

**UNECE**

# **Single Submission Portal**

## ***Recommendation No. 37***



**United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation  
and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)**



**UNITED NATIONS**

**United Nations Economic Commission for Europe**

United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business

**Recommendation No. 37  
Single Submission Portal**



**United Nations  
Geneva, 2019**

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United Nations’ publication issued by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe.

ECE/TRADE/447

## Foreword

Streamlining border crossing and helping traders to access international markets can provide significant stimulus to national economies and directly supports the implementation of UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 17, specifically on promoting a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable trading system in target 17.10. One of the key smart connectivity solutions a country can ideally adopt for this is a Single Window for international trade; however, fostering the cooperation between government agencies and replacing legacy systems can make this a challenge. And while plans are developed, and discussions held, traders wait for the trade facilitation which should result. The private sector can often be more reactive and has in many cases already set up their own smart connectivity platforms that act as an interface between traders and government authorities.

In a spirit of promoting the development and diffusion of technologies to all countries, in line with the SDG targets 17.7, 10.2 and 5.b, this recommendation number 37 on “Single Submission Portals” (SSP) describes how such systems function and how governments can capitalize on these initiatives. From Port Community Systems to Customs Clearance Systems, Cargo Community Systems and Freight Forwarder Systems, multiple possibilities likely exist already in national economies and can help to facilitate trade. This can significantly increase access to information and communication technology as outlined in SDG target 9.c. There are even specific eCommerce platforms targeting Micro-Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) to access international trading markets. All of these SSPs can offer the declarative information and help streamline border crossing; they can also propose connectivity through information exchange between economic operators creating a seamless use of information along the entire supply chain.

This recommendation is accompanied by a repository of best practices which show that private-sector driven solutions bring added value to the trading community, with between 1’500 and over 10’000 users and between 25 thousand and 36 million transactions per day. The services offered can vary from customs or port declarations to logistics and supply chain messaging.

I am happy to present this recommendation to the trading community in an aim to constantly streamline and facilitate processes, create smart connectivity between stakeholders and help economies become more competitive.



Olga Algayerova  
Executive Secretary  
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

## Note

The designations employed and the presentation of the material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area, or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

### **The United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT)**

#### **Simple, Transparent and Effective Processes for Global Commerce**

UN/CEFACT's mission is to improve the ability of business, trade and administrative organizations, from developed, developing and transitional economies, to exchange products and relevant services effectively. Its principal focus is on facilitating national and international transactions, through the simplification and harmonization of processes, procedures and information flows, and so contribute to the growth of global commerce.

Participation in UN/CEFACT is open to experts from United Nations Member States, Intergovernmental Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations recognised by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Through this participation of government and business representatives from around the world, UN/CEFACT has developed a range of trade facilitation and e-business standards, recommendations and tools that are approved within a broad intergovernmental process and implemented globally.

UN/CEFACT is committed to ensuring that the gender dimension is reflected in norms, roles, procedures, and access to resources. Government and trade are encouraged to promote equal opportunities for women and men within the scope of Trade Facilitation activities. UN/CEFACT specifically encourages the collection, analysis, and monitoring of gender disaggregated data in order to better understand and support women's engagement in international trade and transport facilitation.

This Recommendation encourages governments, business communities, development partners, international organizations, and other policymakers to follow UN/CEFACT's commitment to ensure inclusiveness for women.

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## **I. Recommendation n° 37: Single Submission Portals**

### **A. Introduction**

1. The UNECE Trade Facilitation Section and the United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business (UN/CEFACT) have continually worked on the topic of Single Window since the early 2000s. Experience has shown that the implementation of a National Single Window as defined in the base Recommendation 33 is not an easy task. It involves strong engagement from all government agencies and can take years to render the trade facilitation measures promised to traders and agencies.

2. Though we still believe that National Single Windows can render long-term savings and facilitations, in the short term, the private sector sees the benefits that such mechanisms can provide and are not necessarily waiting for these to be fully implemented. They are launching facilitation platforms now, and traders—especially Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)—can reap the benefits immediately. These private-sector-driven initiatives correspond to what UN/CEFACT has termed “Single Submission Portals” (SSP).

3. The purpose of establishing a National Single Window (NSW) is to streamline procedures at the border and connect traders to all relevant agencies through a single portal. The NSW should handle regulatory procedures and must therefore have a mandate from the government to this end. This has been well documented in UNECE Recommendations 33, 34 and 35; establishing an NSW is also a best-endeavour obligation under the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement<sup>1</sup>.

4. Although UN/CEFACT still strongly advises the establishment of an NSW as outlined in Recommendations 33, 34 and 35, it also recognizes the pertinence of these private-sector-driven initiatives. This document aims to provide recommendations and guidance on such trade-driven initiatives.

### **B. Purpose and scope**

5. This document explains the principle of SSPs, the potential stakeholders and the various services such systems can provide. These are all electronic, as the main purpose is to provide trade facilitation measures to economic operators and eventually to government authorities.

6. The current scope concentrates on a national environment of data exchange only. Some of the different examples of SSPs today include Port Community Systems, Cargo Community Systems, Data Pipelines, Customs Clearance Systems, and Integrated Services for MSMEs for International Trade.

7. As SSPs can provide the same or similar trade facilitation mechanisms as a National Single Window, some countries may want to study either how to capitalize on such systems as a viable alternative to a National Single Window or how to exchange effectively with them to streamline procedures for both economic operators and government agencies.

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<sup>1</sup> World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Trade Facilitation Agreement website as of January 2019: [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tradfa\\_e/tradfa\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tradfa_e/tradfa_e.htm)



## **C. Benefits**

8. The benefits are like those offered by National Single Window mechanisms: streamlining procedures, reducing wait times due to administrative procedures, reducing cost and so on. Both economic operators and government agencies should find benefits in using such systems, as outlined in the Guidelines (Part II).

## **D. International standards**

9. SSPs are defined as being electronic systems—keeping in mind that the main objective should be the facilitations that can be achieved, not the electronic system itself (i.e., the electronic system is a means to achieve trade facilitation and not a goal in itself). Being electronic, the use of internationally recognized and defined standards is paramount to ensure the interoperability between systems and the same understanding of individual pieces of information between sender and receiver. As described in the guidelines, the main area of activity of most SSPs will be the business to business (B2B) and business to government (B2G) environments; for this reason, we believe that the defined semantics and messages of UN/CEFACT are the most appropriate international standards for these exchanges.

## **E. Recommendation**

10. In light of the above, UN/CEFACT at its twenty-fifth Plenary session on 8-9 April 2019 in Geneva recommends the following:

- (a) Governments should put in place the legally enabling environment to allow the establishment and the free-market operation of SSPs;
- (b) Governments should encourage the automated exchange of information in administrative systems (Single Window, customs and all other administrative electronic systems that deal with trade);
- (c) Private sector operators should consider putting in place SSPs in order to streamline and facilitate trade; and
- (d) All actors should use internationally recognized standards and harmonized business processes, ideally using the models provided by UN/CEFACT.

11. Where standards, applications and technologies are no longer set by government agencies, but usually by the private sector, governments are advised to cooperate with private sector operators and look for existing interoperability options before developing new ones themselves.

## **II. Guidelines to Recommendation n°37: Single Submission Portal**

### **A. Introduction**

12. The purpose of establishing a National Single Window (NSW) is to streamline procedures at the border and connect traders to all relevant agencies through a single portal. The NSW should handle regulatory procedures and must therefore have a mandate from the government to this end. This has been well documented in UNECE Recommendations 33, 34 and 35; establishing an NSW is also a best-endeavour obligation under the World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Agreement<sup>2</sup>.

13. However, as experience has shown, implementation of an NSW is not an easy task. It involves strong engagement from all government agencies and can take years before it provides the trade facilitation measures promised to traders and agencies. Also, some countries may not have a National Single Window.

14. Meanwhile, the private sector sees the benefits that such systems can provide and are not necessarily waiting for an NSW to be fully implemented. They are launching facilitation platforms, based on their own initiatives, and traders—especially Micro, Small and Medium sized Enterprises (MSMEs)—are immediately able to reap benefits.

15. Although UN/CEFACT still strongly advises the establishment of an NSW as outlined in Recommendations 33, 34 and 35, it also recognizes the pertinence of these private-sector-driven initiatives. This document aims to provide recommendations and guidance on such trade-driven initiatives.

### **B. Single Submission Portal**

#### **1. Definition of Single Submission Portal**

16. A Single Submission Portal (SSP) is an access point that allows traders to exchange information, in a standard format and related to a specific activity, with relevant parties including government agencies.

17. SSPs will cover Business to Business (B2B) processes such as contracting for transport, logistics and financial services. SSPs will often also facilitate regulatory processes through Business to Government (B2G) information exchange, in cooperation with or within the context of a Single Window (if one exists). As the business processes covered can be as varied as the types of stakeholders that can exist in an international supply chain, there are a variety of types of SSPs. These are discussed below and can, potentially, coexist within the same economy.

18. In all SSPs, regardless of the type, economic operators are ultimately the main ‘clients’ to whom the offered trade facilitation services are targeted.

#### **2. Relationship between the Single Submission Portal and the Single Window**

19. More and more countries are implementing NSWs and when one exists, it is the obligatory gateway for all relevant regulatory information which is submitted to

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<sup>2</sup> World Trade Organization Trade Facilitation Trade Facilitation Agreement website as of January 2019: [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tradfa\\_e/tradfa\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tradfa_e/tradfa_e.htm)

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government authorities. If an SSP exists in parallel to an NSW within an economy and facilitates regulatory processes through B2G information exchange, then the required links should be established by the SSP with the NSW.

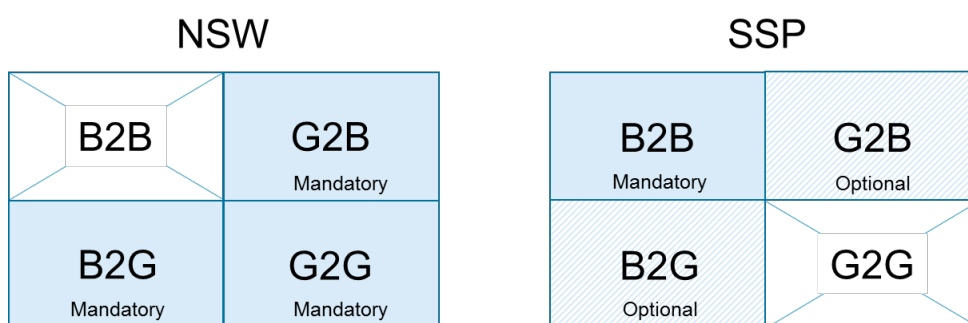
20. However, a NSW may not cover all B2G requirements and in such cases, the SSP will be the best-positioned to provide such services to its clients. When such services comply with standards used by the NSW as well as those used by its clients, the SSP can facilitate both B2G and G2B information exchange.

21. In this respect, the SSP is complementary to the NSW—while each facility holds its own legal status.

22. However, many economies have not yet established an official NSW and some NSW initiatives do not cover all the regulatory procedures required for cross-border trade. This may oblige economic operators to continue communicating with multiple government agencies while these agencies wait to be phased into the NSW. In such situations, economic operators cannot fully benefit from an NSW and SSP operators may consider establishing facilities that cover some or all their clients’ needs, not yet included in the NSW.

23. Multiple SSPs could coexist within a single economy as they are private-sector driven, and presumably motivated by economic interest. Free market competition should be allowed to encourage the development of new, high-performance services and it is possible that only those SSPs which provide the most positive economic benefits to their users will survive.

Fig. 1: The differences between a NSW and a SSP



24. Figure 1 shows that an NSW is expected to service B2G, G2B and G2G transactions (information exchange). It also shows that an SSP is expected to service B2B but may also service B2G and G2B.

25. Comparing both, it shows that both NSWs and SSPs can also be engaged in B2G and G2B information exchange. Consequently, when both an NSW and an SSP operate in the same segment of the market (supporting similar specific activities) it should be clear that

- Their services are complementary to each other and are provided to serve different traders;
- Their services are interoperable, to facilitate single submission of data by these traders; and
- The legal basis and governance of their services differ, as the NSW operates in the public domain and the SSP operates in the private domain. Consequently, the proper identification, authentication and authorization procedures in place may also differ—as well as when and how data may be shared, under what circumstances and with which organizations.

## C. Main functions of a Single Submission Portal

26. SSPs can offer many functions. Below some functions of an SSP are stated. This list is not exhaustive and SSPs will not by default offer all functions:

- (a) Facilitate the submission of data for single transactions by companies and especially MSMEs;
- (b) Improve interoperability between MSMEs and Single Windows;
- (c) Electronically link government agencies that are involved in the trade process;
- (d) Provide tangible cost savings for business and government;
- (e) Expedite cargo release and clearance by controlling agencies through the simplification of trade-related processes and procedures;
- (f) Provide benefits to the trading community by eliminating duplicated processes;
- (g) Enable world-class trade facilitation practices by providing a fully-transparent and predictable border environment;
- (h) Enhance transparency and impartial treatment in the fiscal and customs framework;
- (i) Eliminate corruption by improving methods to counter dishonest practices and by reducing discretionary decisions; and/or
- (j) Facilitate communication from government agencies back to traders.

27. The above functions are facilitated by the following inherent features of SSP.

### 1. Single entry

28. The single entry characteristic of an SSP is its most fundamental characteristic. This functionality implies one single point of access. The “single entry” feature, supplemented with the “single submission” feature, means that traders do not need to submit their data separately. Instead, data submission is only performed once. The SSP system may offer a single point of access to various parties’ and government agencies’ back-end systems.

29. The SSP may offer a set of shared services and may exhibit intelligence that differentiates it from data switches and from gateways. Examples of such shared services may include orchestration of inter-agency business processes, which is shown as a single business service to users.

30. The SSP may undertake onward distribution of the relevant documentation and/or data requirements to the participating authorities or agencies. After examination of the documentation and/or data by the relevant authorities or agencies, the results can be notified to the applicants through the SSP.

### 2. Single submission

31. This function implies one-off submission of data and relevant information to an SSP for onward distribution—at the request of (and with the permission of) the entitled person, according to the user agreement—to service providers and government agencies through the single entry point. As described above, this feature implies that the traders submit their data only once through the single entry point.

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32. After submission, the data is made available to any authorized party or to the government agencies that require them. However, the “one-off submission” feature does not refer to a single transmission of data, as the different data can be transmitted in multiple stages. This allows traders to incrementally submit data as it becomes available and is needed. Consequently, in SSPs, the following principles could be implemented:

- Incremental submission of data: This is required to reflect a change or progression in a transaction.
- Reusability of data: This refers to the submission of data to multiple parties (including government agencies and/or private sector service providers) when it is required and permitted by the entitled person.

### 3. User Agreements

33. For terms and obligations related to data privacy, storage, transfer, transmission and use, the SSP may operate based on a User Agreement. The purpose of a User Agreement is to prevent disputes related to data management by governing the limitations on use, addressing obligations related to data safety and outlining any liabilities that may arise from the misuse of all private and confidential data by the SSP. This therefore means that the User Agreement ensures that the trader’s confidential data is kept private in all transactions conducted with and by the SSP.

### 4. Electronic environment

34. SSP operators facilitate the move from paper-based systems to electronic environments, where required information is submitted, maintained and shared in an electronic form. The basis of a paperless system is the identification of the required documents/forms/licences and the data that these documents require, as well as the standardization of this information.

35. For parties to exchange information effectively using fully electronic messages, all information elements need to be clearly defined and unambiguous, both from a semantic and syntactical perspective. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the format of any electronic data exchange be recognized by industry standards; involved parties make no distinction between paper-based and electronic information; and the data exchange itself is governed by a legal framework (see User Agreements and sharing of information).

### 5. Standardized documents and data

36. Standardizing the information contained in its data flows is very important in an SSP as it is the key element in linking together different parties and government agencies—as well as parties within different countries (i.e. achieving cross-border connectivity).

37. The success of an SSP depends heavily on the ability to exchange messages in a format that the systems on both sides (private-sector parties and government agencies) can understand and manage. This is called “semantic interoperability”. This implies a common data reference model which serves as the logical model for the information used in cross-border trade.

38. This common data reference model for cross-border trade serves as the basis for the electronic document specifications. To identify the elements of such a data reference model, one step in an SSP implementation requires the analysis of data models used by the various systems with which the SSP will communicate, as well as the required documents (both paperless and paper based).

39. The process discussed above is also known as “data harmonization”. Within a Single Window environment, data harmonization is defined as the act of reconciling the definition and representation formats of data elements<sup>3</sup>, and this is also true for the SSP.

40. Through data harmonization, a set of core data elements (data elements with identical meanings but which may be expressed using different vocabularies) can be extracted. Descriptions of each core data element including its definition and representation format can then be formalized.

41. The goal of data harmonization is to eliminate redundancies, duplications and ambiguity in data, culminating in a set of standardized data requirements and standardized messages. The outcome of data harmonization is the definition of national requirements, the mapping of these document requirements to international standards; and the harmonization of data requirements across documents based on the comparison of the national trade requirements with international standards (e.g. UNECE Trade Facilitation Recommendations and UN/CEFACT standards).

42. Another outcome of data harmonization is the alignment of documents to international standards, the usage of internationally accepted codes for trade data, and a reduction in the number of documents.

43. International standards which can be used include the United Nations Trade Data Elements Directory (UNTDDED)<sup>4</sup> and the UN/CEFACT Core Components Library (CCL)<sup>5</sup>.

### 6. Sharing of information (information dissemination)

44. Important information (e.g. customs declarations, permits and certificates) can be maintained in electronic format and shared with the appropriate parties or agency whenever it is requested and allowed.

45. To achieve this, not only must the data elements for exchange be standardized, the appropriate interfaces and message exchange formats must be defined to align the IT systems of the involved parties. In the business domain, sharing of this information is protected by the User Agreement—as the legal framework that provides privacy, confidentiality and security in the exchange of information.

46. However, it should be recognized that when the information is shared with the appropriate government agency through a National Single Window (B2G), the use of the information by this government agency and the sharing of this information between government agencies is governed by public law.

## D. Services that can be offered by a Single Submission Portal

### 1. Data reuse and data accuracy

47. SSPs may service the reuse of data for different purposes such as using the data by another party for a subsequent action in the underlying business process, or using the data by another party for a different business process or government action. Such a service

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<sup>3</sup> See UNECE Recommendation 34 “Data Simplification and Standardization for International Trade”, 2011, ECE/TRADE/400. Link as of January 2019:

[http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/Publications/ECE-TRADE-400E\\_Rec34.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/trade/Publications/ECE-TRADE-400E_Rec34.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> See UNTDED website. Link as of January 2019: <http://www.unece.org/tradewelcome/un-centre-for-trade-facilitation-and-e-business-uncefact/outputs/standards/untded-iso7372/introducing-untded-iso7372.html>

<sup>5</sup> See the UN/CEFACT Core Component Library directories as of January 2019 at: [http://www.unece.org/cefact/codesfortrade/uncl/ccl\\_index.html](http://www.unece.org/cefact/codesfortrade/uncl/ccl_index.html)

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should be governed by a proper legal framework and agreement between the submitting party and the SSP operator.

48. For this purpose, the SSP operator should have a proper identification, authentication and authorization procedure in place<sup>6</sup>.

### 2. Clearance by border authorities

49. The SSP may enable and facilitate the provision of complete and accurate declaration data to cross-border agencies. Cross-border regulatory authorities (customs, veterinary inspection, product safety authority, and others) may use the data provided by the SSP for risk-management purposes, clearance purposes or other.

50. Specifically, on clearance, the SSP needs to have arrangements with customs and other cross-border agencies to provide trusted traders and Authorized Economic Operators (AEOs) with quick release via a green channel<sup>7</sup>. Companies which have AEO status voluntarily meet a wide range of criteria and work in close cooperation with customs authorities to assure the common objective of supply chain security.

51. The SSP can facilitate increased compliance by supporting a common declaration process and functions by preventing declarants from sending information to authorities which does not follow business rules as defined by authorities. This contributes to operators' ability to maintain their AEO status and consequently continue to benefit from the related reduced inspection levels.

### 3. Trade Finance

52. The SSP can facilitate increased trade finance collection security by helping to check and validate trade finance instruments for Letters of Credit terms, thereby providing better business risk control.

53. Some of the finance-related benefits for both traders (specifically MSMEs) and government that an SSP can provide include the following:

- Since the money flow and logistics flow are conducted within the SSP, the information managed by the SSP can provide a reliable basis for managing associated risks, facilitating trade financing and compliance as well; and
- The need to check all traders individually is reduced, particularly where the SSP's risk controls include checking a trader's legitimacy before accepting them as a trader in the SSP.

54. Further, the SSP can facilitate financial functions.

### 4. Logistics

55. SSPs can offer a wide range of services connecting transport and logistics chains. Examples of such services are:

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<sup>6</sup> See UNECE Recommendation 14 on "Authentication of Trade Documents" 2014, ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2014/6 (link as of January 2019): [http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/recommendations/rec14/ECE\\_TRADE\\_C\\_CEFACT\\_2014\\_6E\\_Rec14.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/cefact/recommendations/rec14/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2014_6E_Rec14.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> The application of risk management and the use of risk-based selectivity (red/green channel) allows Customs to allocate its scarce resources to the high-risk areas while increasing the efficiency of the clearance process for low-risk shipments. See TFIG, UNECE Custom Risk management (link as of January 2019): <http://tfig.itcilo.org/contents/customs-risk-management.htm>.

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- (a) Information exchange regarding import and export of cargo between all players in the logistics and transport chain, sharing detailed information like the manifest, bill of lading or electronic consignment note;
- (b) Contracting of transport and freight forwarding services;
- (c) Status information and control, tracking and tracing of shipments throughout the entire logistics chain;
- (d) Terminal pre-notification for the pick-up or delivery of containers; and
- (e) Electronic facilitation of consolidation or division of shipments.

56. Where each of these services already delivers added-value to trade on an individual basis, the combination of services and the combining and reusing of information are important features of an SSP. With this integral, real-time reuse of available data, SSPs can enhance logistics by supporting synchro-modal planning where operators are enabled to change the modality of transport for goods or transport equipment at any given node in the supply chain.

57. SSPs are ideally situated to leverage the use of technologies such as the ‘Internet of Things’ (IOT), Location-Based Services (LBS), Blockchain and Data Pipelines on their platforms to create a more secure trade lane and to help operators:

- Gain insight on the status of the transported goods, especially on perishable goods;
- Improve logistics planning by using location-based data; and
- Combat crime, such as theft.

58. As an ultimate result, traders can improve their supply chain compliance and trade facilitation thanks to the rigorous systems and procedures of the SSP.

## E. Benefits

### 1. Benefits for trade

59. An SSP can offer trade benefits thanks to the opportunities it provides for data-sharing and reuse of information in the supply chain, including in multimodal transport. Currently, many of these opportunities are already provided by services which facilitate electronic information exchange between business partners. The operators of these B2B services usually take a neutral position and facilitate an intelligent and secure exchange of information that respects the business relations of their clients and does not disturb free market processes.

60. When a range of such services is offered by one platform, facilitating data-sharing and the reuse of information, in many cases it can be said that the platform operators already provide B2B single submission and reuse of data. The legal basis for such information sharing is the contract between the data holder and the operator. This provision is not only used for the data holder’s business needs, but also for its regulatory needs, as mentioned in the section on the relationship between SSP and NSW.

61. When SSPs provide an interface to official, regulatory systems (whether existing or new) traders and other supply chain stakeholders can continue to work using the web screens of the SSP (or their own industry applications and message standards) without being concerned by the consequences to their systems and processes of an NSW implementation, or even changes to an existing NSW. In this respect, the SSP ensures that



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B2G and G2B information exchange is translated into the proper formats and standards, and in compliance with industry and customer demands.

### 2. Benefits for Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs)

62. MSMEs can benefit from the existence of SSPs due to a combination of features an SSP brings to the trade environment. The following are some benefits:

- **Single submission:** when allowed by national legislation, MSMEs just need to submit all the required information (e.g. customs, tax, inspection) once and do not need to submit information to different places. This can improve their efficiency in international trade and reduce their costs.
- **Easier clearance:** MSMEs can rely on SSPs to help them to take care of the clearance process because SSP can facilitate the provision of complete and accurate declaration data to cross-border agencies.
- **Better financial support:** MSMEs can get better financial support from banks with the help of an SSP because an SSP may be able to facilitate increased trade finance collection security and provide better business risk control. Banks can provide MSMEs with better credit rankings and access to trade finance instruments when information on trade transactions is readily available through an SSP.
- **More efficient logistics:** MSMEs can get more efficient and cheaper logistics and transport services because SSPs can offer a wide range of services connecting transport and logistics chains.
- **Reduced business transaction costs:** with an SSP, MSMEs can interact with the standard import and export service eco-system with lower costs and higher efficiency. This may reduce the recruitment needs of MSMEs within their own international trade staff, thus saving human resources and management costs.

### 3. Benefits for administrations

63. Administrations can benefit from the existence of SSPs due to a combination of features an SSP brings to the Single Window environment. This combination of SSP features leads to more comprehensive, streamlined and automated business compliance with governments' legislative and regulatory requirements than without an SSP. Consequently, as both SSPs and the SWs include the terms of international trade treaties, this will also improve the efficiency of Single Windows.

64. SSPs could provide specific functions that Single Windows or authorities' systems may not cover. Specific benefits are as follows:

- Enhanced quality of data
  - SSPs often receive data from the source—data owner—and can ensure data quality by using comprehensive validations on data input. Since these validations are carried out centrally and consistently by SSPs, this also enhances the quality of the entire information chain. Often, SSPs have a broad business knowledge which helps in determining the right validation mechanisms. A high level of data quality ensures a smooth process with administration systems.
- Shorter time-to-market for changes initiated by authorities
  - As aligning changes only need to be done with a limited number of parties (the SSP and often only a few associations representing the business parties

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impacted), this will lead to solutions which are faster and easier to achieve and better fit to the needs of all stakeholders.

- Platform for connecting authorities with the business environment
  - SSPs can provide a platform, online or offline, where authorities can consult business parties on the implementation of new legislation, but also on business needs and technical developments. This platform, based on constructive cooperation among all parties, could have an official status or could be more free-format depending on the needs of the stakeholders.
- Easier road to standardization for administrations
  - SSPs can support the implementation and use of standardization and harmonization initiated by authorities (B2G) and support the continued use of well-established industry standards (B2B). This position as an intermediary can be used to prevent businesses being confronted with standards that are unfamiliar to them but can also be used to enhance harmonization of standards on both sides. Consequently, the SSP can translate new standards to old standards and vice versa, which can be beneficial to both administrations and the business environment.

### F. Some possible types of Single Submission Portals (SSP)

65. Multiple forms of systems can exist to assist the different actors in the supply chain to manage their activities in the chain. Each actor can have a very different view and different data needs. Naturally, over the years, software providers have developed systems to help each of these actors to perform their activities in the most efficient way possible. It is therefore not surprising that in the list below many of the types of SSPs identified cater to different types of economic operators. The main facilitation for each of these economic operators is that they only need to exchange with their own SSP service provider and that the SSP in question then performs most of the exchanges with other actors, whether they be private sector actors or government agencies.

66. The multiplicity of different systems illustrates the importance of using international standards. If each of these systems is developed and works in isolation from the others, it will be difficult or tedious to establish connections with other systems and the information exchanged may be defined very differently. For example, the date of arrival in a port community system would likely be very different from the date of arrival in a warehouse management system and so on. We therefore highly recommend using UN/CEFACT standards to define the base semantics of the information to be exchanged and recommend the consideration of UN/CEFACT standards for the data exchange.

#### 1. Port Community System (PCS)

67. A Port Community System usually defines itself as a neutral and open electronic platform enabling an intelligent and secure exchange of information between public and private stakeholders to improve the competitive position of sea and/or airport communities (sometimes referred to as Port Community User Groups)<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> UNECE Technical Note on Terminology for Single Window and other electronic platforms (ECE/TRADE/C/CEFACT/2017/10). Link as of January 2019:  
[http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/uncfact/plenary/2017/ECE\\_TRADE\\_C\\_CEFACT\\_2017\\_10\\_Technical\\_note\\_on\\_SW\\_Final.pdf](http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/uncfact/plenary/2017/ECE_TRADE_C_CEFACT_2017_10_Technical_note_on_SW_Final.pdf)

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68. The PCS can be based around a single port (whether sea, air, inland, or rail) or multiple ports within an economy. A PCS can be public, private or a public/private model. Where the PCS is a private organization, a government may still consider it to be a critical public infrastructure.

69. In situations where a Port Community System performs the same functions as a Single Window system (as defined in Recommendation 33) it is no longer considered an SSP. This could be the case when the PCS has received a clear mandate from the government to be the sole provider of specific services to facilitate regulatory requirements, and there is only one PCS in the given economy.

70. If there are multiple PCSs in the same economy, then carriers or other economic operators trading within the given economy will need to communicate with multiple systems; therefore, it is not a Single Window for all operations within that economy. When these conditions are fulfilled, the type of economic operator could be identified by the system in its name (e.g. Single Window for maritime carriers). Otherwise it might be considered a Single Submission Portal or as a system contributing to a Single Environment<sup>9</sup>.

### 2. Cargo Community System (CCS)

71. A Cargo Community System (CCS) is an information technology platform linked to the freight flows (import/export/transit) of any kind of cargo passing through an identified port, airport, or multimodal site(s) at a local or national level. A CCS is open to all parties involved in cargo freight and logistics, including customs administrations. It handles a database in which information is collected, processed, stored and exchanged and aims to enhance freight optimization, trade safety and security, cargo tracking and tracing, and the facilitation of customs and administrative procedures. These systems might be considered a Single Submission Portal or as contributing to a Single Environment.

### 3. Customs clearance systems

72. Many economic operators involved in international trade utilize customs clearance management software systems to prepare and transmit electronically all their detailed import, export or transit declarations to government customs administration IT systems. As paper-based declaration options are gradually replaced by the requirement for traders to file electronically, customs clearance systems provide a valuable and indispensable tool to economic operators who rely on the services offered to remain compliant with cross-border regulations.

73. Customs clearance systems often act as the front-end interface for traders to convey all their declarative information to government agencies for the clearance of the goods. In addition to aiding in the preparation of declarations and their supporting documents, these systems may also propose other functionalities to traders to facilitate data collection, automation, report creation, duty payment monitoring, etc.

74. Customs clearance systems can also enable traders to coordinate with other partners in the supply chain to exchange or prepare commercial documentation and data elements linked with the cross-border movement of goods.

### 4. Freight Forwarding System (FFS)

75. Most freight forwarders have electronic systems that permit them to prepare all the documentation related to the movement of goods and to coordinate and exchange

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid

information with other actors on the supply chain. The information is usually organized in a manner which is consistent with logistics operations and can help with multiple aspects of such movements including the management of arrivals/departures, the management of fleets, stock management and so on.

**5. Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT)**

76. Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade (ISMIT) Platforms can assemble service providers and service partners (such as customs brokers, freight forwarders, logistics service providers, warehouses, export agencies, banks, insurance companies, law firms, etc.) to provide MSMEs with professional international trade services such as customs clearance, tax refunds, foreign exchange settlement, logistics, insurance, financing, legal advice, etc.

**G. Key factors in the success of a Single Submission Portal**

77. To be successful, the SSP should be able to act as a trusted third party when providing information services, thus enabling B2B information exchange between stakeholders in trade and transport.

78. In addition, the SSP should provide its clients with a user-interface or electronic interface using internationally-recognized standards to facilitate the B2G and G2B information exchanges required for regulatory processes.

79. Other key factors for the success of an SSP include:

- (a) Knowledge of cross-border trade and transport regulatory requirements;
- (b) An accreditation to provide a single entry point for Business to Government (B2G) information exchange, according to national law;
- (c) Long-term commitment of one or more investors;
- (d) 24/7 service availability;
- (e) Optimal opportunities for business to reuse their data, when they wish to do so;
- (f) Clear uncoupling of the public and private domains, such that SSP clients do not need to adapt their interfaces or systems due to changes imposed by the NSW operator (or other stakeholders that use the SSP such as banks) because these are handled by the interface between the NSW (or others) and the SSP;
- (g) Acting as trusted third party, ensuring mutual trust and equality to its clients;
- (h) Focus on information exchange between multiple types of stakeholders in the same business environment; and
- (i) Cost efficiency.

## **Annex I: Table of abbreviations**

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<i>Acronym</i>	<i>Signification</i>
B2B	Business to Business
B2G	Business to Government
CCS	Cargo Community System
FFS	Freight Forwarding System
G2G	Government to Government
ISMIT	Integrated Services for MSMEs in International Trade
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
NSW	National Single Window
PCS	Port Community System
SSP	Single-Submission Portal
UN/CEFACT	United Nations Centre for Trade Facilitation and Electronic Business
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe

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## **Annex II: Explanation of terms**

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<i>Term</i>	<i>Definition</i>
Portal	An access point that allows traders to exchange information related to a specific activity in a single electronic platform
Platform	A platform is any hardware or software used to host an application or service.

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## Annex III: Repository/Case Studies of Single Submission Portals

A Repository of case studies of Single Submissions Portals may be maintained by the UNECE Secretariat based on the following questionnaire.

	Questions	Reply
<b>Organization identity</b>		
1	Type of Single Submission Portal (SSP) facility?	
2	Name of the SSP operator?	
3	Country of operation?	
4	Does the SSP provide a single access point for information sharing?	
5	Contact details	
<b>Background</b>		
6	What motivated the establishment of the SSP?	
7	What year was the SSP (or its predecessor) established?	
<b>Establishment</b>		
8	How was the SSP establishment funded? (For example: private sector funding, public sector funding, private-public sector funding...)	
9	Was a pilot project used to test the SSP before it was launched?	
<b>Legal aspects</b>		
10	How is the arrangement between the client and the SSP service provider established?	
11	What is the legal structure under which the SSP operates? (e.g. private limited company, partnership, non-profit organisation...)	
12	What kind of legal issues were encountered during the initial set-up of the SSP?	
13	If the SSP operates in conjunction with other SSPs or systems, what issues or requirements have been considered before entering such an arrangement?	
14	What kinds of the contractual arrangements are required for other organisations to interact with the SSP?	
15	Is there a certification process for other service providers before interfacing with the SSP?	





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