



## Protecting plant health by managing e-commerce and postal and courier pathways

The growing trade in cross-border e-commerce has revolutionized the way businesses and private individuals market, sell and purchase goods. The internet has become a convenient means of promoting, selling and distributing products and has resulted in a major shift in retail buying and distribution patterns. It has also opened global economic opportunities in terms of providing wider access to overseas markets. Consequently, e-commerce is an increasing component of economic growth, particularly in developing countries.

However, the exponential increase in buying and selling goods over the internet has resulted in a surge in small parcels moving on postal and courier pathways. Parcels containing plants, plant products and other regulated articles may be a pathway for the introduction and spread of plant pests, particularly if they do not meet the phytosanitary requirements of the destination country. These pests may threaten cultivated and wild plants, disrupt international trade and impact food production chains.

National plant protection organizations (NPPOs) need to address the challenges posed by e-commerce in ways that will facilitate trade of goods moving on the postal and courier pathways while protecting plant health by preventing the introduction and spread of pests.

### About the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)

The IPPC is a multilateral treaty established to protect the world's plants, agricultural products and natural resources from plant pests. Established in 1951, IPPC is ratified by 185 countries.

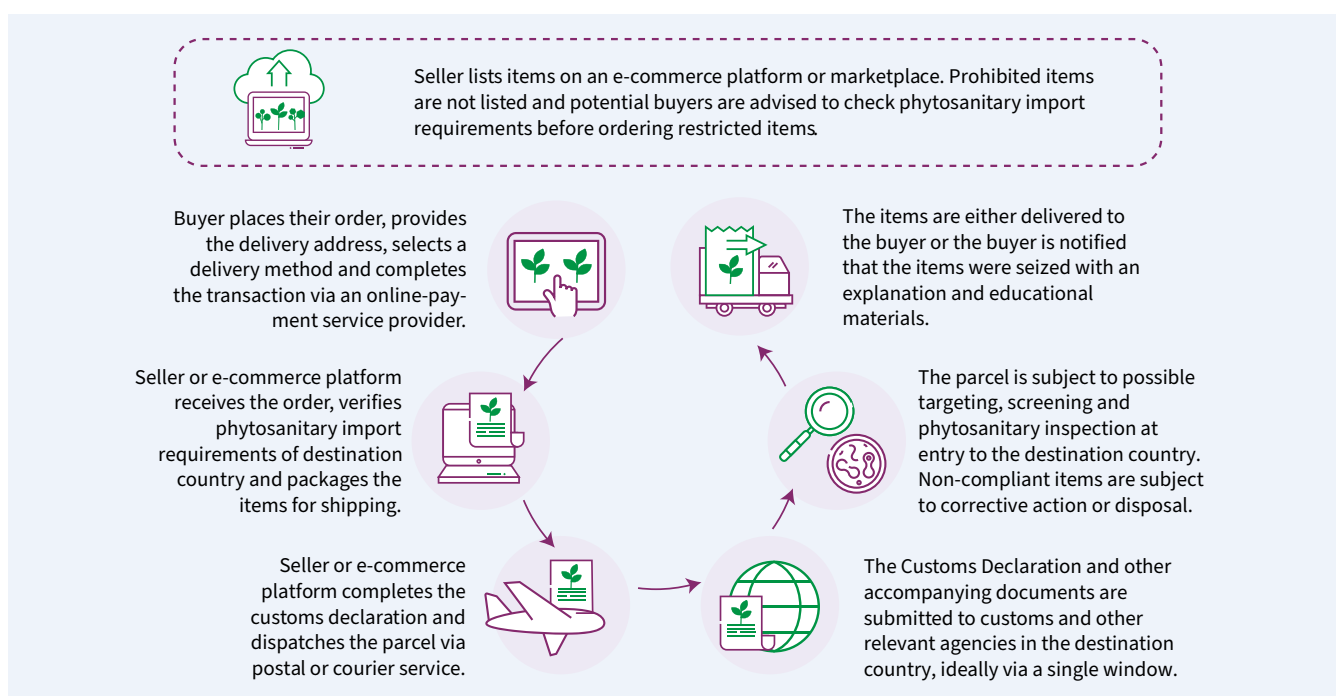
The IPPC Secretariat and community are focusing on eight **development agenda items (DAIs)** to achieve the objectives in the [IPPC Strategic Framework 2020–2030](#).

These agenda items, in various stages of implementation, are:

1. harmonization of electronic data exchange;
2. commodity- and pathway-specific International standard phytosanitary measures (ISPMs);
3. management of e-commerce and postal and courier pathways;
4. developing guidance on the use of third-party entities;
5. strengthening pest outbreak alert and response systems (POARS);
6. assessment and management of climate change impacts on plant health;
7. global phytosanitary research coordination; and
8. diagnostic laboratory networking.

## Challenges

- » Buying, selling, and trading products over the internet has resulted in an enormous increase in the number of parcels moving through the postal and courier pathways. This increase, coupled with demands from industry and consumers for rapid delivery, puts pressure on the normal components of national phytosanitary export and import systems.
  - » Rapid changes in digital technology may have outpaced the ability of countries to adopt the legislation, training and tools needed to effectively regulate e-commerce trade.
  - » NPPOs may not have strong collaborative arrangements with their national customs administration and other government agencies, to address the pest risk associated with e-commerce trade.
  - » Single-window and electronic-advance-data systems may not be in place to facilitate communication and data sharing between relevant parties involved in e-commerce supply.
  - » Sellers and buyers may not comply with the phytosanitary import requirements of the destination country, either intentionally or because they are unaware of these requirements.
  - » It is difficult to detect regulated articles in small parcels entering a country on postal and courier pathways, particularly if they are not declared.
- Below is an example of a typical e-commerce supply chain with suggested actions to mitigate the pest risk at each step.



## Solution

The International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) is focusing on key opportunities for improving the management of e-commerce of plants and other regulated articles moving on the postal and courier pathways. The approach highlights the importance of detecting and intercepting small parcels containing regulated articles that do not comply with import requirements, while expediting the clearance and release of low-risk goods and goods that meet import requirements. Effective management of e-commerce is built on the following key pillars:

- » promoting compliance by raising awareness among stakeholders about potential pest risks

- » ensuring that the national legislative framework and national procedures are appropriate and effective and sufficient for addressing the challenges posed e-commerce
- » encouraging enhanced collaboration with customs and other government agencies to implement procedures to manage pest risk both offshore and at the border
- » strengthening coordination with national postal operators and couriers and with e-commerce marketplaces and platforms
- » establishing procedures to analyse, investigate and prevent illicit cross-border e-commerce activities



## Benefits

- » Plants, plant products and other regulated articles sold through e-commerce and shipped via postal or courier services will meet the phytosanitary import requirements of the destination country.
- » NPPOs will be aware of the pest risk associated with e-commerce trade, particularly by business-to-consumer and person-to-person transactions.
- » Contracting parties will update their legislation and authorities to address e-commerce challenges, considering digital innovations, available technologies and new business models.
- » NPPOs will prepare and maintain lists of regulated articles and ensure these are available to all relevant e-commerce stakeholders, including other government departments and stakeholders in other countries.
- » NPPOs will identify key stakeholders and establish communication, education and outreach programmes to make online buyers, sellers, e-commerce platforms and marketplaces, and others involved in the e-commerce supply chain aware of the regulatory requirements, risks and responsibilities associated with transactions involving regulated articles.
- » Contracting parties will apply risk management measures to identify and intercept e-commerce consignments that have an unacceptable risk of non-compliance, while facilitating legitimate e-commerce

trade (e.g. by use of electronic advance data, screening methods and non-intrusive inspection methods).

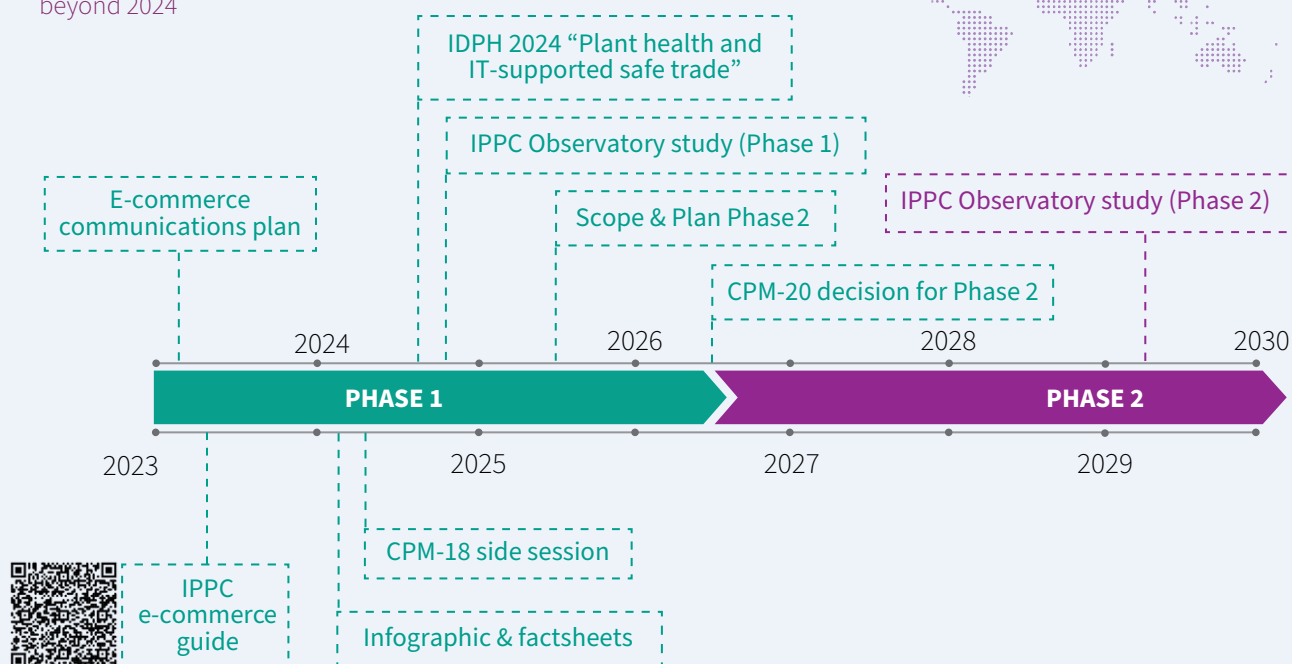
- » NPPOs will share information, cooperate, and collaborate with their national customs administration, postal operators and courier services to address pest risk associated with e-commerce trade.
- » NPPOs will gather data and monitor non-compliances, inspections and regulatory activities in collaboration with their national customs administration and will be able to demonstrate a measurable reduction in non-compliance associated with postal and courier pathways.



## Current status and opportunity to invest

**USD 234 000**

are needed to continue implementing the IPPC e-commerce programme beyond 2024



The following materials have been developed and can be accessed from the International Phytosanitary Portal:

- » [IPPC E-commerce guide](#): *E-commerce - A guide to managing the pest risk posed by goods ordered online and distributed through postal and courier pathways* provides NPPOs with easy-to-understand technical information about e-commerce and serves as reference for enhancing national legislation, policies and procedures.
- » [IPPC infographic video](#): *Managing the pest risk posed by e-commerce*, raises the global visibility of this issue and provides NPPOs with a video and harmonized messages that they may use at a national level.

The first phase of an IPPC Observatory study on e-commerce will be launched in 2024 to establish a baseline for measuring key e-commerce outcomes, as specified in the Strategic Framework.

The study will characterize the current phytosanitary risks associated with e-commerce trade and identify gaps.

The development of the IPPC guide, infographic factsheet, and communications plan for e-commerce were developed thanks to in-kind and financial support from Canada. Canada has also provided support to launch an IPPC Observatory study on e-commerce in 2024.

Additional financial resources are required to facilitate active engagement with other international organizations on the topic of e-commerce and joint initiatives. They would also support additional awareness-raising and capacity development activities and allow the second IPPC Observatory study to be launched in 2029. In addition, partners are needed to support translating the new IPPC e-commerce guide to all FAO languages.

## Why your investment matters

- » Joint initiatives with key international organizations that share an interest in e-commerce will create synergies and help to address the pest risks associated with e-commerce and goods moving on the courier and postal pathways.
- » By effectively addressing the challenges posed by e-commerce, NPPOs can facilitate the movement of goods on the mail and courier pathways while safeguarding plant health and preventing the introduction and spread of pests.

- » Education and communication are powerful tools that may be used to promote compliance and mitigate pest risk. A comprehensive and inclusive approach is vital since sellers, e-commerce platforms and marketplaces, buyers, and postal and courier services all play key roles in ensuring compliant trade.

## Funding mechanism

Contact us on how you can contribute financially or in kind by sending an email to [ippc-dai@fao.org](mailto:ippc-dai@fao.org).

For other inquiries, please email Barbara Peterson at [Barbara.peterson@fao.org](mailto:Barbara.peterson@fao.org).

# Invest in enhancing the management of e-commerce and postal and courier pathways to protect plant health today.

## CONTACT US

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of the United Nations

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## MORE RESOURCES

- » Web: [IPPC and e-commerce](#)
- » IPPC Guide: [E-commerce: A guide to managing the pest risk posed by goods ordered online and distributed through postal and courier pathways](#)
- » Video: [Managing the pest risk posed by e-commerce](#)



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