EASTERN PARTNERSHIP TRADE HELPDESK

INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) Trade Helpdesk, launched in late 2019, is a EU4Business project that is being implemented by the International Trade Centre (ITC), a joint agency of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. The 5 year long project aims to increase economic ties between the EU and the EaP countries and within these countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine).

The project has six components:

1. The EAP Trade Information Portal, which will provide trade information on the region and the EU, complementing information that is already available on national web sites.
2. An Online Helpdesk, available via the portal, which will allow companies to report on issues they face in relation to exporting or importing.
3. National surveys of non-tariff measures to identify regulatory and procedural trade obstacles experienced by companies.
4. Sector specific guides to exporting to the EU, the sectors to be selected in consultation with relevant authorities in each country.
5. Trade in services data management training and support to build the capacity of relevant institutions in each country to collect and process trade in services data for selected sectors.
6. Capacity building programme in market analysis at country level, based on the information available through the Portal, to assist business support organisations and governmental institutions to identify market opportunities within the EaP region and in the EU.

These components are described in more detail in the following sections.

1. THE EASTERN PARTNERSHIP TRADE INFORMATION PORTAL

The EaP Trade Information Portal will provide information on the following:

- Trade statistics and trade indicators for originating and destination countries.
- Export potential data to identify products and markets with (untapped) export potential as well as opportunities for export diversification.
- Customs tariffs, applied MFN tariffs at the national tariff line level, preferential tariffs, trade agreements and related rules of origin.
- Compulsory requirements (non-tariff measures): product specific as well as general requirements applied by the EU and EAP countries on their imports and exports;
- Business contacts: list of trading companies and their contact details, searchable by product.

COMPLEMENTARITY
The portal will be designed to complement information available from national web sites and will include links to these sources.

LANGUAGE
The portal will be developed in English. The first level of the portal's interface will be available in each country's official language and in English and Russian. A summary of compulsory requirements will be available in English and Russian. Official documents (legislation etc.) will remain in the original language.

DATA GATHERING
ITC will collaborate with the relevant government agencies in each country to collect the most recent trade statistics and information on tariffs and non-tariff measures, enabling the continuous update of information on the online portal.

> **TIMING**
> The portal will be designed during the first year of the project, with a beta version available at the end of 2020. The completed version of the portal will be *launched* in mid-2021.

2. ONLINE HELPDESK FOR REPORTING TRADE OBSTACLES

An Online Helpdesk, available through the portal, will enable companies to report trade obstacles they encounter while exporting or importing. They will also be able to use the system to request information they have been unable to locate on the portal or in other sources.

The obstacles and enquiries submitted on the portal will be channelled to the EAP Trade Helpdesk's "problem solving network", made up of national focal points located in relevant national governmental and business support institutions. The focal points in the institutions will receive an immediate notification from the system about the problems or inquiries submitted through the system and can respond by providing information and advice.

By monitoring the flow of cases in the system, national authorities will have an additional instrument to monitor trade barriers and to consider remedial policies or required reforms to address the identified barriers.

> **TIMING**
> The development of the Online Helpdesk system will be completed in the second year of the project (2021). The network of national focal points will also be established during the second year of the project and the members will receive appropriate training in the management of the system.

3. NATIONAL SURVEYS OF TRADE OBSTACLES

Surveys of companies in each country will be undertaken to identify and document obstacles they face in relation to trade in goods and services.

The surveys will employ an ITC methodology, adjusted to national circumstances through consultation with relevant stakeholders. The surveys will cover all goods sectors and three services sectors (i.e. transport and logistics; information and communications technologies (ICT) and ICT-enabled services; and tourism).

The results will serve as an evidence base for stakeholder consultations that are aimed at designing mitigating actions. The results will also provide a representative baseline against which the issues reported through the Helpdesk can be benchmarked.

TIMING
The surveys will be launched in the first year of the project (June 2020). The surveys and related consultation process will be completed by year 3 of the project (2023).

4. EXPORT GUIDES ON SELECTED PRODUCTS

Sector specific guides on the administrative procedures required to export from the six EaP countries to the EU market will be created and made available on the EAP Trade Information Portal.

The products to be included in the guides will be selected in consultation with the relevant national authorities in each country. The administrative steps that an exporter has to go through before shipping their products will be documented in detail, listing the required documents, their cost, and information about the institutions involved in issuing the documents. The mapping of the related export procedures will also allow for the identification of possible duplications and the scope for streamlining administrative processes.

TIMING
The selection of the sectors and the creation of the guides will start in the second year of the project (2021) and be completed in the third year (2022).

5. TRADE IN SERVICES DATA MANAGEMENT

There are a number of challenges in relation to the collection of data on trade in services. These include the intangible nature of services, the limited capacity of national statistics agencies to expand their coverage to services, and the dispersed nature of relevant data sources.

In terms of the international availability of trade in services data, members of the inter-agency Task Force on Statistics of International Trade in Services (TFSITS), which include the OECD, UNCTAD, WTO and the IMF, compile trade in services data at an aggregated level. Similarly, national submissions to the WTO on services data is at an aggregated level and, where available, is not comprehensive.

Given the above, the aim of this component will be to build capacity in each country to collect and process trade data in one selected services sector. The component will begin with an assessment of what services data is available in each country and identify the gaps that exist in identifying and collecting services data. Following this, and in conjunction with national counterparts, a priority service sector will be selected for each country.

A training programme will be conducted to build the capacity of staff in key institutions on the methodology for the collection of services data. The programme will be developed and delivered in collaboration with UNCTAD and WTO and will be based on the *Compilers' Guide for the Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services*, produced by the TFSITS.

Training and advisory support will also be provided for the processing of the services data to be collected, including in terms of survey methodology, sampling, and estimations of missing data. The services data that is collected during the project may be integrated into the information disseminated through the EaP Trade Information Portal and will be made available to the relevant national authorities.

TIMING
The component will run over the course of the project duration.

6. CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME IN MARKET ANALYSIS

ITC will deliver a capacity building programme, at national level, based on the EAP Trade Information Portal's resources, ITC's suite of market analysis tools and other trade information sources. The programme will include training on:

- The application of the resources available through the portal
- Preparation of market profiles
- Training of trainers on market analysis and the usage of the EaP Trade Information Portal

The programme will enable the participants to make full use of the Portal's resources and other information sources, in order to analyse current export performance and to identify potential opportunities for selected products and target markets.

The target audience of the training will include the national focal points of the Helpdesk's problem solving network, trade analysts and trade promotion officers from government agencies and business support organisations. The training programme will be designed to run for up to 5 days. Following the training, the participants will be able to submit market profiles or studies they have prepared and, upon satisfactory completion of their assignment, they will obtain ITC's trade analyst certificate.

The EU4Business Initiative covers all EU support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region of the Eastern Partnership which brings together the EU, its member states and six partner countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

More general information on www.eu4business.eu. For more information about the Eastern Partnership Trade Helpdesk, please contact ITC's Trade and Market Intelligence Section at marketanalysis@intracen.org.