WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures
Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade

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EPING USER SURVEY

SUMMARY OF RESPONSES

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This document, prepared by the WTO Secretariat, contains a summary of the ePing survey responses.

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1 BACKGROUND

1.1. In the context of the 7th Triennial Review completed in December 2015, the TBT Committee requested the Secretariat to develop an online alert system for TBT notifications, in cooperation with other organizations.[1] In response, the WTO Secretariat joined forces with UNDESA and ITC for the development and maintenance of a new SPS/TBT notification alert system called ePing.[2] The publicly available system was launched during the November 2016 meeting of the TBT Committee.

1.2. ePing's email alert service allows registered users to receive SPS/TBT notifications of particular interest to them based on criteria such as products covered or export markets.[3] The system also offers a number of additional features, such as the Enquiry Point Management tool and discussion fora, with a view to facilitating dialogue among public and private stakeholders in addressing trade problems at an early stage.

1.3. Since the launch of ePing, the three partner organizations have been involved in a range of training and outreach activities while also continuing to work on the maintenance and further fine-tuning of the system.

1.4. An online survey was conducted in February 2017 to collect some preliminary feedback from users and identify potential areas for further improvements and enhancements. It was sent to all registered ePing users, which totalled 1,635 at the time.[4] 338 users or 21%, covering 78 countries/territories, replied.

1.5. Section 2 below summarizes the key points that can be gleaned from the responses while Section 3 provides further details and statistical data on the specific responses received for each question.

2 SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS RAISED

2.1 Users value ePing's customized alerts

2.1. The survey results indicate that users highly appreciate the customized and timely alerts as well as the user-friendly set up of ePing. The alerts facilitate the task of Enquiry Points in managing incoming notifications and reaching out to their stakeholders. It also allows other

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[1] Seventh Triennial Review of the Operation and Implementation of the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (G/TBT/37, para. 5.12.d).

[2] www.epingalert.org

[3] The data on SPS and TBT notifications is pulled from the SPS and TBT Information Management Systems using an XML feed (http://spsims.wto.org and http://tbtims.wto.org).

[4] As of 30 June 2017, ePing had 2,292 registered users.

government officials as well as private sector stakeholders, especially SMEs, to access notifications of particular interest in a timely manner, without waiting for information to be processed and transmitted through their Enquiry Points or sectoral associations.

2.2 More training needed to navigate the system, especially the Enquiry Point Management Tool

2.2. Users do indicate that they would like to receive more help on how to use the system. Some highlight the need for more online training, including a quick-start guide, and others prefer face-to-face training. While the three partner organizations have already delivered a range of training sessions on ePing, more training and outreach is needed to assist current users and attract new ones. Also, the user guide needs to be updated and improved in line with the latest changes to the system.

2.3. In addition to its alert and search functions for SPS and TBT notifications, ePing incorporates an Enquiry Point Management tool, which can lead to significant efficiency gains and facilitate the process of domestic consultations and information sharing. However, this tool is so far not being used widely. Partner organizations need to continue to reach out to Enquiry Points to raise awareness and provide training on the functions of this specific tool, which only Enquiry Points can access.[5] At the same time, feedback from Enquiry Points can also help improve the tool.

2.3 Role of languages in enhancing global and local reach

2.4. With respect to languages, some users underline the importance of having access not only to full texts of notified regulations, but also to their translations into English. While ePing does not provide a translation service, it can actually serve as a forum for users to share unofficial translations. Other users would like to see the system operate in their local language. While the interface remains available in English, French and Spanish, users can use their local language to share files or communicate through the national discussion fora.

2.4 Suggested enhancements to address needs of users

2.5. In terms of improvements or enhancements to the system, proposals by users include the following:

- improve Enquiry Point Management Tool to better track national users' profiles/preferences

- receive notification alerts as SMS on phones

- allow better technical integration of ePing with other national websites/systems

- convert ePing to local language

- expand alerts to include SPS/TBT Committee documents, agendas, meeting dates

- expand alerts to other WTO notifications; technical assistance activities on offer

- send alerts when proposed regulations are actually adopted[6]

- improve product-based searches and alerts by making sure all notifications include HS/ICS codes and/or by introducing sectoral product categories[7]

- introduce general discussion forum, separate from notification-specific fora

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[5] Depending on Members' internal arrangements, this tool can be used by the Enquiry Point and/or the Notification Authority.

[6] Following the recommendations of the SPS and TBT Committees, Members sometimes use the Addendum format to notify the adoption of a proposed regulation. These Addenda are then included in ePing and the alerts.

[7] Some of the data gaps were due to the fact that the Addenda/Corrigenda notification formats are mainly in free text and do not contain specific fields for products covered or objectives of the notified measures. This is currently being addressed by carrying over and incorporating information from the parent notification, where these are available.

2.6. Partner agencies will assess these suggestions and consult as necessary with Members, with a view to improving the system further.

2.5 Complementary efforts necessary to draw maximum benefits from ePing

2.7. It is encouraging that users have actually taken specific action upon receiving alerts of particular concern, such as seeking information, contacting government officials or private sector stakeholders, formulating comments, etc. However, as users also point out, a number of complementary elements are necessary for drawing maximum benefits from ePing's services. These include awareness of rights and obligations under the SPS and TBT Agreements, fulfilment of notification obligations by all Members, effective national coordination/consultation mechanisms and active participation in SPS/TBT Committees. If notifications are missing information, if exporters do not know how to channel their concerns, or if a Member does not participate in SPS/TBT Committee meetings, then the tool itself will have limited benefits. Therefore, training programmes on ePing need to go hand in hand with national initiatives as well as technical assistance in these complementary areas.

2.8. The survey responses are indicative that ePing fills a gap in terms of timely access to information on evolving SPS and TBT requirements. The WTO Secretariat will continue to collaborate closely with UNDESA and ITC to ensure the well-functioning and sustainability of the system, to offer training and outreach activities, and resources permitting, to introduce further enhancements to the system.

2.9. This first survey was conducted three months after the official launch of the system where some users were still in the early stages of getting to know the system (although there were some registered users during the pilot phase). The Secretariat intends to repeat the survey towards the end of 2017 for further feedback and guidance.
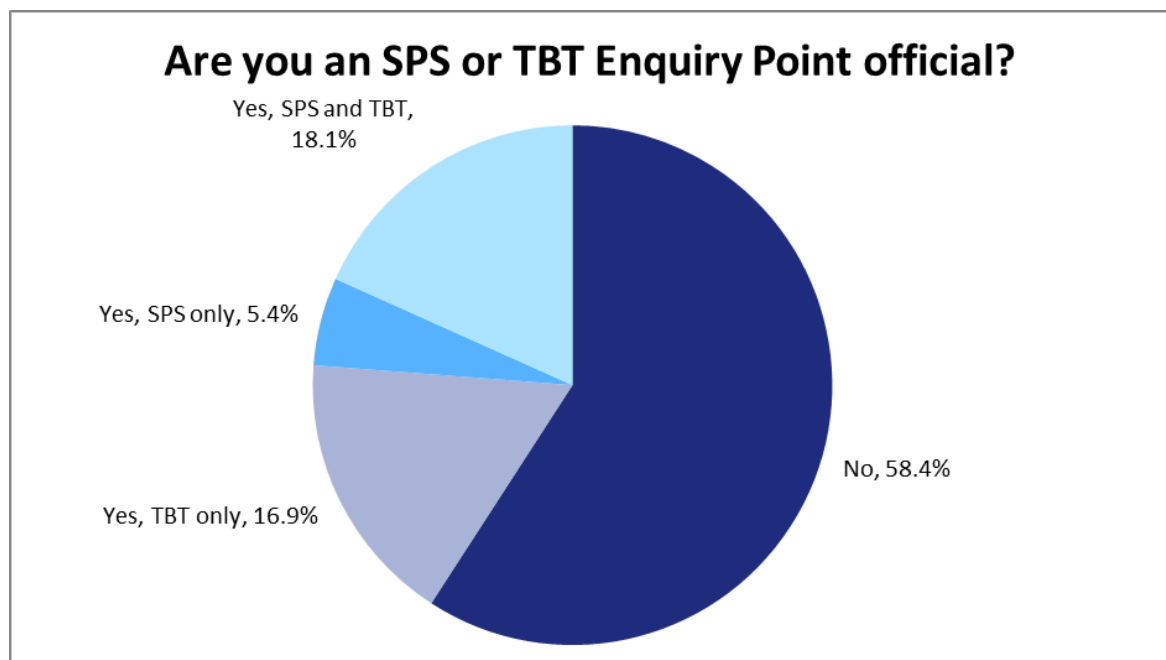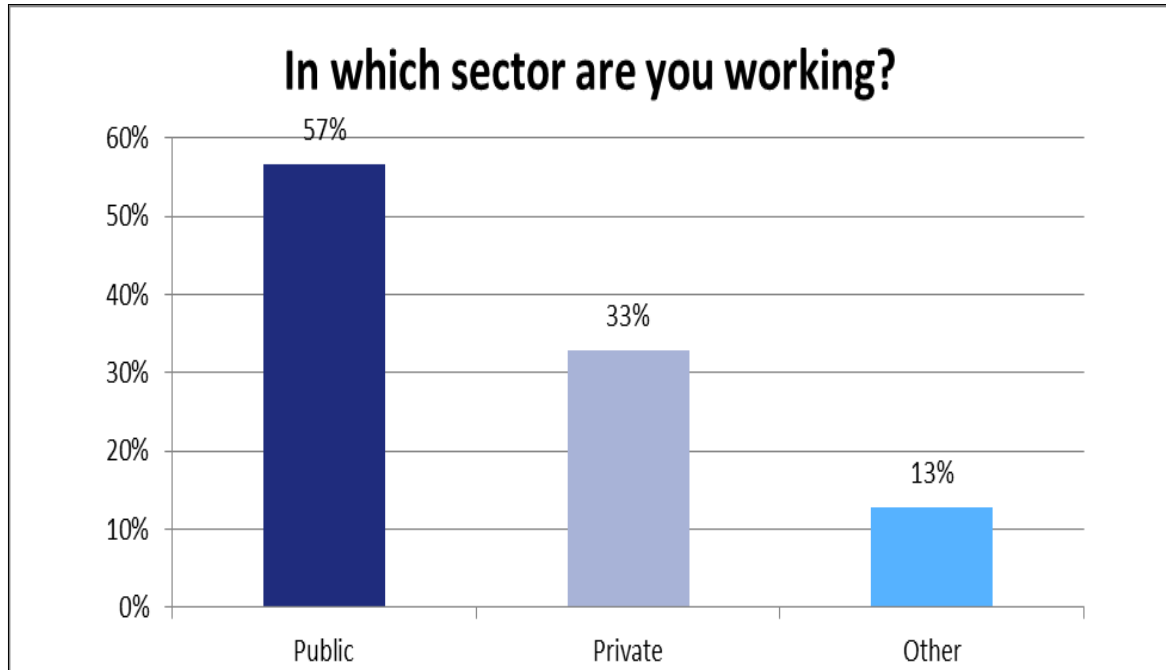
3 FURTHER DETAILS ON THE RESPONSES

3.1 Profile of respondents

3.1. As indicated above, 338 users (out of 1,635) responded to the survey. The table below indicates the countries/territories with the highest number of replies.

Uganda	38	Tanzania	8
Australia	26	New Zealand	8
United States of America	22	Germany	8
Japan	18	Mexico	7
Turkey	11	Singapore	6
Indonesia	11	Rwanda	6
Canada	11	India	5
Brazil	11	Belgium	5

3.2. 57% of the respondents[8] work in the public sector and 33% in the private sector. 40% of respondents work as an SPS/TBT Enquiry Point official.

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[8] The term "respondents" is used to refer to the number of respondents that have replied to a certain question. This can differ, since respondents were not obliged to reply to all questions.

In which sector are you working?

Public: 57%
Private: 33%
Other: 13%

Are you an SPS or TBT Enquiry Point official?

Yes, SPS and TBT, 18.1%
Yes, SPS only, 5.4%
Yes, TBT only, 16.9%
No, 58.4%

3.2 Questions on ePing

3.3. The survey included 14 questions: three on users' affiliation, eight specifically on ePing and three on SPS/TBT notifications more generally.

3.2.1 How did you hear about ePing?

3.4. About one third of the respondents heard about ePing through government meetings and workshops, 26% through UN and WTO workshops and 24% through a UN, WTO or ITC newsletter.
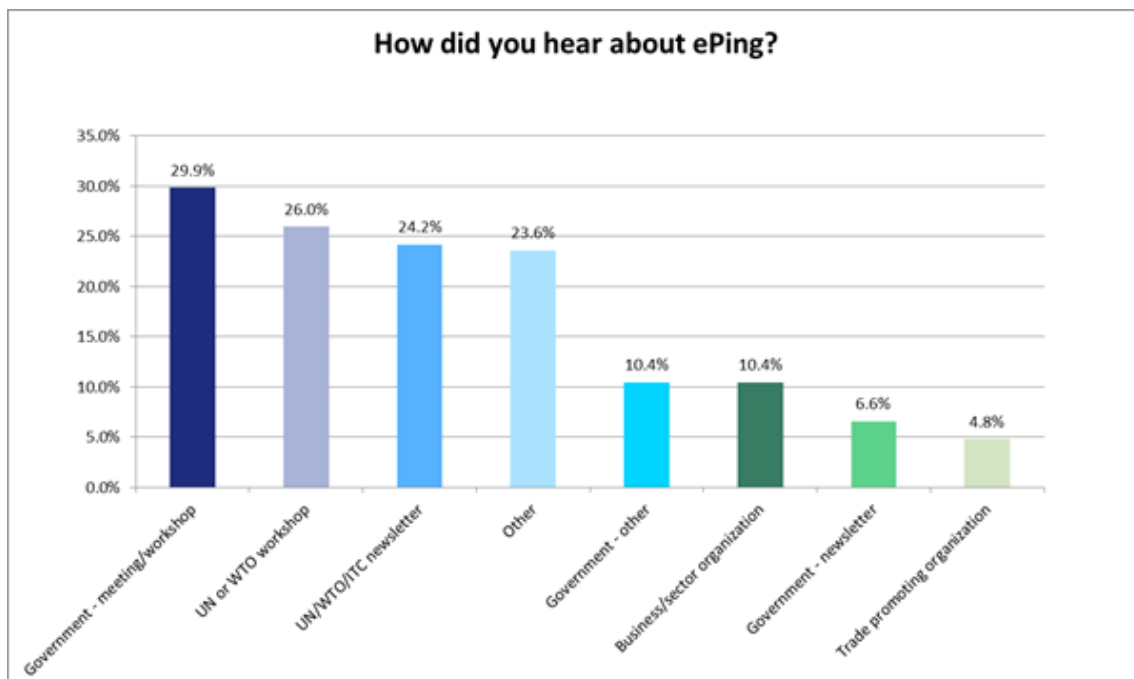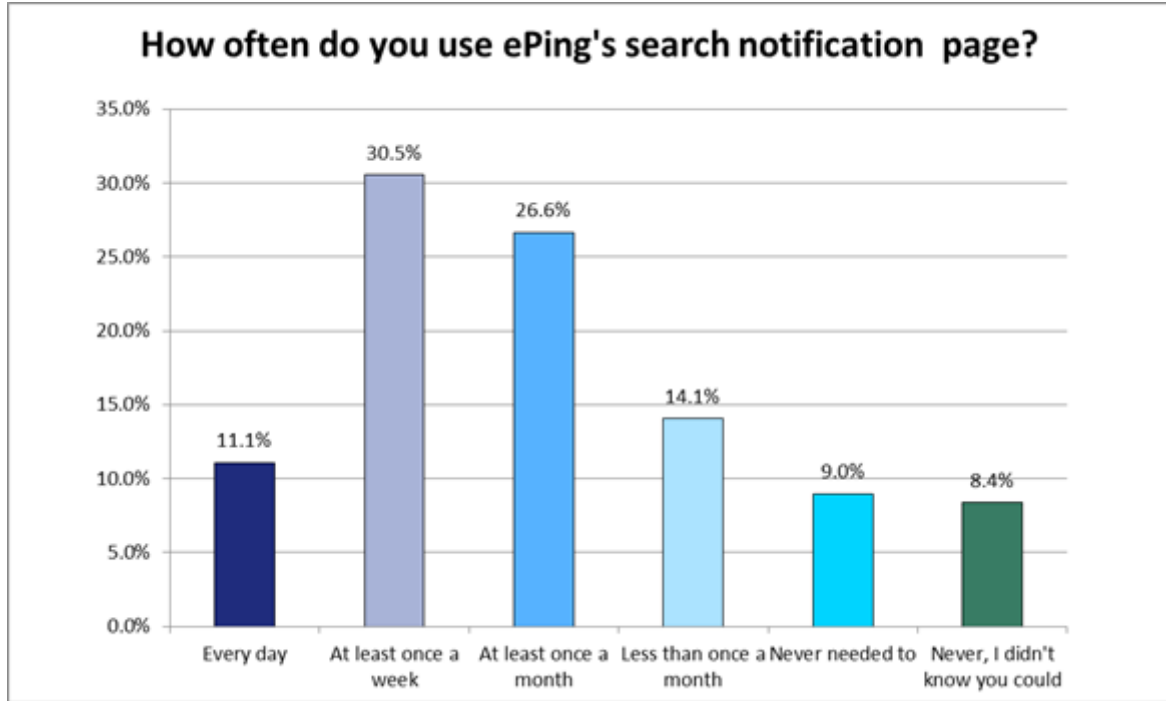
3.2.2 How often do you read your ePing email alert?

3.5. Respondents indicated that they read the ePing alert frequently: 80% read the email alert either daily or weekly.
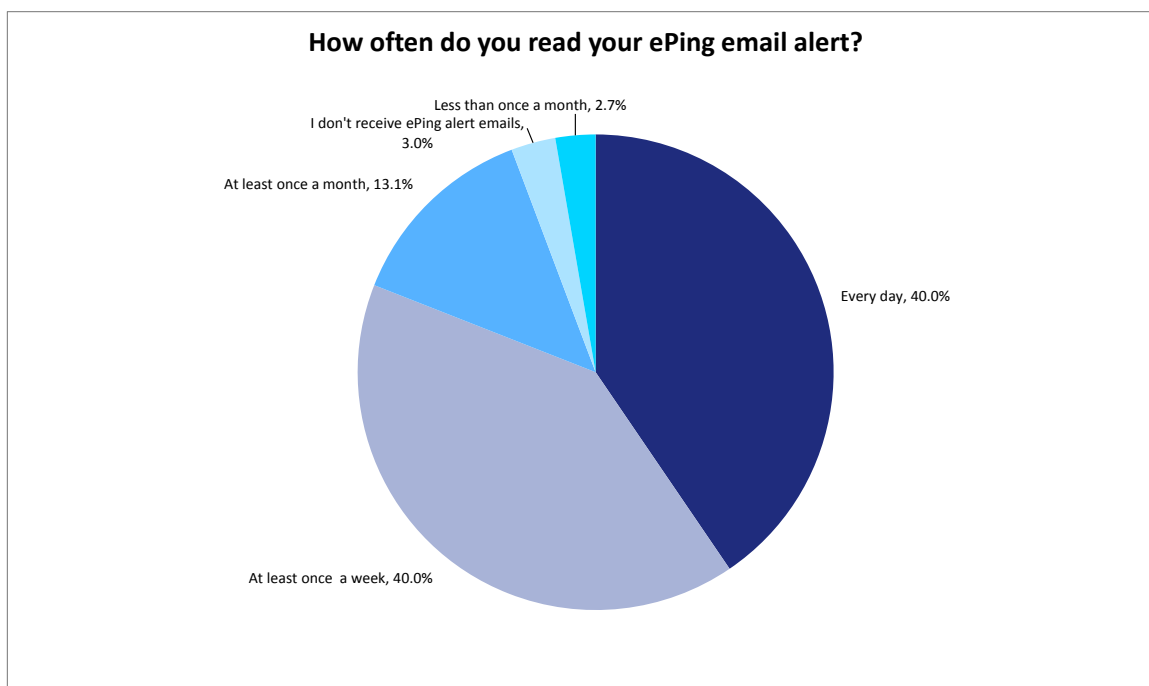
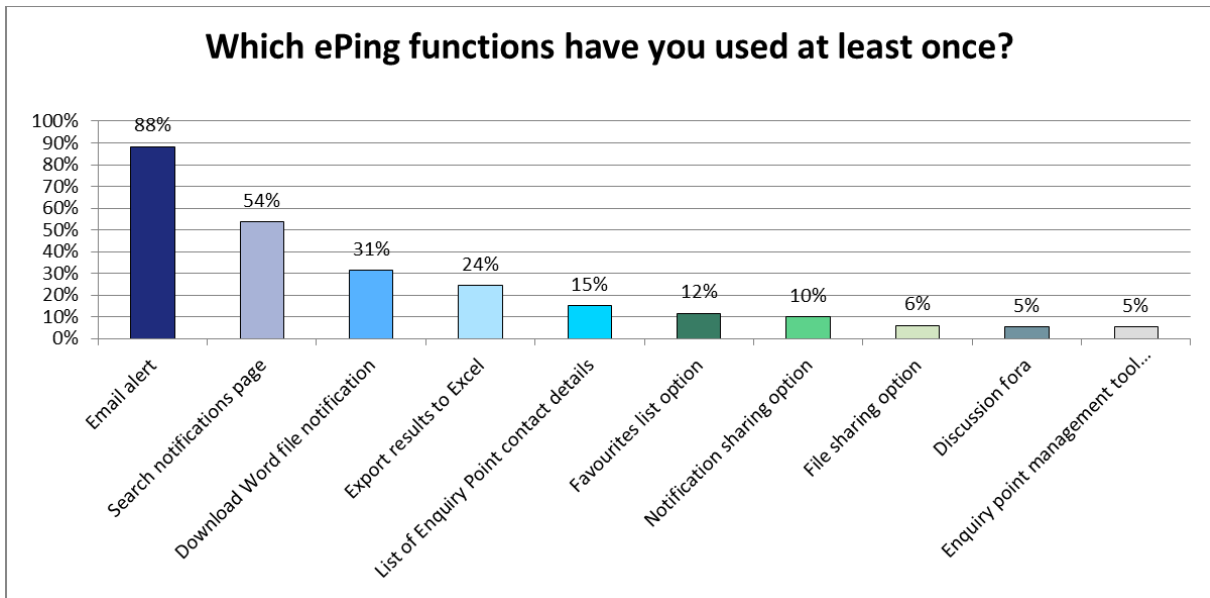### 3.2.3 How often do you use ePing's search notification page?

3.6. The search function for SPS/TBT notifications on the ePing website is also a frequently used tool: more than 40% of respondents use the search page at least once a week, and 27% at least once a month. However, 8% did not know this feature was available on ePing, indicating that more training and information activities might be necessary.

How often do you use ePing's search notification page?

Bar chart showing usage frequency:
- Every day: 11.1%
- At least once a week: 30.5%
- At least once a month: 26.6%
- Less than once a month: 14.1%
- Never needed to: 9.0%
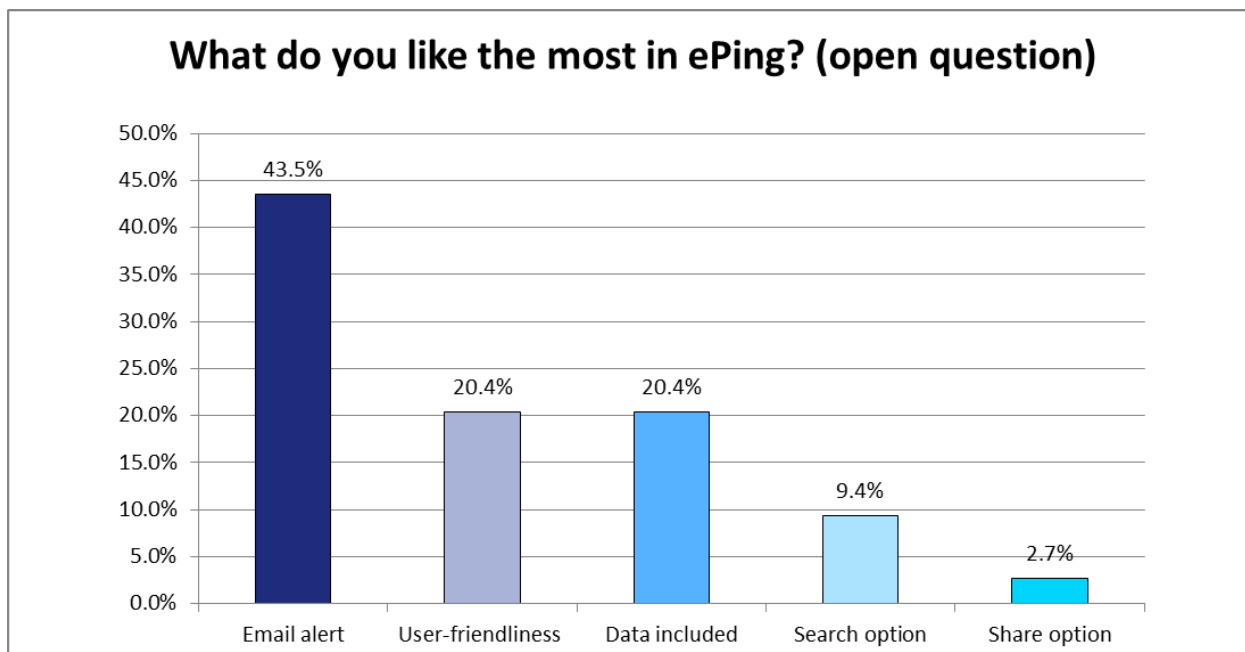- Never, I didn't know you could: 8.4%

3.2.4 Which ePing functions have you used at least once?

3.7. The email alert and the notification search page are the two most popular functions of ePing. Besides these functions, 30% of respondents downloaded the word file of a notification at least once, 24% exported search results to an excel file, and 15% consulted the Enquiry Point contact details list.

Which ePing functions have you used at least once?

Bar chart showing:
- Email alert: 88%
- Search notifications page: 54%
- Download Word file notification: 31%
- Export results to Excel: 24%
- List of Enquiry Point contact details: 15%
- Favourites list option: 12%
- Notification sharing option: 10%
- File sharing option: 6%
- Discussion fora: 5%
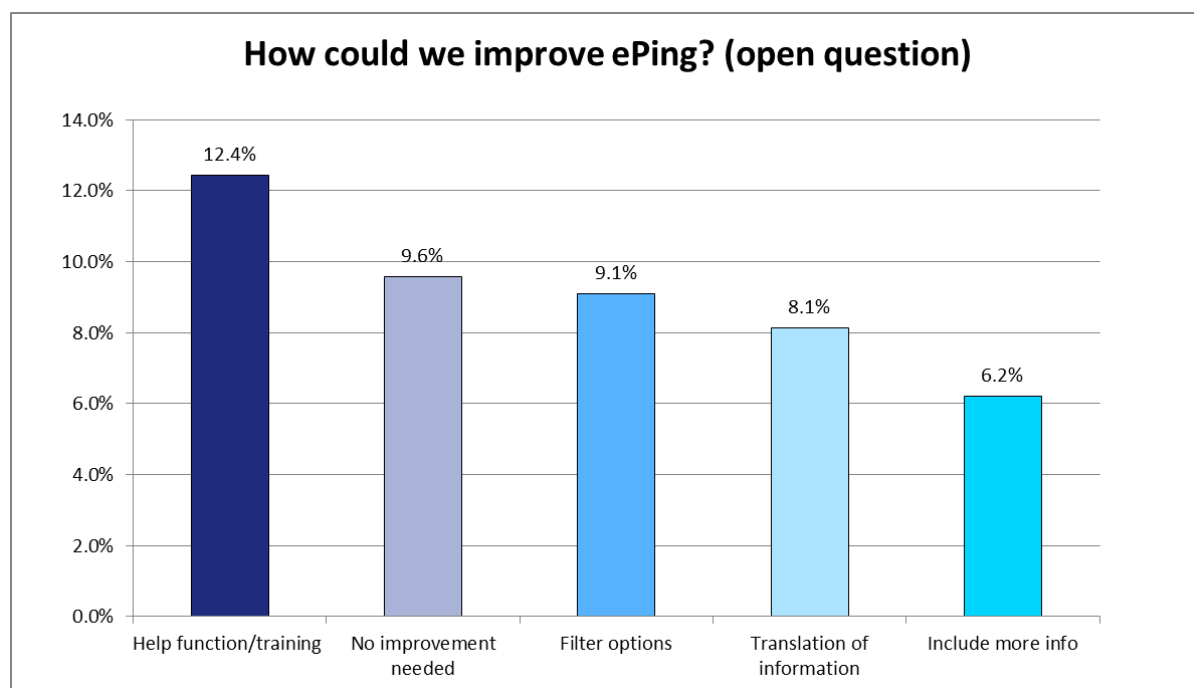- Enquiry point management tool…: 5%

3.2.5 What do you like the most in ePing?

3.8. When asked what they most like about ePing, 44% of respondents referred to the email alert. 20% indicated that they appreciated the user-friendliness the most and 20% mentioned the data included in the ePing alerts and website.

What do you like the most in ePing? (open question)

A bar chart showing:
- Email alert: 43.5%
- User-friendliness: 20.4%
- Data included: 20.4%
- Search option: 9.4%
- Share option: 2.7%

3.2.6 How could we improve ePing?

3.9. ePing could be improved by including more help options or providing training, according to 12% of respondents. 9% of respondents indicated that filter options could be enhanced and 8% pointed to language issues and asked to provide information in other than the three official WTO languages.

How could we improve ePing? (open question)

A bar chart showing:
- Help function/training: 12.4%
- No improvement needed: 9.6%
- Filter options: 9.1%
- Translation of information: 8.1%
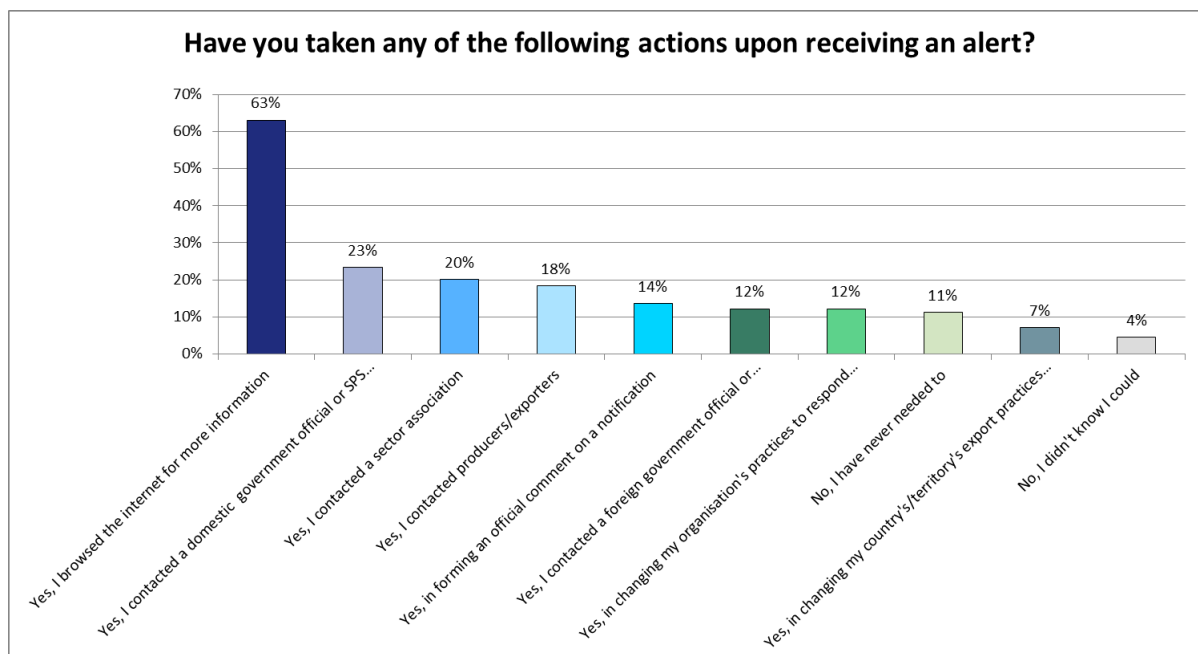- Include more info: 6.2%

3.2.7 What would help you better use ePing?

3.10. 55% of respondents indicated that online training would help them to make better use of the ePing system. 47% stated that a quick-start guide would be helpful. 40% of respondents referred to online assistance and 34% to face-to-face training.

What would help you better use ePing?

Online training: 55.1%
Quickstart guide: 46.5%
Online assistance: 39.5%
Face-to-face training: 34.2%
Other: 7.0%
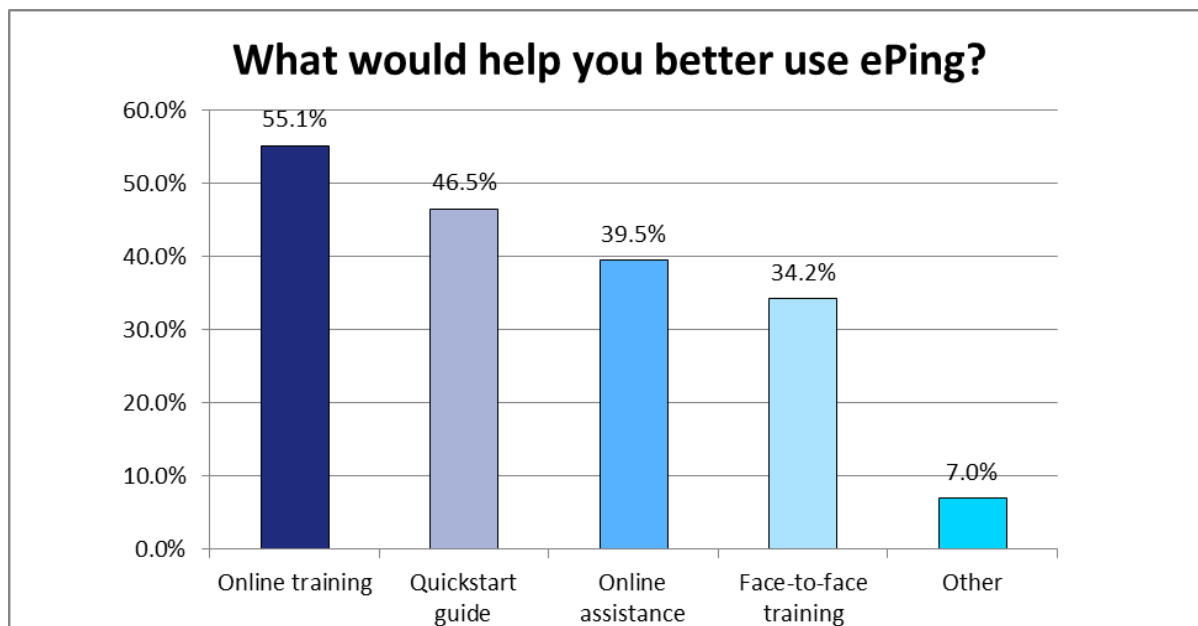
3.2.8 Have you taken any of the following actions upon receiving an alert?

3.11. More than 60% of respondents have browsed the internet for more information upon receiving an email alert; 23% have contacted a domestic government or Enquiry Point and 20% a sector association; 18% have contacted producers and/or exporters; 14% have formed an official comment to a notification; 12% have contacted a foreign government official or Enquiry Point; 12% have changed their organization's practices and 7% their country's/territory's practices in order to respond to the new regulation.

Have you taken any of the following actions upon receiving an alert?

- Yes, I browsed the internet for more information: 63%
- Yes, I contacted a domestic government official or SPS...: 23%
- Yes, I contacted a sector association: 20%
- Yes, I contacted producers/exporters: 18%
- Yes, in forming an official comment on a notification: 14%
- Yes, I contacted a foreign government official or...: 12%
- Yes, in changing my organisation's practices to respond...: 12%
- No, I have never needed to: 11%
- Yes, in changing my country's/territory's export practices...: 7%
- No, I didn't know I could: 4%

3.3 Questions on SPS&TBT notifications

3.3.1 Do SPS and TBT notifications provide enough information and are they easily understood?

3.12. The majority of respondents indicated that SPS and TBT notifications provide sufficient information and are easily understood. However, 14% stated that notifications do not contain enough information and 8% responded that notifications are difficult to understand.
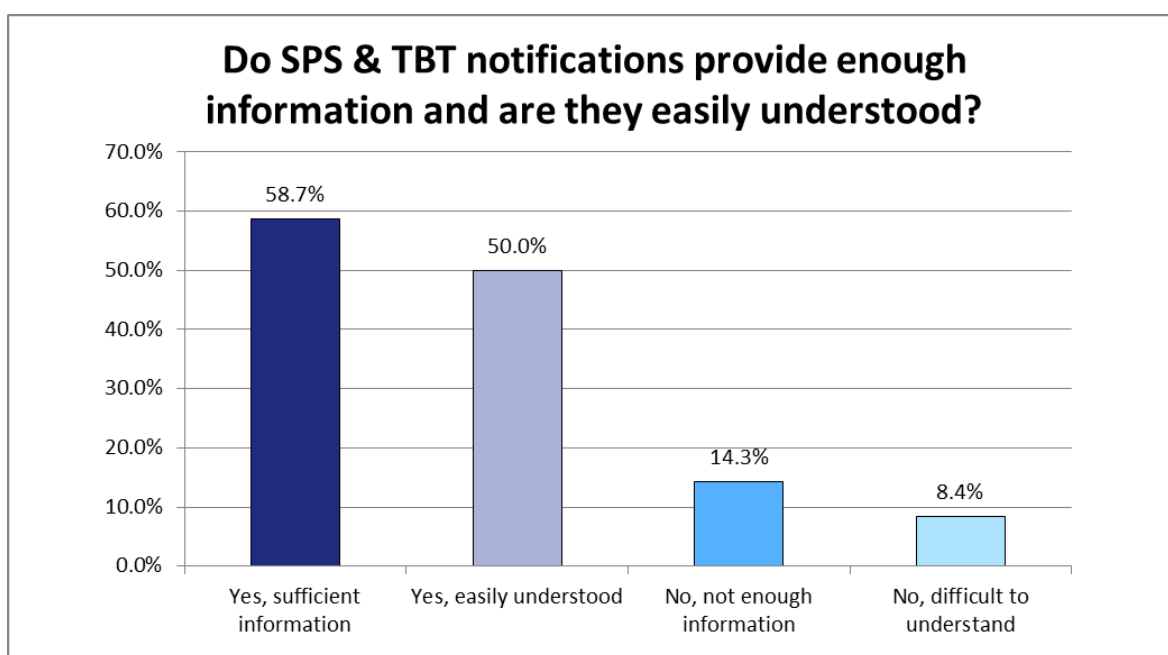
3.3.2 Apart from ePing, how else do you learn about SPS or TBT issues?

3.13. 66% of respondents learned about SPS and TBT issues through the government, 58% through workshops organized by international organizations, 40% through private sector stakeholders, 23% though news and media, and 23% through sector associations.
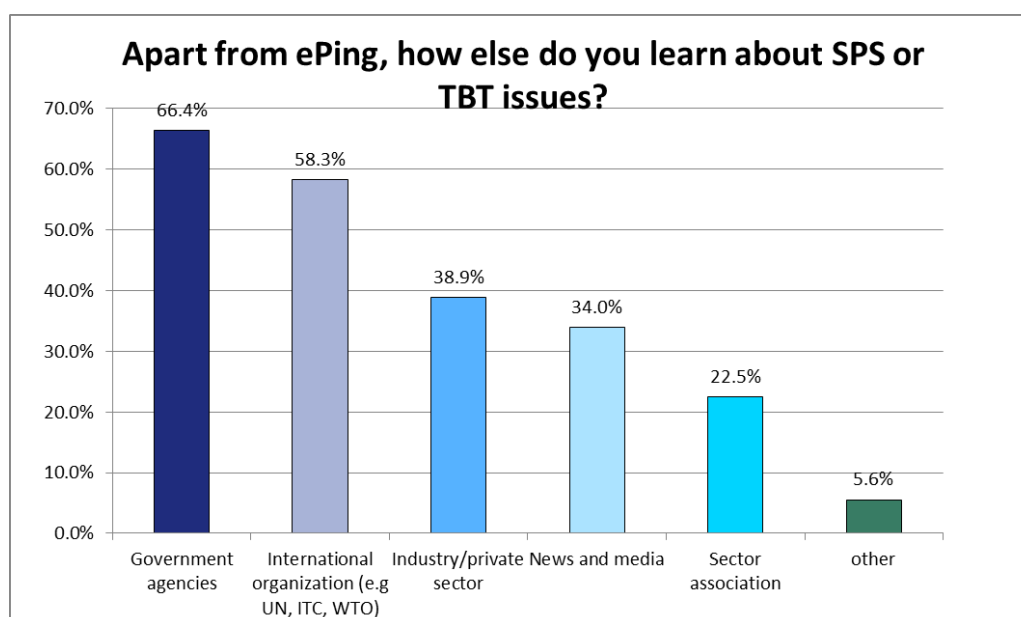
3.3.3 What could be improved to help you learn more about SPS and TBT issues?

3.14. Training and technical assistance are the most cited activities when asking what could improve knowledge on SPS and TBT issues. 16% of respondents indicated that more info should be provided and 5% referred to sensitization and promotion activities.

14. What could be improved to help you learn more about SPS and TBT issues? (open question)

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