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PRESS RELEASE

Recently Released Sri Lanka Customs Time Release Study (TRS) 2025 Report shows Improved Trade Facilitation.

In line with the Government's commitment to improving trade facilitation, strengthening economic competitiveness and creating a more business-friendly environment, Sri Lanka Customs (SLC) has successfully completed and launched the Time Release Study (TRS) 2025 Report.

The TRS 2025 was conducted in accordance with the methodology of the World Customs Organization (WCO) with technical assistance provided by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) under the Sub-programm I of their Policy Based Lending programme to the Government of Sri Lanka. It is the first Time Release Study in Sri Lanka to be carried out entirely using electronic data extracted from the ASYCUDA (Automated System for Customs Data) system, demonstrating the significant progress made by Sri Lanka Customs in digitalization and data-driven performance management.

More than 9,000 Import Declarations Analysed

The study analysed over 6,700 import Customs Declarations (CusDecs) covering sea cargo and over 2,300 CusDecs covering air cargo imports. The findings provide valuable insights into the time taken for cargo clearance and identify opportunities to further improve trade facilitation while maintaining effective border controls. The study confirms that Sri Lanka Customs has made significant progress in implementing risk-based controls and trader facilitation measures which support faster clearance of legitimate trade.

AEO Programme Delivering Measurable Benefits

One of the key findings of the study is the positive impact of the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) Programme. The study found that AEO certified traders recorded a median cargo release time of approximately 30 hours compared to approximately 53 hours for non-AEO traders, resulting in an average facilitation gain of about 22 hours per consignment.

These findings demonstrate the value of trust-based compliance programmes and support for ongoing efforts to expand the AEO Programme to a wider segment of the trading community.

Risk-Based Controls Supporting Faster Cargo Clearance

The study also confirms the effectiveness of Sri Lanka Customs' risk management system. Cargo exempted from physical examination generally recorded faster release times than cargo selected for examination (more than 5 hours). This demonstrates the benefits of risk-based facilitation and supports further strengthening of modern risk management practices. The study also highlighted the importance of improving coordination among border regulatory agencies to streamline risk-based selectivity to further reduce cargo release times.

Opportunities Identified for Further Improvement

A significant portion of overall clearance time was found to occur outside direct Customs processing activities. Areas for improvements were observed relating to other government agencies in the submission of Customs declarations after cargo arrival, payment of duties and taxes, movement of containers for examination, and cargo collection after Customs release.

The study found that a significant area for improvement is possible in the sea cargo process as it occurs after Customs issues the release order and before the cargo physically exits the port system. This highlights the importance of improving logistics coordination and cargo movement processes involving multiple stakeholders.

Cargo Flow System Introduced to Improve Container Movement

In response to the findings of the study, Sri Lanka Customs has already developed an in-house digital solution known as "Cargo Flow". The system introduces a queue management mechanism for container movement to examination yards based on available examination capacity. Separate priority arrangements have been introduced for refrigerated and perishable cargo to ensure faster handling of time-sensitive consignments. Future enhancements will allow direct integration with Port Terminal systems, enabling automatic exchange of container movement information and further improving operational efficiency.

TRS 2026 to Build on the Findings

The findings of TRS 2025 will serve as a baseline for future performance measurement and reform initiatives. Sri Lanka Customs has commenced preparations for TRS 2026, which has already begun in May 2026. This study will include expanded data collection, deeper engagement with terminal operators and Other Government Agencies, and enhanced analysis of both import and export processes.

Regularly measuring cargo clearance performance and implementing evidence-based reforms contributes for Sri Lanka Customs to remain committed to supporting economic growth, facilitating legitimate trade, improving the investment climate and enhancing Sri Lanka's position as a regional trade and logistics hub.

Ministry of Finance, Planning & Economic Development