Summary of Webinar "Paperless trade and trade digitalization: state of the art" – 19 November 2025

The webinar featured presentations from experts from OECD and the World Bank who discussed paperless trade and digitalization initiatives and insights, including the OECD paper on "The Digitalisation of Trade Documents and Processes: Going Paperless Today, Going Paperless Tomorrow", and the World Bank "Digital Trade Regulatory Readiness (DTRR)" database. The discussion concluded with conversations about interoperability issues in cross-border paperless trade and the role of artificial intelligence, emphasizing the need for comprehensive approaches involving government and private sector collaboration.

Luca Castellani (Legal Officer, UNCITRAL secretariat) gave introductory remarks highlighting UNCITRAL's work in this area and providing information on the upcoming UNCITRAL Colloquium on 19-22 January 2026.

Silvia Sorescu (OECD) presented insights from OECD's recent paper on the digitalization of trade-related documents and processes as well as from INDIGO, the OECD Index of Digital Trade Integration and Openness that measures the level of digital trade integration across countries. She discussed the challenges and progress in going paperless, highlighting the need for a legal and regulatory environment that supports digital trade at the domestic and international levels. Silvia outlined the several plurilateral and private sector initiatives that include a paperless trade component as well as the various policy elements involved in such efforts, such as frameworks for electronic transactions, border processes and cross-border data exchange. She noted that while there has been progress in some areas, such as border facilitation and lowering restrictions, challenges remain in areas like electronic payments, cross-border agency cooperation and complex regulatory environments for cross-border flow of both personal and non-personal data. Silvia also touched on the impact of paperless trade reforms, suggesting that improvements and the application of less restrictions to paperless trade applications could lead to significant increases in global goods exports. Finally, she addressed emerging social and environmental regulations that may impact paperless trade efforts.

Silvia presented findings from an OECD analysis of trade regulations, noting that many new requirements lack clear implementation guidance and insufficiently specify information exchange processes and their link to the border clearance process. She highlighted that while two-thirds of regulations clarify border formalities including the roles of customs, the roles of other competent authorities should be more clearly defined.

Satya Prasad Sahu (World Bank) presented the DTRR Database, which maps regulations across 121 countries to assess digital trade readiness. The DTRR database involves data on whether regulations exist, which are those, what is their impact, and the existence of restrictive measures. The database, which contains 13,000 data points, covers three regulatory pillars: electronic transactions, trust-building measures, and platform regulations, with a focus on both paperless trade and digitally delivered services. While high-income countries generally have fewer restrictions and stronger frameworks, many countries lack comprehensive legal frameworks for intermediary responsibility, particularly regarding notice, takedown procedures, liability limitations and safe harbor protections. The World Bank is working on both legal readiness and operational practices for paperless trade, including customs automation, port community systems and digital cross-border solutions, with plans for a new flagship report and ongoing monitoring of digital trade reforms.

The Q & A session focused on addressing interoperability issues in cross-border paperless trade. The discussions emphasized the need for a comprehensive approach that involves collaboration between governments and the private sector, as well as the adoption of regulatory frameworks and standards. The role of artificial intelligence in enhancing paperless trade was also explored, with examples of its use in developing platforms and optical character recognition. The conversation concluded with recommendations for developing countries to adopt a comprehensive and stakeholder-inclusive approach to digital trade, highlighting successful regional initiatives (e.g. eFTI, eIDAS, adoption of digital economy laws) and the importance of digital identity frameworks, including for MSEs.

The webinar was held on Zoom and livestreamed via Chinese platforms, namely, WeChat Video Channel, Xiaoetong and Bilibili, some of which provided AI-generated live captions in the Chinese language. The webinar welcomed more than 1700 attendees.