

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION

Summary of Presentation

Digitalization for the Future of Ports

Keywords: Digitalization, Shipping, Ports, COVID-19 response

Economics stimulus packages, growing e-commerce, and the need for further paper- and contact-less solutions in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have all lead to further demands on the digitalization of port services. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the process of digital transformation and added urgency for ports and governments to respond. As reported in the UNCTAD Digital Economy Report 2021, it has been estimated that global Internet traffic in the singly year of 2022 will exceed the global Internet traffic of all years combined up to 2016. Data have become a key strategic asset for stakeholders, including ports. The UNCTAD Digital Economy Report 2021 examines the implications of growing cross-border data flows.

Growing demand for port services is not matched by supply and therefore causes the historically high freight rates. Carriers, ports and shippers were all taken by surprise by the pandemic, and the subsequent shortage of empty containers observed since late 2020 is unprecedented. No contingency plans were in place to pre-empt the lack of availability or to mitigate its negative impacts.

Trade facilitation and digitalization for resilient supply chains have become ever more important in this situation. Customs officials, port workers and transport operators have recognized the need to reduce physical contact, while at the same time keeping ships moving, ports open and cross-border trade flowing. The trade facilitation solutions proposed by UNCTAD contribute to facilitating trade and transport while protecting the population from the virus. Many of the measures depend on the digitalization of trade procedures, including in maritime transport. More than ever, ports and supply chains need to invest in digital solutions.