



Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

**REPORT
SPS COMMITTEE WORKSHOP ON TRANSPARENCY**

MONDAY, 20 JUNE 2022

**WTO, CENTRE WILLIAM RAPPARD, GENEVA
PARTICIPATION IN PERSON AND VIA ZOOM**

NOTE BY THE SECRETARIAT¹

The Secretariat of the World Trade Organization (WTO) organized a half-day workshop on transparency on 20 June 2022. This was the ninth SPS workshop on transparency (or transparency and coordination) organized by the Secretariat; the first eight took place in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2015, 2017 and 2019.² The workshop was held in hybrid format, with interpretation in the three working languages of the WTO. There were around 30 participants attending in person and over 200 connections on Zoom worldwide. Mr Juteau Déadjufo Toussé, Chairperson of the SPS Committee for the period 2021-2022, moderated the workshop. A dedicated [webpage for the workshop](#) had been made available ahead of the event, with relevant information, including the programme, circulated on 15 June 2022 in document [G/SPS/GEN/2015/Rev.1](#). In addition to the workshop, a "notifications clinic" targeted to SPS notification authorities and enquiry points was held virtually via Zoom on the afternoon of 20 June 2022, with over 150 connections.

The workshop covered the transparency provisions of the SPS Agreement, ongoing transparency related work in the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), WTO online tools and sources of SPS information, and presented in detail the functionalities of the new [ePing SPS&TBT Platform](#), which went live in March 2022. Participants also learned about the use of ePing in Viet Nam as part of an International Trade Centre (ITC) project. A brief summary of the workshop's different sessions can be found below.

Presentations from the workshop as well as the trilingual recordings are available on the [workshop's dedicated webpage](#) and can be accessed from the "Events, workshops and training" section under the WTO SPS Gateway (http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/sps_e/events_e.htm).

1 OBJECTIVE OF THE WORKSHOP

1.1. The purpose of the workshop was to provide an update on recent developments related to transparency and present the main functions of the new [ePing SPS&TBT Platform](#), which integrates SPS and TBT online transparency tools.

1.2. The workshop covered an overview of the transparency provisions of the SPS Agreement and of relevant Committee/Ministerial Decisions (session 1), transparency work in the TBT Committee (session 2), WTO tools and sources of SPS information (session 3), an overview of the new ePing SPS&TBT Platform (session 4), and the sharing of experiences related to the use of the new Platform (session 5).

¹ This document has been prepared under the Secretariat's own responsibility and is without prejudice to the positions of Members or to their rights and obligations under the WTO.

² The reports of these workshops are contained in documents [G/SPS/R/16](#), [G/SPS/R/32](#), [G/SPS/R/47](#), [G/SPS/R/60](#), [G/SPS/R/68](#), [G/SPS/R/80](#), [G/SPS/R/89](#) and [G/SPS/R/96](#) respectively.

2 WORKSHOP SESSIONS

2.1 Introduction ([Session 1](#))

2.1. In the first session, **Mr Rolando Alcalá** (WTO Secretariat) provided an overview of the transparency provisions in the SPS Agreement, contained in Article 7 and Annex B; of relevant Committee and Ministerial Decisions, in particular, the Recommended Transparency Procedures ([G/SPS/7/Rev.4](#)) and the Doha Ministerial Decision on Implementation-Related Issues and Concerns ([WT/MIN\(01\)/17](#)); as well as of relevant discussions in the SPS Committee. The Secretariat highlighted that a new technical revision of document [G/SPS/7/Rev.4](#) to update outdated information related to online tools will be circulated to Members ahead of the November 2022 SPS Committee meeting for their review and adoption. The Practical manual for SPS national notification authorities (NNAs) and SPS national enquiry points (NEPs)³ would also be updated. It was outlined that the main transparency obligations under the SPS Agreement were the obligation for WTO Members to notify draft regulations, publish regulations, establish an NEP, and designate an NNA. The session also discussed relevant recommendations on transparency contained in [G/SPS/7/Rev.4](#) as well as those related to equivalence ([G/SPS/19/Rev.2](#)), special and differential treatment ([G/SPS/33/Rev.1](#)), and regionalization ([G/SPS/48](#)). Also highlighted was the 5th Review of the SPS Agreement concluded in 2020, which contained specific recommendations related to transparency and coordination (see document [G/SPS/64](#) and Addendum). Furthermore, the Secretariat noted that the duties of SPS NNAs and NEPs could go beyond transparency obligations, for example to raise awareness at national level and build capacity. The last annual report of the level of implementation of the transparency provisions of the SPS Agreement had been circulated in document [G/SPS/GEN/804/Rev.14](#); [G/SPS/GEN/204/Rev.22](#).

2.2. In response to questions from participants, it was clarified that while the SPS Agreement required the establishment of an NEP to respond to reasonable questions, some Members have found it more functional to establish more than one NEP, for example to cover the areas of food safety, animal health and plant health. It was important that the contact information for the NEP(s) be communicated to the WTO. It was also noted that "reasonable questions" referred to in Annex B(3) were those related to SPS matters, and that according to the Recommended Transparency Procedures, questions or comments should be addressed to the Member notifying the measure, that should respond within five working days.

2.2 Transparency work in the TBT Committee ([Session 2](#))

2.3. **Ms Serra Ayrál** (WTO Secretariat) provided a snapshot of the transparency recommendations resulting from the triennial reviews of the TBT Agreement. The 9th Triennial Review of the TBT Agreement, which concluded in 2021 ([G/TBT/46](#)), contained 19 transparency-related recommendations including on developing new formats and guidelines, improving coordination through the ePing Platform, and exploring the use of IT tools for the translation of notified documents. Regarding improvements to online tools, the process to streamline TBT tools had been facilitated by feedback from Members participating in the "Friends of eTools" group, established in 2021. In 2021, 83 Members submitted at least one TBT notification and 61 per cent of new TBT specific trade concerns referred to notifications. The TBT Committee had established a new working group in March 2022 to move forward with transparency-related recommendations.

2.4. In response to a question on the use of tools for the translation of notified documents, it was clarified that possible tools discussed in the TBT Committee could be explored for use in the SPS Committee. It was noted that in 2021, a total of 7,800 notifications had been circulated in the WTO, of which around 75 per cent were related to SPS or TBT. Regarding the reviews of the SPS and TBT Agreements, it was explained that following the 2001 [Doha Ministerial Decision](#), it had been decided that the SPS Agreement would be reviewed every four years, instead of every three years like the TBT Agreement.

2.3 WTO tools and sources of SPS information ([Session 3](#))

2.5. **Ms Nazia Mohammed** (WTO Secretariat) provided a brief overview of relevant sources of SPS-related information, including: (i) [Documents Online](#), a repository of all WTO documents,

³ The Practical Manual for SPS National Notification Authorities and SPS National Enquiry Points can be downloaded from: <http://www.wto.org/spstransparency>.

including SPS; (ii) [Trade Concerns Database](#), which provides information on trade concerns including those discussed in the SPS Committee, as well as the TBT and Market Access Committees; (iii) [eAgenda](#), which had improved transparency in the work of the SPS Committee by allowing authorized users to submit online agenda items ahead of SPS Committee meetings, which are made available for other users in real time; and (iv) the new [ePing SPS&TBT Platform](#), which integrates all SPS and TBT transparency tools, as well as the ePing alert system, into a single platform. A recap of the functionalities and types of SPS information available from the different platforms was also presented.

2.4 Overview of the new ePing SPS&TBT Platform ([Session 4](#))

2.6. **Mr Rolando Alcalá** and **Ms Carmina Báez** (WTO Secretariat) presented in detail, through a live demo, the main functions of the new ePing SPS&TBT Platform, including: (i) searching of information on notifications, specific trade concerns, NNA and NEP contact information; (ii) submission of notifications; and (iii) communication/outreach functions. It was noted that registered users benefitted from additional features, including receiving email alerts on notifications on products and/or markets of interest, as well as reaching out to other Members' notification authorities and enquiry points. In addition, certain functions, such as the submission of notifications, were password-protected. Some of the benefits highlighted included: extracting data from a single source, reducing errors and maintenance costs; searching information across the SPS and TBT Committees; and using the WTO single sign-on authentication system. It was highlighted that the official launch of the new ePing SPS&TBT Platform, with senior officials from the three ePing partner organizations, WTO, UNDESA, and ITC, had been tentatively planned for 13 July 2022.⁴

2.5 Sharing of experiences related to the use of the new ePing SPS&TBT Platform ([Session 5](#))

2.7. In the last session, **Mr Vianney Lesaffre** (ITC) shared insights from an ITC project implemented in Viet Nam to help traders comply with SPS and TBT requirements by receiving alerts on regulatory changes in foreign markets, using the ePing alert system. According to an ITC business survey on regulatory and procedural trade obstacles, technical measures (SPS/TBT) accounted for the largest share of non-tariff measures for the agriculture and manufacturing sectors. The presentation highlighted how transparency-related issues, including difficulties finding information on regulations, affected exports in several sectors. Mr Lesaffre also shared an example of how a university project had provided translations and explanations of selected notifications into Vietnamese. In closing, he noted that there were over 800 registered ePing users from Viet Nam, from the public sector, private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and academia.

3 NOTIFICATIONS CLINIC

3.1. Following the workshop, a "notifications clinic" targeted to SPS NNAs and NEPs was held virtually via Zoom on 20 June 2022 afternoon, with interpretation in the three working languages of the WTO. This was the first time ever that a "notifications clinic" was held for SPS officials. The highly interactive format facilitated an open discussion on the more practical transparency issues. Specifically, it provided an opportunity for direct consultations with the Secretariat on questions related to the new [ePing SPS&TBT Platform](#).

3.2. The WTO Secretariat provided a brief overview of the main functions of the ePing SPS&TBT Platform, and presented the notifications submission and outreach functions of the Platform through a live demo. Many questions were discussed, including on the different notification access rights, email alerts, advanced search filters, multiple notification administrators, domestic coordination, and the development of a mobile application to facilitate private sector use of the Platform. There were over 150 connections to the "notifications clinic".

⁴ The official launch of the ePing SPS&TBT Platform took place on 13 July 2022. See news item here: [WTO | 2022 News items - Improved online platform launched to ease access to product information](#).