Gender Dimensions of Cross-Border Trade in Tajikistan
List of Abbreviations

AEO - Authorized Economic Operator
BCP - Border Control Post
CARs-4 - Central Asia Regional Links program
CATI - Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews
CCFTP - Coordinating Committee on Facilitation of Trade Procedures
FGD - focus group discussion
GPG - gender pay gap
IFC - International Finance Corporation
IOM - International Organization of Migration
MSME - micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises
MEDT - Ministry of Economic Development and Trade
NTFC - National Trade Facilitation Committee
OSBP - One Stop Border Post
SRS - simple random sampling
SW - Single Window
UAIS - Unified Automated Information System
WBG - World Bank Group
WCO - World Customs Organization
WTO TFA - World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement

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Abstract

This report summarizes the main challenges that men- and women-led companies (also referred to as “traders” or “trade firms”) and customs brokers face in undertaking cross-border trade of merchandise goods in the Republic of Tajikistan. The report also provides recommendations to address these challenges.

Global research has shown that the expansion of international trade is essential for poverty reduction, and it provides better job opportunities and increased returns, particularly for women working in export-oriented sectors. Oftentimes, however, women may face more or different challenges than men that prevent them from fully participating in trade. While globally there is a growing body of research on why women participate less in cross-border trade than men, there is still a lack of data and research that quantifies the exact nature of the trade facilitation challenges that women traders face at the firm level.

Generally, trade facilitation measures are assumed to be non-discriminatory in their design; however, implementing and delivering these measures may not necessarily impact all traders similarly. Studies by the World Bank, for example, found that men and women traders often face different trade facilitation challenges, including in areas such as access to information, usage of electronic payments, submission of electronic documents, pre-declaration of goods, consultations with the government, and participation in trade or industry-specific associations.

This study in Tajikistan explored a range of topics, primarily within the scope of the World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA), including experiences with public consultations and enquiry points, clearance and release of goods, formalities connected with import/export/transit procedures, detentions of goods, appeal or review procedures, and publication and availability of information. Areas beyond the WTO TFA, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, transport, and safety and security issues at the borders, were also researched.

Data collection for this report was done via phone survey interviews across Tajikistan and was complemented by qualitative research methods, such as focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and technical visits to select border crossings in the country. The work was built upon a similar methodology developed and used in other surveys by the World Bank Group.

The data collected in the study and the resultant analysis contribute to the literature on trade and gender. Importantly, the report helps fill a significant knowledge gap in Tajikistan, where there is no robust country-representative research shedding light on gender-specific challenges faced by cross-border traders. This study adds to the increasingly important dialogue on addressing gender equality issues in trade policies. The study may be useful to the government of Tajikistan, development organizations, and others in ensuring that trade interventions can benefit all traders equally.

1 The survey and this report are focused on trade of merchandise goods and do not cover trade in services. This is because the WTO TFA—the primary scope of the study—pertains to the movement, release, and clearance of goods and not services.


3 See World Bank. 2021 “Trade Facilitation Challenges for Women Traders and Freight Forwarders in the Pacific Region.”

4 Similar studies have been undertaken in Brazil, the Philippines, South Africa, and across the Pacific Islands and Timor-Leste.
**Tajikistan Country Profile**

**Number of active cross-border trade firms (2020–2021):** 4,398[^5]

**Number of active customs brokers (2017–2021):** 41[^6]

**Capital city:** Dushanbe

**Region:** Central Asia

**Income category:** Lower-middle-income[^7]

**Population (thousands, 2023):** 10,077.6[^8]

**GDP (current US$, 2021):** 8,746,270,636[^9]

**Estimated GNI per capita female/male (2021 based on 2017 PPP$):** 2,980/6,096[^10]


**Gender Inequality index (2021):** 0.285 (68th out of 170 countries)[^12]

**Merchandise trade (% of GDP, 2021):** 72.7[^13]

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**Top exports by value (2022):**
- Ores, slag, ash (HS 26); natural or cultured pearls, precious or semi-precious stones, precious metals, metals clad (HS 71); cotton (HS 52); aluminum and its products (HS 76); mineral fuel, oil and products of their distillation, bituminous substances, mineral waxes (HS 27)[^14]

**Top imports by value (2022):**
- Mineral fuel, oil and products of their distillation, bituminous substances, mineral waxes (HS 27); vehicles other than railway or tramway rolling stock, parts and accessories thereof (HS 87); nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances, parts thereof (HS 84); cereals (HS 10); iron and steel (HS 72)[^15]

**Top importing trading partners (million US$, 2021):**
- Russian Federation (1,280.5), Kazakhstan (816.6), China (679.7), Uzbekistan (326.1), Türkiye (158.3)[^16]

**Top exporting trading partners (million US$, 2021):**
- Kazakhstan (360.1), Switzerland (354.1), Türkiye (232.2), Uzbekistan (126.7), Belgium (88.8)[^17]

**WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement ratification date:**
- July 2, 2019.

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[^5]: The number is based on the list of Uniform Automated Information System (UAIS).
[^6]: The list of customs brokers provided by the Tajikistan Customs Authority.
[^16]: UN Comtrade.
[^17]: UN Comtrade.
The Environment for Working Women in Tajikistan

Tajikistan exhibits large gender gaps in many areas, such as educational and health endowments, economic opportunities, and equality in the voice and agency that women hold in society compared to men. Only 31 percent of women participate in the labor force compared to 52 percent of their male counterparts. The low female labor force participation (LFP) in absolute terms and the 20 percentage point difference in LFP indicate a significant disparity in economic opportunity for women compared to men and point to the magnitude of economic potential that bridging this gap would represent for the country.

Women are concentrated in the agriculture, health, and education sectors, while men dominate other sectors, such as industry, construction, and transport. Occupational segregation contributes to a high gender pay gap (GPG) in the labor market. On average, in 2019, men earned 35.9 percent more than women in Tajikistan when their median monthly earnings were compared, which is one of the highest GPGs in the whole Europe and Central Asia region. Tajikistan scored 78.8 out of 100 — lower than the regional average in Europe and Central Asia—on the 2023 Women, Business and the Law index, which measures the laws and regulations that affect women’s economic opportunity. The main areas to improve women’s legal equality include laws affecting women’s decisions to work, women’s pay, women’s work after having children, and the size of a woman’s pension.

There are fewer women entrepreneurs than men entrepreneurs in the country. Women entrepreneurs reportedly face disproportionate challenges compared to their men counterparts when trying to start or grow their businesses, including weak application of property rights by women, which limits their ability to pledge property as collateral to access finance; lack of business skills and networks; lack of knowledge of legislation and taxation; and poor self-esteem. Domestic violence is also highly prevalent in Tajik society, including spousal abuse.

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Executive Summary
There is a dearth of research that quantifies the exact nature of challenges women and men cross-border traders face at the firm level in Tajikistan. To help fill this gap, the World Bank Group undertook a survey of 401 cross-border trade firms and 31 customs brokers. To supplement the quantitative part of the research, the study also included four focus group discussions with traders, six key informant interviews, and technical visits of three border crossing points and one airport. The survey largely focused on areas related to the World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA), while also researching the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts in the region, transport issues, and safety and security at the borders.

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the study undertaken in Tajikistan between March and November 2022. Independence tests have been undertaken using chi-square statistical test and Fisher’s test for two-by-two tables that do not meet the assumptions of the Chi-square test due to small sample size.

The WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA) contains provisions for expediting the movement, release, and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. The TFA sets out measures for customs compliance issues and for effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation. Trade facilitation measures can help to reduce transaction costs to import and export with simplified, transparent trade procedures. The TFA is particularly important for countries striving to increase exports and overall trade and to strengthen domestic economic activity.

Profile of Surveyed Trade Firms in Tajikistan:

- A large majority of firms trading across borders are led by men (87 percent compared to 13 percent women-led firms).
- Around 80 percent of traders are importers, and the majority of trade firms import goods beyond Central Asia (51 percent of men-led and 61 percent of women-led).
- There are considerably fewer married women-led (78 percent) than married men-led firms (98 percent).
- Fewer women (26 percent) than men (31 percent) are members of industry/trade associations. The likelihood of membership in a trade/industry association correlates with the size of the firm: 61 percent of large firms are members of a trade/industry associations compared to only 15 percent of micro firms.
- Fewer women traders (80 percent) work full time (40 or more hours per week) compared to their men counterparts (87 percent of men).

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23 Trade firms are legally registered firms that are engaged in import, export, and/or transit of goods from/to different countries, excluding state-owned enterprises. Customs brokers are formally registered professionals who provide cross-border trade services and can operate as representatives of trade firms.

24 The target respondents for this study were either owners or top managers of trade firms. Depending on the gender identification of the respondent (woman/man), the firm is defined as women- or men-led firm. “Owner” refers to 51 percent or more of the shareholding in the business, and “top manager” refers to the highest position in the business with the decision-making authority, for example, CEO, manager, or director. Since most of the men and women respondents interviewed are managers of firms, and there were just a handful of women owners, the study is reporting both owners and managers in an aggregated form.

25 In this survey, firm size levels are micro (1–4 employees), small (5–19 employees), medium (20–99 employees), and large (100 employees and above).
The challenges identified through the survey responses can be categorized into two main categories: (A) challenges that are common to both women and men traders and customs brokers, and (B) gender-specific challenges:

Thirty-eight percent of trade firms, regardless of gender, reported their businesses’ ability to trade was impacted by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Forty-five percent of customs brokers also named Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a major factor affecting their ability to undertake cross-border trade.

The majority of men- and women-led firms and customs brokers reported that their businesses have been impacted by the pandemic (74 percent of men-led firms, 71 percent of women-led firms, and 71 percent of customs brokers).

Most trade firms do not pre-declare their shipments to customs prior to arrival — 89 percent of women-led firms and 85 percent of men-led firms. The larger the firm, the more likely it would pre-declare its shipments, with 14 percent of large firms pre-declaring compared to only 6 percent of micro firms. Among customs brokers, 29 percent of them pre-declare prior to arrival of shipments.

Although Tajikistan has implemented a Single Window system, more than 50 percent of trade firms and 42 percent of customs brokers reported that they still have to submit both paper and electronic forms and documents to customs.

Due to the low number of customs brokers that participated in the survey, a gender-disaggregated analysis for customs brokers was not feasible.
This study treats the findings on sexual and other types of harassment with caution since the telephone format of interviews does not usually allow interviewers to establish a rapport with the respondents to discuss issues of this sensitive nature; therefore, significant underreporting is expected.

gender-specific challenges for trade firms

Significantly more women traders are unsatisfied with the amenities provided at the land border posts or airports. Lack of access to the internet (43 percent of women traders versus 30 percent of men), unhygienic toilet facilities (36 percent of women versus 18 percent of men), and lack of adequate resting rooms and private space for mothers (36 percent of women versus 10 percent of men) were cited as reasons for this lack of satisfaction.

More women reported that caretaking responsibilities affect their ability to trade (12 percent of those women with caretaking responsibilities compared to 4 percent of men).

Less than 15 percent of traders use government enquiry points for trade-related questions, and fewer women than men have used them (10 percent versus 15 percent, respectively).

Most trade firms are not familiar with the Authorized Economic Operator program (88 percent of women-led and 95 percent of men-led firms).

No women traders reported experiencing inappropriate behavior at land border posts or airports they most frequently visit, while 9 percent of men reported it to be an issue.²⁷ The most typical transgressions reported by the men that have experienced harassment are verbal abuse and threats (6 percent), intimidation (2 percent), and physical violence (1 percent).

Awareness of the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC), known as the Coordinating Committee on Facilitation of Trade Procedures (CCFTP), is very low in Tajikistan—only 7 percent of women-led firms and 14 percent of men-led firms know that this entity exists. The larger the size of the firm, the greater the chance that they are aware of the NTFC.

Significantly fewer women traders (26 percent) compared to men traders (42 percent) stated that their business is consulted regularly or has the opportunity to comment on public consultations regarding changes to official trade processes and procedures.

A larger share of women traders (69 percent) rely on personal/company savings to finance their business compared to their men counterparts (53 percent). More men traders (26 percent) compared to women traders (20 percent) use official bank loans.

Among traders that face difficulties finding information, more women than men stated that official websites are not user-friendly (75 percent of women traders versus to 41 percent of men) and that the information is not centralized (62 percent of women traders versus 44 percent of men).

Most traders do not use public transport for travel to the border post or airport (71 percent of men and 79 percent of women). Most of those who still use public transport think it is too expensive.

²⁷ This study treats the findings on sexual and other types of harassment with caution since the telephone format of interviews does not usually allow interviewers to establish a rapport with the respondents to discuss issues of this sensitive nature; therefore, significant underreporting is expected.
Summary of Key Recommendations
These recommendations primarily aim at government agencies charged with promoting international trade and economic development in Tajikistan. Initial findings demonstrate an opportunity to improve the design of trade interventions to better address the needs of all traders and customs brokers, and women in particular, for example, by:

- **Expediting the full and effective implementation of the WTO TFA, considering specific challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and regional conflicts.**
  The government should continue to monitor and assess the implementation of the National Trade Facilitation Roadmap and the Mid-term Customs Development Program of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2020–2024. The progress should be publicly available.

- **Reviewing and publicizing official grievance procedures in a clear and easy-to-access manner.**
  This includes reviewing and identifying gaps in the existing process, involving stakeholders in the review process, making the procedures easily accessible and publicizing them widely online and in print, and training officials on the proper handling of grievances.

- **Strengthening and promoting electronic declaration systems.**
  Removing the need for paper copies and ensuring traders know that they can submit documentation via electronic platforms to customs and other border agencies are critical to reduce both trade costs and time.

- **Improving infrastructure services at border crossings.**
  The government should thoroughly assess existing infrastructure at all border posts and develop a long-term infrastructure plan that outlines specific measures and activities to improve border infrastructure, including timelines and funding sources.

- **Recruiting more women staff and improving staff working conditions at customs and other border agencies.**
  Development of a gender-sensitive recruitment strategy that actively targets and encourages women to apply for roles in border agencies, increasing visibility of female role models, and offering flexible working arrangements are critical steps to enhance women's representation across staff in all border agencies.

- **Increasing access to trade finance.**
  This can be done by reducing bureaucratic barriers and creating a more transparent and predictable regulatory environment, establishing trade finance facilities, and exploring a deeper partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC) trade finance team.

Section II of the report provides detailed analyses on the identified findings, and section III provides more details for each of the recommendations listed above.
1 Summary of the Methodology and Limitations
The study employed mixed methods to combine qualitative and quantitative data collection and analyses. The following four research methods were used:

- A survey on trade facilitation and gender involving interviews with 401 trade firms and 31 customs brokers was conducted between October and November 2022. The survey was designed to identify common and gender-specific trade barriers experienced by firm-level cross-border traders and customs brokers in Tajikistan. A simple random sampling (SRS) method was adopted to sample trade firms from the master list of all registered (formal) firms engaged in cross-border trade during 2020–2021 provided by the Tajikistan Customs authorities. The master list of trade firms contained a total of 2,472 cross-border traders out of which a random sample of 650 firms was drawn. The survey successfully interviewed 340 men-owned/led and 61 women-owned/led trade firms by telephone. For customs brokers, the full population of 41 customs brokers registered in the Registry of Customs Brokers between 2017 and 2020 were approached for the survey, of which 31 were surveyed (14 women and 17 men).

- Four focus group discussions (FGDs) with informal and formal traders (12 women and 12 men) engaged in cross-border trade were held in three regions of Tajikistan: Sughd and Khatlon regions and the city of Dushanbe. This qualitative component provided deeper insights into some of the common and gender-specific challenges of cross-border trade and helped the researchers to interpret some of the survey results by using a “triangulation approach,” that is, validating data through cross-verification of quantitative and qualitative sources to help produce a fuller understanding of the gender dimensions of cross-border trade. The FGDs were conducted in May to June 2022.

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**QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH**

**TOPICS COVERED**

- Demographic and business profile
- Challenges caused by external factors, such as border closures and COVID-19 pandemic
- Trade facilitation-related challenges in the context of WTO TFA
- Safety and security challenges at the borders
- Main challenges to expanding business

**TELEPHONE SURVEY**

Cross-border Trade Firms

- 340 men-led
- 61 women-led

Customs Brokers

- 17 men
- 14 women

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**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**DEEPER INSIGHTS** into common and gender-specific challenges of cross-border trade

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

24 traders (12 women and 12 men)

**FIELD VISITS**

3 border control posts and 1 airport and 37 individual interviews at visited locations

**IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS**

- 2 customs brokers
- 2 customs officers
- Women Business Association
- Chamber of Commerce and Industry

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28 The SRS is a probability sampling technique in which all the elements in the target population have an equal probability of being selected regardless of other known characteristics/stratifications of the elements.

29 Informal traders in this report refers to traders who are not registered, do not have a license to trade, or simply trade in small quantities that are exempt from certain regulatory requirements. They are often also referred to as small-scale traders.
In-depth interviews with two customs brokers, two customs officers, and representatives of the Women Business Association and the Chamber of Commerce and Industry were conducted between July 5–11, 2022. Like FGDs, these interviews complemented the quantitative part of the research and provided a more holistic view of the trading environment in Tajikistan.

Field visits to three border control posts (BCPs) and the Dushanbe International Airport were conducted in August 2022. The three BCPs were the Dusti BCP in the Tursunzade District, the Fotekhobod-Oybek BCP in the Matchoh District, and the Patar BCP in the Kanibadam District. The BCPs were selected to gather information on the conditions at different types of border posts along the Uzbekistan border. These visits aimed to review the accessibility and safety provisions of the customs offices (and services), customer feedback mechanisms, and current customs services provided in digitized form, as well as to recommend changes in relation to all the above findings. The researchers conducted 37 individual interviews with traders crossing on foot (2), customs officers/inspectors (16), customs supervisors (4), representatives of other border agencies (12), drivers (2), and customs brokers (1) at different locations. The visits yielded rich visual observations, further enhancing the researchers’ understanding of the trade-related challenges.

The study acknowledges the following limitations:

- Challenges in fulfilling the sample size of trade firms and customs brokers for the interview were encountered due to nonresponse and inaccurate contact information in the population list from which the sample was drawn. Sample weights were applied to eliminate any biases arising from nonresponse.

- Due to the low number of customs brokers that participated in the survey, a gender-disaggregated analysis for customs brokers was not feasible.

- The study only focused on identifying challenges to the cross-border trade of goods and not services.

- The survey only captured the views of formal traders. Although the study held two focus group discussions with informal traders, it did not present their findings due to the inability to draw any conclusions regarding the wider group of informal traders in the country.

- The use of binary categories of “men” and “women” adopted by the study may not capture the full diversity of gendered experiences in cross-border trade. While the questionnaire included nonbinary categories for gender identification, none of the respondents chose those options.
2 Study Findings
The survey findings are presented in four parts. Part A provides an overview of the demographics of the cross-border traders and the trade profile of the trade firms and customs brokers; part B dives deeper into the trade facilitation–specific findings in the context of the World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA), as well as other findings related to conducting cross-border trade (such as safety and security); part C presents the impact of recent challenges caused by external factors, such as Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border trade; and part D highlights the main obstacles to expanding business internationally.

All figures and percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number. The survey of trade firms employed a simple random sampling method, which is a probability sampling technique. The survey findings have therefore been generalized to the entire population of trade firms. Further, independence tests have been undertaken using chi-square statistical testing.

A. Respondents’ Demographics and Business Profile

Profile of Traders and Customs Brokers

Most firms engaged in international trade in Tajikistan are owned or managed by men. Even though numerically more men-led firms are involved in cross-border trade, their intragroup demographic characteristics are largely similar. Women traders, however, differ from men traders by the size of their businesses and sources of finance. More women, for example, operate micro businesses, use personal/company savings for trade activities, and do not join professional associations to the same extent as men. In comparison, more men lead or own small, medium, and large firms and rely on bank loans to finance their trade activities. Also, there are considerably fewer married women than married men cross-border traders, potentially indicating that the household and care burden could be keeping some women from engaging in trade activities. This finding is in line with other global and Tajikistan-specific research on women’s time poverty and its implications for paid work. For example, in rural Tajikistan, women spend about seven hours per day on household and care responsibilities versus 40 minutes for men, while men dedicate three times as much time as women on paid labor. Women traders come from more ethnically diverse backgrounds compared to their men counterparts. In terms of functional difficulties, very few traders and brokers self-identified as having them regardless of gender. 

Only 13 percent of all registered firms that are engaged in cross-border trade are owned or managed by women (see Figure 1). The striking gender disparity in women’s participation in top management and ownership of trading firms is in line with similar enterprise-level data (both trading and non-trading) collected by the World Bank Enterprise Survey in 2019, which found that 7 percent of firms have a female top manager and 23 percent of firms have female participation in ownership in Tajikistan.

![Figure 1. Share of Respondents by Gender, Trade Firms](https://dx.doi.org/10.22617/TCS200167-2)

**Figure 1. Share of Respondents by Gender, Trade Firms**

- **Women**: 13%
- **Men**: 87%


31 Functional difficulties include physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory difficulties that may impede the ability to engage in cross-border trade.


33 Figures 1-101 are based on the data collected and analyzed through the survey.
The study interviewed owners and top managers (or “traders” hereinafter) of firms participating in cross-border trade. Of the men respondents, 21 percent are owners (72 firms), 72 percent are managers (245 firms), and 7 percent are both owners and managers (23 firms). In comparison, fewer women respondents are owners (10 percent or 6 firms) while a larger share of women respondents are top managers (84 percent or 51 firms), and 7 percent (4 firms) are both owned and managed by women (see Figure 2).34

The study also surveyed 31 customs brokers, of which 14 were women. Of the services provided by customs brokers, all of them provide services related to customs transactions to clear goods, such as legal services, filing of paperwork, and insurance. About 50 percent of customs brokers also assist traders with payments of official fees and duties/tariffs, and up to 40 percent of them provide other types of services, such as freight forwarding and warehousing (see Figure 3).

Figure 2. Proportion of Owners and Managers of Trade Firms by Gender

Figure 3. Type of Services Provided by Customs Brokers

34 This finding is significant at a 99 percent confidence level.
A larger share of women traders than men lead or own micro firms (36 percent versus 29 percent), while more men lead or own small, medium, and large firms compared to women (see Figure 4).

Most firms are small taxpayers with an income of fewer than 25 million somoni (US$2.3 million), working under the general taxation system, or are small business entities. However, slightly fewer women-led firms (8 percent) compared to men-led firms (13 percent) are large taxpayers with an income over 25 million somoni (see Figure 5).

---

Figure 4. Proportion of Firm Sizes by Gender

Figure 5. Size of Business According to the Types of Taxation

---

35,000,000 somoni is equivalent to US$2,306,060 as of February 23, 2023, based on the official exchange rate of the National Bank of Tajikistan.
Most traders are between 35–59 years old. Almost 80 percent of women and 70 percent of men traders are in this age category. One significant gender difference is there are more younger men traders between 25–34 years old (22 percent) compared to women traders in the same age category (16 percent) [see Figure 6].

Compared to men traders, more women traders have more than 10 years of experience in cross-border trade (see Figure 8).

Like traders, most customs brokers are between 35–59 years old (84 percent). There are no brokers younger than 25 years old and only 10 percent are younger than 34 (see Figure 7).

More women traders (92 percent) have a university-level degree compared to men traders (85 percent) [see Figure 9]. All those who work as customs brokers, both men and women, have higher education at the university level.
The share of traders who self-identified as having functional difficulties (physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory) is small (2 percent of women and 4 percent of men) (see Figure 10). Among customs brokers, 3 percent self-identified as having functional difficulties.

Women are more diverse in ethnic composition. Seventeen percent of women traders self-identified as belonging to an ethnic minority compared to 8 percent of men traders (see Figure 11). Most customs brokers (90 percent) are ethnic Tajiks (see Figure 12).

Most traders reported to be married, but the share of married women is lower than men (78 percent of married women compared to 98 percent of married men traders). Twelve percent of women traders have never been married compared to only 1 percent of men traders (see Figure 13). This may indicate that married women find it harder than men to juggle their disproportionate level of household and caregiving tasks with their paid work. Of those who reported having caretaking responsibilities, 12 percent of women traders compared to only 4 percent of men traders reported that caretaking responsibilities affected their ability to trade across borders (see Figure 16). A similar trend is observed among customs brokers: 84 percent of them are married (see Figure 14).

This finding is significant at a 99 percent confidence level.
More than 50 percent of traders have caretaking responsibilities; however, most of them report that these responsibilities do not affect their ability to trade across borders. Nonetheless, 12 percent of women traders compared to only 4 percent of men traders reported that caretaking responsibilities affected their ability to trade across borders (See Figure 15 and Figure 16).  

Only about one-third of surveyed firms are members of trade/industry associations (26 percent of women and 31 percent of men) (see Figure 17). Most customs brokers are also not members of trade/industry associations (see Figure 18).
The likelihood of membership in a trade/industry association correlates with the size of the firm: 61 percent of the large firms are members of a trade/industry association compared to only 15 percent of micro firms (see Figure 19). This trend might explain some gender differences in membership, as more women than men are concentrated among micro firms while more men lead larger firms.

Among firms that are not members of associations, almost one-half of traders (48 percent of men-led and 44 percent of women-led) are not aware of the existence of trade or industry-specific associations. However, 21 percent of men-led and 22 percent of women-led firms believe that their business does not need the networking opportunities (see Figure 20).

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

This finding is significant at a 99 percent confidence level.
Gender differences exist in the work schedules of traders: fewer women traders (80 percent) work full-time (40 or more hours per week) compared to their men counterparts (87 percent of men) (see Figure 21). Eighty-four percent of customs brokers also work full-time.

A larger share of women traders (69 percent) rely on personal/company savings to finance their business compared to their men counterparts (53 percent). More men traders (26 percent) compared to women traders (20 percent) use official bank loans. Other sources of finances are rarely used (see Figure 22).

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
Customs brokers also actively use their personal or company savings to finance their business. Another popular source of finance for customs brokers is payment in advance by clients (see Figure 23).

Figure 23. Main Source of Finance for Customs Brokers to Finance Their Business by Gender

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

According to the Tajikistan Trade Portal (tajtrade.tj), imports of goods were US$4.2 billion in 2021, doubling exports of goods at US$2.1 billion.

Women-led firms dominate the importation of mineral, plastic, and rubber products from beyond Central Asia, such as Russia, China, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates, while more men-led firms import animal and vegetable products, beverages, and machinery, vehicles, and arms. As for exports, more women-led firms compared to men-led firms export their goods only to Central Asian countries, such as Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, compared to the majority of men-led firms that export beyond Central Asia. Most commonly, women-led firms deal with exports of textile and footwear, and they almost exclusively trade collectors’ pieces, antiques, and miscellaneous manufactured goods. Men-led firms mainly export animal and vegetable products and beverages. Regardless of gender, most trade firms and customs brokers engage in international trade through land border posts rather than airports.

Around 80 percent of traders are importers, whereas 12 percent of women-led trade firms and 11 percent of men-led trade firms both import and export, and the remaining 8 and 10 percent specialize in exports, respectively (see Figure 24).

Figure 24. Proportion of Importing and Exporting Trade Firms by Gender

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

40 According to the Tajikistan Trade Portal (tajtrade.tj), imports of goods were US$4.2 billion in 2021, doubling exports of goods at US$2.1 billion.

41 Product categories are based on the Harmonized System (HS) Codes at the two-digit chapter level.
The majority of trade firms import goods beyond Central Asia (51 percent of men-led and 61 percent of women-led). Only 23 percent of women-led firms and 27 percent of men-led firms limit their imports from Central Asia only (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) [see Figure 25].

The most popular origins of imported goods do not differ significantly by trade firm size: about one-half of all firms import goods only from beyond Central Asia (58 percent of large firms, 44 percent of medium firms, 55 percent of small firms, and 57 percent of micro firms). The share of trade firms importing only within Central Asia (Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) is relatively similar (26–30 percent) except for large firms for which this share is much smaller—only 12 percent (see Figure 26).

---

**Figure 25. Import Origins for Trade Firms by Gender**

![Bar chart showing import origins by gender.]

**Figure 26. Import Origins for Trade Firms by Firm Size**

![Bar chart showing import origins by firm size.]

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*This finding is significant at a 90 percent confidence level.*

*This finding is significant at a 99 percent confidence level.*
Responding to the demand of trade firms, customs brokers provide their services to import goods mainly from beyond Central Asia. Ten percent support imports only from within Central Asia, and the same share (10 percent) supports imports both from within and beyond Central Asia (see Figure 27).

Fifty percent of women-led firms and 35 percent of men-led firms import minerals, plastic, and rubber products. This category of goods is rather large and includes, for example, products of the chemical industries (pharmaceutical products, fertilizers, soap, cosmetics, paints, explosives, etc.) as well as construction materials (plastering materials, lime, cement), which are important for large-scale construction. A greater share of men-led firms import animal and vegetable products, beverages (30 percent for men versus 16 percent for women) and machinery, vehicles, arms (21 percent of men versus 16 percent of women) (see Figure 28).

Forty percent of customs brokers provide import services for machinery and vehicles; 30 percent deal with mineral, plastic, and rubber products; and 23 percent with animal and vegetable products and beverages (see Figure 29).

Figure 28. Main Products Imported by Trade Firms by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal and vegetable products, beverages (HS chapters 1–24)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral, plastic and rubber products (HS chapters 25–49)</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile and footwear (HS chapters 50–67)</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, glass, and metals (HS chapters 68–83)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Machinery, vehicles, arms (HS chapters 84–93)</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artwork, collectors’ pieces, antiques, miscellaneous manufactured articles (HS chapters 94–97)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Among exporting firms, men-led firms are more actively engaged in exports beyond Central Asia (56 percent) compared to only 33 percent of women-led firms. At the same time, the share of women-led firms exporting goods only to Central Asian countries is much higher than men-led firms: 50 percent compared to 19 percent (see Figure 30).

Most customs brokers provide export services only for goods traded beyond Central Asia (see Figure 31).

Stark differences exist in the export profile of goods by gender. The greatest share of women-led firms deals with exports of textile and footwear (33 percent of women compared to 19 percent of men) while the majority of men-led firms export animal and vegetable products and beverages (51 percent of men versus 17 percent of women). More women-led firms compared to men-led firms also export artwork, collectors’ pieces, antiques, miscellaneous manufactured articles and stone, glass, and metals (see Figure 32).
Among customs brokers, the largest share offers their services for exports of animal and vegetable products and beverages (43 percent). Other customs brokers deal with machinery and vehicles (26 percent) and mineral, plastic, and rubber products (22 percent). The smallest share export textile and footwear (9 percent) (see Figure 33).

Fewer women-led firms trade more than once a month: 23 percent of women-led firms compared to 31 percent of men-led firms. Additionally, 35 percent of women-led firms trade only up to three times a year compared to 24 percent of men-led firms who trade this infrequently (see Figure 34). Almost 90 percent of customs brokers provide their service 4 to 12 times per year.

---

**Figure 32. Main Goods That Trade Firms Export by Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal and vegetable products, beverages (HS chapters 1–24)</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral, plastic and rubber products (HS chapters 25–49)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile and footwear (HS chapters 50–67)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, glass, and metals (HS chapters 68–83)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artwork, collectors’ pieces, antiques, miscellaneous manufactured articles (HS chapters 94–97)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Women**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Men**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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**Figure 33. Sectors in Which Customs Brokers Provide Export Service**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal and vegetable products, beverages (HS chapters 1–24)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mineral, plastic and rubber products (HS chapters 25–49)</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textile and footwear (HS chapters 50–67)</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stone, glass, and metals (HS chapters 68–83)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Women**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Men**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

---

**Figure 34. Frequency of Trading for Trade Firms by Gender**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 or fewer times per year</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–12 times per year</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than once a month per year</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Women**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Men**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0%</th>
<th>10%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>30%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>50%</th>
<th>60%</th>
<th>70%</th>
<th>80%</th>
<th>90%</th>
<th>100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

---

45 This finding is significant at a 95 percent confidence level.
Around 90 percent of trade firms transport their goods through land border posts compared to airports. A slightly larger share of women-led firms compared to men-led firms use airports (see Figure 35). More customs brokers, accordingly, provide their services at land border crossing posts (84 percent) compared to airports (16 percent).

Figure 35. Proportion of Trade Firms That Use Airport and Land Posts by Gender

This finding is significant at a 95 percent confidence level.

B. Trade Facilitation—Specific and Other Related Key Findings

This section investigates the experiences of trade firms and customs brokers with the cross-border trade processes and procedures in Tajikistan, including whether there are gender differences in their experiences. The findings in this section are presented in the context of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement as well as other topics related to international trade (such as safety and security at the borders).

a. Moving Goods and Use of Intermediaries

Customs brokers, freight forwarders, and other agents help facilitate customs clearance and other import/export processes and procedures for traders. These service providers are trained experts, knowledgeable of trade regulations, and have experience with trade supply chains. WTO TFA Article 10.6 stipulates that measures mandating the use of customs brokers shall not be introduced after February 22, 2017 (the date of the agreement’s entry into force). The use of customs brokers is not mandatory in Tajikistan.

Most trade firms, and more women-led firms, use the services of customs brokers. Interestingly, while the use of customs brokers is not mandatory in Tajikistan, 24 percent of women traders and 28 percent of men traders believe that the use of customs brokers is mandated by law.

The use of customs brokers is more common among women-led firms: 67 percent of women-led firms traders and 56 percent of men-led firms hire intermediates. The largest share of firms that use intermediary services are large firms, and the smallest share is micro firms (see Figure 36 and Figure 37).

The use of customs brokers is more common among women-led firms: 67 percent of women-led firms traders and 56 percent of men-led firms hire intermediates. The largest share of firms that use intermediary services are large firms, and the smallest share is micro firms (see Figure 36 and Figure 37).
The most common reasons for hiring intermediaries for both women and men are that they speed up the process, provide technical knowledge to address complex procedures/regulations, and an assumption that the use of agents is mandated by law. Interestingly, 24 percent of women traders and 28 percent of men traders believe that the use of customs brokers is mandated by law, when in reality it is not. But when it comes to hiring intermediaries to avoid safety issues at land or air border posts, the share of men-led firms doubles compared to women-led firms (see Figure 38).

Of the firms that do not hire customs brokers (42 percent), 75 percent of women-led firms and 69 percent of men-led firms stated that they do not need such services. More men-led firms than women-led firms stated that customs broker services are not available locally or are too costly to use (see Figure 39).

Figure 37. Use of Customs Brokers by Trade Firms and Firm Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Firm Size</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Micro (1–5 employees)</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small (6–19 employees)</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium (20–99 employees)</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large (100 employees and above)</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

Figure 38. Reasons for Hiring Intermediaries by Trade Firms and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They speed up the process</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They provide technical knowledge to address</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>complex procedures/regulations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s cheaper to use agents</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of agents is mandated by law</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To avoid safety issues at land or air border</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>posts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Most trade firms are not familiar with the Authorized Economic Operator program (88 percent of women-led and 95 percent of men-led firms). None of the surveyed firms reported that their business is an AEO (see Figure 40).

According to the World Customs Organization (WCO), an authorized economic operator (AEO) is “a party involved in the international movement of goods in whatever function that has been approved by or on behalf of a national customs administration as complying with WCO or equivalent supply chain security standards.” WTO TFA Article 7 on Authorized Operators states that each WTO Member shall provide additional trade facilitation measures to authorized operators who meet certain criteria.

Chapter 8 (Article 68) of the Tajikistan Customs Code sets the legal basis for the AEO program in Tajikistan. The AEO was introduced in Tajikistan in January 2, 2020. Article 68(2) of the Customs Code provides details on the conditions of granting AEO status and its privileges. Tajikistan does not publish the list of AEO-certified companies. Currently, there is only one company registered as an AEO in Tajikistan.
c. National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC)\textsuperscript{47}

WTO TFA Article 23 stipulates that each WTO Member should establish and/or maintain a national committee on trade facilitation or designate an existing mechanism to facilitate domestic coordination and implementation of the WTO TFA. Tajikistan established its National Trade Facilitation Committee (also known as the Coordinating Committee on Facilitation of Trade Procedures [CCFTP]) in December 2016 by Government Decree #529. The objectives of the CCFTP are to enhance the simplification and harmonization of international trade procedures (including the implementation of the WTO TFA obligations) and to facilitate the coordination and collaboration between ministries, border regulatory agencies, and the private sector.

Awareness of the NTFC is very low in Tajikistan—only 7 percent of women-led firms and 14 percent of men-led firms know that such an entity exists (see Figure 41).\textsuperscript{48} By firm size, awareness of the existence of the NTFC is lowest among micro firms, and bigger firms are slightly more informed about the committee (see Figure 42).\textsuperscript{49} The situation with customs brokers is slightly better: 36 percent of them are aware of the NTFC.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure41.png}
\caption{Awareness of Trade Firms about the Existence of the NTFC by Gender}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure42.png}
\caption{Awareness of Trade Firms about the Existence of the NTFC by Firm Size}
\end{figure}

\textbf{d. Airport and Land Border Working Hours}

Restrictive working hours at government offices and facilities can have a negative impact on international trade and on supply chains. If goods are delayed at borders awaiting physical inspection and clearance, the increased time to clear goods could adversely affect the cost of doing business and increase overall trade costs. Additionally, there can be an increased risk of theft and spoilage if goods are not adequately secured or stored while waiting for border clearance.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure43.png}
\caption{Awareness of Trade Firms about the Existence of the NTFC by Firm Size}
\end{figure}

Most traders and customs brokers find that working hours of the airport and land borders are convenient. A small share of men traders find working hours of Tajik or neighboring border posts restrictive due to differing opening hours of border agencies within the country. During the visit to one of the border posts, screening equipment appeared to be nonoperational, causing additional delays. The absence of fast lanes for traders with small consignments was also observed.

\textsuperscript{47} Coordinating Committee on Facilitation of Trade Procedures: https://tajtrade.tj/menu/271-en.

\textsuperscript{48} This finding is significant at the 95 percent confidence level.

\textsuperscript{49} This finding is significant at the 90 percent confidence level.
More than 90 percent of trade firms find that the working hours of the airport and land border posts they use are convenient for their businesses. However, 8 percent of men traders compared to 0 percent of women traders reported inconvenience related to different opening hours at border agencies within the country (see Figure 43). Most customs brokers also find that the working hours of the airport and land border posts they use are convenient for their businesses.

![Figure 43. Perception of Working Hours Convenience for Traders by Gender](image)

Accessing and understanding official regulations and procedures are important for transparency, compliance, and predictability of the trading environment. The publication and dissemination of changes to relevant laws and regulations must be done with sufficient advance notice and in easy-to-understand language. If traders are unaware of new customs rules and regulations, or if they cannot understand them, they may face additional compliance burdens and costs for not properly meeting requirements. WTO TFA Article 1.1–1.2 covers publication and availability of information, including the prompt publication of general trade-related information in a nondiscriminatory and easily accessible manner, as well as publication of practical guides, forms and documents, and relevant trade laws. Article 1.3 further advises that members shall establish or maintain one or more enquiry points to answer reasonable enquiries of governments, traders, and other interested parties.

Regardless of gender, most trade firms appear to not face any difficulties with finding and understanding information on official regulations and procedures. Nonetheless, BCP visits revealed that many interviewees were not able to obtain current information on trade rules and regulations. By firm size, the largest share of firms who reported difficulties in finding information is micro firms. As for sources for finding trade-related information, more women than men traders use official government websites and communication to get information, whereas a lot more men traders use officials at airports or borders posts/enquiry points as a preferred source of finding information. Of those who reported having difficulty with finding trade-related information, a significant share of women compared to men stated that official websites are not user-friendly, and that the information is not centralized. On the other hand, more men than women traders responded that not all agencies have comprehensive information available online and not all agencies keep information up-to-date. With regards to enquiry points, less than 15 percent of traders use government enquiry points for trade-related questions, and fewer women have used it compared to men. Notably a large share of traders do not believe that enquiry points exist, with a higher prev-
alence among women traders. Of those traders who use enquiry points, twice as many women traders believe that enquiry points take too long to respond compared to men.

- Ninety percent of traders reported that they don’t face difficulties in finding information on official regulations and procedures. Among those who do have problems with obtaining information, very few under 35 years old face difficulties. Gender seems to not be impacting the ability to find information (see Figure 44). Nonetheless, the interviews held during visits to select borders revealed that many interviewees were not able to obtain current information on trading rules and regulations. In addition, it was reported that information posters at the borders were outdated and difficult to read.

- Language barriers can affect the ability to find information: 38 percent of ethnically Russian traders reported that they face difficulties when looking for information on official regulations and procedures related to border processes (see Figure 45). The Tajik Trade Portal and Customs portal both provide information in Tajik, Russian, and English languages; however, content in Russian and English does not appear to be updated as often.

- By firm size, the largest share reporting difficulties in finding information is micro firms. This decreases as firm size increases (see Figure 46).

Figure 44. Proportion of Traders That Face Difficulties When Looking for Information on Official Regulations and Procedures Related to Border Processes and Procedures by Gender

Figure 45. Proportion of Traders That Face Difficulties When Looking for Information on Official Regulations and Procedures Related to Border Processes and Procedures by Ethnicity

Figure 46. Proportion of Traders That Face Difficulties When Looking for Information on Official Regulations and Procedures Related to Border Processes and Procedures by Firm Size
Just like traders, customs brokers usually do not face difficulties with finding information on official regulations and procedures related to border processes and procedures. Only 6 percent of them (two respondents) reported that they encounter difficulties (see Figure 47). They cited problems with official government information websites not being user-friendly, trade-related information not being centralized, not all agencies having comprehensive information available online, and not all agencies keeping information up-to-date.

“‘There is not enough information, especially at border crossings, and information boards should be installed everywhere, with recommendations so that everything is clear at night. Especially drivers sometimes get lost.’
CUSTOMS BROKER, DUSHANBE

Of the 10 percent of traders who face difficulties finding information on official regulations and procedures, the types of difficulties faced differ by gender. A significant share of women compared to men stated that official websites are not user-friendly (75 percent of women traders versus to 41 percent of men) and that the information is not centralized (62 percent of women traders versus 44 percent of men). On the other hand, more men than women traders reported that not all agencies have comprehensive information available online (44 percent of men traders versus 25 percent of women) and not all agencies keep information up-to-date (50 percent of men traders versus 38 percent of women traders) [see Figure 48].

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
Around one-half of traders use personal networks and official government websites as their main sources of information on official regulations and procedures related to border processes. More women than men traders (61 percent of women versus 51 percent of men) actively use government sources to get information, whereas a lot more men traders use officials at airports, border posts, or enquiry points as a preferred source of finding information (35 percent of men versus 20 percent of women) (see Figure 49).

By firm size, the smaller the firm, the more it relies on personal networks and government officials at airports, border posts, or physical enquiry points for finding official trade-related information. A big difference is observed in using official government websites or official communication among different sized firms: only 38 percent of micro firms use this source compared to 64 percent of large firms (see Figure 50). Interestingly, almost no traders use trade and industry associations for information on official regulations and procedures.

Figure 49. Sources for Finding Information on Official Regulations and Procedures by Traders by Gender

Figure 50. Sources for Finding Information on Official Regulations and Procedures by Traders by Firm Size
Customs brokers actively use official government sources for finding trade-related information: 55 percent look for the information on official government websites and 52 percent ask officials at airports, border crossing points, or physical enquiry points (see Figure 51).

Less than 15 percent of traders use government enquiry points for trade-related questions, and fewer women have used them than men (10 percent versus 15 percent) (see Figure 52).\(^1\) About one-half of traders stated that their business has never needed to use the enquiry points, and 43 percent of women and 34 percent of men traders believe that enquiry points do not exist. The Law of the Republic of Tajikistan No. 1678 amended and supplemented the Customs Code of the Republic of Tajikistan, providing that all information regarding the movement of goods across the customs border should be posted on the official website of the customs service. A request for the provision of the necessary information can be submitted both in person and in writing. An in-person request is subject to consideration by the customs authority on the day of receipt of the said request. When submitting a written request, the answer must be given in writing within 10 days from the date of receipt of the said request. In addition, enquiry points exist in the form of different helplines for each region, as well as electronically via the official customs website. Telephone enquiry points usually work 24/7, and the operational duty service is responsible for answering the helpline. The phone call is recorded and transferred to the leadership of the Customs Service for making an appropriate decision.

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\(^1\) This finding is significant at a 95 percent confidence level.
Of those who used enquiry points, around 50 percent of traders prefer to submit their enquiries in person by visiting a customs office. More men than women actively use the customs website and more women than men more often visit or call a Customs office (see Figure 53).

Figure 53. Way of Submitting Enquiries by Traders by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way of Submitting Enquiries</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In person by visiting a customs office</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through a form on the customs website</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By phone (calling the customs office)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

Almost all men traders (94 percent) who used government enquiry points consider them helpful and fast compared to 50 percent of women traders. Another 50 percent of women traders think that enquiry points take a long time to respond (see Figure 54).

Figure 54. Experience of Traders When Using Government Enquiry Points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enquiry point was helpful and fast</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enquiry point took a long time to respond</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

Thirty-two percent of customs brokers use government enquiry points for trade-related questions. Almost one-half of customs brokers (45 percent) have never needed to use them and 23 percent think they do not exist (see Figure 55).

Figure 55. Proportion of Customs Brokers Who Use Government Enquiry Points for Trade-Related Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No, I have never needed to use the enquiry points</th>
<th>No, to my knowledge, enquiry points do not exist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

f. Consultative Mechanisms

A mechanism whereby stakeholders are consulted on any changes to official border processes and procedures can alleviate misinformation regarding planned changes related to their cross-border trade activities and can improve compliance. Equally important is a consultation mechanism that takes into consideration the feedback provided by stakeholders before any changes are implemented. Article 2.2 of the WTO TFA calls for regular consultations between border agencies, traders, and other stakeholders. Article 2.1 states that stakeholders must be given an opportunity and time to comment on proposals for new or amendments to trade-related regulations and customs law.
Fewer women-led firms than men-led firms are consulted regularly or have the opportunity to comment on public consultations regarding changes to official trade processes and procedures. More women-led firms also have never been consulted or do not know if they have been consulted by the government. When asked about reasons for not being consulted, most men- and women-led firms stated that they are not made aware of these opportunities, and more women also believe that they are not being consulted because their business is too small. Of the trade firms that are regularly consulted, the majority are consulted via government-managed public consultations and think that their feedback is taken into consideration.

- Significantly fewer women-led firms (26 percent) compared to men-led firms (42 percent) stated that their business is consulted regularly or has the opportunity to comment on public consultations regarding changes to official trade processes and procedures. More than one-half of women traders (54 percent) stated that their business has never been consulted, and 16 percent of women did not know whether their business has ever been consulted or had an opportunity to comment on public consultations (compared to 46 percent and 2 percent of men, respectively) (see Figure 56). As for customs brokers, only 16 percent of customs brokers are reportedly never consulted while others said they are consulted on a regular basis (see Figure 57).

- Almost one-half of trade firms who confirmed that they are not being consulted explained that they have not been made aware of opportunities for consultations. More women-led firms (40 percent) compared to men-led firms (28 percent) also believe that they are not consulted because their business is too small to be part of a consultative process (see Figure 58).

52 This finding is significant at a 99 percent confidence level.
Of the about 40 percent of trade firms who are regularly consulted, the most common way consultations are undertaken is through general government-managed public consultations, a notice-and-comment mechanism. More men-led firms compared to women-led firms use this source—71 percent versus 56 percent. Traders also reported being consulted through agents and service providers (33 percent of the women-led firms are regularly consulted through this channel). Trade/industry associations are a less common source for men-led firms (9 percent) and especially for women-led firms (6 percent) for consultations, reflecting the low level of membership in and awareness of such entities (see Figure 59). As for customs brokers, 96 percent are consulted through general government public consultations and 19 percent through a trade/industry association (see Figure 60).

**Figure 58. Perception of Trade Firms on Why Business Is Not Regularly Consulted or Does Not Have the Opportunity to Comment on Public Consultations**

Note: This was a multiple-choice question, and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

**Figure 59. Sources of Consultations on Changes to Official Trade Processes for Trade Firms by Gender**

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
Of the trade firms that are consulted, there appears to be a relatively strong perception that their feedback is taken into consideration by the government (78 percent of men-led trade firms and 76 percent of women-led firms). Nonetheless, 24 percent of women-led and 22 percent of men-led trade firms do not believe their feedback is taken into consideration or are not sure if it is taken into consideration (see Figure 61). Ninety-two percent of customs brokers think that feedback is taken into consideration by the government (see Figure 62).
While most trade firms and customs brokers believe that trade procedures and processes are consistently implemented by border officials, fewer women-led firms hold this opinion compared to men. Of those who believe that processes and procedures are not consistent, a larger share of women noted that clearance of import and export declarations and cargo inspections are not consistently applied.

Most trade firms find that border processes are consistently implemented by border officials, though slightly fewer women-led firms have this perception (85 percent of women-led versus 91 percent of men-led firms) (see Figure 63). Most customs brokers (84 percent) also believe that border procedures are consistently implemented most of the time (see Figure 64).

Of the trade firms that believe procedures are not consistently applied, a larger share of women-led firms compared to men-led firms believe that clearance of import and export declarations (75 percent of women versus 17 percent of men) and cargo inspections (50 percent of women versus 26 percent of men) are not consistently applied (see Figure 65).

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
h. Pre-Arrival Processing of Goods

Pre-arrival processing can expedite the release of goods, as it allows traders and customs brokers to submit declaration data to the relevant authorities prior to arrival (imports) of goods. Article 7.1 of the WTO TFA states that each Member shall adopt or maintain procedures allowing for the submission of import documentation and other required information, including manifests, in order to begin processing prior to the arrival of goods, with a view to expediting the release of goods upon arrival.

In accordance with Article 130 of the Customs Code, customs declaration can be submitted before arrival of goods in the customs territory of the Republic of Tajikistan or before the completion of internal customs transit. The declaration can be submitted 15 days prior to the arrival of goods.

Although Tajikistan established a legal basis for pre-declaring of goods prior to arrival, in practice most trade firms do not pre-declare shipments to customs. More than one-half of women-led firms and slightly fewer men-led firms do not find any benefits to pre-declaring. There is also a strong association between firm size and pre-declaring of shipments prior to arrival, with large firms more likely to pre-declare compared to micro firms.

- **Most trade firms do not pre-declare their shipments to customs prior to arrival—89 percent of women-led firms and 85 percent of men-led firms.** Within the very small share of those who do pre-declare, the proportion of women traders is only 7 percent compared to 11 percent of men traders (see Figure 66). Among customs brokers, almost one-third of them pre-declare prior to arrival of shipments (see Figure 67).

- **The main reasons for not pre-declaring shipments vary by gender:** more women-led firms do not pre-declare because the business does not find any benefits in pre-declaring (56 percent for women versus 45 percent for men). More women-led firms (19 percent) compared to men (13 percent) also think that pre-declaration does not save time or money. Fifteen percent of women-led firms and 17 percent of men-led firms also believe that pre-declaration is not allowed (see Figure 68).
There is an association between the size of the firm and whether it pre-declares shipments prior to arrival. The larger the firm, the more likely it will pre-declare its shipments—with 14 percent of large firms pre-declaring compared to only 6 percent of micro firms (see Figure 69).33

Figure 69. Proportion of Trade Firms That Pre-declare Shipments by Firm Size

- Micro (1–5 employees)
- Small (6–19 employees)
- Medium (20–99 employees)
- Large (100 employees and above)

The ability to submit import and export declarations through a Single Window, or other electronic system, reduces time to comply with documentary requirements by functioning as a single point of entry/exit for all regulatory documentation for internationally traded goods. This facilitates trade and reduces costs. Benefits to traders include faster clearance times, transparent and predictable processes, and less bureaucracy.

Article 10.4 of the WTO TFA stipulates that WTO Members shall endeavor to establish or maintain a Single Window and to the extent possible, use information technology to support the Single Window. Additionally, Article 7.2 states that an electronic option—to the extent practicable—should be adopted or maintained for the payment of duties, taxes, fees, and charges collected by customs incurred upon importation and exportation.

A Single Window (SW) for registration of export, import, and transit procedures was established in Tajikistan on September 1, 2020, by Government Decree #410 of June 24, 2020. The Decree prescribed to transfer the paperwork connected to export, import, and transit procedures to electronic media. The Tajikistan SW offers a unified application form for import, export, and transit of goods, which can be submitted electronically 24/7 from any location to 11 government agencies.

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

Figure 68. Reasons Why Traders Do Not Pre-declare Shipments by Gender

- Customs/border agencies don’t allow it
- The business does not find any benefits in pre-declaring
- It doesn’t save any time or money
- Instructions aren’t clear
- Declares upon receipt
- Don’t know
- Other

- Women
- Men

This finding is significant at a 99 percent confidence interval.33


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53 This finding is significant at a 99 percent confidence interval.
Although Tajikistan has implemented a Single Window system for registration of export, import, and transit procedures, more than one-half of trade firms reported that they still have to submit both paper and electronic forms and documents to customs. With regards to electronic payments, both women and men trade firms and customs brokers actively use payment methods such as bank transfers, and the extent to which this method is used varies by the size of the firm. Only one-half of micro firms use bank transfers compared to about three-fourths of large firms.

More than one-half men traders (56 percent) and women traders (51 percent) reported that they have to submit both paper and electronic forms and documents to customs. A slightly smaller percent of traders state that they have to submit paper and electronic forms and documents to other border agencies (41 percent of men versus 36 percent of women) (see Figure 70).

Figure 70. Perception of Trade Firms on Whether All Trade Documents Can Be Submitted Electronically by Gender

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
As for customs brokers, 77 percent of them believe that all the border crossing points have systems that accept all forms and documents electronically. However, 42 percent of brokers still have to submit both paper forms and electronically (see Figure 71). Feedback from key informant interviews with customs brokers further substantiated the survey data. It was mentioned that submitting electronic declaration does not mean anything. “We [customs brokers] also need to submit a pile of documents in paper, including this declaration. They [Customs] do not receive documents in the electronic version.” During border post visits, customs officers elaborated that the internet speed is slow and cumbersome, which means gaining access to information in online documents is difficult. Some reported having to use their personal smart phones to access information because the internet bandwidth provided is simply too slow.

“"It is necessary to make everything electronically. It is necessary to eliminate contact between a broker or a subject and customs official. Customs officials should work electronically.”

“It is necessary to make a feedback in order to improve the single window operation, remove personal contacts with customs officers and remove those forms that we fill out every time.” CUSTOMS BROKER, DUSHANBE

Most trade firms state they pay their fees by bank transfers, with no major gender differences between women- and men-led firms (66 percent of women- and 62 percent of men-led firms). The second most common method used by 23 percent of women-led and 25 percent of men-led firms is payment in cash via Amonatbank at the customs terminals (see Figure 72). Most of those who prefer cash payment argue that this method is faster. Customs brokers also prefer bank transfers (87 percent); payment in cash via Amonatbank at the customs terminals is the second most popular method (35 percent) (see Figure 73).
Figure 72. Methods of Paying Official Fees and Charges Related to Border Processes and Procedures by Trade Firms by Gender

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

Figure 73. Methods of Paying Official Fees and Charges Related to Border Processes and Procedures by Customs Brokers

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
Bank transfers are also more typical for larger firms, and the percentage of firms that use this method gradually increases with the size of the firm: 52 percent for micro firms, 58 percent for small firms, 76 percent for medium firms, and 70 percent for large firms (see Figure 74).

Figure 74. Methods of Paying Official Fees and Charges Related to Border Processes and Procedures by Trade Firms by Size

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
j. Detention of Goods

Customs has the power to search imports and exports and exclude, detain and/or seize, and destroy counterfeit and infringing products. To avoid time and financial loss to traders, the best practice is for customs to promptly inform traders that goods have been detained for inspection, which is covered in Article 5.2 of the WTO TFA.


Most trade firms and customs brokers did not have goods detained in the last three years. While there are no major differences across genders, slightly more micro firms have experienced detentions compared to larger firms.

- More than 90 percent of trade firms have not had goods detained by customs or other border agencies in the last three years regardless of gender (see Figure 75). Similar findings are true for customs brokers, 90 percent of whom did not have goods detained in the last three years.

- By firm size, the highest proportion of detentions was reported by micro firms (see Figure 76).
Of those whose goods were detained, 75 percent of men-led firms and 73 percent of women-led firms reported they were promptly informed about the detention. However, 27 percent of women-led firms reported not being promptly informed compared to 20 percent of men-led firms (see Figure 77). By firm size, 50 percent of large firms and 24 percent of micro firms were not promptly informed about their goods being detained (see Figure 78).

Of firms that had goods detained, the following were the three main reasons cited for detention by both women- and men-led firms: (i) problems with customs declaration/classification/valuation; (ii) plant quarantine/animal health, and (iii) licenses, permits, and certificates of origin and or authorization to import. However, the first two reasons are more pronounced for women traders compared to men (50 percent and 25 percent, respectively). On the other hand, 40 percent of men cited problems with customs declaration/classification/valuation, and 40 percent cited other reasons, such as late payment of the amount and failure to comply with the customs duty plan (see Figure 79).

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
There is a strong association between access to official appeal mechanisms and gender. Fewer women-led firms (34 percent) than men-led firms (51 percent) reported that guidance and explanations on penalties and on how to make an official appeal are clear and easy to access across government entities. The other 60 percent of women-led and 47 percent of men-led firms did not know if guidance is clear and easy to access because their business hasn’t had to pay a penalty or submit an appeal (see Figure 81).

“We do not know who to complain to — there is no book of complaints, no telephone number to contact in case of violation or harassment by customs officers . . . ”

FGD IN SUGHD, WOMEN

Figure 81. Perception of Trade Firms That Guidance on How to Make an Official Appeal Is Clear and Easy to Access across Government Entities by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know, my business hasn’t had to pay a penalty or submit an appeal</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fewer women-led firms compared to men-led firms claim that official appeal procedures are clear and are easy to access. When asked about the effectiveness of the appeal mechanism, almost 25 percent of men-led firms and only 17 percent of women-led firms believe that formal complaints lead to change. More men-led firms also believe that they do not have the right for appeal and unofficial methods are faster to resolving issues. At the same time, a large share of women- and men-led firms did not have experience in filing formal complaints.

An official grievance mechanism is important to enable traders to contest and appeal against border agencies’ decisions regarding a detained shipment or non-compliance. Article 4 of the WTO TFA aims to ensure that concerned parties have the right to administrative appeals or a review, as well as a judicial appeal or review, of administrative decisions issued by customs. Chapter 7 of the Tajikistan Customs Code established the legal basis for appealing decisions or actions (inaction) of customs authorities and customs officials.

Fewer women-led firms compared to men-led firms claim that official appeal procedures are clear and are easy to access. When asked about the effectiveness of the appeal mechanism, almost 25 percent of men-led firms and only 17 percent of women-led firms believe that formal complaints lead to change. More women-led firms also believe that they do not have the right for appeal and unofficial methods are faster to resolving issues. At the same time, a large share of women- and men-led firms did not have experience in filing formal complaints.

This finding is significant at the 99 percent confidence level.
The main reason among women-led firms have difficulty with appeals and grievance procedures was the perception that "official appeal procedures are unclear." Sixty-seven percent of women-led firms (out of the total 5 percent who considered guidance not clear) cited that official appeal procedures unclear compared to only 13 percent of men-led firms who stated the same. The same share of women also stated that no explanation for penalties is provided. Thirty-three percent of the women-led firms also believe that there is no right to appeal compared to 25 percent of men-led firms (see Figure 83).

At the same time, most traders—in equal shares (67 percent of both women-led and men-led firms)—have had no experience with filing formal complaints/grievance procedures. However, 24 percent of men-led firms compared to only 17 percent of women-led firms believe that formal complaints lead to change. More women-led firms also believe that unofficial methods are faster for resolving issues (see Figure 84).

Only 10 percent of customs brokers have experience with submitting an appeal (see Figure 82), and they reported that the guidance how to submit an appeal is clear and easy to access across government entities.

Figure 82. Perception of Customs Brokers That Guidance on How to Make an Official Appeal Is Clear and Easy to Access across Government Entities

![Pie chart showing 10% Yes, 90% Don't know, I haven't had to pay a penalty or submit an appeal]

Figure 83. Reasons Why Guidance and Explanations on Penalties and How to Make an Official Appeal Not Clear or Easy to Access across Government Entities for Trade Firms by Gender

![Bar chart showing reasons for unclear guidance]

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

Figure 84. Effectiveness of Formal Complaint/Grievance Procedures of Trade Firms by Gender

![Bar chart showing effectiveness of formal complaints]

![Legend: Women, Men]
I. Safety and Security at the Border

Safety and security issues at the border can arise from unwelcome attention, requests for favors, and other verbal or physical conduct by both officials and non-officials. These behaviors create and foster hostile or offensive environments that may impact a trader’s ability or desire to undertake trade.

- Twenty-eight percent of men traders and 18 percent of women traders regularly visit the airport or border post to undertake cross-border trade processes (see Figure 85). Almost one-half (48 percent) of customs brokers regularly visit border crossing points (see Figure 86).

- While more than one-half of traders did not identify any serious safety problems, some women traders highlighted specific issues. As many as 21 percent of women traders compared to 6 percent of men feel unsafe because border post/airport/terminals are too crowded; 14 percent of women traders compared to 3 percent of men experienced lack of safe separate examination rooms for women and men; and 14 percent compared to 6 percent of men reported unsafe sanitation facilities, for example, no toilets with lockable doors or toilets located in remote/dark areas (see Figure 87).

The study would like to treat the findings on sexual harassment with caution since the format of the interview (telephonic) does not usually allow interviewers to establish a rapport with the respondents to discuss an issue of this sensitive nature; therefore, significant underreporting is expected. According to the survey results, sexual harassment is not reported to be an issue for cross-border traders in Tajikistan. The most typical negative behavior reported by respondents is verbal abuse, mostly toward men. Safety issues raised during phone interviews were mainly related to the conditions of infrastructure at border checkpoints, which were raised by women. More women complained about the lack of basic amenities at checkpoints, which complicates doing business because traders have to spend a lot of time at the border.

"The toilets are without facilities, lighting is poor... there was an incident when crossing the neutral zone — I fell down because it was dark, there are pits on the road."

"The procedure of customs clearance takes a long time — there are no conditions for waiting, no benches or shelters. The toilets are very dirty, you go to them and it seems that all your clothes are stained. You have water in a jug to wash your hands in the street, but it's not always there."

FGD IN SUGHD, WOMEN

Figure 85. Regularity of Visiting the Airport or Border Post by Traders by Gender
Figure 86. Regularity of Visiting the Airport or Border Post by Customs Brokers

Figure 87. Potential Safety Issues Listed by Traders by Gender

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
Most respondents reported to have not experienced inappropriate behavior at land border posts or airports that they visit most frequently. However, 6 percent of men claimed that they faced verbal abuse or threats, followed by intimidation (2 percent), and physical violence (1 percent) (Figure 88). As with the case of sexual harassment, these figures need to be treated with caution as some people do not feel comfortable sharing the stories in surveys (especially in telephone interviews) out of fear of retaliation.

“‘It happens—they are rude, shout—I give money, quietly and silently I pass the border’;”

“They overturn all the products, spread them around. It takes a long time to pack. The staff are rude, they calculate the amount. Of course I have to give some money to the customs officer.’

FGD IN SUGHD, WOMEN

Of the men traders who reported that they have faced abuse, they have not reported the inappropriate behavior because they do not trust that anything would change as a result of their claims. One more common reason is the fear of retaliation (see Figure 89).

“All this is useless, no one will help. Only if you have connection with a "high-ranking" official who will instruct customs officials can let you through.”

FGD IN KHATLON, MEN

Figure 88. Negative Behaviors Experienced by Traders by Gender

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
During the BCP technical visits, the absence of pedestrian walkways with clear separation, causing pedestrians and vehicles to share transit routes, was also flagged as an issue, in addition to the aforementioned safety concerns. At one of the border posts, it was reported that an elderly traveler had recently fallen into one of the vehicles under carriage inspection racks, demonstrating the dangers that arise from shared passageways.

**Figure 89. The Reason Why Such Inappropriate Behavior Has Not Been Reported by Men Traders**

- I was not aware that I could report it or who to report it to: 43%
- I don’t trust that anything would change: 14%
- I was scared to jeopardize my career/reputation: 14%
- I was scared to report it for safety reasons/fear of retaliation: 29%
- Other: 29%

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

- Generally, more women traders are unsatisfied with the amenities provided at the land border post or airport. Among the most critical problems of border points that infrastructure traders listed are lack of access to the internet (43 percent of women traders versus 30 percent of men), unhygienic toilet facilities (36 percent of women versus 18 percent of men), lack of adequate resting rooms and private space for mothers (36 percent of women versus 10 percent of men) (see Figure 90). Of the 16 customs brokers who regularly visit crossing points or visit crossing points only when there is a problem, four mentioned lack of access to the internet and desperate situations with hygiene in the toilets. These findings were backed up by the focus group discussions and technical visits to BCPs.

- During the BCP technical visits, it was observed that the public toilets at the airport were in good condition. However, at the three land border posts, public toilet buildings were in various states of disrepair—including no lighting, no locks on doors, and no running water—posing both safety and hygiene hazards for the public. Staff facilities were also in poor condition apart from the indoor facilities at one border post, funded by a staff member’s personal resources.

- Most of the traders do not use public transport to travel to the border post or airport (71 percent of men and 79 percent of women). Most of those who do use public transport think it is too expensive. Others claim public transportation lacks accessibility for differently abled people, has difficulties in carrying goods, and has inconvenient schedules. In all cases, more women raised these problems compared to men (see Figure 91).

“We got used to the fact that there are no conditions at the border (shelter, waiting room) — I take an umbrella and warm clothes in bad weather.”

FGD in Sughd, Women

“There are no conditions at customs — no place to sit down, no shelter, no water. There is no room for mothers with children, no medical staff in case someone feels ill.”

FGD in Khatlon, Women

“We were not aware that I could report it or who to report it to.”

FGD in Khatlon, Women
**Figure 90. Perception of the Amenities at the Land Border Post or Airport for Traders by Gender**

- Toilet facilities not readily available/cannot be found: 29% (Women), 8% (Men)
- Toilet facilities available but unhygienic: 36% (Women), 18% (Men)
- Lack of access to internet: 43% (Women), 30% (Men)
- Lack of adequate resting rooms: 36% (Women), 15% (Men)
- Lack of private space for mothers to nurse or tend to their babies: 36% (Women), 10% (Men)
- Lack of stores nearby selling snacks and refreshments: 21% (Women), 13% (Men)
- Border crossing territory not arranged for different weather conditions: 29% (Women), 14% (Men)
- No problem: 43% (Women), 48% (Men)
- Other: 7% (Women), 1% (Men)

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

**Figure 91. Perception on Public Transport Accessibility for Traders by Gender**

- Transport is too expensive: 7% (Women), 5% (Men)
- Transport is unsafe: 14% (Women), 8% (Men)
- Transport is not available (e.g., infrequent, not available at night): 0% (Women), 1% (Men)
- Transport is not accessible for differently abled people: 7% (Women), 1% (Men)
- Transport mode for carrying goods is unavailable: 7% (Women), 2% (Men)
- I am not using public transport to the border post or airport: 79% (Women), 71% (Men)
- Other: 14% (Women), 20% (Men)

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
m. Human Resources–Related Issues

The objective of the BCP visits was to evaluate specific aspects of customer service at select border posts. Without prompting, however, participating customs staff voluntarily provided information on what can best be categorized as human resources (HR) issues. The customs profession remains a male-dominated field across the world. The lack of women at all levels, particularly among managerial and customer front-facing roles, often prevents policy makers from connecting strongly with the needs of women traders and affecting the quality and gender responsiveness of the customer service.56 It is this context within which the study also examined some HR-related aspects.

The following qualitative information gathered during BCP visits should be viewed as purely indicative as it is based on a very small sample and applies to the visited locations only.

Employment and Compensation: Interviewees flagged that male customs officers dominate staff ranks. This can also be confirmed by official workforce statistics; accordingly, in 2020, just 10 percent (114) of the 1,108 employees in customs offices in Tajikistan were female.57

Work Life Balance and Career Development: Interviewees informed that all customs supervisors are men, and that there are no women staff at the managerial level. Furthermore, respondents claimed that some positions are reserved strictly for men officers, for example, the electronic screening of large trucks and the position of cynologist for which only men are trained. On the other hand, both men and women officers perform luggage searches, physical personal searches (by same sex only), declarations processing, data entry, and administrative paperwork completion. Interviewed customs staff all attended in-house trainings on topics related to their work, including terrorism and extremism, violence against women, human trafficking, and gender equality. Trainings, however, were not regular.

Physical Working Conditions: Customs staff reported dissatisfaction with a number of working conditions, including the absence of a designated resting area or kitchen for officers working 24-hour shifts, poor heating in the customs hall during winter (which also affects equipment operation), lack of protective wear for rapid scan operations (operators complain of headaches), autumn to winter power outages that shut down information technology (IT) systems and slow down service provision, and outmoded diesel-operated generators in poor operating condition, as well as broken and unusable office furniture. Evidence to some of these concerns could be observed by the research team during the visits to some of the border crossing points.

C. Challenges Caused by External Factors

Global and regional challenges affect all spheres of life, and cross-border trade is no exception. Border closures, reduced demand for exported and imported goods, disruptions in value chains, decline in economic activity, and other factors affect firms’ ability to trade across borders. The survey shows that perceptions related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, and border closures with Afghanistan and the Kyrgyz Republic are equally affecting men- and women-led firms. During in-depth interviews, experienced customs brokers stated that the situation has especially negatively affected those who dealt with goods transiting through Russia. While this route is currently closed, for example, trade firms have to pay double to arrange logistics.

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and Border Closures with the Kyrgyz Republic or Afghanistan

Thirty-eight percent of trade firms, regardless of gender, reported that their businesses’ ability to trade was impacted by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. In addition, 15 percent of women-led and 11 percent of men-led firms reported that the border closure with the Kyrgyz Republic impacted their business (see Figure 92).

Forty-five percent of customs brokers also named Russia’s invasion of Ukraine as a major factor affecting their ability to undertake cross-border trade. As for the border closure with the Kyrgyz Republic, only 10 percent reported being impacted (see Figure 93).


57 Data obtained from Customs Service on June 5, 2020.
Almost one-half of trade firms reported that the impact of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and border closures with the Kyrgyz Republic or Afghanistan was caused by restrictions imposed by affected governments. Other significant factors that negatively impacted business were less demand for trading products for 30 percent of men-led firms and 17 percent of women-led firms, as well as issues with sending/receiving payments for 28 percent of men-led and 31 percent women-led firms (see Figure 94).

The most significant factor that negatively impacted the majority of customs brokers was a decrease in demand for their services (87 percent). A significant share of customs brokers also reported issues with receiving production inputs for their clients and restrictions imposed by affected governments (see Figure 95).
Figure 94. Factors That Impacted Business Ability of Trade Firms by Gender

- There is less demand for my business’ product: Women 17%, Men 30%
- There is more demand for my business’ product: Women 10%, Men 7%
- Ability to cross-border trade was restricted due to export/import/transit restrictions imposed by the affected governments (e.g., closed borders in other countries): Women 48%, Men 48%
- There are long delays for my business’ cross-border trade goods to be cleared in Tajikistan: Women 17%, Men 15%
- There are issues with sending/receiving payments for my business’ product: Women 31%, Men 28%
- There are issues with receiving production inputs (delays/stopped receiving the input or receiving in insufficient quantity): Women 21%, Men 26%
- Other: Women 24%, Men 28%

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.

Figure 95. Factors That Impacted Business Ability of Customs Brokers

- There is less demand for my services: 87%
- Ability to import/export/transit was restricted due to export/import/transit restrictions imposed by the affected governments (e.g., closed borders in other countries): 67%
- There are long delays for the imported/exported/transited goods I arrange to be cleared in Tajikistan: 7%
- There are issues with sending/receiving payments on behalf of my clients: 33%
- There are issues with receiving production inputs for my clients (delays/stopped receiving the input or receiving in insufficient quantity): 67%

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100.
COVID-19 Pandemic

Most men- and women-led firms reported that their businesses have been impacted by the pandemic (71 and 74 percent, respectively) (see Figure 96). Seventy-four percent of men-led firms compared to 67 percent of women-led firms reported that their ability to undertake cross-border trade was restricted due to cross-border trade restrictions imposed by other governments during the pandemic (see Figure 97). On the other hand, more women-led (38 percent) compared to men-led firms (30 percent) reported that their ability to undertake cross-border trade of certain goods was restricted due to Tajik government-imposed cross-border trade restrictions during the pandemic.

As many as 71 percent of customs brokers also claimed that their ability to provide services in cross-border trade was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. They cited less demand for their services and restrictions imposed by other governments as the main factors (see Figure 98).

Figure 97. Effects of the Pandemic on Cross-border Trade Activities of Trade Firms by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is less time to work on my business because my family care and household obligations have increased</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is less demand for my business’ product</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is more demand for my business’ product</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to undertake cross-border trade of certain goods was restricted due to Tajik government-imposed cross-border trade restrictions during the pandemic (e.g., alcohol)</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability to undertake cross-border trade of certain goods was restricted due to cross-border trade restrictions imposed by other governments during the pandemic (e.g., closed borders in other countries)</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are long delays for the imported/exported/transited goods I arrange to be cleared in Tajikistan</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clearance times have decreased (e.g., due to expedited processing or simplified processing, which were not available prior to the pandemic)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100. PCR is a COVID-19 test that detects genetic material of the virus using a lab technique polymerase chain reaction (PCR).
D. Main Challenges to Expanding Business

The survey asked respondents to rank the top three barriers that pose a challenge to their firm’s ability to further expand to international markets. Significantly more women-led firms than men-led firms have no further business expansion plans. Access to finance is a major barrier for both women- and men-led firms, although more so for men. By firm size, micro firms also perceive access to finance as their biggest barrier compared to larger firms. Other barriers, such as a lack of knowledge of international markets, and bureaucratic and burdensome export and import processes and procedures, are most pronounced among micro firms. The findings indicate that the size of the firm is an important determinant of the traders’ intentions to expand their business internationally.

- More women-led firms than men-led firms do not have further expansion plans (72 percent of women versus 56 percent of men). Besides of an absence of expansion plans that can be determined as an internal reason, there are a number of external difficulties for business development to international markets. Access to finance is a significant barrier to expanding business, and more men-led firms rank it as the top external obstacle compared to women (16 percent of men and 10 percent of women) (see Figure 99 and Figure 100).
Figure 99. Barriers to Expand Business to International Markets for Women Traders

- No expansion plans: 72%
- Lack of knowledge of international markets (e.g., networks, language barriers): 3%
- Bureaucratic and burdensome import and export processes and procedures: 2%
- Access to finance: 10%
- Expensive/complex transport and logistics services: 3%
- High tariffs: 2%
- Time management: 2%
- Lack of capacity to increase production: 3%
- No expansion plans: 2%

Note: The percentages are based on the number of respondents that have ranked each issue area as either their first, second, or third most challenging barrier to expanding their business.

Figure 100. Barriers to Expand Business to International Markets for Men Traders

- No expansion plans: 56%
- Lack of knowledge of international markets (e.g., networks, language barriers): 3%
- Bureaucratic and burdensome import and export processes and procedures: 4%
- Access to finance: 16%
- Expensive/complex transport and logistics services: 8%
- High tariffs: 5%
- Time management: 3%
- Lack of capacity to increase production: 2%
- No expansion plans: 3%

Note: The percentages are based on the number of respondents that have ranked each issue area as either their first, second, or third most challenging barrier to expanding their business.
Most firms, regardless of size, have no plans of further expanding their businesses. The plans to expand decrease by firm size: 83 percent of large firms, 73 percent of medium firms, 72 percent of small firms, and 61 percent of micro firms have no expansion plans. As for the barriers for further international expansion, access to finance is the top obstacle, especially for smaller firms: 38 percent for micro firms, 25 percent for small firms, 22 percent for medium, and 17 percent for large firms (see Figure 101). During focus group discussions (FGDs), women traders leading micro firms also complained about the lack of funds and access to finance.

Figure 101. Barriers to Expand Business to International Markets by Firm Size

Note: This was a multiple-choice question and more than one answer could be chosen, so totals may exceed 100. The top three ranked obstacles were combined for this graph.
3 Recommendations
Study findings demonstrate an opportunity to improve the design of trade facilitation interventions to better address the needs of all traders and customs brokers, with specific attention to women traders where gender gaps have been identified. These recommendations are organized around common themes of the World Trade Organization’s Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA)—including transparency, technology solutions, simplification of processes and procedures, and institutional arrangements—as well as topics beyond the WTO TFA, such as safety and security, border infrastructure, and human resources (HR).

Recommendation 1. Expedite the full and effective implementation of the WTO TFA, considering specific challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and regional conflicts

Implementation of the WTO TFA provides a unique opportunity to make cross-border trade easier, quicker, and less costly. Full and effective implementation of the WTO TFA should be expedited, particularly through the conclusion of ongoing projects and initiatives, as envisaged by the Central Asia Regional Links (CARs-4) program. Component 3 of the CARs-4 program aims to streamline and rationalize processes and procedures at the border and provide a platform for the application of a range of internationally agreed norms and standards, many of which are incorporated in the Government of Tajikistan’s Medium-Term Program for Customs Development.

Unforeseen crises and conflicts have negatively impacted the ability of businesses to trade in recent years. In Tajikistan, most traders and customs brokers reported that their businesses have been impacted by the pandemic, largely because of the restrictions imposed by neighboring countries, but also because trade of certain goods was restricted due to Tajik government-imposed cross-border trade restrictions during the pandemic. Many traders also reported that the border closure with the Kyrgyz Republic impacted their business. An effective implementation of trade facilitation measures has been found to positively impact economies by improving export and import performance and generating gains for developing countries.⁵⁹ In light of the current crises, strong trade facilitation measures can also serve as important tools to maintain business continuity and to keep the flow of goods moving across borders. Specific recommendations include:

- **Monitor implementation of the existing National Trade Facilitation Roadmap developed by the the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) of the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade (MEDT) and the Mid-term Customs Development Program of the Republic of Tajikistan for 2020–2024.** Ensure that continuous assessment of, and accountability for, the trade facilitation performance of the country is undertaken (e.g., alignment of processes and procedures with international standards, publication of release times and other relevant indicators, traders’ satisfaction reports, and independent assessments by the private sector of procedures at border points). Moving forward, the results framework should also include specific indicators associated with women’s participation in international trade. The status of the progress of the Roadmap and Mid-term Customs Development Program should be made publicly available and updated regularly according to the current situation.

- **Build stronger relationships with neighboring countries around key trade issues.** Explore avenues to establish more regular collaboration between joint border agencies, including a potential Joint Border Committee with representatives of all border agencies and the private sector in neighboring countries. Prioritize the implementation of Article 8.2 on Border Agency Co-operation, including the implementation of One Stop Border Posts (OSBPs) with joint cargo inspection. Other areas for collaboration between Central Asian republics should be explored, such as introduction of green corridors when moving perishable products, introduction of electronic queues at the border, and preliminary exchange of information.

- **Continue conducting training with private sector participants** (including women in particular) in matters related to border processes and procedures.

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Recommendation 2. Strengthen and promote the National Trade Facilitation Committee (WTO TFA Article 23 on Institutional Arrangements)

Only 7 percent of women traders and 14 percent of men traders are aware of the existence of the NTFC established in 2016 (also known in Tajikistan as the Coordinating Committee on Facilitation of Trade Procedures). The awareness level of micro firms is lowest of all firms (9 percent). Made up of both public and private sector representatives, the NTFC plays a vital role in planning and implementing trade reforms. Efforts should be made to promote the visibility of the NTFC, especially among women-led and micro firms whose voices are often left out of the public debate.

Specific recommendations include:

- Enhance the NTFC’s action plan to include a detailed communications strategy to raise awareness of the NTFC’s existence. Both the action plan and the communications strategy should specifically target women traders and micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSME).

- Ensure that NTFC continues to hold regular meetings to monitor implementation of the TFA, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Promote visibility of the NTFC through official government websites and official communication, which are the most used sources for official information by women traders in Tajikistan. The government should explore ways to improve proactive communication with traders for both dissemination of information and consultations. Enhance the NTFC website to share information on the work of the NTFC, the issues raised, the measures taken, the meetings to be held, as well as to allow for a wide range of the private sector to bring emerging issues to the NTFC.

- Strengthen the partnership with the private sector by encouraging and recognizing their participation in workshops and consultations held by the NTFC. When the NTFC targets the diversity of firms, including those represented by women and micro firms, it is imperative that the committee demonstrates that the voices of the private sector are heard and the committee is willing to incorporate their feedback. The NTFC should also organize capacity building seminars for traders and associations to strengthen capacity of these agencies to participate in trade-related discussions.

- Invite associations of businesswomen to the NTFC to help design trade facilitation reforms. The NTFC has a rotation principle among the private sector, where the private sector has the opportunity to apply for membership of the NTFC. This information should be disseminated to the private sector. The selected associations will need to represent a diverse set of women-led businesses in Tajikistan.

- Formalize collaboration of NTFCs of other Central Asian republics at the regional level.

Recommendation 3. Improve access to official border regulations and procedures (WTO TFA measures 1.1 on Publication, 1.2 on Information Available Through Internet; 1.3 on Enquiry Points)

Of traders who find it difficult to access information, a significant share of women stated that official websites are not user-friendly (75 percent of women traders versus 41 percent of men) and that the information is not centralized (62 percent of women traders versus 44 percent of men). Traders also reported that not all agencies have comprehensive information available online or keep the information up-to-date. Micro firms face the most difficulties in finding information, and the majority of all firms do not use or are not aware of enquiry points.

Specific recommendations include:

- Enhance the Tajikistan Trade Information Portal and Single Window websites to make them more user-friendly and more centralized with information from all border agencies. Official websites should include the most recent detailed information on the trading process, regulations, and fees, including valid contact information for various border agencies and enquiry points to respond to questions and requests for required forms and documents.

- The government, through the NTFC and in collaboration with industry associations, should design tools, instruments, and platforms to address gaps in knowledge on trade formalities and procedures. Such capacity building should target the diversity of traders, including women and micro firms. It is also critical that customs and other border agency officials receive continued and regular training to ensure that they are up-to-date on new border processes and procedures that are introduced.

- Ensure up-to-date and comprehensive information are disseminated through other channels, such as through border signage and government officials. Disseminate information through visuals at border control posts (BCPs) on how to fill in the information and consider providing easy-to-follow leaflets. This is especially important for micro firms, for whom the second most common way to access information (after personal
Recommendation 4. Enhance formal and regular consultations between the government and the private sector, especially women-led businesses (WTO TFA measures 2.1 Opportunity to Comment and Information Before Entry into Force: 2.2 on Consultations)

There is a clear gender gap in government consultations with the private sector: only 26 percent of women-led firms compared to men-led firms (42 percent) are consulted regularly or have the opportunity to comment on public consultations regarding changes to official trade processes and procedures. Consultations can be enhanced across three main levels: (i) pre-changes to notify of planned adjustments; (ii) active consultations to seek feedback on proposed changes; and (iii) active participation in which the private sector engages, for example, through focus groups and expert panels.

Specific recommendations include:

- **Enhance communications around consultations on proposed changes to regulations and legislation.** Almost one-half of trade firms who are not being consulted explained that they have not been made aware of opportunities for consultations. The consultation mechanism should be accompanied by an efficient communication strategy to ensure the entire trade community and all customs brokers become aware of any proposals for new laws and regulations or suggested amendments to existing laws and regulations. This may happen through official websites, social media platforms, specific communications at local border stations, or even through direct messaging to stakeholders. Where and when appropriate, meetings or roundtables should also be held for stakeholders to present their comments in-person to the relevant authorities, and draft regulations for general discussion and feedback should be published through a variety of channels before their approval.

- **Ensure that women-led firms are made aware of the consultative processes.** The survey revealed that more women-led firms (40 percent) compared to men-led firms (28 percent) believe that they are not consulted because their business is too small to be a part of the consultative process. The quality of information shared needs to be improved to clarify any misconceptions around consultative processes, and the three major sources of information for women-led firms should be utilized to inform about these: official government websites and communication channels, personal networks (such as intermediaries), and government officials at airports and border posts.

- **Institutionalize regular consultations.** While consulting with stakeholders prior to the promulgation of new procedures and regulations is critical, a mechanism for regular consultations (regardless of changes) should be established. Improving the frequency of which stakeholders are consulted through actions, such as focus group discussions, open notice-and-comment periods, and feedback surveys, as well as through the NTFC could help bolster private sector confidence in the government’s efforts.

Recommendation 5. Review and publicize official grievance procedures in a clear and easy-to-access manner (WTO TFA measure 4 on Procedures for Appeal and Review)

There is a strong association between access to and understanding of official appeal mechanisms and gender. Fewer women-led firms (34 percent) than men-led firms (51 percent) reported that guidance and explanations on penalties and on how to make an official appeal are clear and easy to access across government entities. An efficient grievance redressal mechanism is a vital anti-corruption measure.

Specific recommendations include:

- **Review existing trade grievance procedures.** Conduct a thorough review of the existing trade grievance procedures to identify any gaps or areas for improvement.
This should include an assessment of the effectiveness of the procedures in addressing trade grievances, as well as any barriers that prevent stakeholders from utilizing them. The government should review the appeal mechanisms to ensure the decisions are issued in a timely manner and that the procedures are well-known and efficient with better communication on the results from the system, including concerning eventual revision and update of policies and procedures. Any performance indicators monitoring response times should be made public to allow public monitoring of the cases of litigation, establishment of service level agreements, and change in satisfaction by clients.

- **Involve stakeholders in the review process.** Engage a diverse group of stakeholders, including businesses, trade associations, and consumer groups, in the review process to ensure that the procedures take into account the needs and concerns of all relevant parties.

- **Make the procedures easily accessible.** Ensure that the trade grievance procedures are easily accessible to all stakeholders, including by publishing them in multiple languages and making them available online and in print at border posts. Publicize details on how to submit an appeal, including how to complete, submit, and track once submitted.

- **Publicize the procedures widely.** Publicize the trade grievance procedures widely, including through public awareness campaigns, to ensure that all stakeholders are aware of their rights and how to access the procedures. The NTFC should publicize and communicate more broadly through the official channels for appeal to private stakeholders.

- **Ensure women-led firms are aware of the procedures.** It is important that guidance is published and communicated through the most used sources of information used by women: official governments websites and communication channels, personal networks (such as intermediaries), and government officials at airports and border posts.

- **Train officials.** Provide training to officials on the proper handling of trade grievances and the effective use of the procedures.

**Recommendation 6. Strengthen and promote electronic systems and establish suitable infrastructure at customs and other border agencies (WTO TFA measure 10.4 on Single Window; 7.1 Pre-arrival processing).**

Tajikistan implemented a Single Window system for registration of export, import, and transit procedures in 2020. Yet, more than one-half of trade firms reported that they still have to submit both paper and electronic forms and documents to Customs; 36 percent of women traders and 41 percent of men traders think they have to submit paper and electronic forms and documents to other border agencies. Feedback from the BCP visits also revealed that poor information technology (IT) infrastructure at border posts makes access to electronic information difficult for border officers requiring submission of paper copies.

Specific recommendations include:

- **Remove any need for paper copies of declarations and other documentation.** Ensuring that traders know that they can submit documentation via electronic platforms is critical to reduce both trade costs and time. Full automation of customs clearance processes would also reduce corruption at the borders and increase transparency of procedures.

- **Enhance the IT infrastructure at all border posts.** Full automation of border procedures would need to be implemented alongside the provision of suitable IT equipment to all border posts and agencies (scanners, servers, safe data storage, computers, and high-speed internet services) to overcome reported cumbersome delays. Mandating e-declarations without providing the necessary infrastructure will result in more delays.

- **Increase the use of pre-arrival processing of goods.** Greater use of pre-declarations will ensure that traders and customs brokers are able to take full advantage of customs automation and its benefits of expedited release. This involves greater awareness-raising among traders and brokers of the benefits of pre-arrival processing through communications campaigns, outreach to business and industry groups, and other forms of dissemination.

- **Ensure interoperability and connectivity.** Ensure that electronic systems are interoperable and connected with other trade-related systems, such as trade (ASYCUDA/UAIS), logistics, and transport systems, to facilitate the efficient flow of goods. This would involve an assessment of the current state and connectivity of electronic systems to determine gaps in interoperability, followed by specific actions to address the identified gaps.

- **Promote the use of electronic declarations among stakeholders.** Promote the use of electronic systems among stakeholders, including businesses and government officials, through awareness-raising campaigns and training programs.
Recommendation 7. Improve infrastructure and facility services at border crossings

While more men traders than women traders experienced harassment at the borders, technical visits to select border crossing points revealed that border infrastructure (including basic amenities) also does not meet the safety and security needs of traders, especially for women. The main claims of traders and customs brokers relate to inadequate sanitation facilities and unsafe conditions inside border posts and customs areas, forcing traders to share the clearance area with trucks and other vehicles, which increases insecurity and slows down procedures. Other concerns include a lack of the following: rest facilities for drivers and individuals crossing on foot, especially for parents traveling with small children; catering facilities for both staff and the traders; transport choices when crossing the neutral zones; fast lanes for traders/drivers with smaller transactions/cargo loads or traveling on foot versus in a vehicle; ATM machines to withdraw cash in the local currency to pay border fees; a means of submitting the feedback by the traders on the service that guarantee the claimants’ complete anonymity; and the lack of/poor internet service. During the border visits it was also evident that scanning equipment at some locations is either not working properly or not meeting the demand for scans. Without sufficient and proper scanning equipment, manual processes are undertaken, resulting in delays at the borders.

Specific recommendations include:

- Thoroughly assess existing infrastructure at all border posts and surrounding territories and develop a long-term infrastructure plan that outlines specific measures and activities to improve border infrastructure, including timelines and funding sources.

- Analyze the border crossing points infrastructure from a public health security perspective. The World Health Organization’s International Health Regulations (IHR) is a binding legal instrument to which Tajikistan is signatory and requires signatories to maintain public health measures and a response capacity at designated airports, ports, and ground crossings. Such an analysis of the border crossing points infrastructure could also consider the International Organization of Migrations’ (IOM’s) Humanitarian Border Management approach.60

- Prioritize the upgrading of critical infrastructure at ports and border crossing points that handle a high volume of trade.

Recommendation 8: Recruit more women staff and improve staff working conditions at customs and other border agencies and border posts

The BCP technical visits revealed that improvements can be made in the areas related to human resources, such as employment and compensation, work life balance and career development, physical working conditions, and a feedback mechanism for staff. Addressing indicative HR findings will improve staff working conditions and result in increased employee satisfaction and performance. This also aligns with the findings of the joint World Customs Organization–World Bank Group (WCO-WBG) human resource management and development diagnostics of 2021.

Specific recommendations include:

- Develop a gender-sensitive recruitment strategy that actively targets and encourages women to apply for roles in border agencies. Increase women’s representation across the Customs organization at different locations and in different types of positions, as well as at the supervisory and management levels. Identify a senior level champion, ideally from or within senior management, to drive the agenda of recruiting more women forward.

- Increase the visibility of female role models within border agencies to encourage more women to consider careers in these fields. This can be done, for example, by ensuring at least one woman official is posted in each shift. Implement a mentorship program that pairs experienced female employees with new hires to provide guidance and support. Address unconscious bias in the recruitment process by providing training to recruiters and hiring managers to ensure a fair and unbiased selection process.

- Review working conditions, including staff compensation, the duration of shifts, and conditions under which 24-hour shifts are undertaken. Offer flexible working arrangements, such as part-time or remote work options, to make it easier for staff to balance

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60 https://www.iom.int/humanitarian-border-management.
work and family responsibilities. Build dormitories (living quarters) and restrooms for women staff at the border. Such living quarters were built in Kazakhstan, which helped ensure that women officers also serve at borders in large numbers.

- **Enable the use of electronic payments for duties, taxes, fees, and charges related to importation and exportation collected by customs authorities.** Cash payments should not be a requirement, but rather an option should the trader not be in a position to pay electronically.

- **Create an institutional staff training calendar.** Expand the staff training curriculum to include regular training on trade rules and regulations and in-depth training in cross-cutting areas like gender equality.

- **Create an organization-wide staff feedback mechanism** for which senior management is accountable to staff. Visibly take action in response to staff suggestions.

### Recommendation 9. Increase access to trade finance

Access to finance goes beyond the scope of this work; however, the study confirmed that lack of access to finance is a significant barrier for many businesses to operate and grow their businesses in Tajikistan, especially for small and medium firms (many of which are women-led). Loans from banks is only a financing source used by one-fourth of the traders in the survey. Factors such as lack of collateral, credit history, and financial literacy can make it difficult for businesses to secure financing from traditional financial institutions. Additionally, trade finance can be perceived as a high-risk endeavor, which can make it difficult for businesses to secure financing from commercial banks.

Specific recommendations include:

- **Assess the policy and legal environment to make it more conducive to trade finance**, by reducing bureaucratic barriers and creating a more transparent and predictable regulatory environment.

- **Establish or support trade finance facilities**, such as export credit agencies or trade finance guarantee schemes, that can provide financing or guarantees to businesses to help them secure trade finance. Consider mechanisms that target women traders specifically.

- **Explore the use of community resources and build upon the tradition of informal networking**, which is an approach that has proved to be successful in Tajikistan in the shape of community-based saving groups (groups of people who pool their savings and take out loans, providing an alternative to formal financial institutions). In addition to the ability to accumulate resources needed for expanding business operations, such community networks have great potential in the development of technical capacities of their members.

- **Explore a deeper partnership with the WBG in trade finance**. Local financial institutions can establish working partnerships with major international banks via the International Finance Corporation (IFC) that can broaden access to finance and reduce cash collateral requirements. This enables the continued flow of trade credit into the market at a time when imports may be critical, and the country’s exports can generate much-needed foreign exchange.  

- **Consider developing capacity-building and training programs to help businesses understand the trade finance options available to them.**

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Bank Eskhata is already an active member of IFC’s Global Trade Finance Program.
Annex A
Detailed Description of Survey Sample and Methodology
Quantitative Survey

The sampling for the trade firms to participate in the survey adopted a simple random sampling (SRS) method. The SRS is a probability sampling technique in which all the elements in the target population have an equal probability of being selected regardless of other known characteristics/stratifications of the elements. The sample selection method differs from the quota sampling approach employed in previous Trade and Gender surveys in the Pacific region, Brazil, the Philippines, and South Africa. The change was informed by limitations of the quota sampling method, which is non-probabilistic, and hence, restricted the inability to generalize survey findings to the general population. SRS is probabilistic and allows for statistical conclusions with confidence; however, its downside is that it can at times generate a sample of unwanted concentration.

To undertake a probabilistic sample survey, a sampling frame, which is a list of all elements eligible for a given survey, is required. The Tajikistan Trade and Gender Survey utilized a list of all registered (formal) firms engaged in cross-border trade provided by the Tajikistan Customs Authority. The list was constructed from systems used by customs to process trade in Tajikistan, namely the Unified Automated Information System (UAIS) and the Single Window (SW). The UAIS list was comprised of data for the years 2020 and 2021 and contained a total of 4,398 firms, while the Single Window was comprised of 1,047 firms. The two lists were combined and manually cleaned to remove non-eligible firms, such as state-owned enterprises and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Duplicates were also removed from the list using unique identifiers in the UAIS list, and telephone contact and name in the combined UAIS and SW lists. Further, since the survey employed Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI), firms without telephone contact information were also removed from the list. Upon cleaning, the sampling frame contained a total of 2,472 firms that were involved in formal cross-border trade in the period 2020–2021 (see table 1).

The constructed sampling frame had information on the name of the firm and telephone contact. It, however, lacked other auxiliary information such as gender of owner/manager, firm size, and location of the firm. This limitation made it impossible to stratify the sampling frame based on these variables of interest—further, informing the choice of SRS as the sampling method for the survey.

The sample size for the survey was computed at 650 firms using Slovin’s sample size computation formula. Slovin’s formula was chosen to calculate the sample size due to the lack of sufficient information about the existing characteristics of the population, including the distribution of characteristics of interest to the survey. The formula and the underlying assumptions are given below:

\[ n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2} \]

Where:

- \( N \) = Population size, which is 2,472 firms
- \( n \) = Sample size,
- \( e \) = Margin of error, assumed at 4%

The above parameters fixed into the formula resulted in a sample size of 499 firms to be interviewed. Given the rarity of women owned and managed firms, as well as to cater for anticipated non-response (which is usually high for CATI surveys), the sample size was further inflated by 30 percent, resulting in 650 firms to be sampled for the survey. These firms were selected randomly from the sampling frame using an SRS sample selection method. The survey results were monitored on a weekly basis, and a decision on a replacement sample or to increase in sample size was discussed based on the numbers realized on a weekly basis. A total of 401 firms were successfully interviewed.

To conduct the phone survey among the customs brokers, the entire population of registered customs clearing agents was surveyed. The list of customs brokers provided by the Tajikistan Customs Authority contained about 41 customs brokers registered in the Registry of Customs Brokers between January 1, 2017, and December 31, 2020 (see table 2). Out of these 41 brokers, eight numbers were unanswered and 2 more

Table 1. Construction of the Sampling Frame for Trade and Gender Survey in Tajikistan Traders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Firms in the Field List</th>
<th>Number of Entries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original list</td>
<td></td>
<td>5,445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed: duplicates</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed: firms with missing contacts</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,606</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed: Non-active</td>
<td></td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed: State-owned enterprises/ nonprofits</td>
<td></td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed: Customs broker companies</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining after initial filtering</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,472</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Construction of Sampling Frame for Trade and Gender Survey in Tajikistan Custom Brokers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number of Customs Brokers</th>
<th>Number of Entries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Original list</td>
<td></td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Removed duplicates</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remaining after initial filtering</td>
<td></td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
brokers refused to participate in the survey. A total of 31 customs brokers were successfully interviewed.

**Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Focus group discussions were held according to the schedule below in three regions of Tajikistan: Sughd and Khatlon regions and the city of Dushanbe (see table 3).

**Table 3. Type of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type of Focus Group Discussion (FGD)</th>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FGD 1</td>
<td>Informal traders—women</td>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>May 26, 2022</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD 2</td>
<td>Formal traders—women</td>
<td>Sughd</td>
<td>May 26, 2022</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD 3</td>
<td>Informal traders—men</td>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
<td>June 17, 2022</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FGD 4</td>
<td>Formal traders—men</td>
<td>Khatlon</td>
<td>June 10, 2022</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FGDs were aimed at gathering qualitative data on the presence of difficulties in compliance with customs procedures, such as:

- Absence/availability of security for traders, both women and men and their cargo
- Absence/availability of sanitary conditions
- Differences in compliance with cross-border procedures by traders—women.

Twenty-four traders participated in FGDs, including 12 women and 12 men engaged in cross-border trade.

**Key Informant Interviews**

In-depth interviews with two customs brokers, two customs officers, and representatives of the Women’s Business Association and Chamber of Commerce and Industry were conducted between July 5 and July 11, 2022 (see table 4). Like FGDs, these interviews complemented the quantitative part of the research and provided a more holistic view of the trading environment in Tajikistan.

**Table 4. Schedule of Key Informant Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Key Informant Interviews</th>
<th>Region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Association of Women Entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Sughd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Chamber of Commerce and Industry</td>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Customs Service, Inspector</td>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Customs Service, Middle Manager</td>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Customs broker, woman</td>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Customs broker, man</td>
<td>Dushanbe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Border Post Visits**

Qualitative technical border visits were conducted at the Dushanbe International Airport and three border posts along the Uzbekistan border: the Dusti BCP (Tursunzade District), the Fotekhobod-Oybek BCP (Matchoh District), and the Patar BCP (Konibadam District). The overall objective was to assess customs services on gender-related issues. The specific research objectives were to review (i) the accessibility and safety provisions of the customs offices (and services), (ii) customer feedback mechanisms, and (iii) current customs services provided in digitized form. The researchers conducted 37 individual interviews with traders (2), customs officers/inspectors (16), customs supervisors (4), representatives of other border agencies (12), and drivers (2), and customs brokers (1) at different locations.

The selection of the BCPs was based on results from FGDs and the importance of some of the BCPs in trade intensity. In relation to trade volume, the BCPs at Dusti and Fotekhobod with Uzbekistan are the most important ones as they serve large truck volumes of more than 10,000 trucks per year. The BCP in Patar (Konibodom) was selected to follow up on results from FGDs with traders which were conducted earlier on a pilot basis in Sughd and Khatlon provinces. Although the BCP road in Patar (Konibodom) with the Fergana Valley region of Uzbekistan serves smaller truck volumes of 5,000 trucks per year on average, the small-scale traders also use this border crossing point.

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A variety of methods to conduct this assessment to triangulate findings for a more thorough analysis of the results were used, including:

- A desk review of existing literature and data.
- Key informant interviews: The researcher met with representatives from government agencies exercising border control, including Customs Service, State Centre for Sanitary Epidemiological Control under the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Transport, and the Committee for Food Security under the Government of Tajikistan, which combines the state veterinary inspection service, phyto-sanitary, and quarantine inspection. Interviews with truck drivers supplied details on circumstances of delays. The research team was able to interview only two women traders. Information was obtained using a structured questionnaire to capture information on dimensions, including physical barriers connected to traders’ activities at border posts.
- On-site observations: Observations were carried out in three BCPs with the Uzbekistan border as well as in cargo and passenger terminals of the Dushanbe International Airport.

Researchers assessed the physical condition of border services’ infrastructure in (and around) border areas.

Several research limitations in relation to this qualitative research study should be noted:

1. Only two women traders (at the Fotekhobod-Oybek BCP) were interviewed during the field trip. A customs officer at the Dusti BCP politely and firmly prevented the researchers from conducting trader interviews, with the reason that “It is not allowed.” The same officer remarked that none of the pedestrians crossing the border ever admit that they are traders. This narrow interview base greatly limits the voice of women traders in the reported findings.

2. Given the “sensitive” nature of border posts, respondents may have felt uncomfortable with disclosing information for a number of reasons, including but not limited to the perceived fear of retaliation or consequences for participating in the interview.

3. The researchers received contradictory information from customs officers at the same BCP in relation to equipment and customs operations.
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