

UNECE SINGLE WINDOW REPOSITORY

Introduction

A number of countries are considering establishing a “Single Window” for the exchange of information between trade and government. The purpose of this paper, prepared by the UN/ECE secretariat is to provide an overview of concrete examples of the operation, costs and benefits of such facilities in different countries based on case-studies compiled in the UNECE Repository of Single Window experiences.

Background

A Single Window is a facility that allows parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements¹. If information is electronic, then individual data elements should only be submitted once. The Single Window is a practical application of trade facilitation concepts intended to reduce non-tariff trade barriers and deliver immediate benefits to all members of the trading community.

In most countries, companies engaged in international trade regularly have to submit large volumes of information and documents to the authorities to comply with import, export and transit-related regulatory requirements. This information and documentation often has to be submitted through several different agencies, each with its own specific (manual or automated) system and paper forms. These requirements, together with the associated compliance costs, constitute a burden both on Governments and on the business community and can also be a major barrier to the development of international trade, particularly in developing countries.

Establishing a Single Window facility is one means of addressing this problem. It can enhance the availability and handling of information, and can simplify and expedite information flows between trade and government. It can also bring about greater harmonization and better sharing of the relevant data across governmental systems, bringing meaningful gains to all parties involved in cross-border trade. It can improve the efficiency and effectiveness of official controls and reduce costs both for Governments and for traders because of better use of resources.

In September 2004, an UN/CEFACT Recommendation Number 33 was approved. The Recommendation is complemented by a detailed set of Guidelines designed to assist countries in implementation (*Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a Single Window*; it is a part of the series of over 30 trade facilitation Recommendations prepared by UN/CEFACT, all of which are available free of charge on the UNECE website, www.unece.org/trade). In the *Recommendation and Guidelines* it is recommended that Governments and those engaged in the international trade and movement of goods should actively consider the possibility of implementing a Single Window facility in their country.

To promote the establishment of Single Window facilities, UN/CEFACT and UNECE held a number of capacity-building workshops, with presentations by current Single Window operators (for example, several workshops were organized in 2008-2009 in the CIS region)..

¹ Recommendation and Guidelines on Establishing a Single Window, ECE/TRADE/352, September 2004, http://www.unece.org/cefact/recommendations/rec33/rec33_trd352e.pdf

UN/ECE Single Window Repository

Following the release of the *Recommendation and Guidelines*, numerous countries approached UNECE and UN/CEFACT with requests for information and support in planning and implementing their Single Window initiatives. The UN/ECE Repository of Single Window implementations was established in response to these requests and it is available and on the UNECE Web².

The Repository offers case studies from countries that have already operational, or soon to be operational, Single Windows. The current repository (last updated in 2009-2010) contains contributions from FYR of Macedonia, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hong Kong SAR (China), Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Republic of Korea, Senegal, Singapore, Sweden and the United States. There are already over 30 Single Windows in operation throughout the world and UNECE plans to expand its Repository over time to include further examples.

For each Single Window, the Repository provides information in the following areas:

- Background
- Establishment
- Services
- Operational model
- Business model and costs
- Technology
- Promotion and communication
- Judicial aspects
- Standards
- Benefits
- Lessons learned
- Future plans
- Source for further information
- Contact details

The template was designed to give potential operators an overview of the main issues that need to be addressed, the tools available and the steps that need to be taken for establishing a Single Window.

Key features of a Single Window

According to the UN/CEFACT Recommendation, a Single Window facility should allow:

- Parties involved in trade and transport to lodge standardized information and documents with a single entry point to fulfil all import, export, and transit-related regulatory requirements. If information is electronic, then individual data elements should only be submitted once.
- The sharing of all information in respect of international trade transactions, which is supported by a legal framework that provides privacy and security in the exchange of information.
- The addition of facilities to provide trade-related government information and receive payment of duties and other charges.

² http://www.unece.org/cefact/single_window/welcome.htm

- Such a single entry point to disseminate, or provide access to, the relevant information to participating governmental authorities or authorised agencies
- Coordination of the controls and inspections of the various governmental authorities.

Benefits and costs

A Single Window benefits all parties engaged in cross-border trade.

| <i>Benefits for government</i> | <i>Benefits for trade</i> |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Correct revenue yields</i> – <i>Improved trader compliance</i> – <i>Enable the use of sophisticated “risk management” techniques for control and enforcement purposes</i> – <i>More effective and efficient deployment of resources</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – <i>Lower costs through reducing delays</i> – <i>Faster clearance and release</i> – <i>Predictable application and explanation of rules</i> – <i>More effective and efficient deployment of resources</i> |

For example, when Mauritius introduced a Single Window, the average clearance time for goods decreased from four hours to just around 15 minutes for non-litigious declarations. Similarly, the Single Window facility in Senegal allows clients to obtain in a single day what previously took two to three days (see case studies). In Singapore, the time for approval reduced from previous 2 hours to 4 days to less than 10 minutes and the number of the required copies of documents (which could have reached in the past 35) went down to 1.

The costs associated with setting up a Single Window vary depending on the approach taken. In case of government-financed Single Windows, the costs are often part of the costs of a larger nationwide trade development policy.

Costs of implementing a Single Window

As can be seen from the case studies, the total implementation costs for a Single Window vary considerably, depending on the type of application and coverage of the system. For example, costs were less than US\$1million in Guatemala, ranged between \$1 million and \$4 million in Finland, Germany, Senegal, Malaysia, and were significantly higher in countries such as the Republic of Korea(around 5 million in customs and 8 million in trade network), Ghana and Singapore, where the systems are quite extensive and cover many additional areas.

Diversity of models

There is no unique model for a Single Window, as operators adopt their systems to specific national/regional conditions and requirements.

Financing can be provided by the State (e.g. Finland, Republic of Korea, Sweden, United States, Macedonia, FYRM, Azerbaijan, Philippines), by the private sector (e.g. Germany, Guatemala) or with the help of a private-public partnership (e.g. Ghana, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Senegal, Singapore).

The use of Single Window facilities can be compulsory (Finland, Ghana, Guatemala, Mauritius, Republic of Korea, Senegal,) or voluntary (Germany, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Malaysia, Sweden, United States, Republic of Korea).

Services vary and may be provided free of charge (Finland, Sweden, United States, Azerbaijan) or based on various payment schemes (Ghana, Germany, Guatemala, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Senegal, Singapore). Even within one country a system can vary, for example, in the Republic of Korea a single window facility run by the customs is free of charge and a KTNET single window (Korea Trade Network) charges fees from its users (for details see relevant studies).

Despite these differences, all participating countries speak favourably of their Single Window experience. The benefits and revenues generally outweigh the establishment/operational costs. However, potential implementers should be aware of the lessons learned by existing Single Window operators. This publication sets out some of the difficulties and obstacles that were faced and overcome in each of the case studies.

Towards common standards and interoperability

Many Single Window operators have asked UNECE and UN/CEFACT to support the establishment of common standards for the interoperability of Single Windows and UNECE and UN/CEFACT are currently working towards achieving this goal.

Whom to contact for further information

Contact details for all Single Window facilities reviewed in this paper are provided within each case study (see in the Repository).

Countries wishing to obtain more information regarding introducing a Single Window and UN/CEFACT's work should consult the UN/CEFACT *Recommendation and Guidelines on establishing a Single Window*. You may also wish to visit the UN/CEFACT website: http://www.unece.org/cefact/single_window/welcome.htm.

UN/ECE and CEFACT hope that the information in the Repository will be beneficial to the policy makers and practitioners and invite other operators to help expand our Repository by contacting the secretariat and sharing their experiences of a Single Window.

