

Report of IRU Activities in CAREC (2020-2021)

IRU main activities in CAREC region have been focused on the following:

- Mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on the road transport sector
- Opening new road and intermodal corridors under the TIR system
- Digitalisation and green lanes
- Driver shortage
- Capacity building

A. Mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on road transport sector

The road transport sector experienced a very challenging time during the last two years due to Covid-19 pandemic. Many road transport companies today are struggling to survive, with global losses expected to reach 2 trillion USD since the outbreak of Covid-19.

Unilaterally imposed restrictions on goods trade, especially those targeting truck drivers at borders, have severely affected supply chains and drivers' health, without preventing the virus from spreading. Many road transport operators, the majority of which are small and medium-sized companies, are already on the brink of insolvency. It is clear that financial support measures are not reaching them, keeping them from driving recovery efforts. This puts the fabric of mobility and logistics networks at risk, especially in developing areas.

IRU has made several initiatives and advocacy at the global, regional and national levels to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on road transport, including a Call for Action to the governments. One IRU initiative was the organization of a joint meeting on 15 March 2021 with the Secretaries General of four intergovernmental organizations covering most of CAREC countries. It included the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Permanent Secretariat of the Intergovernmental Commission TRACECA (PS IGC TRACECA), the Organization of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) and the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States (Turkic Council). The meeting led to a joint statement calling for a coordinated and robust approach to address the sanitary, social and economic challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic with clear recommendations.

Based on IRU, ECO also developed a guideline to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 on road transport and transit.

B. Opening new road and intermodal corridors under the TIR system

IRU aims to remove trade barriers between countries and regions. TIR – a customs transit and guarantee system, which allows goods to flow seamlessly, securely, and reliably across borders – has been responding to the need for a multilateral, mutually recognized trade facilitation tool since it was created by IRU in 1949. Over the last 70 years, TIR has developed into the only globally applicable international customs transit and guarantee system.

The pandemic and its consequences have affected all modes of transport heavily. Maritime transport costs grew tenfold in some corridors and delivery time has not only increased but remains highly unpredictable.

Acute container shortage adds to the pressure on supply chains. In this regard, IRU has actively collaborated with national and regional players to activate new road corridors and reduce the cost and time of transport and trade.

In 2020, ECO and IRU published a joint study on the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) and Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran (KTAI) corridors. The recommendations of this study did not remain pure theory and have helped to connect the economies of these countries. IRU and ECO have worked together and succeeded in activating these corridors under the TIR system. Furthermore, IRU and ECO have co-organized TIR transports using the Iran-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan corridor, which is now operational. Another emerging corridor is the one connecting Pakistan with Uzbekistan via Afghanistan.

IRU, with its members, has explored new corridors connecting CAREC countries with other regions, notably with the GCC and CIS countries. In this regard, it is worth highlighting door-to-door transport operations under the TIR system from Pakistan to Russia and from Russia to the UAE via Iran and Azerbaijan. These new corridors, now operational, have reduced the transport time by up to 80%, and costs by 20% compared to traditional sea routes.

C. Digitalization and green lanes

Continued digitalization of the TIR system is one of IRU's priorities, especially to mitigate the impact of Covid-19. Following the adoption of Annex 11 of the TIR Convention by the TIR Administrative Committee, IRU has been working closely with TIR contracting parties and development partners to conduct digital TIR projects and pave the way for the full implementation of Annex 11 and eTIR, in particular in South, West and Central Asia.

CAREC region has been at the forefront of transport digitalization. Following eTIR pilot projects in Iran, Turkey and Azerbaijan in 2015 and 2019, digital TIR projects were activated in 2020-2021 in Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, connecting the three countries under digital TIR.

Following these operations, a joint workshop was organized with ADB to discuss the results of the pilots and agree on the next steps to further the implementation of digital TIR projects between the three countries. An extension of the project to Kyrgyzstan is under way. IRU is also working closely with other CAREC countries, including Pakistan, to expand the scope of these projects.

Furthermore, some CAREC countries, notably Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, have set up digital TIR green lanes, which combine hard infrastructure with soft infrastructure. These green lanes intend to provide real facilitation to secure TIR transport carried out under digital TIR guarantees. This also allows customs authorities to use their scarce resources to conduct more thorough risk assessments and carry out controls only on identified higher risk cargo.

IRU is also working with national and regional players to extend the success of TIR digitalization to CMR, and to support the CAREC countries by implementing a solution for e-CMR.

D. Driver shortage

Road transport driver shortage is a chronic and serious global issue, and some countries in the CAREC region are suffering from an acute lack of drivers.

IRU has published an annual driver shortage survey since 2019. We are working with our national members in some countries of the CAREC region in order to:

- Measure and monitor the problem
- Identify key challenges to attract and retain drivers
- Identify key measures needed to address the issue, as well as best practices to be disseminated

The survey notably identified three key reasons for driver shortage, identical in all regions: ageing of drivers, lack of skilled drivers and poor image of the profession.

To address these challenges, within its Eurasian members working group (which includes some countries of the CAREC region), IRU is implementing measures to improve the image of the profession and attract more drivers. Specifically, the road transport industry could be a massive source of employment for young people. Restrictive rules on minimum age represent a serious obstacle for young people joining the profession at a time when youth unemployment exceeds 30% in some countries. Other priority areas include the legal environment to incorporate initial and periodic training, market intelligence, better working conditions, career guidance, promotion of a positive image of the profession and communication with the media.

With the role of drivers becoming increasingly crucial, and having a great impact on the performance and efficiency of transport services, IRU has helped the private sector by implementing [RoadMasters](#), an easy-to-use online analyser to assess driver skills and ensure they match current industry needs.

E. Advocacy and capacity building

IRU has been involved in advocacy and capacity building in the region. Further to its members in the region, IRU has established close relations with relevant authorities, including road transport and customs authorities at the national level to address the challenges faced by road transport sector. IRU also regularly participates in road transport-related meetings in the region. Additionally, several events have been organized on transport and transit issues, in collaboration with regional players such as TRACEA, ECO, SCO, ADB and other development partners involved in road transport-related issues.

On capacity building, due to the limited driver training capacity in Uzbekistan, IRU member AIRCUZ and its training branch, Bilimitertrans, have opened an additional training centre. This will help to improve the situation and guarantee sufficient capacity to train, assess and certify drivers. This new training centre has just completed the instructors' development programme and is ready to deliver additional driver training.

IRU member GIRCA has enlarged its service portfolio and is now offering IRU Tachograph programme for drivers via its newly established education research centre: Road Transport Academy.

Activities Planned and Under Way In 2022

IRU will continue to monitor the **impacts of Covid-19** on road transport in the region. It will continue to work closely with national and regional players to take measures to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on road transport, border crossing and transit, and ensure that the borders remain open.

While trying to open new ones, IRU will work with relevant public and private stakeholders to address the challenges of the **new road and intermodal in 2020 and 2021**. Our goal is to improve their functioning and make them sustainable through the digitalization of transport documents.

IRU will work with the Kyrgyz Republic to extend the **digital TIR** pilot corridor to this country. Our goal is to include other CAREC countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan under this project, and to pave the way for the full implementation of Annex 11.

IRU will also work with relevant partners in the region to implement a solution for e-CMR.

To tackle **driver shortage**, IRU and its Eurasian members working group (which includes some countries of the CAREC region) will be implementing the following activities in 2022 to improve the attractiveness of the profession and attract more drivers:

- Lobby to lift the legal ban on women to work as professional truck drivers
- Promotion of the driver profession to women and youth
- Promotion of the IRU global charter for the treatment of drivers at delivery sites. IRU has joined forces with the Global Shippers' Alliance (GSA) and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) to develop common principles, in the form of a charter. The primary objective of this charter is to improve the treatment of drivers at delivery sites. This will consequently improve working conditions, increase operational efficiency, and ultimately, contribute to making the driving profession more attractive. All interested industry stakeholders are encouraged to join the initiative and lead by example. Signatories will contribute to making the road transport industry a better place to work and must be committed to improving the current working conditions.

To foster **capacity building** in addition to TIR training, IRU member ACCI is planning to develop a professional qualification framework in partnership with national authorities. ACCI is also planning to build capacity to implement CPC Driver and CPC Manager Programmes in Afghanistan. This project is under development.

In addition to Tachograph training for drivers, IRU member GIRCA plans to enlarge its training portfolio with the IRU Academy Transport of Dangerous Goods programme. It will be tailored to the practical needs of road transport companies and their drivers, preparing them for constantly evolving market conditions and regulations. The implementation is scheduled for Q1 2022.

The Kyrgyz Republic joined the AETR Agreement in May 2021 with a transitional period of 2 years. In this regard, IRU member AIRTO KR requested IRU's assistance in the implementation of the IRU Tachograph program for drivers. This project is under development.