



World Customs Organization

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The World Customs Organization (WCO) is the only international intergovernmental organization that deals with Customs procedures governing trade between countries. Its work aims to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Customs administrations across the globe, and to help them fulfil their dual role of facilitating trade whilst ensuring its security.

Born after the Second World War out of a desire by countries to re-launch world trade, and to provide a platform for the discussion of Customs issues, the WCO – officially established in 1952 as the Customs Co-operation Council – held its first meeting on 26 January 1953. Since then the Organization has grown from its original 17 founding members to encompass a truly global membership now numbering 176.

Setting international standards to facilitate cross-border trade

Modern production and delivery systems, linked with new forms of electronic commerce, make swift and predictable Customs clearance an important prerequisite for economic development. Improving the efficacy and harmonization of Customs procedures and practices around the world has become an essential part of the trade facilitation process.

The adoption of international standards leads to simplification and harmonization. Applied to the management of border transactions, the use of these standards adds to the effectiveness of Customs operations as they provide a simple and predictable trading environment and promote easier and better compliance from traders.



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Securing the international trade supply chain

Global challenges transcend borders and call for worldwide responses. Securing trade and combating illegal trafficking and commercial fraud without disrupting legal trade requires a high degree of cooperation between countries, and the application of uniform methods and standards which are recognized and applied by all.

As a frontline border agency dealing primarily with the cross-border movement of goods, people and means of transport, Customs is best placed to ensure the security of international trade thus promoting national economic prosperity and social development.

Mission

The WCO's mission is to improve the effectiveness and the efficiency of its Member Customs administrations across the globe.

While three-quarters of its Members are developing countries, the WCO's combined membership is collectively responsible for managing and processing more than 98% of world trade.

The responsibilities linked to the international movement of goods, people and means of transport have expanded and will continue to do so, ranging from traditional Customs activities such as the collection of revenue to activities as diverse as environmental protection, combating drug trafficking and money laundering, and ensuring food safety and revenue security.

To facilitate the work of Customs at borders, over time the WCO has developed a number of instruments and tools, and introduced a number of programmes and initiatives, that significantly enhance Customs operations.



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Key activities

► Harmonization and simplification

- Developing and promoting harmonized and simplified Customs procedures aimed at facilitating trade.
- Offering strategic direction and examples of best practice to ensure a uniform trade environment that will enhance economic prosperity and social development.
- Administering and developing the international goods nomenclature known as the Harmonized System, which enables products to be identified by the same code all over the world.
- Ensuring the uniform interpretation and application of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Agreement on Customs Valuation.
- Progressing the discussions on Harmonized Rules of Origin developed by the WCO for the World Trade Organization as part of the implementation of the WTO Agreement on Rules of Origin.



► Partnerships and cooperation

- Fostering cooperation, the exchange of information and intelligence, and mutual assistance between Customs administrations, by making various international instruments available.
- Stimulating collaboration between Customs administrations and other border regulatory agencies involved in cross-border movements, by promoting coordinated border management.
- Advancing Customs-Business partnerships in a transparent regulatory environment where information is shared, which will lead to better compliance, less formalities and a smoother flow of trade.
- Cooperating with international organizations in areas of shared competence, by contributing, in particular, to WTO trade facilitation capacity building missions, World Bank Customs reform projects, and UN Counter-Terrorism Committee security missions, among others.

► Security and enforcement

- Strengthening the security of the international trade supply chain through the WCO SAFE Framework of Standards that lists the minimum standards that Customs and economic operators should apply in order to avert the risk of terrorist attacks and other criminal threats.
- Bolstering efforts to combat fraudulent and criminal activities by improving enforcement methods and practices through training, managing a global network of regional intelligence liaison offices, developing secure communication tools for the exchange of information, preparing analyses of smuggling trends and modus operandi, and facilitating field and border enforcement operations.

► Modernization and capacity building

- Devising capacity building programmes and encouraging Customs modernization projects by organizing diagnostics, whilst supporting the implementation of action plans through the use of WCO tools, training and technical assistance.
- Encouraging synergy and cooperation at the regional level via a network of Regional Offices for Capacity Building and Regional Training Centres.
- Providing guidance in the use of enabling information and communications technologies and tools with a view to improving Customs processing, risk management and assessment, intelligence handling and non-intrusive detection.
- Establishing research partnerships with the academic community in order to enhance knowledge and skills, including the identification of professional standards that will ultimately improve the management and operation of Customs administrations.



WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION

Fact file

Date of establishment: 1952

Headquarters: Brussels, Belgium

Number of Members: 176*

*176 plus the European Communities which, since July 2007, has had rights akin to those of a WCO Member for matters falling within its competency as an interim measure

Governing body: the Council

Council Chairperson: Martyn Dunne

Secretary General: Kunio Mikuriya

International Customs Day: 26 January

Official languages: English and French

Resources

Website: www.wcoomd.org

Official magazine: WCO News

http://www.wcoomd.org/home_press_wco_news.htm

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Date of issue: November 2009

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