



World Customs Organization

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Att. Directors General

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Dear Director General,

I am pleased to inform you that International Customs Day (ICD) on 26 January 2022 will be dedicated to the efforts of Customs administrations to accelerate their digital transformation by embracing a data culture based on a true knowledge-driven Data Ecosystem leveraging on science and technology, with the slogan: “Scaling up Customs Digital Transformation by Embracing a Data Culture and Building a Data Ecosystem”.

The COVID-19 pandemic is not over yet, and looking to the future Customs needs to address human resource challenges and take advantage of the abundance of available, and often under-utilized, data. Despite the global trend regarding data governance, Customs faces various obstacles, including technical, ethical and legal issues, in deploying policies towards a more open use of its data.

Customs can give new impetus to its digital transformation in the following ways:

- **Building a Customs Data Ecosystem based on trust**

Customs is part of an existing Data Ecosystem (defined as a collection of infrastructure, analytics, and applications used to capture and analyze data) whose actors are citizens, government agencies, and local and transnational companies, among others, and all of these entities produce or collect a colossal volume of data. Thanks to the development of digital technology, Customs can tap into data from other government agencies, commercially available databases, and open-source information platforms such as digitized global public records and multilingual news sources.

Customs data is intrinsically linked with how Customs functions; data is used to formulate strategies, improve the quality of the fight against fraud and the collection of revenue, optimize the allocation of resources on the ground and measure the performance of Customs units.

The extent to which data can be used effectively depends on various factors surrounding data ethics, including privacy, commercial secrecy or legal issues regarding the use of data by Customs and Tax administrations, and the importance assigned to innovation in public administrations.

To build or consolidate existing Data Ecosystems, the following enabling actions may be considered:

- establishing formal data governance to ensure the relevance, accuracy and timeliness of data;
- making use of the standards developed by the WCO and other institutions regarding data format and data exchange;
- ensuring appropriate management of data to make sure that the right people have access to the right data, and that data protection regulations are respected; and,
- adopting progressive approaches, such as data analytics, to collect and successfully exploit data to drive decision-making.

- **Embracing a data culture by bridging the human resource gap**

The biggest obstacles to creating an organization that prioritizes data-driven decision-making are not technical, but cultural. A data-driven culture is one where every member of an organization has access to data analytics, along with the knowledge needed to utilize the data in order to manage the business. To help create and sustain a culture with data at its core, experts highlight the need for top managers to set an expectation that decisions must be anchored in data.

Data culture empowers people to ask questions, challenge ideas and rely on concrete insights, not just intuition or instinct, to make decisions.

In order to nurture the data culture, administrations need to enhance the data-literacy of their staff - in other words, their ability to interpret and analyze data accurately. A decade ago, the Harvard Business Review predicted that organizations would need people with the right skill set to make sense of data and use the relevant technologies. In 2022 this prediction has materialized, with the increasing use of algorithms and data science tools leading to a desperate need for civil servants who have an empirical and intuitive intimacy with data.

Customs administrations should integrate data science in their curriculums for newly recruited officers and participate in the development of distance learning courses to familiarize Customs officers with the collection and analysis of data in order to forge a data culture. Besides training, administrations must develop effective strategies to retain talented staff with better infrastructure and complex technical challenges. Staff also need to understand the bigger picture, namely the impact of Customs on the effective protection of society, trade facilitation and fair revenue collection.

- **Fostering a collaborative culture among Customs administrations**

Customs administrations are invited to consider leveraging data in their relationships with other actors along the supply chain, as well as making data available to the public and academia as a means of enhancing transparency, stimulating the production of knowledge and enabling dialogue with civil society.

Sharing data analysis with other government agencies increases the role and visibility of Customs in policy-making and in obtaining necessary resources, including donor funding. Disseminating Customs data and information in society is part of governments' response to the general demand for open governance.

International organizations like the World Bank (WB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), United Nations agencies such as the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) or the International Trade Center (ITC), are all looking for Customs data to guide resource allocation and help them assess the impact of modernization

projects. Another stimulation comes from private sector companies which are specialized in data applications and are eager to promote the use of data, and of their tools, within public administrations.

To support Customs administrations, the WCO Secretariat has placed data-related topics on the Agendas of several Committees and Working Groups, organized awareness-raising seminars, developed e-learning modules, drafted a Capacity Building Framework for Data Analytics which was adopted by the WCO Council in December 2020, issued practical publications and published articles in the WCO News.

Moreover, a community of experts has been put in place, called BACUDA (Band of Customs Data Analysts), which brings together Customs and data scientists with the objective of developing data analytics methodologies.

The Secretariat will continue to investigate ways to collect and share data on Customs administrations with a view to enhancing the way it delivers capacity building, and will continue to undertake data-driven assessments and work with international experts to respond to assistance requests. More measures will be presented in the WCO Data Strategy that the WCO Secretariat is currently working on. The ambition will be to make data a vernacular language among Customs and between the WCO Secretariat and WCO Members.

To mark International Customs Day, it is customary for Members to award WCO Certificates of Merit. Each administration may award a maximum of 20 certificates, on my behalf, to Customs officials and representatives of the public and private sectors who, in its opinion, have demonstrated their commitment to the 2022 theme.

Certificates may be ordered online by visiting the “International Customs Day 2022” section under “About Us” on the WCO Web site (<http://www.wcoomd.org/en/about-us/international-customs-day/icd-2022.aspx>). Please note that you will need to log in before being able to order certificates via this link.

The WCO will send the certificates by post. To ensure that they reach your Administration before 26 January 2022, **please place your order as soon as possible, and no later than 15 December 2021**, as delivery cannot be guaranteed after this date due to high postal volumes at this time of the year.

I would like to thank you in advance for your support and efforts in making this International Customs Day a success, and in ensuring that the theme for 2022 is promoted throughout the year.

Yours sincerely,



Kunio Mikuriya
WCO Secretary General