

Son La

Provincial performance in implementing Free Trade Agreements

Below average

BAND 6 OF 6

PERFORMANCE TIER

Below average

Band 6 of 6 — 34th of 34 (last nationally).

OVERALL SCORE

11.62 / 40

Below the national average of 21.66 by 10.04 points.

THE DEFINING PARADOX

3 / 34

FTA utilisation — firms rank 3rd despite the province placing last overall.

FOUR PILLARS AT A GLANCE

A INFORMATION ACCESS

RANK 29 / 34

3.20 / 10

–1.60 vs national average

B LEGAL IMPLEMENTATION

RANK 33 / 34

2.60 / 10

–2.61 vs national average

C SUPPORT POLICIES

RANK 34 / 34

2.28 / 10

–3.54 vs national average

D SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

RANK 29 / 34

3.54 / 10

–2.42 vs national average

★ STANDOUT STRENGTHS (AMID THE WEAKNESSES)

- #1 A2 — Authorities providing FTA information (best nationally)
- #3 C1 — FTA utilisation (3rd nationally)
- #4 A8 — Quality of forecasting and market-orientation information from local authorities
- #16 B4 — Complexity of compliance with legal documents (manageable)

CRITICAL GAPS (6 INDICATORS RANKED LAST)

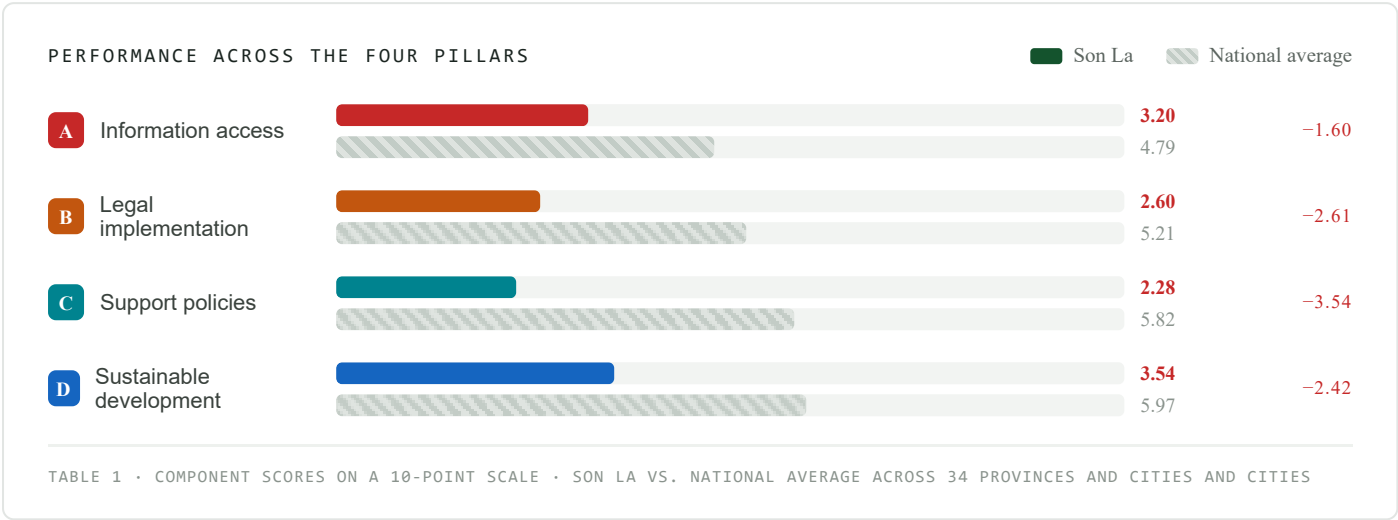
- #34 B5/B6/C5/C8/C9.1 — Training, feedback, barriers, support needs, promotion
- #33 B2/B7/C7/C9.2 — Guidance, uptake, effectiveness, promotion quality
- #32 A5/A6/C4 — Event participation, event sources, commitments utilised

SOURCE: FTA INDEX 2025, PREPARED BY FOREIGN TRADE UNIVERSITY FOR THE MINISTRY OF INDUSTRY AND TRADE; SURVEY OF 4,066 EXPORTING AND IMPORTING ENTERPRISES. COMPONENT SCORES ARE ON A 10-POINT SCALE AND THE OVERALL SCORE IS ON A 40-POINT SCALE. RANKINGS COVER 34 PROVINCES AND CITIES.

01 Overview of results

Son La ranks last among the 34 provinces and cities assessed, in the “Below average” tier (band 6 of 6). The survey nonetheless reveals one of the starkest paradoxes in the FTA Index: firms in the province rank 3rd nationally on FTA utilisation, while FTA-related information provided directly by the authorities (A2) leads the country and forecasting and market-orientation information from local authorities (A8) ranks 4th. Firms clearly want to exploit FTAs and remain active

in import-export. Against that initiative, the province's institutional support system is very thin. Six indicators rank last nationally: participation in training on legal documents, enterprise feedback on FTA-related legal documents, trade promotion, the capacity to meet support needs, and barriers to FTA utilisation. Son La is therefore a textbook case of strong demand for FTA utilisation outrunning the supply of public support, leaving firms to find information and export assistance largely on their own.



02 Detailed analysis by component

A

COMPONENT 1

Information access

3.20 /10

RANK 29 / 34 • -1.60

OVERVIEW

The information pillar shows a stark contrast. FTA-related information provided directly by the authorities (A2) ranks **1st** and forecasting and market-orientation information from local authorities (A8) ranks **4th**, showing that local agencies can deliver essential information to firms directly. The channels through which enterprises access information on FTAs (A3) and the quality of FTA-related information on the local online portal (A9), however, both rank **31st**; frequency of participation in FTA-related events (A5) and sources of information on FTA-related events (A6) both rank **32nd**. The system leans too heavily on direct notification, while communication events, digital platforms and other channels are not working.

PARTICIPATION & DIGITAL CHANNELS

About 50% of firms say information from central and local agencies meets most or all of their needs. Event participation, however, is very low: just 15% attend even occasionally, while 85% never or rarely attend, and not one firm reports attending regularly. Among the few that have attended, 55.6% rate the events useful, but only 16.7% rate the materials well and none rate the discussion time positively. On the local online portal, quality and reliability rate reasonably well, while specificity and timeliness fall short.

Son La

3.20

National average

4.79

NATIONAL RANK BY INDICATOR

#1 Authorities providing FTA information

#4 Quality of forecasting and market-orientation information from local authorities

#31 Channels through which enterprises access information on FTAs

#31 Quality of FTA-related information on the online portal

#32 Frequency of participation in FTA-related events

#32 Sources of information on FTA-related events

OVERVIEW

Local legal accompaniment is very limited. Participation in training on legal documents (B5) and enterprise feedback on FTA-related legal documents (B6) both rank **34th**; the frequency of guidance (B2) and the uptake of enterprise feedback by local authorities (B7) both rank **33rd**. The quality of that guidance (B3) ranks **21st**, and complexity of compliance (B4) ranks **16th** — better in relative terms. The bottleneck therefore lies in the frequency, coverage and continuity of legal support.

GRASP & GUIDANCE FREQUENCY

Only about 20–32% of firms have a clear grasp of the main legal areas, while 53–63% know nothing or hold only a basic understanding. Not one firm receives regular guidance on tariff preferences or rules of origin; regular guidance in the remaining areas reaches just 10–15%. Some 50–81% of firms find the rules largely complex, TBT above all (81.2%), followed by tariff preferences and environmental rules (75%).

Son La

2.60

National average

5.21

NATIONAL RANK BY INDICATOR

#16 Complexity of compliance with legal documents

#21 Quality of guidance on legal documents

#33 Frequency of local-authority guidance on legal documents

#33 Uptake of enterprise feedback by local authorities

#34 Frequency of participation in training on legal documents

#34 Frequency of enterprise feedback on legal documents related to FTA commitments

OVERVIEW

This is Son La's weakest pillar and the sharpest expression of the gap between business capability and public support. Self-assessed FTA utilisation (C1) still ranks **3rd** nationally, showing that firms pursue trade opportunities on their own initiative despite the lack of matching backing from local government.

THE SUPPORT ECOSYSTEM

The indicators covering that ecosystem, by contrast, all sit at the bottom of the table. Trade promotion frequency (C9.1), the need for FTA support programmes and policies (C8) and barriers to utilisation (C5) all rank **34th**; the effectiveness of support policies and programmes implemented by local authorities (C7) ranks **32nd** and access to competitiveness support policies (C6) ranks **31st**. The FTA utilisation record therefore rests on firms' own efforts rather than on any organised support ecosystem. That is both a major weakness and a sign of considerable headroom, should the province put the right support programmes in place.

Son La

2.28

National average

5.82

NATIONAL RANK BY INDICATOR

#3 FTA utilisation

#31 Access to competitiveness support policies

#32 Effectiveness of support policies and programmes implemented by local authorities

#34 Barriers to FTA utilisation

#34 Need for FTA support programmes and policies

#34 Participation in trade promotion programmes

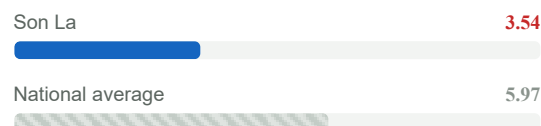


OVERVIEW

Sustainable development results are low across most indicators. Understanding of the sustainable development commitments (D1) ranks **30th**, while most of the remaining indicators also sit near the bottom. The relative bright spot is the perceived importance of compliance for business operations (D5), at **13th**. Firms have therefore grasped something of the commercial significance of sustainability but lack the knowledge, preparation and support to turn that into action.

AWARENESS & SUPPORT COVERAGE

Only about 6–13% of firms judge the sustainability requirements to have a large or very large effect on their business. Across commitments, local agency support rates better on labour and environment (46.7%) but reaches just 13.3% on IUU, CSDDD and CBAM. As many as 60% of firms report receiving no support on IUU, while around 30–40% receive none across most specialised areas. Connection with technical agencies is the most effective form of support (43.8%), while conferences and training reach only 12.5%. The gap is especially worrying for Son La's agricultural and fruit exports as environmental and traceability requirements tighten.



NATIONAL RANK BY INDICATOR

#13 Perceived importance of compliance with import-market sustainable development commitments

#30 Understanding of sustainable development commitments

03 Conclusions & implications

STRENGTHS TO BUILD ON

- **FTA utilisation ranks 3rd**, showing that firms pursue import-export opportunities actively despite receiving little matching support.
- **FTA-related information provided directly by the authorities ranks first nationally**, reflecting good reach into the business community through traditional administrative channels.
- **Complexity of compliance ranks 16th** — better in relative terms, though the share of firms finding the rules complex remains high. It is therefore still a real obstacle, to be met with in-depth guidance.

WEAKNESSES TO ADDRESS

- **Six indicators rank last nationally**, showing that the institutional support system does not meet firms' actual needs.
- **Legal accompaniment is barely delivered on any regular basis**, as seen in the shortage of training, advice, enterprise feedback and uptake by local authorities.
- **Sustainable development is not yet built into the business support programme**, even though it is an increasingly pressing requirement for agricultural and fruit exports to the EU.

Action agenda

build the system firms are waiting for

NOW • 0–12 MONTHS

NEXT • 1–3 YEARS

1

Build a base of training and legal advice

Run training, advice and dialogue on a regular footing, and create a mechanism to receive, respond to and resolve business problems during FTA implementation.

B5/B6 · 34 → establish a support base

2

Develop a trade promotion programme

Build a basic but targeted trade promotion programme, prioritising market and partner matching for the active exporters already in place.

C9.1 · 34 → establish a programme

3

Expand events and digital channels

Add FTA events, upgrade the online portal and develop digital channels such as Zalo to reduce reliance on direct notification.

A5/A9 · 31–32 → improve rank

4

Launch a sustainable development programme

Raise awareness and help agricultural and fruit exporters meet traceability, environmental and supply-chain due-diligence requirements in the EU market.

Pillar D · 29 → improve rank



TARGET

Move from the “Below average” tier to “Average” — build institutional support to a basic standard and the province's strong business demand will do the rest