

CAREC Trade and Investment Facilitation Partnership Agreement Implementation Roadmap for 2026

The CAREC Trade and Investment Facilitation Partnership Agreement (CARTIF) Implementation Roadmap 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.

1. Purpose and Context

Following the adoption of the Bishkek Ministerial Declaration in November 2025, CAREC member countries agreed to initiate CARTIF negotiations. CARTIF aims to advance regional cooperation by establishing a flexible, voluntary framework for trade and investment facilitation that is consistent with each country's economic circumstances and WTO commitments. Beginning in 2026, ADB, together with the CAREC Secretariat and National Focal Points, will offer technical and administrative support for these negotiations.

2. Negotiation Structure and Governance

- Each CAREC country designates CARTIF Chief Negotiators and CARTIF focal points.
- 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) agreed by the countries.

3. Key Phases of Implementation

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

- Voluntary national consultations to assess readiness, priorities, and sensitivities
- CARTIF Inaugural meeting for the Negotiations on the CARTIF (conducted on 11 March, virtually)
- Preparation of the Negotiations Modalities with proposed Working Groups prioritization (draft is submitted)
- Regional meeting for the Chief Negotiators on CARTIF structure and process (to be held on 8 May, virtually)
- Updating the CARTIF text and preparation of the bracketed CARTIF text.

Phase 2 – Zero Round of Negotiations (Q2 2026)

- Formal launch of the Zero Round of Negotiations with CARTIF Chief Negotiators (to be held on 3 June, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia) alongside the RTG and Customs Cooperation Committee (CCC) meetings.
- 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
- Initial Working Groups sessions
- 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

4. 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

5. 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