# Singapore

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Singapore’s Bogor Goals Progress Report (as at 3 September 2018)[[1]](#footnote-1)\* | |
|  | **Highlights of Achievements and Areas for Improvement** |

* Imports into Singapore are mostly tariff free.
* Import prohibitions and restrictions remain for public health, security or environmental matters.
* Liberalisation of telecommunications and energy sector. Goods and Services Tax will be introduced on imported services from 2020.
* Singapore maintains an open and transparent investment regime.
* Domestic standards are aligned with international standards.
* Plans to improve customs procedures with the use of a common platform.
* Reforms in the Patents Act. All applications will need to undergo full examination.
* Competition policy guidelines revised to streamline and clarify procedures.
* Reforms in legislation reduce regulatory burden on companies, especially SMEs.
* Singapore ratified international agreements on dispute resolution, and increased support for enforcement of mediated settlements.
* Mobility of business people enhanced with the use of technology, but salary requirements for obtaining an Employment Pass increased.
* Comprehensive RTA/FTA network continues to expand, with one new FTA in force since the last assessment.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Summary of Topics** |

Tariffs

As in previous updates, Singapore imports are mostly tariff free, except for six tariff lines: beer made from malt (two tariff lines) and samsu (four tariff lines).

Non-Tariff Measures

Singapore maintains import licensing regimes for the import of some products for health, safety and environmental reasons. Import prohibitions remain for shisha tobacco, non-medicinal chewing gum and motor vehicles more than three years old, but there has not been substantial changes in import licensing or prohibitions since the last update. Singapore continues to not maintain any subsidy schemes that are dependent on export performance.

Services

Singapore maintains an open and transparent services regulatory regime. In terms of telecommunication services, a new operator, TPG Telecom Pte Ltd, from Australia, is entering to provide international mobile telecommunications, including 4G services. In April 2017, the Infocomm and Media Development Authority of Singapore (IMDA) awarded a total of 175 MHz spectrum through the General Spectrum Auction to four winning bidders (M1, Starhub, Singtel and TPG) to enhance their mobile networks, meet the increasing demand for consumer mobile data services and support new growth areas.

In October 2017, the Energy Market Authority (EMA) announced the introduction of Open Electricity Market. Starting April 2018, households and businesses in Jurong (a residential town situated in the West of Singapore) can choose to buy electricity from a retailer with a price plan that best meets their needs.

From 1 January 2020, Goods and Service Tax (GST) will be introduced on imported services such as consultancy, marketing, apps and music purchased from overseas suppliers. GST will also be raised from the current 7% to 9% between 2021 and 2025.

In the legal sector, foreign law firms with a Foreign Law Practice (FLP) license may offer foreign law-related services in all areas of legal practice that the FLP is competent to offer and Singapore law-related services in the context of international commercial arbitration or in relation to the Singapore International Commercial Court (SICC), through certain types of registered lawyers. Foreign law firms may provide certain types of Singapore law-related legal services through a Qualifying Foreign Law Practice (QFLP) license, a Joint Law Venture (JLV) with a Singapore Law Practice (SLP), or a Formal Law Alliance (FLA) with an SLP.

Investment

Singapore has 42 Bilateral Investment Treaties (BIT) in force, of which 6 are with APEC member economies. At present, Singapore has ongoing BIT negotiations with Indonesia, Myanmar and Argentina.

Singapore was ranked 2nd in the world in ease of doing business according to the World Bank Doing Business Report 2017. For categories specific to investment, Singapore was ranked first in “Protecting Minority Investors” and second in “Enforcing Contracts”.

Standards and Conformance

Domestic standards in Singapore are largely aligned with international standards such as those set by International Organisation for Standardization (ISO), International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC), and International Telecommunication Union (ITU). Singapore also continues to participate actively in standards and conformance activities at both the regional and international levels. There were no specific trade concerns raised against Singapore between 2016 and 2017 at the WTO.

Customs Procedures

Singapore is building the National Trade Platform (NTP) as a trade and logistics IT ecosystem connecting businesses, community systems and platforms, and government systems. The NTP will streamline work processes by replacing TradeNet as the National Single Window for permit declarations, TradeXchange as the platform connecting the trade and logistics community, as well as adjacent sectors such as trade finance. The B2B tier of the NTP (Release 0) went live in Dec 2017.

With effect from 1 Jan 2018, Singapore has commenced the live operation of the ASEAN Single Window for the electronic exchange of the preferential Certificate of Origin (Form D) under the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement of the ASEAN Free Trade Area (ATIGA).

Mutual recognition of Authorized Economic Operators (AEO) programs are maintained with nine APEC economies: Australia; Canada; China; Hong Kong, China; Japan; Korea; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; and the United States.

Intellectual Property Rights

Singapore’s amendments to the Patents Act entered into force on 30 October 2017. A key amendment was the broadening of the grace period, so that applicants have the opportunity to obtain patent protection notwithstanding that it has been disclosed prior to the filing of the patent application. In addition, the supplementary examination route, which allowed patent applicants to rely on the grant of a foreign corresponding application, will be unavailable for patent applications filed on or after 1 January 2020, and all patent applications will need to undergo full examination.

In terms of international engagement, Singapore is the champion economy of the ASEAN Patent Examination Cooperation (ASPEC) programme, which helps rights owners obtain patent protection in multiple ASEAN members more efficiently. In 2017, Singapore was re-appointed as an International Searching and Preliminary Examining Authority (ISA/IPEA).

Amendments to Singapore’s Registered Designs regime also entered into force on 30 October 2017. Some key amendments include the broadening of the scope of designs protection to permit protection for virtual designs, and the inclusion of colours as one of the features of a design. The grace period for designs has also been broadened from 6 months to 12 months to cover any disclosure of the design originating from the designer.

Competition Policy

The Competition Commission of Singapore (CCS) revised its Guidelines on 1 December 2016. Key changes include a new Fast Track Procedure, which allows businesses under investigation to enter into an agreement with CCS where they will admit their liability early by acknowledging their participation in an anti-competitive activity. In return, they will receive a reduction on the financial penalty to be imposed. The Guidelines also include more clarity and guidance on how CCS will calculate financial penalties, based on the financial year preceding the date when the undertaking’s participation in the infringement ended, rather than basing it on the financial year preceding the issuance of CCS’s decision. Various notification forms and procedures will be simplified to allow businesses to know upfront what to expect and what will be required by CCS during the investigation process.

Government Procurement

Singapore maintains an open and transparent procurement system. Government procurement requirements, procedures and evaluation criteria for quotations and tenders are posted on GeBiz, a one-stop e-procurement portal.

Deregulation/Regulatory Reform

The Companies Act (CAA 2017) and Limited Liability Partnerships Act (LLPAA 2017) were amended in 2017 to reduce the regulatory burden on companies, make the ownership and control of business entities more transparent as well as improve the ease of doing business in Singapore. Additionally, CAA 2017 introduced a new inward re-domiciliation regime to facilitate the transfer of registration into Singapore. These changes reduce the regulatory burden on firms, especially SMEs.

Dispute Resolution

Singapore ratified the Hague Convention on Choice of Courts Agreements in June 2016, which came into force on 1 October 2016. This enhances the effectiveness of reciprocal enforcement of court judgements among the Contracting States.

Singapore also amended legislation to allow for third-party funding in international commercial arbitration, and strengthened the enforcement of mediated settlements in Singapore with the introduction of the Mediation Act.

The Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) signed a Host Country Agreement with Singapore in July 2017 to open its first Asia office in Singapore, and the International Court of Arbitration of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC Court) inaugurated its new case management office in Singapore, adding to the suite of dispute resolution options available in Singapore.

Mobility of Business People

The Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) of Singapore fully implemented BIKES II (Biometric Identification of MotorBikers) at land checkpoints in Dec 2016. BIKES II uses fingerprint matching and human detection technologies to automate immigration clearance of motorcyclists. The number of automated counters expanded from the initial 43 to 164.

From 1 January 2017, the Ministry of Manpower increased the qualifying salary for Employment Pass (EP) applications from SGD 3,300 (USD 2,495) to SGD 3,600 (USD 2,722). EP applicants who can command a monthly salary of SGD 3,600 (USD 2,722) or more, subject to meeting other criteria on qualifications and experience, will be considered. Those with more years of experience are also required to command higher salaries commensurate with their work experience and skill sets, as per current practice.

RTA/FTAs

Singapore has a comprehensive network of RTA/FTAs, with 21 RTAs/FTAs in force[[2]](#footnote-2). Since the previous 2016 Bogor Goals Assessment, Singapore has signed two more RTA/FTAs: ASEAN-Hong Kong, China Free Trade Agreement (AHKFTA) and Sri Lanka-Singapore Free Trade Agreement (SLSFTA). The Singapore-Australia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) was upgraded in December 2017. The Comprehensive & Progressive Agreement for the Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) was signed in March 2018. Singapore is currently participating in negotiations in three RTAs/FTAs: Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)-Singapore Free Trade Agreement, and with the Pacific Alliance.

1. \* This brief report was prepared with information from Singapore’s submission of 2018 APEC Individual Action Plan (IAP) template; the 2016 WTO Trade Policy Review – Report by the Secretariat – Singapore; the WTO SPS and TBT Information Systems; information provided by the Ministry of Trade and Industry; and Infocomm and Media Development Authority, Singapore Customs, Ministry of Law, Competition Commission of Singapore, Intellectual Property Office of Singapore and Ministry of Manpower websites. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Singapore’s RTA/FTAs in force are the following ones: ASEAN (1992); Singapore-New Zealand (2001); Singapore-Japan (2002); Singapore-EFTA (2003); Singapore-Australia (2003); Singapore-United States (2004); Singapore-Jordan (2005); ASEAN-China (2005); Singapore-India (2005); Singapore-Korea (2006); Trans-Pacific SEP (2006); Singapore-Panama (2006); ASEAN-Korea (2007); ASEAN-Japan (2008); Singapore-Peru (2009); Singapore-China (2009); Singapore-GCC (2013); ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand (2010); ASEAN-India (2010); Singapore-Costa Rica (2013); and Singapore-Turkey (2017). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)