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Article — Published Version

World Customs Organization's Role During the COVID-19-Pandemic: Declarations, Information Distribution, Guidance and Leadership

Public Administration and Customs Administration

Suggested Citation: Weerth, Carsten (2020) : World Customs Organization's Role During the COVID-19-Pandemic: Declarations, Information Distribution, Guidance and Leadership, Public Administration and Customs Administration, ISSN 2310-9653, University of Customs and Finance, Dnipro, Ukraine, Vol. 27, Iss. 4, pp. 44-56, <https://doi.org/10.32836/2310-9653-2020-4.8>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/228739>

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WORLD CUSTOMS ORGANIZATION'S ROLE DURING THE COVID-19-PANDEMIC: DECLARATIONS, INFORMATION DISTRIBUTION, GUIDANCE AND LEADERSHIP

The worldwide spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus from Wuhan, Hubei province, China, in 190 countries (according to WHO figures: 219 countries, territories and economic areas) represents an unprecedented threat to Global Health and Global Trade in the times of Globalization – a truly global pandemic spread. The virus triggers COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019), which can range from a symptom-free course to severe respiratory syndrome (pneumoPhnia) and affect the heart, brain and other organ systems as well (a so called multi-organ virus or micro-vascular virus).

More than 46.1 million persons were infected worldwide at the beginning of November 2020, more than 1,197,000 persons died from COVID-19 (as of 1 November 2020).

The World Customs Organization (WCO) has played and is still playing a crucial part during the COVID-19-pandemic in terms of making (joint declarations), distributing information on the customs procedures and the importance of trade facilitation in a global economic, human and public health emergency and providing guidance together with its partnering International Organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), World Trade Organization (WTO) and its stakeholders (such as the ICC, IMO, IRU, UNTAD). All have in the light of the global COVID-19 pandemic joined forces and developed joint trade policies and legal online databases that are accessible freely in the internet in order to help mitigate the social and economic impact COVID-19 on the societies and World Trade and the joint declarations and the joining of forces has mostly been facilitated by the WCO. While many countries issued trade restrictions the International Organizations and business stakeholders called for free trade and trade facilitation.

This paper gives an overview of all initiatives, declarations, information and guidance and all newly emerging lists, data collections and free online databases for the global interested public and businesses. All of these items are of the utmost importance to give insight, guidance and help for states, stakeholders and businesses in a global human, public health and economic emergency. Most have been published online on the WCO internet site but some are jointly collected in newly emerging cooperation databases. These databases are constructed to give information seekers overviews about guidance and technical advice for open borders and the facilitation of cross-border trade to ensure open supply chains and the delivery of necessary goods even if borders stay mostly closed for the travel of persons. But the information and databases are also on trade restrictions due to COVID-19. Trade facilitation is the key issue in a global pandemic and the blueprints circulated for more than ten years now are adapted for the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

Key words: customs law, international organizations, tariff classification, harmonized system (HS) nomenclature, trade facilitation, trade restrictions, Revised Kyoto Convention, international customs law, capacity building.

Карстен Веерт. Роль Всесвітньої митної організації під час пандемії COVID-19: заяви, розповсюдження інформації, вказівки та управління

Поширення вірусу SARS-CoV-2 з міста Ухань (провінція Хубей, Китай) у 190 країнах світу (за даними ВООЗ: 219 країн, територій та економічних районів) представляє безпрецедентну загрозу для глобальної охорони здоров'я та глобальної торгівлі в часи глобалізації – по-справжньому глобальна пандемія. Вірус викликає COVID-19 (коронавірусна хвороба 2019), що може перебігати безсимптомно або супроводжуватися тяжким респіраторним синдромом (пневмонією) та уражати серце, мозок й інші системи органів (так званий поліорганний або мікрovasкулярний вірус).

Станом на 1 листопада 2020 року в усьому світі було заражено 46,1 млн осіб та понад 1 197 000 осіб померли від COVID-19.

Всесвітня митна організація (ВМО) продовжує відігравати надзвичайно важливу роль в умовах пандемії COVID-19, виражену у створенні (спільні заяви), розповсюдженні інформації про митні процедури та значущість сприяння торгівлі в глобальній економічній, суспільній надзвичайній ситуації в галузі охорони здоров'я, а також наданні вказівок разом із міжнародними партнерськими організаціями, такими як Організація Об'єднаних націй (ООН), Всесвітня організація охорони здоров'я (ВООЗ), Світова організація торгівлі (СОТ) та зацікавленими сторонами (такими як Міжнародна торгова палата (МТП), Міжнародна морська організація (ММО), Міжнародний союз автомобільного транспорту (МСАТ), Конференція ООН з торгівлі та розвитку (ЮНКТАД)). У зв'язку із глобальною пандемією COVID-19 усі вони об'єднали зусилля та розробили спільну торгову політику та інтерактивні правові бази даних у вільному доступі в Інтернеті, щоб допомогти пом'якшити соціальний та економічний вплив COVID-19 на суспільство та світову торгівлю, але переважно ВМО сприяла об'єднанню сил та виходу спільних заяв. Багато країн запровадили торговельні обмеження, тоді як міжнародні організації та представники бізнесу закликали до вільної торгівлі та сприяння торгівлі загалом.

У статті розглядаються ініціативи, заяви, інформаційні повідомлення та вказівки, нові переліки, збірки даних та інтерактивні бази даних, у вільному доступі випущені для зацікавленої громадськості та бізнесу в усьому світі.

Усе це надважливо для розуміння управління та надання допомоги країнам, зацікавленим сторонам та бізнесу в умовах світової надзвичайної ситуації в галузі охорони здоров'я. Більшість інформації опубліковано на вебсайті ВМО в Інтернеті, але децю зібрано в спільних базах даних. Вони створені для надання всім, хто шукає інформацію, відповідних вказівок та технічних консультацій щодо відкритих кордонів та сприяння транскордонній торгівлі для забезпечення відкритих ланцюгів поставок та доставки необхідних товарів, навіть якщо кордони здебільшого залишаються закритими для мандрівників. Але надані відомості також стосуються торгових обмежень через COVID-19. Питання сприяння торгівлі є ключовим у контексті глобальної пандемії, а схеми дій, якими користувалися вже понад десять років, адаптуються до умов пандемії COVID-19 у 2020 році.

Ключові слова: митне право, міжнародні організації, класифікація тарифів, номенклатура гармонізованої системи (ГС), спрощення торгівлі, обмеження торгівлі, переглянута Кіотська конвенція, міжнародне митне право, розбудова спроможності.

Introduction. The worldwide spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus (a corona virus) from a wildlife market in the 11 million metropolis of Wuhan, Hubei province, China, in 190 countries (according to WHO figures: 219 countries, countries and economic areas) – a truly global pandemic spread – represents an unprecedented threat to global health and Global Trade in times of Globalization. The virus triggers COVID-19 (Coronavirus disease 2019), which can range from a symptom-free course to severe respiratory syndrome (pneumonia) and affect the heart, brain and other organ systems apart from the lung as well (e.g. the gut, kidneys and blood-vessels – a so called multi-organ virus or micro-vascular virus).

More than 46.1 million people were infected worldwide in the beginning of November 2020, more than 1,197,000 people died from COVID-19 (as of 1 November 2020)¹.

The situation in the different countries is dynamic and the measures taken by national and regional governments vary from week to week, from month to month². Most economies suffer strongly due to social and economic lockdowns: The world trade, the industrial production and the overall economic development slows and sometimes stops. The OECD has reported an overall drop of the global GDP in prices of about 13% for the World and of about 15% for the OECD³.

The World Customs Organization (WCO) has played a crucial role in the beginning of the COVID-19-Pandemic in creating a hub of information and guidance in this human, public health and economic emergency by bringing together its International Partners and stakeholders and issuing (joint) declarations on the importance of open borders for essential trade and trade facilitation amid an atmosphere of nationalism and closing borders.

The United Nations (UN), the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN (FAO), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and its stakeholders such as the UN Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the International Air Transport Association (IATA), World Road Transport Organization (IRU) and the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) have joined the WCO's forces in order to create (joint) declarations, guidance and warnings to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic and social consequences of slowed or halted industrial production, lockdowns and curfews and a severely cut down global trade.

Again it is urged by all stakeholders that all medical supplies must be delivered with a high priority and the trade in essential goods such as medication and food must be upheld and ensured over borders that are closed for humans in order to stop the spread of COVID-19. INTERPOL and EUROPOL and others are warning over new criminal approaches and counterfeit products in the COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper reviews the different initiatives, co-operations, declarations, lists and databases of the International Organizations and Intergovernmental Organizations that are newly emerging and are containing info on trade restrictions and trade facilitation during the COVID-19 pandemic and crisis. All information and free online databases [71] are of the utmost importance to give insight, guidance and help in a global public health and economic emergency but mostly are pointing at the importance of trade facilitation – a topic that is not new but of the highest importance in times of a global emergency for all stakeholders to deliver medical supplies and necessary goods such as food to humans in need.

Categories of the WCO Contribution. The different contributions of the WCO can be sorted in different categories: (joint) declarations, advice and guidance, measures and Databases of collections of the declarations, reports, guidance and warnings (a warning or declaration or report or guidance may be released as press release). This paper will list them in these categories.

Method. An internet search of the WCO internet site (www.wcoomd.org) and the webpages of all relevant International Organizations, Intergovernmental Organizations and further stakeholders was conducted from the beginning of March 2020 to the end of October 2020.

¹The situation is dynamic and can best be seen on the Johns Hopkins University Corona Dashboard, URL: <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html> (retrieved 1/11/2020).

²NYT, Coronavirus Map: Tracking the Global Outbreak, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/world/coronavirus-maps.html> (retrieved 1/11/2020).

³OECD, COVID-19 and international trade: Issues and actions, URL: <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-and-international-trade-issues-and-actions-494da2fa/> (retrieved 1/11/2020).

Limitations: Although all relevant information is researched and pooled only limited organizations and stakeholders and the most relevant information can be displayed in this paper.

All results are listed as footnotes and in the list of references as original link.

Results.

1. World Customs Organization

The World Customs Organization is an inter-governmental organization with 183 member states founded as Customs-Cooperation Council in Brussels [55] The WCO offers a very detailed set of information, guidance and declarations on its dedicated webpage on COVID-19 [36] (figure 1).

The WCO lists on this same site all trade and customs restrictions by its 183 member states.

The WCO has a recommendation on natural disaster relief but this covers smaller and local events such as earth quakes, volcanic eruptions, wild fires or floods than a global pandemic [35].

The WCO has created its own guidance and lists and joint declarations together with other International Organizations – it is truly the hub for international customs policy and customs law expertise and has developed accordingly since 2008 [57].

As early as 20 March 2020 the WCO reacted and openly was pulling all internal and external strings of its global network in order to communicate sober stringent helpful messages to the customs administrations, customs officers and the general public and businesses⁴ and a guide of how to best communicate in a global crisis was also published⁵.

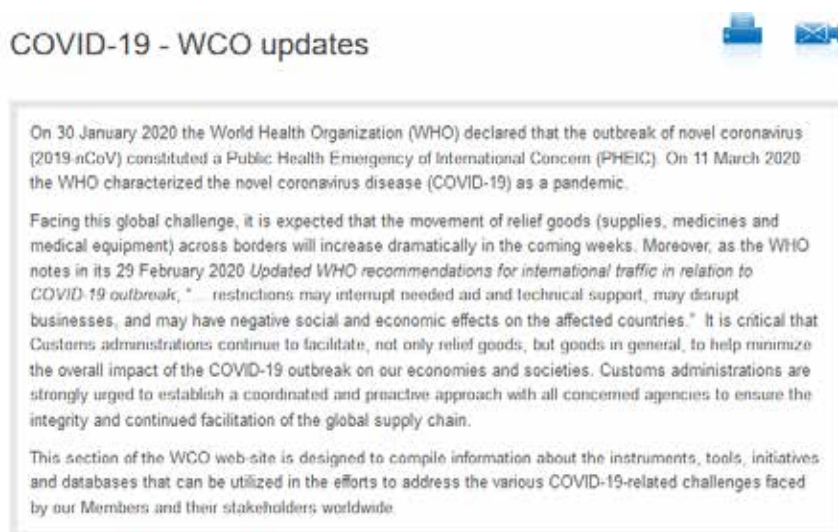


Fig. 1. WCO Special dedicated site for the COVID-19 outbreak

The WCO warned early about fake medicine and other fake goods (PPE) for COVID-19 [39], it has prepared together with the WHO customs classification guidance [53] on medical supplies and PPE [32] and it has again with the WHO prepared customs classification guidance on medicine and chemicals (INN) [33] The WCO has pooled all communications on COVID-19 in a special “Communications” section (figure 2).

In the COVID-19 pandemic the WCO and its member states also went on to online meetings and online trainings in order to practice social distancing and reduce personal contact [19].

The WCO has issued joint declarations with the WTO [43], the ICC [30], the IMO [34], the IRU [14], the OTIF/OSJD [44] and the UN-OHRLLS [46] on the importance of trade facilitation, the openness of borders and World Trade (figure 3).

Experiences of national customs authorities in the COVID-19 pandemic have been shared [4], the WCO Director-General has issued a statement of cooperation in a unique pandemic [22] and the industry is calling in its WCO Private Sector Consultative Group for open borders and fast lanes in order to secure trans-border global trade. [37] Practitioners reported on the importance of air traffic transport [26] and customs agents in a global pandemic crisis [21].

The WCO news bulletins No. 92 (June 2020) and partly No. 93 (October 2020) were dedicated in its focus on COVID-19⁶.

⁴WCO, The Global Customs community mobilizes efforts to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic URL: <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/media/newsroom/2020/march/the-global-customs-community-mobilizes-efforts-to-mitigate-the-effects-of-the-covid-19-pandemic.aspx> (retrieved 1/11/2020).

⁵WCO, COVID-19 Crisis WCO Guidance on how to communicate during a crisis, URL: http://www.wcoomd.org/-/media/wco/public/global/pdf/media/guideline/wco-guidance-on-how-to-communicate-during-a-crisis_en.pdf?la=en (retrieved 1/11/2020).

⁶WCO, WCO news No. 92 (June 2020), URL: <https://mag.wcoomd.org/magazine/wco-news-92-june-2020/> and WCO news No. 93 (October 2020), URL: <https://mag.wcoomd.org/magazine/wco-news-93-october-2020/> (retrieved 1/11/2020).

Communications

- [Novel coronavirus \(2019-nCoV\) outbreak](#)
- [WCO Communique regarding the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#)
- [The Global Customs community mobilizes efforts to mitigate the effects of the COVID 19 pandemic](#)
- [The Global RILO Network continues to support WCO Members in times of crisis](#)
- [COVID-19 Urgent Notice: counterfeit medical supplies and introduction of export controls on personal protective equipment](#)
- [COVID-19: WCO launches an IPR CENcomm Group for data exchange on counterfeit medical supplies and fake medicines](#)
- [Greater facilities requested for ATA Carnet procedures during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [Joint WCO WHO HS classification list for COVID_19 medical supplies issued](#)
- [The Private Sector Consultative Group outlines solutions to humanitarian, government and business needs amidst the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [WCO and UPU take action to facilitate the sharing of information on the global postal supply chain in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [WHO WCO list of priority medicines and an updated joint WCO WHO HS classification list](#)
- [How to establish and utilize essential goods lists during a disaster](#)
- [WCO partners with stakeholders to launch a COVID-19 Trade Facilitation Repository](#)
- [Cambodia's Air Cargo Control Unit successfully targets fake COVID-19 test kits](#)
- [Japan supports WCO Project to Build the Capacity of Developing Countries' Customs Administrations Respond to COVID-19](#)
- [New edition of the WCO/WHO HS Classification List for COVID-19 Medical Supplies now available](#)
- [WCO Secretariat issues a Note on Support to SMEs](#)

Fig. 2. WCO Communications on COVID-19

Joint statements with partner organizations

- [WCO-WTO Joint Statement on COVID-19 related trade measures](#)
- [Joint statement WCO-IMO on the integrity of the global supply chain during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)
- [COVID-19: WCO and ICC issue joint statement and call for increased action on Customs and trade facilitation](#)
- [Joint WCO-IRU statement on responding to the impacts of COVID-19 on cross-border transport](#)
- [Joint WCO-OTIF-OSJD statement on responding to the impacts of COVID-19 on cross-border railway transport](#)
- [WCO and UN-OHRLLS call for trade and transit facilitation during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)

Letters to Members

- [Letter to WCO Members of 17 March \(members only\)](#)
- [Letter to ATA/Istanbul Conventions Contracting Parties of 20 March 2020 \(members only\)](#)
- [Joint WCO-UPU letter of 15 April 2020 \(members only\)](#)

Fig. 3. WCO Joint statements with partner organizations

Such guidance has been pooled in the section WCO instruments and tools by which the WCO and WHO have jointly issued on Customs classification guides regarding the customs tariff classification on essential medicine and medical equipment and essential lists of medicine and medical equipment. Here also the Resolution on the role of customs in international Disaster Relief, the Revised Kyoto Convention and the Convention on Temporary Admission (Istanbul Convention) are presented.

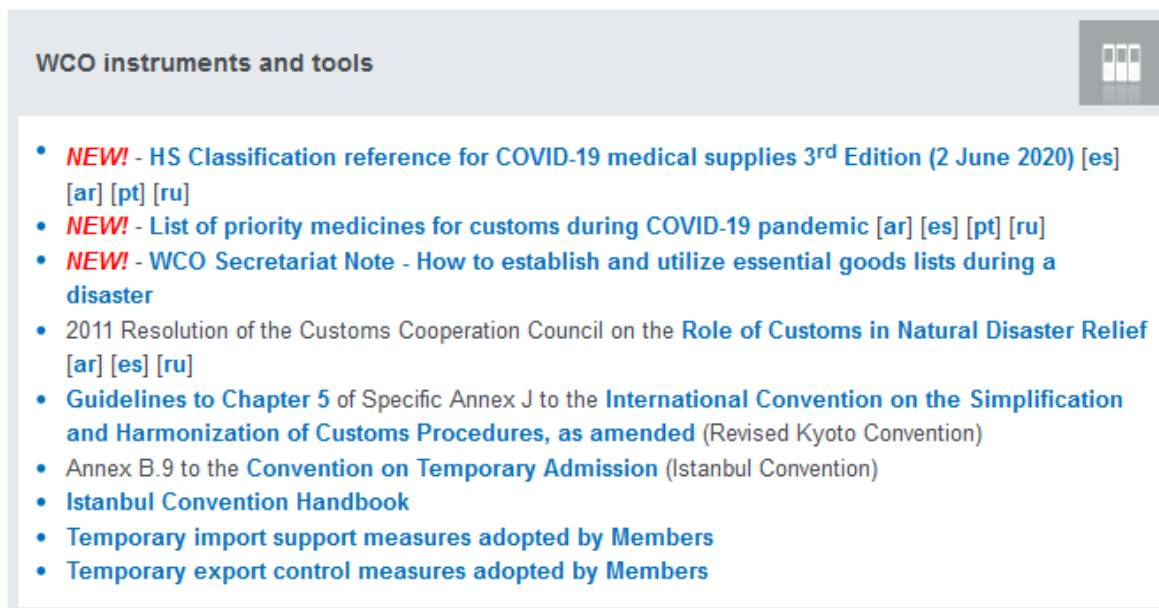


Fig. 4. WCO instruments and tools

One of the most influential reports of the WCO is its guidance of what Customs Services in member states can do to mitigate the COVID-19 economic and public health: the most influential report and working paper was the 72-page report “WCO Secretary Note: What Customs can do to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic” (4th edition 29 May 2020) [41]. In this section the WCO member states also share their approaches of how to tackle the crisis with political measures.

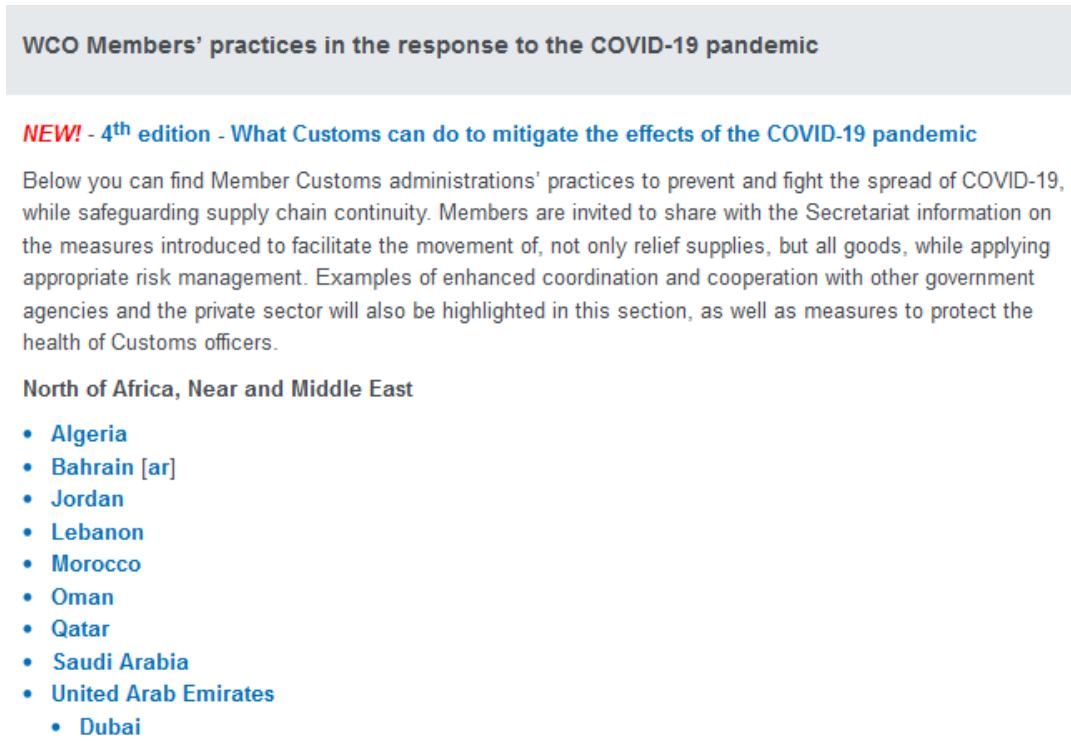


Fig. 5. WCO – Members practices in the response to COVID-19

Together with other international Organizations the WCO is pooling data in publicly available free online databases on trade facilitation: The WTO COVID-19 Trade Facilitation database (figure 6).

COVID-19 TRADE FACILITATION RESOURCE REPOSITORY
A JOINT INITIATIVE BY:

World Trade Organization, Trade Facilitation Agreement Parties, UNITED NATIONS UNCTAD, GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR TRADE FACILITATION, The Commonwealth, IATA

Keyword Search:
Organization: - Any -
Type of information: - Any -
APPLY

Organization	Description	Type of information	Focal Point (Contact details)	Go to Source
International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA)	Maintaining the flow of essential goods during the COVID-19 crisis Defining freight forwarding as an 'essential service', as they facilitate the movement of essential cargo during COVID-19.	Report	tang@fiata.com	
International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA)	FIATA welcomes FMC's final interpretative rule on demurrage and detention charges FIATA welcomes the US FMC new guidance on its approach to assessing the reasonableness of detention and demurrage regulations and practices of ocean carriers and marine operators	Article/Press Release	tang@fiata.com	
International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA)	Guidance on the addition of COVID-19 specific clauses in bills of lading Factors to keep in mind when considering the inclusion of a specific COVID-19 addendum to protect freight forwarders.	Report	tang@fiata.com	
International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA)	Left with abandoned goods: What's next? Guidance for freight forwarders on how to deal with abandoned goods during COVID-19 and how to mitigate losses.	Report	tang@fiata.com	
International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA)	The challenge of handling airfreight capacities in COVID-19 and beyond Addressing capacity depletion, trade imbalance, and other airfreight challenges during COVID-19	Report	tang@fiata.com	
International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA)	Container imbalances and COVID-19: Freight forwarders' role in finding solutions to the problems of today Identifying opportunities and value-added services of the freight forwarding industry, despite the challenges encountered with container imbalances during COVID-19.	Report	tang@fiata.com	
International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA)	Invoking force majeure in the COVID-19 crisis: Some practical tips Principles for freight forwarders to apply a force majeure clause, eligibility, and considerations during COVID-19.	Report	tang@fiata.com	
International Federation of Freight Forwarders Associations (FIATA)	FIATA invites shipping lines to adapt their practice on demurrage and detention charges during the COVID-19 crisis FIATA calls upon shipping lines and terminals to exercise restraint in their demurrage and detention charges and practices, taking into consideration COVID-19.	Article/Press Release	tang@fiata.com	
World Trade Organization (WTO)	TFA Database Covid-19 measures Covid-19 measures notified under the TFA	Instruments and tools	tfad@wto.org	

Fig. 6. WTO COVID-19 Trade Facilitation Database

In the end of June 2020 the WCO announced that the WCO is also contributing to the Global Trade Helpdesk which is re-organized in order to help tiny, small and medium businesses to overcome the COVID-19 crisis [49] (figure 7).

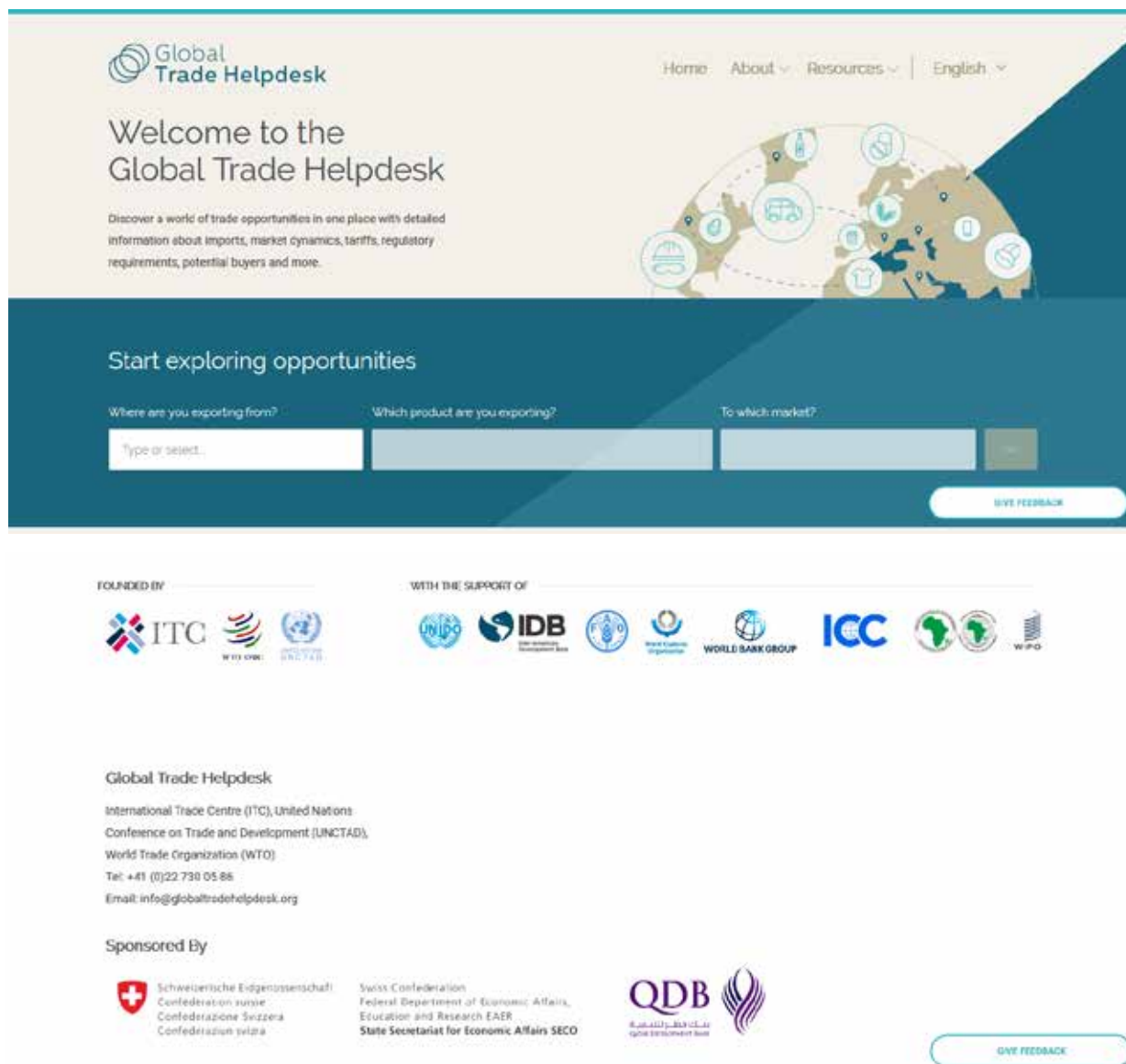


Fig. 7. ITC/WTO/UNCTAD Global Trade Helpdesk

1.1. Joint declarations with the United Nations System

The UN represents 194 nations of the World. The UN has an internet site dedicated to the COVID-19 response [61] and generally underlines that the human rights must be enforced [83], mankind must work together in order to combat COVID-19 and all humans must have access to medication and a possible future vaccine [85]. The UN-Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) and other agencies have issued joint declarations with the World Customs Organization (WCO) and other stakeholders – six UN agencies have issued a joint statement with the IRU: UN-OHRLLS, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD); United Nations Economic Commission for Africa; United Nations Economic Commission for Europe; United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America; United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific [15] on the importance of open cross-border trade in particular for essential goods such as medication and food. The most important contribution of the UN and its organizations are declarations and press-releases that can be found on their homepages in the internet.

The UN uses conventional information items on its internet site to inform the general public.

1.2. Joint initiatives and guidance with the World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) formally represents 194 UN member states but also recognizes 219 countries, territories and economic entities. It is in charge of global health. The WHO has a very large coverage of COVID-19 on special dedicated internet sites [59].

The WHO has issued two COVID-19 public health warnings in its stages: On 30 January 2020 WHO declared that the outbreak of novel coronavirus (2019-nCoV) constituted a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC). On 11 March 2020 the WHO characterized the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) as a pandemic⁷.

During the following months it issued warnings on criminals [69], cybercrime attacks [67] and offered technical guidance and lists of medical and personal protective equipment (PPE) in demand globally [68].

Together with the World Customs Organization (WCO) it repeatedly offered guidance on the legal customs classification of medical equipment, medication, chemicals and PPE (shown in the section of the WCO).

1.3. Joint declaration with the International Maritime Organization

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) is the special organization of the UN for all maritime matters and has 174 member states⁸. The IMO has a special dedicated page for COVID-19 [13]. It is in particular caring for seafarers and maritime trade and it has declared the importance of open sea ports and customs offices in this public health crisis [10] and it urges that all seafarers are allowed to go ashore, travel home and underlines the importance of crew changes [12]. The IMO has also called together with the WCO in a joint declaration for opening all customs border posts and all harbours [10].

1.4. Joint declaration with the International Road Transport Union

The International Road Transport Union (IRU) represents more than 165 individual members out of the transport sector and has its seat in Geneva/Switzerland. Together with the WCO it has published a joint declaration about the importance of road traffic in this global health crisis that urges customs authorities to hold borders open for goods and in particular critical goods by help of fast lanes (green lanes), fewer physical checks and the use of the TIR-system and electronic transit declarations (eTIR) [14]. The importance of using the TIR and eTIR system in particular for landlocked developing countries in the COVID-19 crisis was underlined in two joint declarations of the UN-system [15].

1.5. Joint declaration with the International Chamber of Commerce

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) is the institutional representation of more than 45 Mio. businesses in more than 100 countries and it is situated in Paris⁹. The ICC is caring in particular for the Small and Medium Businesses in the COVID-19-crisis and has called for the rescue of small and medium enterprises (SME), offers seven key tools for SME in the COVID-19 crisis¹⁰ and has developed a COVID-19 Web portal in cooperation with the WHO in order to facilitate information flows by disseminating the latest and most reliable information on the COVID-19 outbreak to businesses¹¹:

- it lists chamber action,
- policy action and
- business action.

2. Overview of all provided info by the WCO: Declarations, Lists / Databases, Guidance, Reports and Warnings

This section provides an overview of all tackled info provided by the WCO and the issued declarations, lists and databases, guidance offered, reports, warnings and press releases – (table 1).

The following table represents an overview of the different approaches of information collection and distribution by the WCO together with other International Organizations for combating COVID-19.

Table 1

Overview of all provided info by the WCO: Declarations, Lists / Databases, Guidance, Reports and Warnings by the WCO together with other international Organizations for combating COVID.19

Organization	Declaration	List/Database	Guidance	Warning
WCO	WTO, ICC, IMO, IRU, OTIF-OSJD, UN-HRLLS; WCO on SME WCO Private Sector Consultative Group	COVID-19, Trade facilitation database WCO List of national reactions on COVID-19 ITC/WTO/UNCTAD, Global Trade Helpdesk	Classification together with the WHO, List of Medical supplies together with the WHO How to communicate in a crisis, How to establish a list of essential goods during a disaster.	COVID-19 Urgent Notice Counterfeit medical supplies

⁷WCO, COVID-19 – WCO updates, URL: <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/coronavirus.aspx> (retrieved 1/11/2020).

⁸IMO, Member States, NGOs and NGOs, URL: <http://www.imo.org/en/About/Membership/Pages/Default.aspx> (retrieved 1/ 11/2020).

⁹ICC, About us, URL: <https://iccwbo.org/about-us/> (retrieved 1/11/2020).

¹⁰ICC, COVID-19: 7 resources to help manage your small business, URL: <https://iccwbo.org/media-wall/news-speeches/covid-19-7-resources-to-help-manage-your-small-business/> (retrieved 1/11/2020).

¹¹ICC, ICC launches COVID-19 web portal, URL: <https://iccwbo.org/media-wall/news-speeches/icc-launches-covid-19-web-portal/> (retrieved 1/11/2020).

Discussion. The WCO has played and is playing a central role in the international response of the Global trade and customs community in the COVID-19-Pandemic mainly by its cool and timely management in the global outbreak, its information distribution and guidance and in particular by help of joint declarations with some of its stakeholders.

The WCO offers very detailed and up to date information, guidance and help for all seekers and stakeholders concerning the tools to mitigate the economic and trade restrictions and foster trade facilitation during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

In particular the joint declarations with other International Organizations and stakeholders such as the WTO, IMO, IRU, ICC, OTF-OSJD and UN-HRLLS show the importance of the WCO and the smart approach of approaching stakeholder in order to produce joint declarations. Similarly the WCO has repeatedly worked together with the WHO in order to produce joint guidance on customs tariff classification on essential medical supplies and medication.

The WCO is thereby displaying not only its role as premier source of knowledge and information distribution on global customs matter and in particular during this human, public health and economic emergency a supreme stakeholder in terms of joint declarations and cooperation with other International Organizations and stakeholders.

The WCO is during this COVID-19-Pandemic relying its normal resources and terms of publishing its information distribution by help of documents and the www.wcoomd.org internet page (figures 1 to 5). The WCO is also contributing its competence to joint databases of the WTO (COVID-19 Trade Facilitation Database) and the ITC/WTO/UNCTAD (Global Trade Helpdesk) (figures 6 and 7).

One of the outcomes of the COVID-19 pandemic for International Organizations is that they should learn from each other how to best use the internet and information technology and use the best possible approaches to distribute their information.

A possible way for reaching that aim is the creation of guidance for best practices and communication in a global human emergency. And a joint effort through cooperation: some of the best interactive databases have been created by cooperation of International Organizations such as the WHO, WTO, WCO, UNCTAD. But also very adequate stand-alone databases have been created by the WHO, WTO and OECD.

The International Organizations that had experience in creating databases before used this expertise during COVID-19 to better handle information and web content.

And here the WCO can still learn from the WTO and other stakeholders on global trade.

Conclusions. The COVID-19 pandemic can in its global spread and speed of spread be compared to the 1918/1919 pandemic of the Spanish flu. Economic and social lockdowns and curfews lead to severe economic downfalls in all affected countries. In 190 states (and 219 nations or economic areas according to the WHO) more than 46 Million humans were infected officially (with a huge dark number of infections) more than 1,196,000 persons died of COVID-19 until the beginning of November 2020 (as of 1/11/2020). Lockdowns and curfews of the civil society and the economic production were issued in order to slow the spread of SARS-CoV-2/COVID-19 down, the airplane travel of persons came to a near halt. In the second wave many second lockdowns partial lockdowns or circuit-breaker lockdown try to break the speed of COVID-19-spread through the societies.

Trade restrictions for medical supplies were issued in March 2020 and the production often was halted. In times of border closures it is of the utmost importance to keep borders open for trans-national trade in order to ensure the supply of critical medical goods and personal protection equipment, medicine/chemicals and food.

In order to enable open borders and fast delivery of essential goods all nations are urged to apply the measures of trade facilitation that are advertised by the WTO, the WCO and its stakeholders since more than ten years: [56] the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and the WCO Revised Kyoto Convention and enable free flow of World Trade and commodities across borders (also by help of information technology and transit procedures) – a strong necessity for otherwise landlocked and least developed nations.

In fall 2020 trade restrictions shall not be issued again, many urge and argue.

The global community and the International Organizations reacted by help lists/databases and guidance or reports but also joint declarations and warnings on this unprecedented threat to global trade in the times of Globalization.

Organized crime and criminals are trying to use the need of personal protection equipment and cures to invent new cybercrime threats and produce and sell huge amounts of fake medical goods and fake corona cures.

At the beginning of the global pandemic the UN and its organizations, the WHO, the FAO, the WTO, the WCO and its stakeholders such as the ICC, the IATA, the IRU and the IMO, INTERPOL and EUROPOL but also the IMF, the OECD and the World Bank, the OECD and the UNCTAD were offering guidance and advice by help of traditional papers, reports and guidelines but also by help of a modern internet presentation and (geographical) databases that were interactive and searchable.

The WCO has given impressive proof of its outstanding position on all customs matters, Trade Facilitation and World Trade in particular during this COVID-19-pandemic. The WCO is reaching out to other International Organizations and its stakeholders in order to produce joint declarations, guidance and information for all stakeholders and displays outstanding leadership. The WCO's ways of displaying all information is of rather conventional

makeup. The WCO contributes its customs knowledge and wisdom to joint databases of the WTO (COVID-19 Trade Facilitation Database) and the ITC/WTO/UNCTAD (Global Trade Helpdesk) that are benefiting from the experience of some stakeholders in online database technology. So one of the outcomes could be that communities of practice emerge and the WCO benefits from the knowledge of other International Organizations and its stakeholders in terms of databases and information distribution. And since customs authorities are sharing their experiences on different levels during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. remote teaching, crisis preparedness) here also communities of practice and learning from each other should emerge.

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