

CARTIF Implementation Plan Outline

The CARTIF Implementation Plan operationalizes the Bishkek Ministerial Declaration by providing a phased, flexible roadmap for launching negotiations on the CAREC Trade and Investment Facilitation Partnership Agreement (CARTIF) in 2026. CARTIF is designed as a voluntary, development-oriented framework focused on reducing practical barriers to trade and investment while respecting countries' diverse economic structures and WTO commitments.

The plan establishes clear governance arrangements, initiates a non-binding zero round to build shared understanding, and transitions to text-based negotiations through thematic Working Groups supported by targeted technical assistance. Progress will be monitored through structured reporting and guided by Ministers at the CAREC Ministerial Conference 2026. Together, these steps aim to deliver a credible, inclusive, and country-driven pathway toward deeper regional trade and investment facilitation in the CAREC region

1. Purpose and Context

With adoption of the Bishkek Ministerial Declaration in November 2025, CAREC countries agreed to begin CARTIF negotiations. CARTIF will promote regional cooperation with a flexible, voluntary framework for trade and investment facilitation that aligns with each country's economy and WTO commitments. Starting in 2026, ADB, alongside the CAREC Secretariat and national focal points, will provide technical and administrative support for the negotiations.

2. Overall Approach

Implementation is guided by three pillars:

1. **Technical assistance** to negotiators and working groups
2. **Administrative and coordination support** through the CAREC Secretariat
3. **Mobilization of regional and international expertise** to support negotiations and reforms

The approach emphasizes inclusiveness, modular commitments, and gradual engagement based on country readiness.

3. Negotiation Structure and Governance

- CAREC countries designate **national CARTIF focal points** and negotiators.
- Negotiations are coordinated by the **Regional Trade Group (RTG)**, supported by the CAREC Secretariat and ADB.
- Talks are organized around a **Framework Agreement** and **thematic Working Groups (WGs)** covering:
 - Trade Facilitation
 - Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures
 - Technical Barriers to Trade
 - Digital Trade & E-Commerce
 - Investment Facilitation
 - Institutional Provisions and Dispute Settlement

4. Key Phases of Implementation

Phase 1 – Preparation and Readiness (Q1–Q2 2026)

- Voluntary national consultations to assess readiness, priorities, and sensitivities
- Mapping of WTO and other international commitments
- Regional briefings for negotiators on CARTIF structure and process

Phase 2 – Zero Round of Negotiations (Q2 2026)

- Non-binding, technical discussions to:
 - Familiarize countries with CARTIF architecture
 - Clarify scope and ambition
 - Identify areas of convergence and divergence
 - Agree on modalities, timelines, and work plans

Phase 3 – Working Groups and Text-Based Negotiations (Q2–Q3 2026)

- Formal establishment of WGs with agreed Terms of Reference
- Transition to text-based negotiations using the zero-draft
- Iterative revision of draft texts reflecting country inputs

Phase 4 – Capacity Building and Technical Assistance (Ongoing)

- Negotiator training and drafting support
- Protocol-specific technical workshops
- Tailored country support, including for non-WTO members

5. Monitoring and Ministerial Oversight

- Regular reporting from WGs to senior officials
- Consolidated progress reports prepared by the CAREC Secretariat
- Formal reporting and political guidance at the CAREC Ministerial Conference 2026 including confirmation of the mandate for continued negotiations

6. Expected Outputs

- Completed zero round of negotiations
- Fully operational negotiating Working Groups
- Strengthened national negotiating capacity
- Revised draft CARTIF Framework Agreement and initial protocols
- Ministerial guidance on next negotiation phases

7. Key Risks and Mitigation

Main risks include capacity constraints, coordination challenges, WTO-consistency concerns, and 'negotiation fatigue'. These are mitigated through phased commitments, targeted technical assistance, strong coordination via RTG, and regular senior-level engagement.

8. Outreach and Communication

Communication will be **selective and milestone-based**, emphasizing that CARTIF is:

- Voluntary and modular
- Focused on facilitation (not tariff liberalization)
- WTO-consistent and country-driven

National authorities lead domestic outreach, with regional coordination by the CAREC Secretariat and technical support from ADB.