and priorities and noted that the most important factor to ensure the successful application of a single window system is to specify the source of funding and the role of participating parties at every step of implementation. To establish a single window system, there must be a unit responsible for management and follow-up and a working group must be formed that includes representatives of all concerned parties including customs, the ministry of trade, transport and finance, banks, port authorities, investment authorities, representatives of the private sector, and all other relevant parties. During discussions, participants highlighted the importance of learning from the experiences of other countries and making use of practices that are well adapted to the countries of the region. The participants agreed that it is better to establish a single window system in a specified port, according to its importance in international trade, to expose pros and cons before applying the system in other ports and locations.

19. A number of conditions and requirements to establish a single window were presented, including the choice of the institutional model, the quality and nature of the partnership to establish a single window and the adopted standards and required legal and organizational frameworks.

20. Discussions showed that the national institution best adapted to manage the single window system is customs management: this institution is already accustomed to the details and symbols of merchandise included in trade, import and export, and has the capacity to use systems such as the Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) or any other computerized coding system. Moreover, customs management is responsible for applying standards and international conventions of WCO on international trade.

21. The paper also focused on legal and organizational procedures related to the single window system. The paper clarified the importance of specifying organizational frameworks. Organizational frameworks encompass procedures and rules, such as those governing electronic signatures on shipment documents and financial documents.

22. This session included a presentation and discussion of the framework of implementing the single window system. The presentation clarified various steps that should be included in the framework, the goals of each step, the activities related to each step and the expected results and outcome. The discussions covered different steps of the structure of the system and information technology. Some important steps that should be included in the framework are: providing long-term political support; appointing a steering committee for the single window system; specifying the management approach; and establishing a mechanism that includes coordination and cooperation between all stakeholders.

23. Participants noted the importance of linking the goals of national and regional policies and the strategies of application of the single window system on one hand, and the international standards and information technology on the other hand, and the importance of having a network of national experts and United Nations experts working in this field in order to enrich and exchange knowledge and increase benefits.

24. Participants also discussed legal issues related to establishing the single window system and highlighted the importance of revising laws that regulate trade. They noted the need to revise laws on electronic trade, e-government and information and communication technology operations in order to support the application of the single window system and to avoid redundancy and interference.

D. FOURTH SESSION: PREPARATION TO ESTABLISH A SINGLE WINDOW

25. During the fourth session, working papers were presented that focused on the status of e-government in ESCWA member countries and the role of trade operations and technology in establishing a single window system.

26. The first paper clarified the current status of e-government in the region, which differs from one country to another, and showed that some countries have a strong capacity to meet information and communication technology requirements, while other countries are not as strong and some are quite weak. Participants noted that networking national institutions through electronic linking has many requirements at the legal and organizational levels. They discussed the challenges countries of the region face in establishing e-government. These challenges are at the economic, social and political levels and ESCWA and the League of Arab States provide technical support to meet those challenges.

27. The discussion highlighted the importance of information technology in facilitating trade operations and the need for a single window system for all stakeholders of trade operations which will save significant time, effort and money and decrease the number of papers required to complete trade operations.

28. A presentation outlined the information technology required to establish an efficient single window system, including infrastructure and essential components such as computer programs, technology to organize electronic paper flow between stakeholders and training for end-users. The standards and international recommendations on the single window system issued by international organizations such as the UN/CEFACT and WCO must be taken into consideration.

29. Nine ESCWA member countries presented and discussed their national experience establishing single window systems to facilitate and simplify trade operations: Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen. The papers focused on single window initiatives including updating and developing custom systems and other related institutions.

30. Some countries conducted surveys of their current operations to facilitate international trade and prepared studies that identified needs and gaps in their facilitation of trade. Within this framework, most countries concluded that applying a single window system is an effective way to facilitate trade operations.

31. National experiences also illustrated initiatives to establish a single window system. Some initiatives in ESCWA member countries had positive results which led to faster import and export operations.

32. Participants also discussed challenges member countries face concerning the single window system. The challenges included the sources of funding and the specification of the appropriate entity to manage the single window system, conduct trainings and build capacity.

III. ORGANIZATION OF WORK

A. VENUE OF THE MEETING AND DATE

33. The regional workshop was held on “Requirements for the Establishment of a Single Window for Trade Procedures and Formalities in the ESCWA Region” in cooperation with WTO, ECE, UNCTAD, the International Trade Center and the League of Arab States on 3 and 4 March 2011 in the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon.

34. Participants included 35 representatives of customs administrations, the ministries of interior, finance, trade and transport, and investment authorities from ESCWA member countries. Also in attendance were experts from regional and international organizations including WTO, ECE, UNCTAD, the International Trade Center, the League of Arab States, the Islamic Bank for Development, the Saudi Fund for Development and an expert on facilitating trade and single window systems. The list of participants is provided in annex I.

B. OPENING

35. The opening took place on 3 March 2011. The workshop was launched with a speech by Mr. Tarek al-Alami, acting director of the Economic Development and Globalization Division of ESCWA. He welcomed the participants and thanked them for accepting the invitation to participate in the workshop. He highlighted the role of ESCWA in promoting cooperation, regional integration, coordination and the exchange of experiences and knowledge in different fields in cooperation and coordination with its partners from regional and international organizations, according to the priorities of member countries and need to support sustainable development. He spoke of the importance of facilitating trade and transport which is considered to be one of the highest priorities in the region and more specifically between the countries of the region. He noted the Commission's interest in this topic and stated that the excessive use of paper, the lack of information technology in ports and the need to update custom systems and achieve greater transparency are hindrances to the implementation of intraregional or interregional trade systems.

C. AGENDA

36. The workshop included four work sessions and a concluding session as follows:
1. Opening of the meeting;
 2. First session: single window concepts and international standards.
 - (a) Adoption of the agenda;
 - (b) Questionnaire of the study on single windows (ESCWA);
 - (c) Recommendations and standards;
 - (d) WTO: facilitating trade and single windows;
 - (e) Trade papers and harmonization of data;
 - (f) General discussion.
 3. Second session: initiatives and applications of a single window.
 - (a) Goals and tasks related to the establishment of a single window;
 - (b) Applications of a single window in the ESCWA region: the experience of Oman;
 - (c) The leading role of participants who are active in establishing the single window system;
 - (d) National reports;
 - (e) General discussion.
 4. Third session: requirements to establish a single window for handling export/import.
 - (a) Single window issues of interest to member countries: round-table discussions (ESCWA);
 - (b) National reports;
 - (c) Discussions.
 5. Fourth session: preparation to establish a single window.
 - (a) Main factors to establish a single window;
 - (b) Conditions and requirements to establish a single window;
 - (c) Institutional coordination and framework of application of a single window;
 - (d) Single windows and legal issues;
 - (e) National reports;
 - (f) General discussion.
 6. Concluding session.

D. DOCUMENTS

37. The list of meeting documents is provided in annex II.

Annex I*

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Annex II

LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Title
النافذة الواحد، المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية برنامج الميكنة المتكامل، المملكة الأردنية الهاشمية
Lebanese Customs Project for Single Window, Lebanon
برنامج السيادة نحو بناء الدولة، مشروع النافذة الواحدة، فلسطين
Al Siyadeh Program, Building the State, Single Window Project, Palestine
Saudi Arabia, Presentation on Single Window
Sudan's Initiatives for the Establishment of Single Window
الوضع الحالي وتسليط الضوء على الجهود التي بذلت من أجل تطبيق النافذة الواحدة، السودان مبادرات السودان لإنشاء النافذة الواحدة
Implementation of Integrated Customs Management System and Single Electronic Window System for Sultanate of Oman, booz & co.
Trade Facilitation and the Single Window, Trade Documentation and Data Harmonization
Key Participants in Single Window Governance
Objective and Tasks involved in Establishing Single Window
E-Governance Overview in the ESCWA Region
The Single Window and Legal Issue
استبيان دراسة النافذة الواحدة، الإسكوا
UNECE Recommendations, Standards and Tools for International Trade Single Window
Single Window Implementation Framework
Conditions and requirements for the establishment of a Single Window UNCTAD
Role of Business and the Role of Technology
Trade Facilitation and Single Window- WTO
