

Annual Report 2024



About this report

This report covers WTO activities in 2023 and the early part of 2024. At the start of the report, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala reflects on the current challenges facing world trade and the role of the WTO in helping the world address these challenges. The report also covers the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference, which took place from 26 February to 1 March 2024.

Further information about the WTO's activities is available on the WTO website: www.wto.org

Who we are

The World Trade Organization deals with the global rules of trade between WTO members. Its main function is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible.

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Overview

The overall objective of the WTO is to help its members use trade as a means to raise living standards, create jobs and improve people's lives. The WTO operates the global system of trade

rules and helps developing economies build their trade capacity. It also provides a forum for its members to negotiate trade agreements and to resolve the trade problems they face with each other.





Fisherman in Chonburi
Province, Thailand.

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Message from Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

These are troubling times for global trade. Amid geopolitical tensions and the backdrop of the climate crisis, we see increased protectionism and unilateral policy measures. The data suggest that after years of talk of decoupling, trade may be starting to fragment along geopolitical lines.

And yet within these challenges there are exciting opportunities. Opportunities to harness digitalization to spur growth and job creation. Opportunities to use trade to enhance global food security and accelerate the push towards net-zero emissions. Opportunities to spread the benefits

of trade to more people and countries. The World Trade Organization has a vital role to play in enabling members to seize these opportunities - and in doing so, to make the global economy more inclusive, more sustainable and more resilient.

In 2023 – the main period covered by this report – merchandise trade volumes fell by 1.2 per cent after growing 3.0 per cent the year before, as many countries dealt with the lingering effects of inflation and high energy prices. But this decline was partially offset by strong growth in services trade, which increased by 9 per cent in value terms, boosted in

particular by the post-pandemic surge in tourism.

Despite trade tensions, political uncertainty, and shocks like COVID-19, world trade has been remarkably resilient in recent years. The value of total goods and commercial services trade in 2023, at US\$ 30.4 trillion, was close to record highs. Merchandise trade volumes at the end of 2023 were 6 per cent above their pre-pandemic peak in 2019, while the value of commercial services trade was up 21 per cent between 2019 and 2023 – and by more than 50 per cent for trade in digitally-delivered services.

As it marks its 30th anniversary this year, the WTO has continued to enable members to use trade as a means to improve living standards, create better jobs and promote sustainable development, in keeping with the mission articulated in the preamble to the Marrakesh Agreement that established the WTO. Since 1995, global trade has expanded nearly five-fold in value terms, driving faster growth in developing and developed economies, and helping lift over 1.5 billion people out of extreme poverty.

The future of trade is services, digital, green – and it must be inclusive. This Annual Report describes how, over the course of 2023 and through to our 13th Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi in February 2024,

Despite trade tensions, political uncertainty, and shocks like COVID-19, world trade has been remarkably resilient in recent years.

the WTO and its members moved forward on all these fronts, helping build the enabling environment for trade's evolution in the years ahead. At the same time, members left key business unfinished – notably on fisheries subsidies and agriculture.

Vis-à-vis services, MC13 saw the entry into force of new disciplines for domestic regulation aimed at cutting services-related red tape and making it more straightforward for service providers to enter foreign markets. Over 70 WTO members are committed to implementing these new disciplines.

On digital trade, members at MC13 helped preserve market predictability by extending by two years the longstanding moratorium against

levying customs duties on cross-border electronic transmissions. They agreed to keep up efforts to reinvigorate the Work Programme on E-Commerce to help developing and least-developed country members address the trade-related challenges they face in building their digital economies.

Meanwhile, throughout the year in Geneva, a large group of members continued to make progress in e-commerce negotiations on setting out some basic shared rules for digital trade.

With regard to making trade a stronger force for environmental sustainability, the year was marked by a steady flow

of formal acceptances by members of the WTO's Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, continuing through and beyond MC13. At the time of writing in July 2024, nearly 80 members have formally accepted the Agreement. This leaves us roughly 30 ratifications away from the two-thirds of the membership threshold for the Agreement to enter into force and start to protect marine fisheries and the livelihoods of the 260 million people worldwide who depend on the oceans for their food and incomes. The WTO's Fish Fund set up to help developing economies implement the Agreement has received more than CHF 14 million in contributions and pledges and will be ready to go as soon as the Agreement enters into force.

At MC13, we came very close to agreement on a second wave of provisions for the Fisheries Agreement, but unfortunately could not get to the finish line. Still, members laid a foundation for bringing these negotiations to a swift conclusion.

Also at the conference, ministers engaged in a groundbreaking open-ended conversation on sustainable development, looking at trade's role in addressing economic, social and environmental concerns.

As it marks its 30th anniversary this year, the WTO has continued to enable members to use trade as a means to improve living standards, create better jobs and promote sustainable development.

Another highlight on the green front was the growing recognition in the wider policy community of the role for trade in tackling climate change. The UN's COP28 Climate Change Conference in Dubai in December for the first time had a dedicated Trade Day, and the WTO Secretariat co-hosted a Trade House pavilion where we launched a new publication showcasing trade policy options governments could use to amplify their climate change policies.

As for inclusion, members made a number of important advances leading up to MC13. One was the formal adoption,

after years of negotiations, of WTO membership terms for Comoros and Timor-Leste - both least developed countries. In addition, members reached long-awaited decisions on special and differential treatment for developing countries, and on easing the transition for economies graduating out of least developed country status.

Another valuable step forward was the finalization of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement, which promises to help developing economies by simplifying investment-related procedures, helping them attract investment and connect to global markets. Over three-quarters of WTO members participate in this initiative and have requested its inclusion in the

WTO framework. Ministers at MC13 also had a structured conversation on socio-economic inclusion, looking at how trade could be used to empower women and expand opportunities for small businesses.

On agriculture, however, despite the sector's importance for employment, incomes and food security, we were unable to achieve a breakthrough. This was disappointing, but work continues in Geneva to find a path towards reforming the WTO agriculture rulebook.

The WTO continued its efforts to enable developing economies to take advantage of international market opportunities, including through the Aid for Trade initiative, targeted supply-side support via the Enhanced Integrated Framework and the Standards and Trade Development Facility, and capacity support through the Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation. At MC13, together with the International Trade Centre, we launched the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund to help women tap into international market opportunities in the digital economy.

As part of this Annual Report's comprehensive look at what the WTO did last year, you will be able read about how regular committee work continued to provide a platform for WTO members to discuss trade concerns, propose new solutions

to pressing issues and find ways of avoiding potential trade conflicts.

You can see how members continued to use the WTO dispute settlement system to resolve disputes, with ten panel reports circulated, including three where the disputing parties found a mutually agreeable solution. WTO members also advanced work on dispute settlement reform and reaffirmed the goal of having a fully functioning dispute settlement system in place by the end of 2024. Efforts to this end are continuing in Geneva in a formal process with a respected ambassador as facilitator, supported by six co-convenors who are leading different strands of technical work.

The report also describes highlights of the WTO's research work, and partnerships with a wide range of other international organizations in areas ranging from subsidies to carbon pricing, trade finance and digital trade.

Finally, I always say trade is about people. This report introduces you to a few people who improved their lives and livelihoods through trade.



DR. NGOZI OKONJO-IWEALA
DIRECTOR-GENERAL

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

13th Ministerial Conference

The WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), held in Abu Dhabi, concluded on 2 March 2024 with the adoption of ten multilateral decisions and declarations aimed at responding to current trade challenges. Ministers were unable to conclude negotiations in all areas under discussion but agreed to continue talks on topics where convergence remained elusive during the Conference.

MC13 took place amidst a very challenging geopolitical and economic environment, with economies around the world grappling with the lingering effects of high inflation, shipping disruptions in vital waterways, ongoing conflicts and upcoming elections in some 60 members in 2024.

The conference brought together nearly 4,000 ministers, senior trade officials and other delegates from the WTO's 164 members and observers, as well as representatives from civil society, business and the global media.

In her opening speech to the conference, DG Okonjo-Iweala

said: "Our challenge this week is to prove that we can still deliver and demonstrate that MC12 was not a one-off miracle on Lake Geneva. We need to show the world that not only does the WTO underpin over three-quarters of global goods commerce — it is also a forum where members deliver new benefits for people through trade."

The opening session saw the adoption of WTO membership terms for Comoros and Timor-Leste, both least-developed countries. DG Okonjo-Iweala said: "Here at MC13, the WTO is welcoming its first new members in almost eight years. We celebrate the hard work they have put in, and the beneficial but

challenging reforms they have implemented at home." Both countries will become members of the WTO once they complete their domestic ratification processes.

For the first time at a ministerial conference, ministers engaged in conversations on how trade relates to two pressing issues that go to the heart of current political, economic and environmental challenges, namely sustainable development and socioeconomic inclusion. DG Okonjo-Iweala emphasized the recognition by members of "the role trade and the WTO can play in empowering women, expanding opportunities for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs,) and achieving sustainable





development in its three dimensions — economic, social and environmental.”

Initially scheduled for 26–29 February, the Conference was extended to 2 March in a push to reach outcomes on the issues at stake. Eventually, after round-the-clock negotiations, the MC13 Chair, Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), thanked members for their active engagement and confirmed the adoption of a series of important accords (see page 13).

In his closing remarks, the MC13 Chair said: “Delivering the Abu Dhabi package of outcomes is a true

testament to the value that members continue to attach to the organization and its pivotal role in ensuring an orderly global system of trade rules. Delivering these results also enhances trust and confidence in multilateralism, which is particularly valuable given the testing and uncertain times we find ourselves in.”

The package of outcomes comprises the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration and nine other multilateral decisions and declarations covering a range of topics, including renewing the commitment to have a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system by 2024 and improving

use of special treatment provisions for developing economies and least-developed countries (LDCs).

In the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration, WTO members commit to preserve and strengthen the ability of the multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core, to respond to current trade challenges, and to work towards necessary reform of the WTO to improve all its functions.

During the conference, ten WTO members submitted their instruments of acceptance of the Fisheries Agreement, bringing the total number of WTO members to have formally accepted the Agreement to over 70 and putting the historic agreement for ocean sustainability on track for entry into force at a record pace.

However, members were unable to conclude a “second wave” of negotiations aimed at adding new provisions – on curbing subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing – to the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. DG Okonjo-Iweala said: “While I had hoped that we could finish these negotiations in Abu Dhabi, you have prepared the ground for its conclusion at the next Ministerial Conference, if not earlier. The livelihoods of 260 million people who depend directly or indirectly on marine fisheries are at stake.”





Closing Ceremony of MC13 on 2 March 2024.

On agriculture, members had a common framework text to discuss for further agriculture reform for the first time in over 20 years. Despite intense negotiations, members were not able to reach consensus, as divergences remained in a number of areas, including on public stockholding for food security purposes.

MC13 saw the entry into force of new disciplines on services domestic regulation, which is expected to lower trade costs by over US\$ 125 billion worldwide. Supported by 72 WTO members, this joint initiative is designed to facilitate services trade by streamlining and simplifying regulatory procedures.

Ministers representing 123 WTO members – three-quarters of the WTO membership, including close to 90 developing economies and 26 least-developed countries – issued a Joint Ministerial Declaration marking the finalization of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement and making it available to the public. Ministers also issued a submission asking for the plurilateral agreement to be incorporated into Annex 4 of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO. However, consensus was not achieved on this request.

Co-sponsors of three environmental initiatives at the WTO presented

the next steps they are taking to advance work on plastics pollution, environmental sustainability, and fossil fuel subsidy reform.

In her concluding remarks, DG Okonjo-Iweala said: “We have worked hard this week. We have achieved some important things and we have not managed to complete others. Nevertheless, we moved those pieces of work in an important way. At the same time, we have delivered some

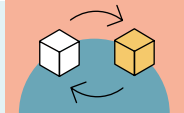
milestone achievements for the WTO and laid the groundwork for more.”

Looking ahead, she added: “The WTO remains a source of stability and resilience in an economic and geopolitical landscape fraught with uncertainties and exogenous shocks. Trade remains a vital force for improving people’s lives, and for helping businesses and countries cope with the impact of these shocks.”





Fact box: MC13 outcomes



Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration

WTO members resolved to strengthen the multilateral trading system to respond to current trade challenges, reiterated the centrality of development in the WTO's work and reaffirmed their commitment to work towards WTO reform.



Accessions

WTO members approved the WTO membership terms of Comoros and Timor-Leste, who will become the first new WTO members in almost eight years.



Dispute settlement reform

WTO members recognized progress made towards having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024. They instructed officials to accelerate discussions and work on unresolved issues.



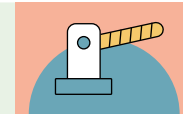
Small economies

WTO members reaffirmed their commitment to the Work Programme on Small Economies, instructing the WTO Secretariat to provide analysis on challenges and opportunities for small economies in e-commerce, the importance of supply chains for food security and the integration of climate change action into trade policies.



Graduating from LDC status

WTO members agreed that countries graduating from the LDC category will continue to benefit from certain procedures under the dispute settlement system and WTO technical assistance for a three-year transition period.



Technical barriers to trade

WTO members affirmed that regulatory cooperation and transparency help to reduce technical barriers to trade (TBT), underlined the value of digital tools and stressed the importance of technical assistance and capacity-building.



Special and differential treatment (S&DT)

WTO members requested improvements in WTO technical assistance to help developing economies address sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and TBT issues. They also called for further work on enhancing implementation of Special and differential treatment provisions.



Electronic commerce

WTO members agreed to re-invigorate work under the Work Programme on E-commerce, with a particular focus on development, and to maintain the practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions until MC14 or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier. The moratorium and Programme will expire on that date.



TRIPS non-violation and situation complaints

WTO members extended until MC14 the moratorium on "non-violation and situation complaints", which deal with situations where a WTO member may argue that it has been deprived of an expected intellectual property benefit, even if no agreement has been violated, under the TRIPS Agreement.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Trade and climate change

For the first time, trade was spotlighted as a specific theme at the UN's COP28 Climate Change Conference, held from 30 November to 12 December in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE).



DG Okonjo-Iweala speaking at the Trade House at COP28.

Underlining trade's pivotal role, the WTO co-led with the UAE a "Trade Day" at the conference, in cooperation with UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Chamber of Commerce, the World Economic Forum and the Abu Dhabi Department of Economic Development.

"Trade is about people, a tool for improving their lives and their livelihoods, and for promoting sustainable development," DG Okonjo-Iweala said in her opening remarks at a "Trade Day" event – "Global leaders unite to promote a roadmap of trade policy options for a just and ambitious global response to climate change". To deliver on

this objective, the WTO has been stressing that trade is part of the climate response and has been producing research and analysis on the complex relationship between climate change and trade, she said.

"The fact is, we cannot get to net-zero without trade because it is indispensable for spreading low-carbon technology to everywhere it is needed," DG Okonjo-Iweala declared. Trade policy tools can help countries increase low-carbon goods uptake by reforming import tariffs, rethinking government procurement and promoting trade facilitation, she added, urging world leaders to make fuller use of trade as part of the climate action toolkit.

DG Okonjo-Iweala participated in several high-level events at the conference, such as the World Climate Action Summit and the Business and Philanthropy Climate Forum. The DG also attended meetings of the Coalition of Trade Ministers on Climate, which issued a set of voluntary actions for aligning trade with climate action.

The WTO also co-hosted the Trade House pavilion at the conference, with three other international organizations – the International Chamber of Commerce, the International Trade Centre and UNCTAD. With 47 events hosted by a series of stakeholders, the Trade House pavilion served as a dedicated space for sparking



discussions and generating possible solutions on how trade can help drive climate and sustainable development actions.

Concrete actions and policies

During COP28, the WTO Secretariat launched a new publication titled “Trade Policy Tools for Climate Action”. The 10-point policy toolkit showcases concrete trade policies and measures that several WTO members are already deploying to address climate change (both mitigation and adaptation). Key measures include updating and aligning energy efficiency regulations with international standards, reviewing domestic regulations and restrictions for providers of climate-related goods and services and rebalancing import tariffs to favour low-carbon technologies.

Also presented at COP28 was a joint report with the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), titled “International Trade in Green Hydrogen”. It highlights the importance of trade in developing markets for “green” hydrogen – hydrogen produced exclusively from renewable power – which is crucial for decarbonizing sectors such as industrial processes, shipping and aviation.

In addition, the WTO Secretariat, with partners including the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the International Energy Agency, the World Steel Association and Responsible Steel, collaboratively developed and launched “Steel Standards Principles”. Endorsed by 42 standards-setting bodies, international organizations, steel producers and industry associations, the principles stress the importance of collaborative dialogue across economies and sectors and contain a commitment to establish common methodologies on measuring greenhouse gas emissions within the steel sector.

Discussions at WTO

In 2023, climate-related issues continued to be increasingly discussed in various contexts at the WTO. For example, the Committee on Trade and Environment held its first thematic session focused on “Trade contributions to energy transition efforts concerning climate adaptation and mitigation” where discussions pointed out the Committee’s role in facilitating transparency, dialogue and evidence-based discussions on energy transition and trade matters (see page 117).

On the instructions of ministers at the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12), the SPS Committee (see page 88) explored the impact on the implementation of the SPS Agreement of challenges including climate change, increasing environmental challenges and associated stresses on food production. The Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee (see page 92) held a thematic session examining the role of technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures in contributing to members’ strategies to address climate change.

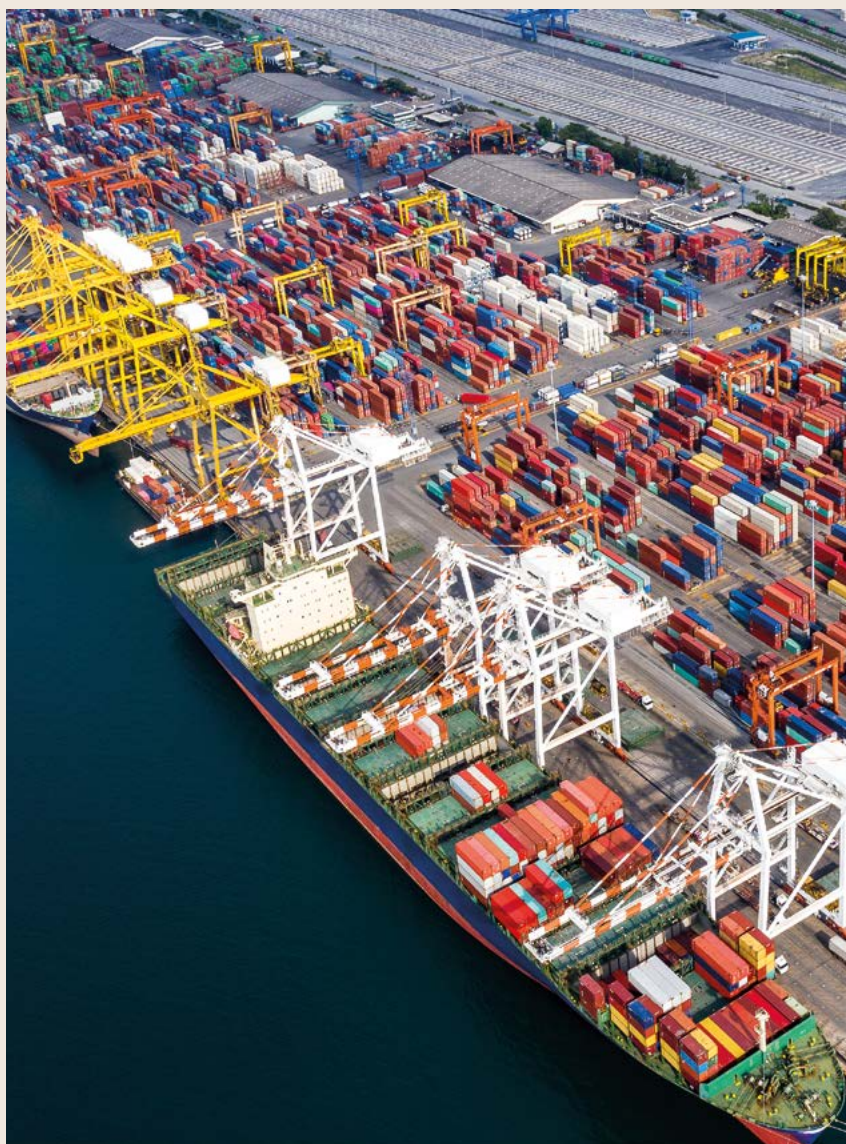
Members also presented and discussed specific climate-related measures in various WTO committees and bodies, including in Trade Policy Reviews. This enhanced activity is reflected in the growing number of trade-related measures with climate-related objectives notified to the WTO. The WTO environmental database contains more than 5,000 measures notified since 2009.

Groups of WTO members also held dedicated discussions on climate-related issues in the member-led environmental initiatives. The Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD) (see page 73) compiled best practices in the development of trade-related climate measures. The Fossil Fuel Subsidies Reform (FFSR) initiative (see page 73) advanced efforts towards “the rationalization and phase out of inefficient fossil fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption”. The Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade (see page 72) discussed a report which explored the emissions associated with the production, consumption and disposal of single-use plastics. At the 13th Ministerial Conference in February 2024, the three environmental initiatives outlined plans for their next phase of work.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Global trade developments and outlook

Merchandise trade declined in 2023 as the lingering effects of inflation and high energy prices weighed on demand for trade-intensive manufactured goods. Meanwhile, trade in commercial services continued to expand. Goods trade is expected to recover gradually in 2024 and 2025 as lower inflation lifts real household incomes and increases demand for imports. However, regional conflicts and geopolitical tensions continue to pose significant downside risks.



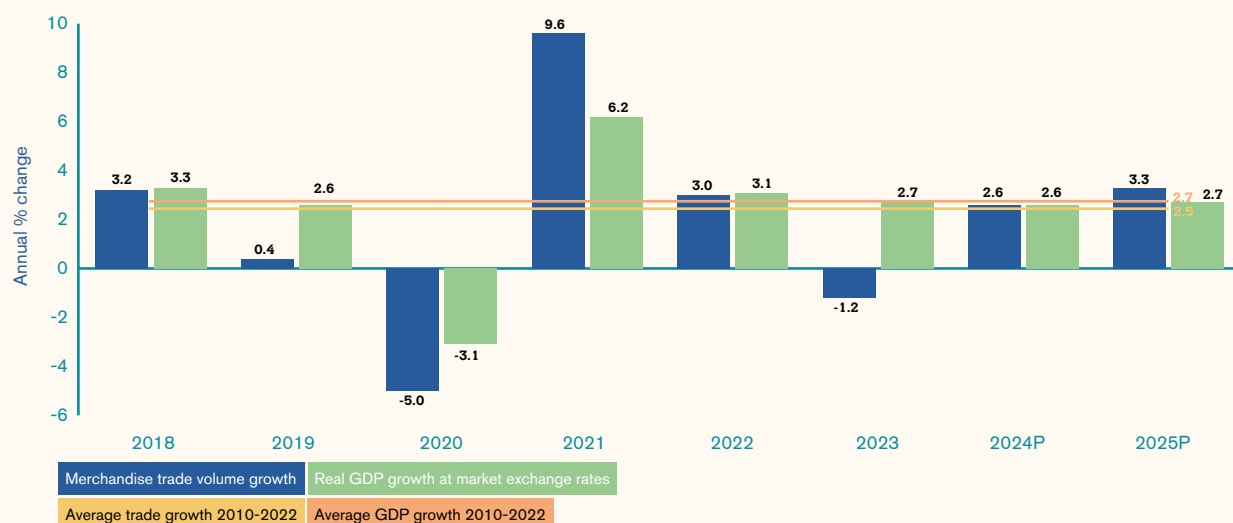
Merchandise trade and GDP

The volume of world merchandise trade fell by 1.2 per cent in 2023, compared with growth of 3.0 per cent in 2022 (see Figure 1). The decline was accompanied by weaker global GDP growth at market exchange rates, which fell to 2.7 per cent in 2023, down from 3.1 per cent in the previous year. Trade growth in 2023 was well below the 2.5 per cent average since the global financial crisis of 2008-09, while GDP growth was only slightly below its average rate of 2.7 per cent over the same period.

The trade slump in 2023 affected some regions and sectors more than others. Inflation reduced real household incomes and eroded revenues of firms, particularly in developed economies. This, in turn, reduced demand for trade-intensive manufactured goods, with some notable exceptions including electric vehicles and solar cells. Europe was hit especially hard by high energy prices due to its dependence on natural gas imports, which were disrupted by the war in Ukraine.

While Europe's exports registered a moderate decline (-2.6 per cent), its imports contracted sharply (-4.7 per cent). North America recorded the

Figure 1: World merchandise trade volume and GDP growth, 2018-25
Annual percentage change



Note: Figures for 2024 and 2025 are projections. Merchandise trade grew 2.5 per cent per year on average between 2010 and 2023 while GDP growth averaged 2.7 per cent.

Sources: WTO for merchandise trade volume and consensus estimates for GDP.

strongest export growth of any region (+3.7 per cent) but its imports also declined (-2.0 per cent). Asian trade volume growth was mostly flat on both the export side (+0.1 per cent) and the import side (-0.6 per cent). Trade volume growth in other regions was mixed, with import growth strongest in countries that export energy products disproportionately. This is because commodity prices and export earnings remained high by historical standards.

The disproportionate magnitude of the decline in goods trade relative to output can be partly explained by the larger share of the European Union in world merchandise trade (30 per cent in 2023) compared to world GDP (24 per cent in the same year). Increasing consumption of services following the end of pandemic measures in China may also have diverted some spending towards services that would otherwise have been directed towards goods.

Despite the downturn in 2023, merchandise trade and output have

been remarkably resilient in recent years, bouncing back from several severe economic shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these disruptions, merchandise trade volume at the end of 2023 was still up 6 per cent compared to its pre-pandemic peak in 2019, and 19 per cent compared to its average level in 2015.

Energy prices receded in 2023 from peaks reached in 2022 following the war in Ukraine but they remained high by historical standards, particularly in Europe, where prices for natural gas were 2.7 times higher than in 2019.

The high cost of energy over the last two years contributed to a broader rise in inflation that forced central banks in advanced economies to raise interest rates to multi-year highs.

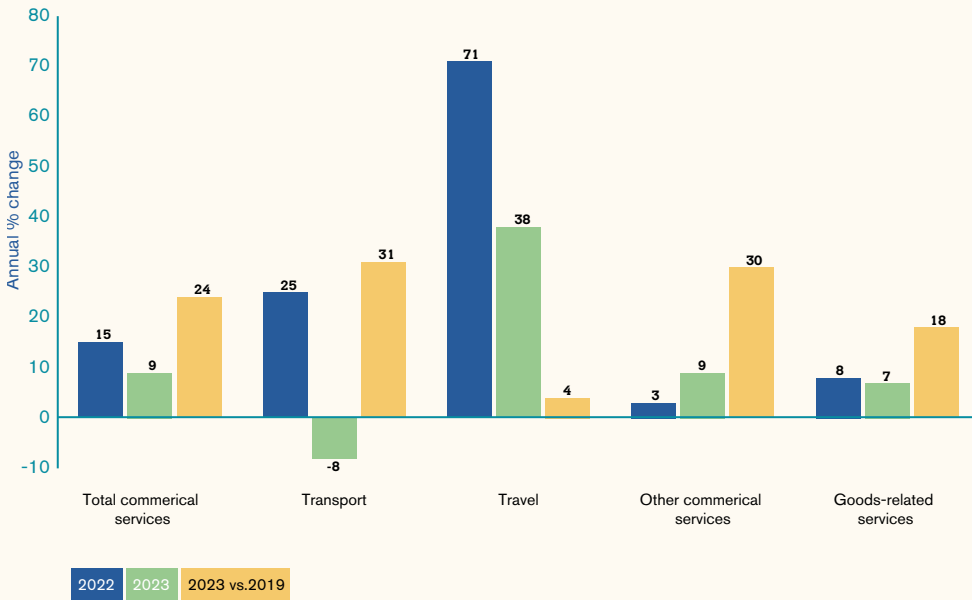
By the end of 2023, monetary tightening had succeeded in bringing inflation down nearly to central bank targets in advanced economies but hopes of early interest rate cuts were dashed.

The US dollar value of world merchandise trade is estimated to have declined by around 5 per cent in 2023 to US\$ 24.01 trillion. Some of this decline reflects falling primary commodity prices while some is attributable to reduced trade volumes in certain categories of goods.

The value of trade in manufactured goods was down 3 per cent, but this figure obscures larger declines in some categories (iron and steel, down 15 per cent, and chemicals down 9 per cent) and substantial

Higher prices and interest rates reduced real incomes of households and raised production and borrowing costs for businesses, which dampened consumption and investment.

Figure 2: Year-on-year growth in world commercial services trade, 2022-23
Annual percentage change



Note: Average of exports and imports.
Source: WTO-UN Trade and Development estimates.

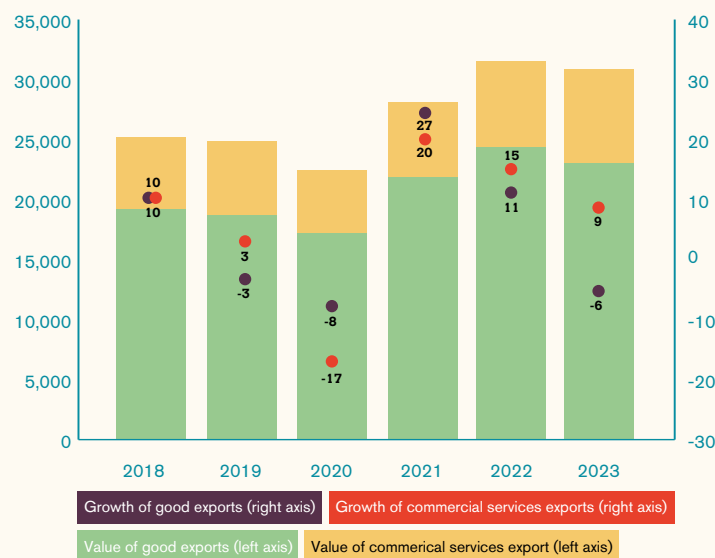
increases in others (automotive products up 17 per cent).

Services trade

Total commercial services trade recorded a strong 9 per cent increase in current US dollar terms in 2023 to reach US\$ 7.54 trillion (see Figure 2). The increase was less than the 15 per cent rise recorded for 2022 but still quite strong compared to the 5 per cent decline in the value of merchandise trade for the year. Growth in services trade partly offset the decline in merchandise trade, leaving total world goods and commercial services exports on a balance of payments basis down just 2 per cent in 2023 at US\$ 30.8 trillion (see Figure 3).

Services trade was boosted by travel spending, which was up 38 per cent following a 71 per cent post-pandemic surge in 2022. Transport was the

Figure 3: World goods and commercial services exports, 2018-2023
Billion US\$ and annual % change



Note: Goods trade differs slightly from merchandise trade.
Source: WTO.

weakest component of services trade in 2023, which registered an 8 per cent year-on-year decline linked to lower shipping rates and reduced goods trade volumes. The categories of other commercial services (including business and financial services) and goods-related services grew 9 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively.

Outlook for trade in 2024

Global trade growth is expected to pick up gradually over the next two years as lower inflation and rising incomes in advanced economies lift real wages and boost demand for goods, including imports. According to the WTO's forecast of 10 April 2024, the volume of merchandise trade is expected to increase by 2.6 per cent in 2024 and 3.3 per cent in 2025. The outlook is also positive for commercial services trade, and digitally delivered services in particular, which rose 51 per cent in value terms between 2019 and 2023.

The 1.2 per cent contraction in merchandise trade volume in 2023 was primarily driven by Europe, which subtracted 1.7 percentage points from global import growth and reduced global export growth by 1.0 percentage points.

If the WTO's trade forecast for 2024 is realised, Asia will make the biggest contribution to trade growth over the next two years (see Figure 4). The region is expected to add around 1.3 percentage points to the projected 2.9 per cent growth in world exports in 2024, or around 45 per cent. On the imports side it should add 1.9 percentage points to the anticipated 2.3 per cent growth in world imports, or around 81 per cent. Other regions should make smaller

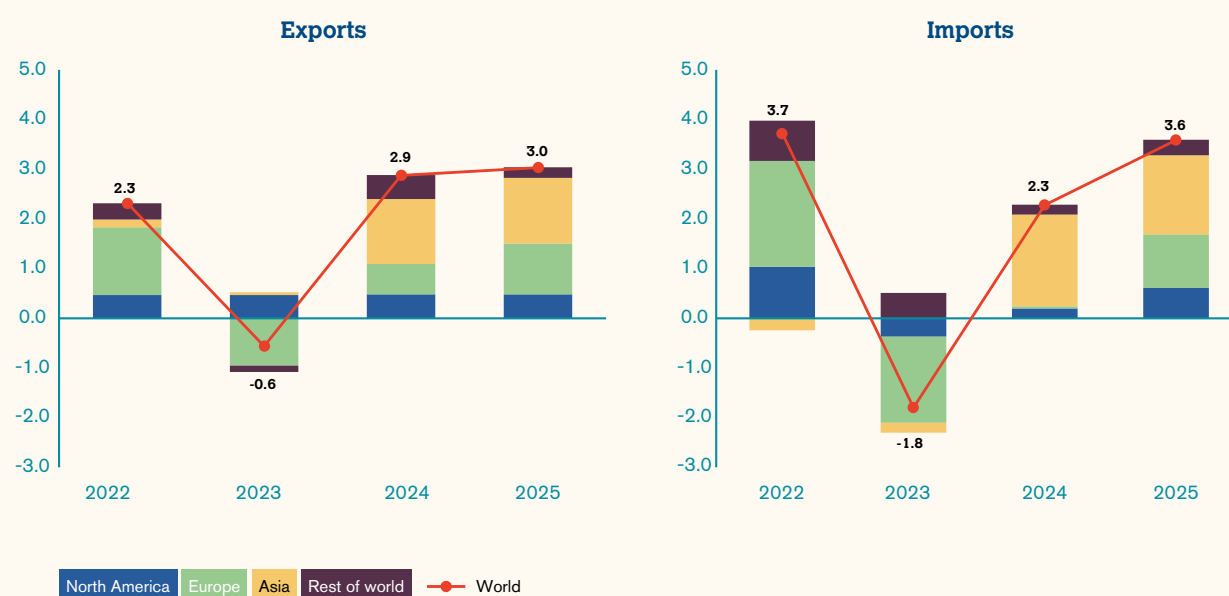
contributions to import demand but all are expected to be positive.

The outlook for 2025 is more positive, with all regions contributing to export and import growth, although there is much more uncertainty associated with longer-term projections.

Risks to the trade forecast are substantial. These include rising protectionism, increasing geopolitical tensions and ongoing regional conflicts in the Middle East and Europe. Other downside risks to the forecast include commodity price shocks and climate-related weather incidents. There is also some upside potential if falling inflation allows central banks to reduce interest rates although timing rate cuts correctly will be challenging for policymakers.

WTO economists predict a 2.6 per cent increase in the volume of world merchandise trade in 2024 following the weak showing in 2023.

Figure 4: Contributions to world trade volume growth by region, 2022-2025
Annual percentage change



Source: WTO and UN Trade and Development.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

World trade success stories

The following success stories show how trade and trade-related assistance can bring benefits to people across the globe, helping entrepreneurs improve their standard of living and creating new opportunities for local communities.

CÔTE D'IVOIRE

More than beans: a story of sustainable cocoa trade

Twenty years ago, some 90 cocoa producers from south-western Côte d'Ivoire came together to form a producers' cooperative and save their livelihoods.

"If we didn't combine our efforts, we would disappear and we would no longer want to grow cocoa," says Assata Doumbia, president of L'Entreprise Coopérative des Agriculteurs de Méagui (ECAM Cooperative). Today, the cooperative works with 2,800 producers, including 700 women.

Côte d'Ivoire supplies about 40 per cent of the world's cocoa but only receives between 5 and 7 per cent of the profit generated by this sector globally. It is estimated that more than half of Ivorian cocoa producers and their families live below the poverty line.

"Our distinctiveness is that we wanted to have connections with chocolate makers directly, which was beneficial for us," Assata says. The cooperative, which has sustainability certificates from Forest Alliance, Fairtrade and Ecocert, works directly with international chocolate-makers



such as Tony's Chocolonely, Ferrero and Mondelez.

Such has been its success that the cooperative has been able to invest in buying trucks to transport cocoa and in training farmers. It has built five schools and a kindergarten.

It has also diversified its income.

"We don't just limit ourselves to the marketing of cocoa beans. We turned towards the transformation of the beans we had on hand. So, we make cosmetics, soap from cocoa butter and coated beans. Here in Côte d'Ivoire, we make very good chocolate," Assata declares proudly.

Assata Doumbia of the ECAM Cooperative harvesting cocoa beans.

ZAMBIA**Growing vegetables for global markets**

Francis Chama is packhouse manager at Zambian vegetable and flower producer York Farm, near Lusaka.

The company specializes in growing and packing fresh vegetables, including baby corn and mange-tout peas. It employs up to 800 workers at its two farms. The packhouse is where produce is stored and packed for export to various destinations, including Germany, New Zealand, South Africa and the United Kingdom.

Compliance with international standards on food safety, farming, labour and the environment has contributed to the company's success in joining global supply chains, Francis says.

But the company has faced multiple challenges. These include high production costs, limited market access, and the cost of maintaining international standards and meeting export requirements. "We also have limited capacity to conduct inspections of exported products and often face product rejections by customers due to quality issues," he adds.

Least-developed countries (LDCs) such as Zambia typically need trade support to equip potential producers to access international markets and bolster their participation in global supply chains.

York Farm has been working with the Standards and Trade Development Facility and the Enhanced Integrated Framework to strengthen its capacity to meet international standards, including by training inspectors, farmers and traders on meeting

phytosanitary requirements and providing training on pest control activities.

"As a result, we now have greater phytosanitary capacity, which has helped open new markets for our horticultural and floricultural products," Francis says.

Source: Enhanced Integrated Framework



Packaging of vegetables at York Farm, Lusaka.

WEST AFRICA

EIF project helps shea exports flourish in West Africa

Dr Fatoumata Sacko is the founder of Kocos Cosmétique, a small enterprise working to create products based on shea butter from Mali for export markets in countries such as Rwanda and Togo.

Fatoumata is one of more than 30,000 women from over 1,000 small businesses who have benefited from an EIF regional project implemented by the Global Shea Alliance (GSA) – based in Accra, Ghana – in collaboration with EIF national implementation units in Benin, Burkina Faso, Mali and Togo.

With a focus on creating processed products rather than raw materials and creating incentives to retain shea trees, women have moved

from being price takers to business partners. This systemic change creates a virtuous cycle where productivity improvements feed into better products, increased trade and future investment. Production of shea products such as shea butter and cosmetics have increased fourfold following investments in new storage and processing facilities.

The investment from the EIF of US\$ 2.5 million has already contributed towards more than US\$ 20 million in additional exports of shea and shea-based products. With the involvement of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the private sector, which helped mobilize an additional US\$ 650,000, the project has contributed towards the creation of more than 2,500 jobs. Shea trees also play a key role in carbon capture, with the project involving the planting of more than 15,000 trees.

Source: Enhanced Integrated Framework

Shea butter processing is helping to connect women in West African villages to the global marketplace.



ASIA

Using biopesticides to facilitate safe trade in Asia

Farmers and producers rely on pesticides to protect their crops against plant pests and diseases but they need to limit the level of pesticide residues in their crops to protect consumer health and meet export market requirements.

In Asia, an STDF regional project tested a new approach to tackle this challenge. Working in partnership with governments, farmers and

the agri-food industry in nine countries, ranging from Bangladesh to Viet Nam, the project piloted how biopesticides (a type of pesticide made from natural materials like animals, plants, bacteria and certain minerals) could be used alongside conventional pesticides to reduce pesticide issues affecting trade.

The project equipped over 170 government officers with the knowledge and skills to roll out the use of biopesticides. Regulations were harmonized, simplifying compliance by the private sector. New protocols and good practices were produced for use by farmers

to meet maximum residue limits (MRLs) set by Codex.

The pilot delivered over 18 residue-mitigation studies for products such as cabbage, sweet basil and chili peppers grown by millions of small-scale farmers. These studies showed that proper use of biopesticides reduced pesticide MRLs by half. With the cost of farm inputs rising, and increased interest in environmental protection, the project demonstrated a win-win both for biodiversity and for safe trade.

Source: Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF)



An STDF regional project is piloting the use of biopesticides to reduce pesticide issues affecting trade.

Our year



- In the run-up to the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), DG Okonjo-Iweala urged WTO members to “narrow down realistic deliverables” for agreement at MC13 and to build on the negotiating successes achieved at MC12.
- Following five days of intense negotiations at the end of February 2024, MC13 ended with ministers adopting ten multilaterally agreed decisions and declarations, covering development, dispute settlement reform, e-commerce and other areas. The package included approval of WTO membership for Comoros and Timor-Leste.
- Members committed to continue negotiations in areas such as agriculture and fisheries subsidies where consensus could not be found.
- The WTO expanded its work with other organizations, such as the World Bank Group and the IMF, cooperating in areas such as subsidies, digital trade, trade finance and climate action.

Trade negotiations and discussions

In the months leading up to MC13, DG Okonjo-Iweala urged members to build on the negotiating successes achieved at MC12 in June 2022, including a landmark accord on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies.

At a senior government officials' meeting in October, she called on members to “narrow down realistic deliverables” for agreement at MC13. Officials discussed priority areas, such as agriculture, trade and development, fisheries subsidies and dispute settlement reform. They also discussed WTO reform, including institutional reform and possible areas of future work.

Talks on fisheries subsidies sought to conclude a “second wave” of provisions on curbing harmful subsidies. Following intensive negotiations throughout 2023 and early 2024, the chair, Einar Gunnarsson, circulated in February 2024 a text as the basis for finalizing negotiations at MC13.

In agriculture, the chair of the negotiations, Alparslan Acarsoy, presented members

in January 2024 with a draft text aimed at striking a “delicate balance” between members' proposals and reflecting “as faithfully as possible” the state of play in the talks.

The DG also stressed the need for members to make progress on development discussions, both within the context of WTO reform and in the work of the Committee on Trade and Development.

On 16 February 2024, the DG submitted the draft “Abu Dhabi Package” of decisions and declarations to ministers to help them prepare for MC13.

Intense negotiations at MC13 at end-February resulted in ministers adopting ten multilaterally agreed decisions and declarations, covering development, dispute settlement reform, e-commerce and other areas. On agriculture and fisheries subsidies, members were unable to find convergence but agreed to continue negotiations.

Members also agreed the WTO accession terms of Comoros and Timor-Leste, the first expansion of the WTO membership since 2016.

For more on trade negotiations, see page 48.



A Heads of Delegation meeting at MC13.



Implementation of WTO agreements and trade monitoring

WTO members discussed a range of issues in the General Council in 2023, including WTO reform, the WTO response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and preparations for MC13 in February 2024.

Discussions on WTO reform included four meetings focusing on development, the WTO's deliberative function and institutional matters, trade and industrial policy, and trade and environmental sustainability. The General Council Chairperson, Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme, said: "WTO reform has become an important element of our preparations to ensure a successful Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi."

The General Council elected Minister of State for Foreign Trade of the United Arab Emirates Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi as MC13 Chairperson in July.

The General Council Chair began consultations on a draft ministerial declaration in November, which culminated in the Abu

Dhabi Ministerial Declaration, adopted at MC13 on 2 March 2024, setting out a forward-looking, reform agenda for the organization.

The package of ministerial decisions adopted at MC13 included a decision instructing the General Council to hold periodic reviews on the E-commerce Work Programme and to maintain the current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions until MC14 or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier.

The General Council agreed in December to increase the WTO's operational budget by 3.6 per cent for 2024 and 2025, the WTO's first operating budget increase in 12 years.

The WTO's latest trade monitoring report showed that, in 2023, members introduced more trade-facilitating than trade-restrictive measures on goods unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic up to mid-October, a period marked by multiple crises affecting the global economy, including inflation and rising geopolitical tensions. However, many restrictions on food, feed and fertilizers remained in place.

For more on implementation, see page 76.



General Council
Chair Athaliah
Lesiba Molokomme.



Petter Ølberg chaired the Dispute Settlement Body in 2023.

Dispute settlement

The WTO's dispute settlement system maintained a high level of activity. WTO members filed six requests for consultations, the first stage in the dispute settlement process, compared with eight in 2022. By the end of 2023, a total of 621 disputes had been initiated under the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) since the establishment of the WTO in 1995.

Parties in three disputes informed the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) during 2023 that, in the absence of a functioning Appellate Body, they had agreed to resort to an alternative mechanism – the multi party interim appeal arbitration arrangement – to decide any appeal of a final panel report.

Ten panel reports were circulated in 2023, including three in which a mutually agreed solution had been reached. The DSB adopted

two panel reports during this period. Nine panel reports were appealed, and the appeals in three disputes were withdrawn. This brings to 30 the number of disputes in which appeals were pending as of 31 December 2023.

WTO members continued informal discussions on dispute settlement reform, with the view to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024, as agreed at MC12. In February 2024, Marco Molina, the convenor of the discussions, presented a consolidated draft text on reform of the system.

At MC13, members adopted a Ministerial Decision recognizing the progress made, renewing their MC12 commitment to the 2024 deadline, and instructing officials to work on unresolved issues, including issues regarding appeal/review and accessibility.

For more on dispute settlement, see page 130.

📌 Ten panel reports were circulated in 2023, including three in which a mutually agreed solution had been reached.



Supporting development and building trade capacity

The Committee on Trade and Development discussed initiatives to boost developing economies' integration into the global trading system, including in e-commerce. The share of least-developed countries (LDCs) in global merchandise exports was 1.15 per cent in 2022, up from 0.93 per cent in 2021, while their share in world commercial services exports grew to 0.53 per cent, up from 0.49 per cent in 2021.

At MC13 in February 2024, WTO members adopted a decision to extend for a three-year period support measures for least-developed countries graduating from LDC status. They also adopted a decision on improving implementation of special and differential treatment (S&D) provisions for developing economies in the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement and the Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement.

Disbursements under the WTO-led Aid for Trade initiative, which seeks to help developing economies and LDCs benefit from trade, amounted to US\$ 47.8 billion in 2021. A total of US\$ 632 billion has been disbursed since 2006.

Projects supported by the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) – a multilateral partnership that helps LDCs use trade as an engine for growth – have generated over US\$ 815 million in additional exports since 2010.

The Standards and Trade Development Facility, a global partnership helping developing economies meet international standards for food and plant trade, approved US\$ 6.5 million for projects in 2023.

Approximately 6,500 government officials participated in WTO training activities to improve understanding about the multilateral trading system, compared to 5,500 participants in 2022.

At MC13, the WTO and the International Trade Centre (ITC) launched a US\$ 50 million global fund to help women tap into opportunities in international trade and the digital economy.

For more on development, see page 136.

EIF is supporting a number of priority sectors in Cambodia, including high-value silk production.

Outreach

DG Okonjo-Iweala attended the COP28 Climate Summit in Dubai in November, where a “Trade Day” was held for the first time. She said: “This thematic day should inspire world leaders to make fuller use of trade as part of the climate action toolkit.” The WTO Secretariat launched a new publication titled “Trade Policy Tools for Climate Action” showcasing trade policies and measures that WTO members are already deploying to address climate change.

The WTO, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum (WEF) launched “Action on Climate and Trade”, a new initiative to help participating developing economies and LDCs use trade to meet their climate change mitigation and adaptation goals.

The WHO, WIPO and WTO Directors-General agreed in September to shift the focus of trilateral cooperation from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

to supporting use of flexibilities in the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) to increase access to health technologies and to make better preparations for future pandemics.

The WTO hosted three Presidential Lectures in 2023, delivered by President Mokgweetsi E.K. Masisi of Botswana, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and President Macky Sall of Senegal.

Under the theme “It is time for action”, the 2023 Public Forum drew more than 2,000 participants to explore how trade and the WTO can help create a greener and more sustainable future.

Cooperation with the World Bank Group and the IMF included joint work on subsidies, a co-publication on digital trade for development, a new report on trade finance and the establishment of a carbon pricing task force.

For more on outreach, see page 154.

DG Okonjo-Iweala greets FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu at the Trade House at COP28 in Dubai.



2

What we stand for



WTO OMC

Simple, fundamental principles form the foundations of the multilateral trading system. These principles have lain at the core of all WTO activities since its creation in 1995.



Centre William Rappard
in Geneva, headquarters
of the WTO.

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In brief



Improving people's lives

The fundamental goal of the WTO is to improve the welfare of people around the world. The WTO's founding Marrakesh Agreement recognizes that trade should be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and increasing real income while allowing for the optimal use of the world's resources.



Opening trade

The WTO seeks to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible. Lowering trade barriers is an obvious way to encourage trade; these barriers include customs duties – or tariffs – and measures such as import bans.

Harvesting coffee cherries at Banaran Coffee Village in Central Java, Indonesia.



Inclusive trade

The WTO seeks to build a more inclusive trading system that will allow more women and small businesses to participate in trade and to reap the economic benefits of global trading. The WTO also recognizes the importance of addressing the digital divide so that economies across the world can take advantage of the opportunities provided by the digital economy.



Fair competition

“Unfair” practices, such as export subsidies and dumping products at below normal value to gain market share, are discouraged. WTO rules try to establish what is fair or unfair and how governments can respond, in particular by charging additional import duties calculated to compensate for damage caused by unfair trade.



Non-discrimination

Under WTO rules, a WTO member should not discriminate between its trading partners, and should not discriminate between its own and foreign products, services or citizens.



Predictability and transparency

Foreign companies, investors and governments should be confident that trade barriers will not be raised arbitrarily. With stability and predictability provided by WTO rules, investment is encouraged, jobs are created and consumers can fully enjoy the benefits of competition – such as increased choice and lower prices.



Support for less developed economies

Over three-quarters of WTO members are developing economies or in transition to market economies. The WTO agreements give them transition periods to adjust to WTO provisions and, in the case of the Trade Facilitation Agreement, provide for practical support for implementation of the Agreement.



Protection of the environment

Protection and preservation of the environment are fundamental goals of the WTO. The WTO agreements permit members to take measures to protect not only public, animal and plant health but also the environment. However, these measures must be applied in the same way to both local and foreign businesses.



Partnerships

The WTO maintains regular dialogue with civil society, labour unions, universities, the business community and other intergovernmental organizations to enhance cooperation and build partnerships. The WTO’s Trade Dialogues initiative and the annual Public Forum provide a platform for civil society, business groups and others to discuss the latest developments in world trade and to propose ways of enhancing the multilateral trading system.

World Trade Organization

A brief history

The WTO began life on 1 January 1995, succeeding the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which had regulated world trade since 1948. Over the past 30 years, the WTO has made an important contribution to the strength

and stability of the global economy, helping to boost trade growth, improve people's lives and support the integration of developing economies into the trading system. The following timeline looks back at some of the WTO's major achievements.

2024

February-March

13th Ministerial Conference concludes with series of multilateral decisions, commitment to continue talks.



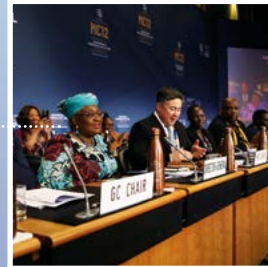
2022

June

12th Ministerial Conference results in an unprecedented package of decisions, including a landmark Fisheries Subsidies Agreement.

December

First **World Trade Congress on Gender** takes place at the WTO.



2020

November

WTO marks its **25th anniversary**.



2023

January

Switzerland becomes first member to formally accept **Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies**.

December

First-ever "**Trade Day**", co-led by the WTO, held at COP28 in Dubai.



2021

February

Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala becomes the first African and first woman to become Director-General.

December

Negotiations on **services domestic regulation** conclude successfully, with increased market access for service providers.

2019

October

WTO hosts inaugural **World Cotton Day** to highlight central role of cotton in developing economies.

2015

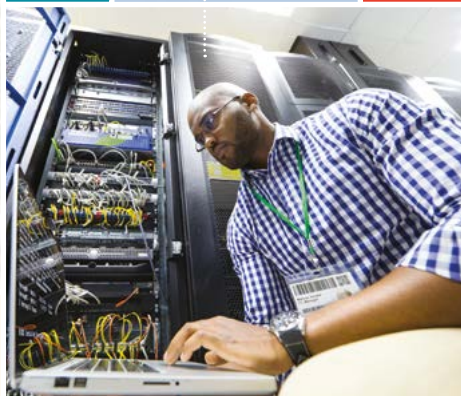
December

10th Ministerial Conference results in “**Nairobi Package**”, including abolition of agricultural export subsidies and expansion of **Information Technology Agreement**.

2013

December

9th Ministerial Conference in Bali, Indonesia, sees conclusion of negotiations on landmark **Trade Facilitation Agreement**.



2017

January

Amendment to the **TRIPS Agreement** enters into force, easing access to medicines.

February

Trade Facilitation Agreement enters into force.

December

11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, sees launch of new areas of negotiations.

2018

January

WTO and UN Environment launch new dialogue on using trade to support **green growth**.

2014

April

Revised Government Procurement Agreement enters into force, adding new markets.

2012

November

Historic signing ends 20 years of **EU-Latin American banana dispute**, the longest-running dispute in WTO history.

2010

January

WTO Chairs Programme launched to support trade-related work of universities in developing economies.

2007

November

First Global Review of Aid for Trade takes place in Geneva.

2005

December

6th Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong, China, sees launch of Aid for Trade initiative.



2011

December

Expansion of Agreement on Government Procurement agreed at **8th Ministerial Conference** in Geneva.

2009

September

First WTO Open Day in Geneva.

November

7th Ministerial Conference in Geneva takes stock of WTO's contribution to growth.

2006

September

First WTO Public Forum takes place in Geneva.

2001

November

4th Ministerial Conference

in Doha, Qatar, sees launch of new round of trade negotiations known as the Doha Development Agenda.

1998

May

2nd Ministerial Conference in Geneva marks 50 years of the GATT.

1996

December

WTO holds first Ministerial Conference in Singapore.



2003

September

5th Ministerial Conference in Cancún, Mexico, welcomes Cambodia and Nepal as first least-developed countries to join WTO since its establishment.

1999

November

3rd Ministerial Conference in Seattle, United States, ends with breakdown in negotiations amid public protests.

1997

July

Information Technology Agreement enters into force, slashing tariffs on IT goods.

1995

January

The WTO is born on **1 January**.

3

What we do

MC13
WTO MINISTERIAL
CONFERENCE
ABU DHABI - UAE

2024



The WTO operates the global system of trade rules, guaranteeing WTO member governments important trade rights.

It provides a forum for its members to lower trade barriers through negotiations and oversees a system for resolving the trade problems

they face with each other. It also helps developing economies improve their capacity to trade.

The overall objective of the WTO is to help its members use trade as a means to raise living standards, create jobs and improve people's lives.

The closing ceremony of MC13 on 2 March 2024.

MINISTERIAL



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In brief



Trade negotiations

The WTO agreements – covering goods, services and intellectual property – are not static; they are altered from time to time and new agreements can be added to the package. Changes to the rules of trade require the agreement of WTO members, who must reach consensus through negotiations. Recent agreements include the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement adopted by WTO members at the 12th Ministerial Conference in June 2022 (see page 48).



Implementation and monitoring

WTO agreements require governments to make their trade policies transparent by notifying the WTO about laws in force and measures adopted. Various WTO councils and committees seek to ensure these requirements are being followed and that WTO agreements are being properly implemented. All WTO members must undergo periodic scrutiny of their trade policies and practices, while trade monitoring reports regularly review trade developments for the WTO membership as a whole (see page 76).



Dispute settlement

The WTO's procedures for resolving trade disputes are vital for enforcing the rules and for ensuring trade flows smoothly. WTO members bring disputes to the WTO if they think their rights under the agreements are being infringed. Rulings by specially appointed independent experts are based on interpretations of the agreements and individual members' commitments (see page 130).



Building trade capacity

WTO agreements contain special provisions for developing economies, including longer time periods to implement agreements and commitments, and support to help them build their trade capacity. The WTO organizes hundreds of training activities for developing economies annually. The Aid for Trade initiative aims to help developing economies improve the skills and infrastructure needed to expand their participation in global trade (see page 136).



Outreach

The WTO maintains regular dialogue with non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians, other international organizations, the business sector, universities and the general public on various aspects of the WTO, with the aim of enhancing cooperation and increasing awareness of WTO activities (see page 154).

Trade negotiations in 2023 culminated with multilateral agreement on ten decisions and declarations at the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, on 2 March.



Joining the WTO

- **At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024, WTO members invited Comoros and Timor-Leste to join the WTO. The two least-developed countries (LDCs) will bring the total number of WTO members to 166 – the first expansion since 2016.**
- **Bhutan resumed its accession process after a 15-year gap.**
- **Accession negotiations in Central Asia were active. Uzbekistan injected renewed momentum into its accession process while Azerbaijan's process resumed after six years. Turkmenistan took the first step in the accession process.**

Background

The WTO is open to states or customs territories with full autonomy over their external commercial relations. To join, a government has to bring its economic and trade policies in line with WTO rules and principles and negotiate with WTO members the guaranteed minimum levels of access to its domestic markets for goods and services. The accession process promotes the integration of new members into the global economy. It begins when WTO members accept an application and establish a working party. It concludes when WTO members and the acceding government accept negotiated terms of accession.

WTO members approved WTO membership for Comoros and Timor-Leste at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi in February 2024. Once the two LDCs submit their acceptances of their respective accession protocols, WTO membership will expand to 166. They are the first new members since Afghanistan and Liberia joined in 2016.

In January 2024, the two working parties negotiating the accessions of Timor-Leste and Comoros agreed on the terms of the countries' membership, paving the way for ministers to take a formal decision at MC13.

Comoros

Members congratulated Comoros and underlined the importance of incorporating another LDC into the multilateral trading system. They noted that the diligent and systematic work done by Comoros, together with the political will demonstrated by the government, showcase how the difficult process of WTO accession can be brought to a successful conclusion.

"I would like to pay tribute to President Assoumani and the country's political leadership who have provided invaluable support for the accession effort since the Working Party first met in 2016. I should also acknowledge the tremendous work done by the country's negotiators and technical experts," DG Okonjo-Iweala said.

Ambassador Omar Zniber of Morocco, the working party chair, paid tribute to the Comoros delegation and negotiators: "I can only admire the way in which Comoros, despite its relatively limited economic and administrative resources, has found ways to successfully complete the long and complex process of accession to the WTO."

The Government of the Union of the Comoros applied for accession to the WTO in February 2007. The working party on the accession was established in October 2007, but did not meet until December 2016. The 10th and final meeting of the working party was on 9 January 2024.

H.E. Mr. AZ
PRESIDENT OF THE



DG Okonjo-Iweala congratulates President Azali Assoumani on the adoption of WTO membership terms for Comoros.

DG Okonjo-Iweala congratulates Deputy Prime Minister Francisco Kalbuadi Lay on the adoption of Timor-Leste's WTO membership terms.



Timor-Leste

Welcoming Timor-Leste, members stressed that the conclusion of negotiations is a milestone which will have a positive impact on the country's economic development and integration into the multilateral trading system. They underlined that Timor-Leste has set an example with the swift and effective way it conducted the accession process and encouraged the country to maintain momentum in the post-accession period.

"This is the fastest accession among all the LDCs which have joined the WTO to date ... building a strong foundation for this young nation's economic development," said Ambassador Rui Macieira of Portugal, chair of the working party.

After gaining independence in 2002, the Government of Timor-Leste submitted its application for accession to the WTO in November 2016. The working party was established in December 2016. It met for the seventh and last time on 11 January 2024.

Bhutan resumes its accession process after 15 years

In April 2023, Bhutan decided to resume its accession process after a 15-year pause. The Working Party on the Accession of Bhutan had last met for its fourth session in January 2008, with the accession process then at an advanced stage.

Ambassador Désirée Schweitzer of Austria was appointed as the new chair of the working party. From August to November, the country submitted key documents for the resumption of its working party process.

Uzbekistan injects renewed momentum into accession process

The working party for the accession of Uzbekistan held its sixth and seventh meetings in March and November. At the November meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Jamshid Khodjaev noted that WTO accession is "a critical part of the ongoing reforms that are fundamentally reshaping the economy and society." For the first time, WTO accession

had been included in the “Uzbekistan – 2030” strategy as “an official high-level development goal”, he added.

Uzbekistan submitted updated documents and introduced policy and institutional measures aimed at accelerating the accession negotiations, including the establishment of a special department in the Ministry of Justice for ensuring compliance with WTO rules. In 2023, Uzbekistan signed bilateral protocols on the conclusion of market access negotiations with Georgia, Mongolia, Nigeria, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Türkiye.

New impetus for Azerbaijan’s accession talks

WTO members welcomed the resumption of negotiations on the accession of Azerbaijan after a six-year gap, with the 15th meeting of the working party taking place in July. They stressed the importance of making substantive progress in both market access and trade rules.

Mikayil Jabbarov, Minister of the Economy, who led a high-level delegation of the Government of Azerbaijan, noted that WTO accession continues to be one of Azerbaijan’s trade priorities, with steps being taken to promote economic diversification. The government is adapting Azerbaijan’s trade legislation to international trade principles and implementing progressive reforms consistent with WTO rules, he said.

Azerbaijan’s accession process began in 1997 and the working party met for the first time in 2002. The 14th working party meeting was held in July 2017.

Turkmenistan takes first step in accession process

In June 2023, Turkmenistan established a commission to develop its Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime, the first step in the negotiating process. The document provides the basis for WTO members to start examining the country’s foreign trade regulations.

To assist in this work, between July and December 2023, the WTO Secretariat,

with support from the Asian Development Bank, delivered extensive virtual and on-the-ground training to Turkmenistan’s officials. These training activities focused on economic policies, a framework for making and enforcing policies, policies affecting trade in goods and transparency.

Technical assistance and outreach

A week-long course on WTO rules in accession negotiations was organized at the WTO in December. It was attended by 29 officials from 11 acceding governments.

The 12th China Round Table on WTO Accessions took place during MC13. The focus was on Arab perspectives on WTO accessions and the multilateral trading system. A high-level session launched a study entitled: “Best Practices in WTO Accessions for the Arab Region: Lessons from Past and On-going Accessions in the Region”. It was the first round table held in the Arab region, one of the most under-represented regions in the WTO.

During 2023, the Secretariat delivered in collaboration with partners a large number of training activities benefiting around 1,000 participants from acceding governments. The Secretariat also organized technical assistance activities for Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

For a full list of WTO members and observers, see page 203.



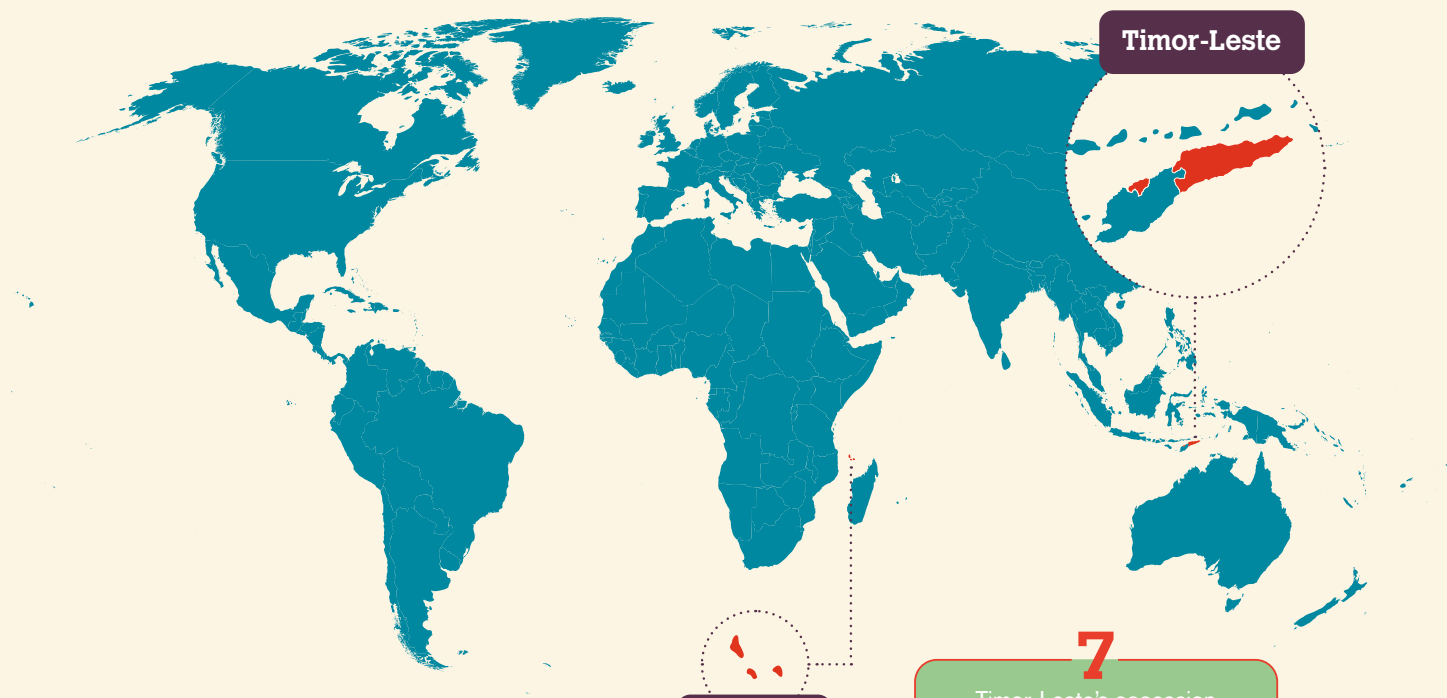
6

WTO members welcomed the resumption of accession negotiations for Azerbaijan after a six-year gap.

Comoros and Timor-Leste will become the WTO’s newest members in 2024.

A growing membership

WTO to grow to 166 members.



Timor-Leste

Comoros

2

At MC13, members approved WTO membership terms for **two countries** – Comoros and Timor-Leste.

16

The accession process for Comoros was just over **16 years**.

30

Comoros and Timor-Leste will become WTO members **30 days** after they deposit acceptance of their protocols of accession.

8

Comoros and Timor-Leste are the first new WTO members in almost **eight years**.

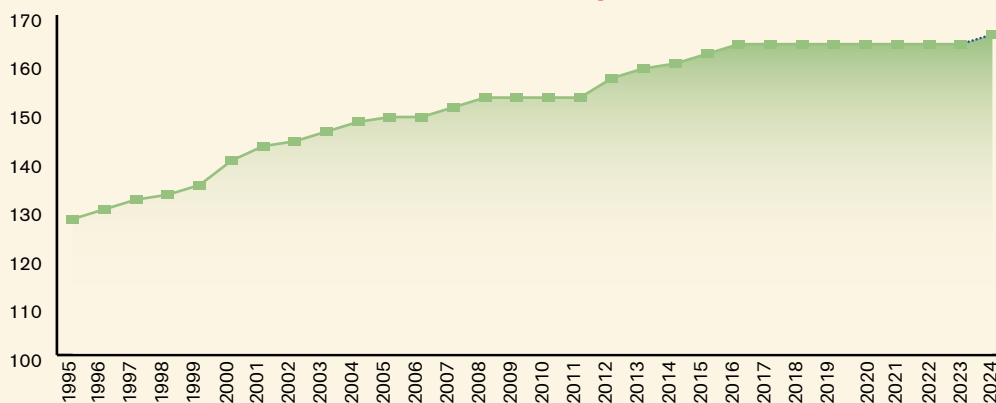
166

Comoros and Timor-Leste, both LDCs, will bring the total number of **WTO members to 166**.

22

There are currently **22 countries** seeking to join the WTO.

Cumulative number of WTO members per year



36

36 countries/territories have joined the WTO since its establishment on 1 January 1995.

A global membership

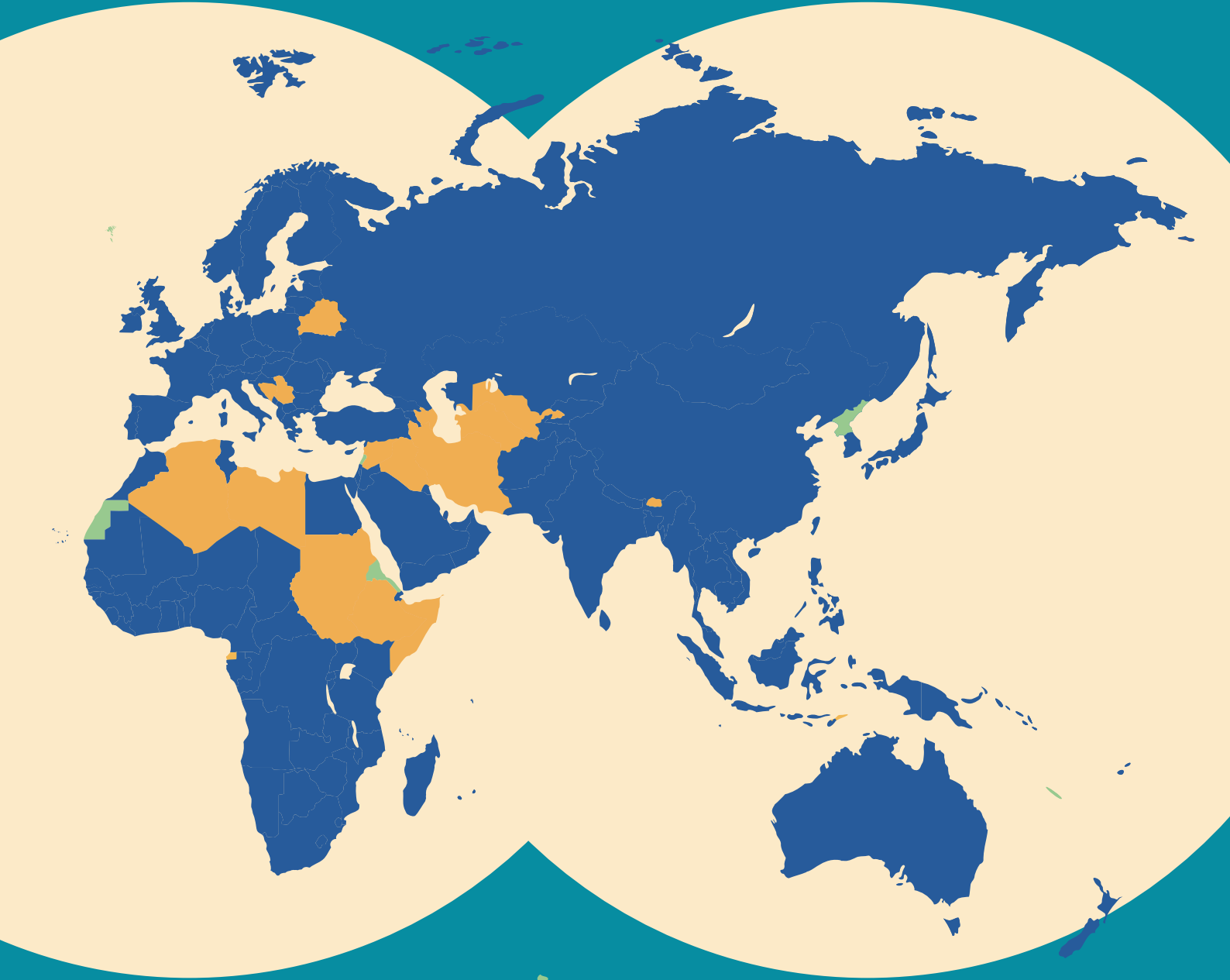
The WTO's 164 members represent 98 per cent of world trade.

At MC13, ministers approved WTO membership terms for Comoros and Timor-Leste, bringing the WTO's potential membership to 166.

- WTO members
- Observers
- Non-members

For a full list of WTO members and observers, see page 203.

The map is not intended to show WTO members' non-metropolitan/overseas territories or the status of such territories in regard to the WTO agreements.



Trade negotiations and discussions

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“It has become a WTO imperative to contribute to solutions to food and energy insecurity, the climate crisis, sustainability issues, pandemic preparedness, economic recovery and persistent developmental challenges.”
DG Okonjo-Iweala

Trade negotiations and discussions in 2023

- In the run-up to the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), DG Okonjo-Iweala urged WTO members to build on the negotiating successes achieved at MC12, including the landmark accord on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies.
- Members were regularly briefed by the chairs of negotiating bodies on the progress of work, in particular on agriculture, fisheries subsidies, development and services. The chairperson of the General Council, Ambassador Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme of Botswana, also updated members on progress on an outcome document for MC13 and on WTO reform.
- At MC13, five days of intense negotiations at the end of February 2024 ended with ministers adopting ten multilaterally agreed decisions and declarations, covering development, dispute settlement reform, e-commerce and other areas (see page 10).

At meetings with WTO members throughout the year, DG Okonjo-Iweala urged them to build on the negotiating successes achieved at MC12 in Geneva, including a landmark accord on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies and outcomes on addressing the food crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal was to prepare the way for achieving significant results at MC13 in Abu Dhabi in February 2024.

“Despite the impressive results you collectively delivered at MC12, we have so much more to



do,” she told the first session in 2023 of the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC), which she chairs. “MC12 cannot be seen as the miracle on Lake Geneva. We can only do that by showing that the organization is capable of delivering continuously, especially now that there’s so little faith and belief in multilateral institutions across the world,” she continued.

“It has become a WTO imperative to contribute to solutions to food and energy insecurity, the climate crisis, sustainability issues, pandemic preparedness, economic recovery and persistent developmental challenges,” the DG said.

At meetings of the TNC and other specially convened meetings, members were briefed by the chairs of committees and working groups handling key areas of the trade negotiations, including agriculture, fisheries subsidies, services and development. The Chairperson of the General Council, Ambassador Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme of Botswana, updated the Committee on consultations on an outcome

document for MC13 and the way forward on WTO reform (see page 13).

In agriculture (see page 52), the talks covered seven negotiating topics ranging from subsidies for farm goods to restrictions on food exports and the challenge of improving farmers’ access to markets.

In January 2024, Ambassador Alparslan Acarsoy of Türkiye, chair of the agriculture negotiations, presented members with a five-page draft text. He explained that it built on members’ submissions and interventions as well as on his consultations in various formats. With positions continuing to diverge widely on many topics, the draft aimed to strike a “delicate balance” between them and to reflect “as faithfully as possible” the state of play in the ongoing talks, he said.

As instructed by ministers at MC12, the talks on fisheries subsidies sought to conclude a so-called “second wave” of provisions for a comprehensive agreement

DG Okonjo-Iweala chairs a meeting of the Trade Negotiations Committee in December 2023.

on curbing harmful subsidies, including further disciplines on subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing.

Negotiations took place in week-long clusters (“Fish Weeks”) involving hundreds of participating delegates based in Geneva and in capitals. In September, the chair of the negotiations, Ambassador Einar Gunnarsson of Iceland, introduced a draft text, drawing from previous negotiating texts and proposals. In December, he circulated a chair’s text containing draft disciplines on subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing. Following a “Fish Month” in January and February 2024, he circulated to ministers a revised draft text as the basis for finalizing the negotiations on these issues at MC13.

At the July 2023 TNC, the DG stressed that members needed to make progress on development discussions, both within the context of WTO reform and in the work of the Committee on Trade and Development. She encouraged them in particular to work on improving the application of special and

differential treatment for developing economies and least developed countries.

In services, WTO members paid particular attention to the need to increase the participation of developing economies in global services trade.

The DG called on members to take the opportunity of a senior government officials’ meeting in October to “narrow down realistic deliverables” for agreement at MC13. Addressing the opening session on 23 October, the DG said: “The world is looking to the WTO and other multilateral institutions to show that we can contribute to solutions and bring a bit of certainty in a sea of uncertainty.”

“That is why at MC13 we need to show the world some solid deliverables on all fronts: fisheries and sustainability; agriculture and food security; development; the e-commerce moratorium (see page 80); services and digital trade; investment; and above all on WTO reform, particularly on reforming our dispute settlement system.”

DG Okonjo-Iweala speaking at a special meeting of members in February 2024.





Closing ceremony of MC13 in Abu Dhabi on 2 March 2024.

During the two-day meeting, senior officials had the opportunity to engage with each other on WTO members' priority areas, holding meetings of the full membership and breakout sessions on specific issues, such as agriculture, trade and development, fisheries subsidies and dispute settlement reform. They also held sessions on the issues of trade and industrial policy, and trade and environmental sustainability.

Before the meeting, WTO members adopted a decision to extend support measures to LDCs graduating from LDC status (see page 138). "With this decision, the WTO is sending a strong political signal that we can deliver for our most vulnerable members and help them achieve their development objectives," the DG said.

The wider issue of WTO reform was also on the table at the senior officials meeting. Ministers agreed at MC12 to address the challenges that the WTO is facing by working towards "necessary reform" of the WTO, with the aim of improving all its functions.

In their summary report as co-chairs of the meeting, the DG and General Council Chairperson highlighted discussions on specific aspects of reform, including institutional reform, the WTO's deliberative and negotiating functions, and possible areas of future work.

With regards to the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions, the DG said members have said clarity on this matter will be key in the run-up to MC13 but "everybody agrees that this is a vital issue to try to get to agreement".

Members were also regularly briefed on progress in various joint initiatives, including on investment facilitation for development (see page 65), e-commerce (see page 64) and services domestic regulation (see page 69). They were also briefed on three WTO environmental initiatives (see page 72).

Speaking at a special meeting of the WTO's General Council on 14 February 2024, the DG acknowledged the challenges that members faced in securing a package of outcomes for MC13 but said she was confident members would be able to deliver. "You know it's always very difficult and seems like it's not going to work," she told delegations. "But we never say never. We are going to get it done."

On 16 February, the DG submitted the draft "Abu Dhabi Package" of decisions and declarations to ministers to help them prepare for the conference.

At MC13, five days of intense negotiations ended with ministers adopting ten multilaterally agreed decisions and declarations, covering development, dispute settlement reform, e-commerce and other areas (see page 10).

Agriculture

- Agriculture Committee chair, Alparslan Acarsoy of Türkiye, undertook an intensive negotiation process to prepare possible outcomes for the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13).
- Ahead of MC13, the chair presented a five-page negotiating draft text that aimed to strike a “delicate balance” between still diverging positions and to reflect “as faithfully as possible” the state of play.
- Members continued negotiations at MC13 in February 2024 but were unable to reach consensus on the way forward.



A farmer harvests rice in Bali, Indonesia.

economies temporarily to raise tariffs in the face of sudden import surges or price falls.

Background

The broad objective of the agriculture negotiations is to reduce distortions in agricultural trade caused notably by high tariffs and domestic support measures as well as export subsidies and equivalent measures and export restrictions. The negotiations take place in the WTO Committee on Agriculture, meeting in special session. They are also to take into account the needs of developing economies.

The chair also encouraged evidence-based negotiations by organizing in March and May 2023 seminars on food security, public food stockholding, domestic support (subsidies), market access and export restrictions.

From May, the negotiations focused on domestic support, public food stockholding and export restrictions, with overall food security as a cross-cutting issue. The chair invited members to engage with each other and provide textual inputs focusing on areas of agreement between the different suggested approaches.

Following his appointment as chair of the special session of the Committee on Agriculture in January 2023, Ambassador Alparslan Acarsoy of Türkiye held numerous consultations with members in various formats.

The Chair of MC13, Dr Al Zeyoudi, Minister for Foreign Trade of the United Arab Emirates, convened a virtual mini-ministerial meeting in November to try to advance the negotiations. About two dozen ministers participated in the discussions, focusing on how to achieve a meaningful outcome on agriculture at MC13.

The special session held 22 meetings, including dedicated sessions on food bought at administered prices under public food stockholding programmes and on a proposed “special safeguard mechanism”. The mechanism would allow developing

“Reaching a reasonable outcome on agriculture at MC13 would not only be good for the agriculture sector, but for the entire multilateral trading system,” DG Okonjo-Iweala told ministers.



On 30 January 2024, the chair presented a five-page negotiating draft text. With positions continuing to diverge widely on many topics, the draft aimed to strike a “delicate balance” between them and to reflect “as faithfully as possible” the state of play in the ongoing talks, the chair said.

Discussions on the draft negotiating text continued at MC13 in February 2024 but WTO members were unable to reach consensus on the way forward.

Public stockholding for food security purposes

Public stockholding for food security purposes remained a priority issue for developing member proponents, who stress its importance for food security and rural livelihoods. WTO members have agreed to pursue a “permanent solution” to the challenges some developing economies face under WTO rules when buying food at government-set prices under these programmes.

Some developing economies called for an MC13 outcome that would expand the scope and coverage of an interim solution that was agreed at the Bali Ministerial Conference in 2013. While the Bali agreement shields certain programmes from legal challenge, under certain conditions,

the proposal would extend this to all developing economies, include more products and programmes and provide additional policy space to provide domestic support. Exporting economies have argued that this would allow some major agricultural exporting economies to distort global markets, undermining rural livelihoods and food security in other economies.

Domestic support

Domestic support was at the centre of negotiations throughout the year, with many technical papers and proposals put forward. The main objective remained to further discipline trade-distorting domestic support. However, members held very different views on key issues, including what constitutes “trade-distorting” domestic support and how a reduction in trade-distorting domestic support can be achieved. The proposals put forward reflected these differences.

Two proposals from the African Group and India called for the elimination of aggregate measurement support (AMS) entitlements (i.e. final bound total AMS) that allow certain members to provide support above their *de minimis* levels. *De minimis* refers to the minimal amounts of trade-distorting support allowed for all members.

Costa Rica submitted a proposal, which was subsequently adopted by the Cairns Group of farm goods exporters, establishing an overall domestic support limit and setting a target for reductions in a proportionate manner. It also provided for an upward adjustment of limits for developing economies. Proponents argued that the proposal would resolve the public stockholding issue, notably by offering additional flexibility for heavily imported products.

Cotton

At World Cotton Day on 4 October 2023, celebrated at the headquarters of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in Vienna, the DG was joined by a large group of African ministers and heads of other international agencies to reiterate

the importance of cotton. She urged WTO members to intensify their engagement in cotton negotiations, especially on reducing domestic support with trade-distorting effects on cotton international markets.

The Cotton-4 Group – Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali – circulated in November a proposal for a ministerial decision at MC13 to achieve this goal.

Following a collaboration agreement signed in 2022, FIFA and the WTO initiated a project to attract investors and technical cooperation partners to support the development of activities that add value to cotton in the Cotton-4 countries and in Côte d'Ivoire.

WTO members held the bi-annual WTO “Cotton Days” monitoring trade and development dimensions of cotton on 16-17 May and 7 November.

Market access

Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay circulated in November 2023 a proposal with substantive suggestions on several market access elements. It suggests approaches to address tariff simplification, tariff escalation (referring to higher import duties on finished or semi-processed products than raw materials), high tariffs and relatively high tariffs (tariff peaks). It proposes improvements in market access conditions under tariff rate quotas (see page 86), calls for a tariff-reduction formula to be agreed by MC14 and proposes phasing out special agricultural safeguards upon adoption of such a formula.

Special safeguard mechanism

Progress on this issue remained hampered by differences among members on whether the special safeguard mechanism should be a stand-alone topic or part of broader market access negotiations. Proponents considered such a mechanism to be critical to allow developing economies to raise tariffs temporarily to address import surges or price declines. The African Group submitted a revised version of a detailed proposal, initially submitted in 2021.



Collecting coffee cherries on a plantation in Jalapa, Guatemala.

Export prohibitions and restrictions

Discussions on enhancing the transparency and predictability of export restrictions and prohibitions intensified with the submission of new proposals by Japan and the United Kingdom. Key elements include timing and content of notification, exemption of certain exports from such measures, review of measures of long duration, clarification of some terms in the existing disciplines, and technical assistance provided by the WTO Secretariat.

In view of the acute food security challenges faced by the most vulnerable WTO members, the LDC Group proposed in October that net food-exporting members refrain from imposing export restrictions on foodstuff imported by LDCs and net food-importing developing countries (NFIDCs) for their domestic use.

Export competition

There was little discussion on export competition in the negotiations as members focused their work in this area in the Committee on Agriculture (see page 85).

Fisheries subsidies, other WTO rules

- **WTO members worked intensively throughout 2023 and early 2024 to conclude a “second wave” of fisheries negotiations on additional provisions for curbing harmful fisheries subsidies. Members came extremely close to concluding the negotiations at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024, and broadly signalled their commitment to continue talks.**
- **As of June 2024, 77 WTO members had formally accepted the landmark 2022 Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, more than half of the required number for its entry into force.**
- **The WTO Fisheries Funding Mechanism, known as the Fish Fund, is being set up to assist developing and least-developed members to implement the Agreement. Contributions received and pledges made amount to more than CHF 14 million.**

Background

The mandate of the WTO Negotiating Group on Rules covers anti-dumping, subsidies and countervailing measures, and fisheries subsidies. The UN Sustainable Development Goals call for agreement in the WTO on eliminating subsidies to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and to prohibit certain subsidies that contribute to overfishing and overcapacity, with special and differential treatment for developing economies.

Members worked intensively throughout 2023 and in early 2024 to conclude by MC13 a “second wave” of fisheries negotiations, as instructed by ministers in 2022, on additional provisions for a comprehensive agreement on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies, including further disciplines on certain forms of fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing.

In June 2022, at MC12, ministers adopted a binding multilateral Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, marking a major step forward for ocean sustainability by disciplining subsidies that harm the sustainability of fisheries and contribute to the depletion of the world’s fish stocks. The Agreement was only the second multilateral agreement reached at the WTO since 1995 and the first WTO agreement with environmental sustainability at its core.

At MC12, the Negotiating Group was mandated to conduct a second wave of negotiations, with a view to making recommendations to MC13, focusing largely on overcapacity and overfishing. Ministers also recognized that appropriate and effective special and differential treatment for developing and least-developed economies should be an integral part of these negotiations.

In January 2023, Ambassador Einar Gunnarsson (Iceland), newly elected as chair of the Negotiating Group on Rules, launched the new round of negotiations. This consisted of eight week-long clusters of meetings (Fish Weeks) in 2023, at which hundreds of participating delegates held vigorous exchanges on outstanding issues. In those discussions, members consistently reaffirmed their commitment to fulfil the MC12 mandate of concluding the second wave of negotiations by MC13.

At the beginning of September, the chair circulated a “starting-point” text of draft disciplines, drawing on the previous negotiating texts and proposals from members.

In subsequent Fish Weeks, members shared their reactions to the text and made textual suggestions for amending it.

Based on members' deliberations, and on instructions issued in October at a meeting of senior officials (see page 50), to adopt disciplines to meaningfully curtail harmful fisheries subsidies, the chair circulated a chair's text on 21 December 2023 containing draft disciplines on subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing and related elements.

The chair subsequently organized a "Fish Month" from mid-January to mid-February 2024 for members to adjust and refine the chair's text before submitting recommendations to MC13. Based on members' extensive engagement and suggestions put forward during the Fish Month, the chair prepared a text containing draft additional provisions on fisheries subsidies for ministers' consideration at MC13. This text was circulated prior to MC13 and served as the basis for discussions during the Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi.

At MC13, members came extremely close to concluding the negotiations on additional provisions. They were able to significantly narrow gaps and prepare the ground for an eventual conclusion. Members broadly signalled their commitment to continue negotiations after MC13.

In 2023, members also launched a workstream to develop the documents, procedures and practices for use by the future Committee on Fisheries Subsidies when the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies enters into force, upon its formal acceptance by two-thirds of WTO members. As of June 2024, 77 members had accepted the Agreement, representing more than 65 per cent of the required number.

The WTO Fisheries Funding Mechanism, established in November 2022 to assist developing and least-developed members to implement the Agreement, has received substantial donations from numerous members. As of 18 March 2024, donor



members had collectively disbursed more than CHF 9 million to the Fish Fund and committed or pledged a further CHF 5 million.

A fishing boat on the Bang Pakong river in Chachoengsao Province, Thailand.

The Fund is operated by the WTO in cooperation with the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Bank and the International Fund for Agriculture Development (IFAD). It is governed by its Steering Committee composed of representatives of donors and beneficiaries as well as representatives of the core partner international organizations. The Steering Committee held its first meeting in January 2024.

Beginning in November 2022 and up to mid-2023, the WTO Secretariat organized seven regional technical assistance and capacity-building workshops to provide capital-based trade and fisheries officials from developing and least-developed members with a detailed understanding of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and the second wave of negotiations.

DG Okonjo-Iweala held minister-level discussions on the Agreement during the workshops for the Pacific, Arab and French-speaking Africa regions. The WTO Secretariat followed up on a member-requested workshop in Geneva in November 2022 on implementing the Agreement with another in January 2023 concerning the state of fisheries resources and fisheries subsidies. These workshops aimed to provide members with factual information relevant to the issues being negotiated.

WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies

The WTO's Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, adopted at MC12 in June 2022, will help to curb harmful subsidies and protect fish stocks.

77

As of June 2024, 77 WTO members had formally accepted the Agreement.



2/3

The Agreement will enter into force once two-thirds of WTO members deposit their "instruments of acceptance".

22

The deal will help to curb the estimated US\$ 22 billion per year in harmful subsidies.

260

The Agreement will benefit over 260 million people who depend on fisheries for food, income and employment.

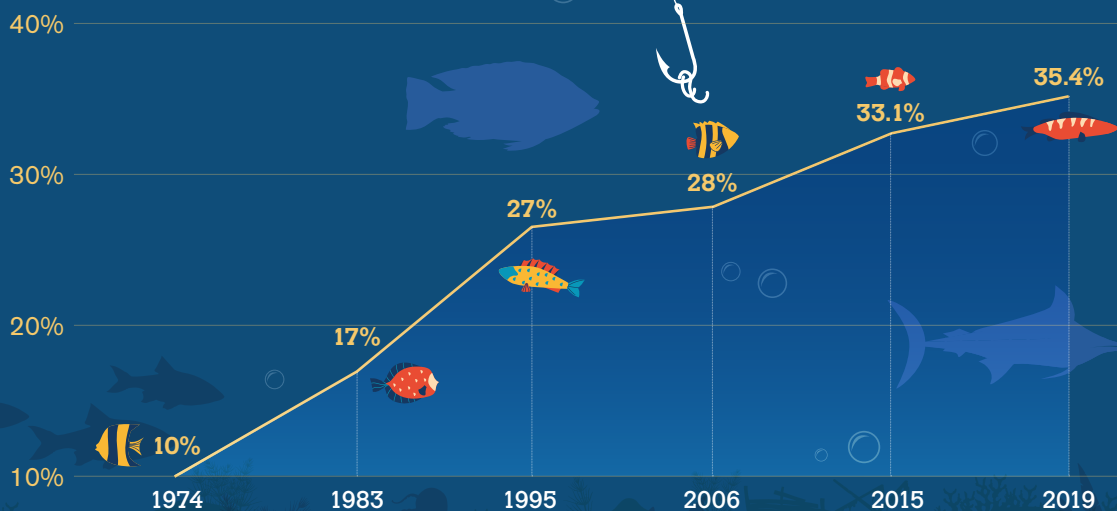
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Members advanced work on concluding a "second wave" of fisheries negotiations but could not reach consensus at MC13.

14

Contributions to the WTO's Fish Fund aimed at helping developing economies implement the Agreement amount to more than CHF 14 million.

Percentage of world fishery stocks that are overfished



Source: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO).

Market access for non-agricultural products

- The Negotiating Group on Market Access did not receive any papers or proposals in 2023 and did not meet during the year.

Background

Non-agricultural products are products not covered by the Agreement on Agriculture. These range from manufactured goods to fuels and fisheries. The negotiations aim to reduce or, as appropriate, eliminate tariffs as well as non-tariff barriers, particularly on goods of export interest to developing economies. The negotiations are conducted in the Negotiating Group on Market Access.

Services

- The chair of the special session of the Council for Trade in Services, Zhanar Aitzhan of Kazakhstan, consulted members on follow-up to the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12).
- Ambassador Aitzhan reported interest in discussing issues highlighted in the MC12 outcome document, including the need to increase the participation of developing economies in global services trade. Some members suggested exchanges of views on achievements regarding services in regional trade agreements and on members' experiences with autonomous liberalization.



Background

The General Agreement on Trade in Services mandates WTO members to progressively open up trade in services. The negotiations are overseen by the Council for Trade in Services, meeting in special session.

The chair of the services negotiations, Ambassador Zhanar Aitzhan, consulted WTO members on further work post MC12, taking account of the exploratory discussions on market access conducted since MC11 in 2017 and the text on services endorsed by ministers at MC12 in June 2022.

In her consultations, the chair said, interest was expressed in further discussing issues highlighted in the MC12 outcome document, in particular the need to increase the participation of developing economies in global services trade, including by focusing on sectors and modes of supply (see page 112) of export interest to them.

At an informal meeting in March 2023, suggestions were put forward for an exchange of information on members' experiences with autonomous liberalization in trade in services and on achievements regarding services in regional trade agreements. The chair said the special session would pursue further work on the basis of members' proposals.

At an informal meeting of the special session in October, members exchanged views on issues of relevance to the work of the special session in the context of a publication prepared by the WTO and the World Bank titled "Trade in Services for Development" (see page 172).

Trade and development

- **The special session of the Committee on Trade and Development agreed to advance work on ten Agreement-specific proposals on special and differential treatment (S&D), proposed by the G90 group of developing economies.**
- **The G90 presented textual submissions on proposals related to the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement and the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement.**
- **At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024, ministers adopted a decision on improving implementation of S&D provisions for developing economies in the SPS Agreement and TBT Agreement.**

Background

Special and differential treatment (S&D) refers to the special treatment, or flexibility, granted to developing economies in WTO agreements, such as longer implementation periods. Many WTO agreements contain provisions that give developing economies special rights and allow developed economies to treat them more favourably than other WTO members. Differences among WTO members include the definition of who exactly should benefit from S&D. The special session of the Committee on Trade and Development is mandated to review all S&D provisions, with a view to making them more precise, effective and operational.

In March 2023, the special session of the Committee on Trade and Development agreed to advance work on ten Agreement-specific proposals to strengthen existing flexibilities for developing members, known as special and differential treatment (S&D), proposed by the G90 group of developing economies. The process consists of a series of formal meetings on each of the proposals to improve S&D provisions, over 100 in all, contained in WTO agreements and decisions. The sessions are to be complemented as necessary by informal meetings and technical workshops.

Ministers reaffirmed at the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) that S&D provisions form an integral part of the WTO and its agreements. They called for work to continue in the special sessions and other relevant bodies on improving the application of S&D.

The chair of the special session, Ambassador Kadra Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti), informed members that she would appoint facilitators to assist her in advancing the discussions on the G90 proposals. Following the circulation by the G90 of textual submissions relating to the SPS Agreement and the TBT Agreement, the Chair appointed Jia Jie Loh (Singapore) as facilitator for these proposals.

The facilitator from Singapore organized a thematic session on SPS and TBT issues in October. Developing members shared their experiences and challenges, including difficulties in adapting to some members' requirements and standards. According to the G90, TBT and SPS measures together account for 95.2 per cent of members' non-tariff measures affecting trade. The G90 proposals call for longer time frames for compliance, accompanied by capacity building and technical assistance, among other measures.

Three additional textual submissions were circulated in November by the G90 relating to their proposals concerning Section B of Article XVIII (governmental assistance to economic development) of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT),



the Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMs) (see page 108) and Article 66.2 of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) on technology transfer. The proponents informed members of their intention to circulate textual submissions on the other remaining proposals as well. The chair indicated that she would shortly be appointing additional facilitators for the relevant proposals.

At MC13 in Abu Dhabi in February 2024, ministers adopted a decision on improving implementation of S&D provisions for developing economies in the SPS Agreement and TBT Agreement. The decision includes a request for improvements to training and technical assistance provided to developing economies to help them overcome the challenges they face in timely engagement on SPS and TBT matters.

Workers at an automotive and technology assembly plant in Kedah, Malaysia.

Trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS) and public health

- **WTO members continued discussions on whether an MC12 ministerial decision on COVID-19 vaccines should be extended to diagnostics and therapeutics.**
- **The TRIPS Council chair, Ambassador Pimchanok Pitfield of Thailand, reported to the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) that despite efforts made to support a fact- and evidence-based discussion, consensus could not be reached.**

Throughout 2023 and into early 2024, members continued discussions on whether an MC12 decision giving WTO members greater scope to diversify production of COVID-19 vaccines should be extended to diagnostics and therapeutics.

At MC12, trade ministers adopted a Ministerial Decision on the TRIPS Agreement providing specific practical tools to overcome potential intellectual property (IP) barriers for diversifying COVID-19 vaccine production and achieving the objective of equitable access.

The TRIPS decision on COVID-19 vaccines, which is effective for five years, has its roots in two proposals by WTO members. One was submitted by India and South Africa in October 2020 and called for a waiver of certain international obligations contained in the TRIPS Agreement for the prevention, containment and treatment of COVID-19. It was subsequently co-sponsored by other members.



Scientists developing vaccines in a laboratory in Cape Town, South Africa.

The second proposal, from the European Union and circulated in June 2021, focused on clarifying existing options under the TRIPS Agreement for governments to override patent rights in the public interest.

The ministerial decision confirmed and clarified the right of members to override patent rights through direct government authorization. It provided for a targeted TRIPS waiver to streamline urgent production of COVID-19 vaccines for export and to facilitate the development of more geographically diverse production chains. It also simplified procedures and clarified that protection of clinical trial data need not impede the government-authorized production and supply of COVID-19 vaccines.

Members have expressed support for the goal of providing timely and secure access to high-quality, safe, efficacious and affordable medical technologies for all. However, disagreement persists on whether IP rights constitute a barrier to access and whether an extension of the ministerial decision is necessary or appropriate.

In October, the United States International Trade Commission (USITC) briefed members on its report "COVID-19 Diagnostics and Therapeutics: Supply, Demand, and TRIPS Agreement Flexibilities". The report provides information on market dynamics of COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics to help inform the discussion around supply and demand, price points and the relationship between testing and treating, and production and access.

Ahead of MC13, members adopted a report developed by Council chair, Ambassador Pimchanok Pitfield of Thailand, summarizing discussions held since 2022 and recognizing the efforts made to support a fact- and evidence-based discussion on extending the ministerial decision to diagnostics and therapeutics. It also acknowledges that despite these efforts, consensus could not be reached.

Trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS): geographical indications

- The chair of the negotiations, Ambassador Alfredo Suescum of Panama, had informal exchanges with the previously most active members in the negotiations on creating a multilateral register of geographical indications (GIs) for wines and spirits.
- He concluded that the moment was not ripe to convene informal meetings or consultations in the special session of the TRIPS Council.

Background

Negotiations on a multilateral system for notifying and registering geographical indications (GIs) for wines and spirits are carried out in the special session of the TRIPS Council. The purpose of the register is to facilitate the protection of GIs for wines and spirits. These are indications (including place names or other terms or signs associated with a place) used to identify products whose place of origin contributes to their special qualities, reputation or other characteristics.

The chair of the negotiations, Ambassador Alfredo Suescum of Panama, held informal exchanges with WTO members that had been active in the negotiations on creating a multilateral register of geographical indications (GIs) for wines and spirits to facilitate the protection of GIs.



Dispute Settlement Understanding

- The Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) did not meet in special session in 2023.

Background

At the 2001 Doha Ministerial Conference, WTO members agreed to negotiate to improve and clarify the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) – the rules and procedures governing the settlement of WTO disputes. Negotiations take place in special sessions of the Dispute Settlement Body.

In his subsequent report to the Trade Negotiations Committee (see page 48), the chair said it seemed that the current negotiating environment was not conducive to substantive engagement nor to any evolution in members' positions on either substantive or procedural issues on the GI register negotiations. The chair concluded that the moment was not ripe to convene informal meetings or consultations.

Members' longstanding positions remain unchanged. They continue to disagree on the legal effects a prospective register should have, and whether it should create obligations for all WTO members or only those choosing to participate in it. They are also divided on, among other issues, product coverage and whether, as the negotiating mandate says, the register should be confined to wines and spirits or whether it could also apply to other products, such as food and agricultural products.

At the 2001 Doha Ministerial Conference, WTO members agreed to negotiate to improve and clarify the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) – the rules and procedures governing the settlement of WTO disputes. These negotiations have seen little activity since November 2019, when WTO members expressed concern that resuming intensive work in special sessions of the Dispute Settlement Body might not be fruitful. The DSB did not meet in special session in 2023.

Separately, at the 12th Ministerial Conference, members noted concerns and challenges regarding the dispute settlement system and committed “to conduct discussions with the view to having a fully and well functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024”. In light of this mandate, members have been pursuing informal technical discussions on dispute settlement reform since mid-2022 (see page 133).

Joint initiatives

Background

Groups of WTO members announced at the 11th Ministerial Conference in December 2017 initiatives to advance talks on e-commerce, investment facilitation for development, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and domestic regulation in services trade. The groups are open to all members.



Joint statement initiative on e-commerce

In January 2023, ministers met on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum (WEF) gathering in Davos to discuss how to accelerate the pace of work of the joint initiative on e-commerce, with the aim of concluding negotiations by the end of the year.

A revised and streamlined negotiating text reflecting progress was circulated in August 2023 and further revised in November 2023.

In January 2024, the co-convenors of the talks — Australia, Japan and Singapore — circulated a chair's text reflecting their judgement on where consensus is most likely to be achieved for a future e-commerce agreement. A revised text was circulated in February, shortly before the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference.

In 2023, participants re-engaged on core issues, some of which had not been discussed for some time, such as data flows and data localization. Discussions also continued on information and communication technology (ICT) products that use cryptography, e-payments, development, telecommunications, source code and some horizontal issues, such as scope and definitions.

An informal meeting on the sidelines of the annual WEF gathering in Davos focused on how to accelerate the pace of work to conclude negotiations by December 2023. Participating in the meeting, DG Okonjo-Iweala said: "Further progress in areas under negotiation promises to bring more stability and predictability to this vast area of international trade. This can be of benefit to all: women, entrepreneurs, remote countries and marginalized groups." In a statement, the co-convenors reaffirmed the participants' commitment to establishing a set of high-standard rules to govern the global digital economy.

In August, the co-convenors issued a revised consolidated negotiating text reflecting progress made. In November, a revised text reflecting further progress was issued. However, many delegations noted that issues with regard to data flows, data localization and source code remained challenging and that addressing them would require more time.



90

WTO members are participating in the Joint Statement on Electronic Commerce, accounting for over 90 per cent of global trade



A statement was issued by the co-convenors on 20 December 2023 committing to conclude the negotiations in 2024. The co-convenors said the initiative had achieved “substantial conclusion” on several global digital trade rules that will facilitate electronic transactions and foster an open and trusted digital economy.

In January 2024, the co-convenors issued a chair’s text reflecting their judgement on where consensus was most likely to be achieved for a future e-commerce agreement. The text was further revised in February, ahead of MC13.

To date, participants have reached convergence on 13 articles, namely on open government data, consumer protection, spam, e-signatures and e-authentication, e-contracts, transparency, cybersecurity, open Internet access, paperless trading, electronic transactions frameworks, e-invoicing, single windows and personal data protection. Participants are continuing negotiations on outstanding issues, with a view to concluding the agreement by summer 2024.

The number of participants in the initiative currently stands at 90 following the inclusion of The Gambia in October. It accounts for over 90 per cent of global trade. Participation is open to all WTO members.

Investment facilitation for development

Participating members concluded negotiations on all substantive provisions of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement in July 2023, following three years of intense text-based negotiations among over 110 delegations at all levels of development.

Participants achieved a “finalized text” in November, designed as a plurilateral agreement open to all members.

Ministers of 124 WTO members participating in the Agreement - representing three-quarters of the WTO membership - issued a joint ministerial declaration at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), officially announcing the finalization of the Agreement and making it publicly available. They also submitted a request to the WTO membership to add the Agreement into Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement.

The co-coordinators of the initiative, Ambassador Sofía Boza of Chile and Ambassador Jung Sung Park of the Republic of Korea, announced in July the conclusion of the negotiations on all substantive provisions of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement.

The purpose of the Agreement is to facilitate and increase the flow of foreign direct investment, particularly to developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs) who are parties to the accord, with the aim of fostering sustainable development.

“This represents a momentous achievement,” said DG Okonjo-Iweala, highlighting that the text is the product of discussions among more than 110 participating members, including 80 developing economies, 20 of them LDCs. In addition, out of the roughly 70 text-based proposals, two-thirds came from, or were co-sponsored by, developing or LDC members, she noted.



Ministers representing 123 WTO members issued a Joint Ministerial Declaration on 25 February 2024 at MC13, marking the finalization of the IFD Agreement.

“The proposed IFD Agreement would not just help WTO members attract and retain more investment, but also higher-quality investment,” the DG added. “By enhancing transparency, accountability and good governance in investment procedures, the Agreement fosters a business climate more conducive to sustainable development. The text also contains provisions addressing ‘responsible business conduct’ and ‘measures against corruption’ – again breaking new ground within the WTO,” she declared.

Following agreement in July, participants undertook in-depth discussions on the format of the Agreement, debating whether it should be multilateral or plurilateral, and carried out a thorough legal review of the text. Acknowledging that not all WTO members may wish to be part of the Agreement, participants decided to finalize the text as a plurilateral accord, open for all WTO members to join.

In November, the finalized English version of the Agreement was circulated to all WTO members. Subsequently, two working groups worked to ensure consistency of the Agreement across the English, French and Spanish versions, with each text being “authentic” upon completion.

The initiative was officially launched by 70 signatories to a ministerial statement in 2017. By mid-February 2024, it had over 120 members – representing three-quarters of the WTO membership – more than two-thirds of which are developing economies and LDCs from all regions.

Ministers from 124 WTO participating members officially announced the finalization of the Agreement at MC13 in February 2024 and made it publicly available. They also submitted to the WTO membership a request to incorporate the Agreement into Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement. Article X.9 of the WTO Agreement requires consensus to add plurilateral agreements to Annex 4.

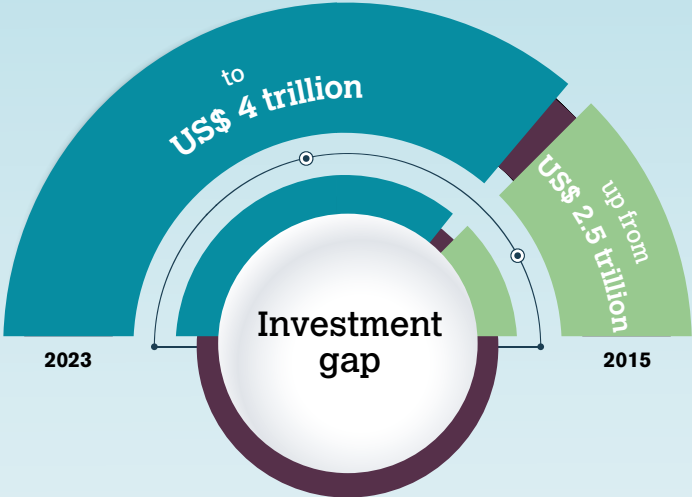
The Agreement includes the following seven sections: 1) Scope and general principles; 2) Transparency of investment measures; 3) Streamlining and speeding up administrative procedures; 4) Focal points, domestic regulatory coherence and cross-border cooperation; 5) Special and differential treatment for developing and least-developed country parties; 6) Sustainable investment; and 7) Institutional arrangements and final provisions.

Bridging the investment gap

WTO members taking part in the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) initiative finalized the IFD Agreement in November 2023, with the aim of improving the investment and business climate.

A growing problem

The investment gap in developing economies to meet the Sustainable Development Goals widened to US\$ 4 trillion per year in 2023, up from US\$ 2.5 trillion in 2015, according to UN Trade and Development.



Removing barriers to investment

127

The IFD initiative boasts participation from 127 WTO members, representing three-quarters of the WTO membership.

124

Ministers of 124 WTO members participating in the Agreement submitted a request at MC13 to add the plurilateral agreement into the WTO legal framework.

85

The initiative has over 85 developing economies, including 25 LDCs. It is open for all WTO members to join.

1,041

A study on the economic impact of the Agreement says the removal of investment barriers could lead to global welfare gains of up to USD 1,041 billion.

82

A World Bank survey showed that 82% of investors considered transparency and predictability as important factors in choosing an investment location.

Micro, small and medium-sized enterprises

Barbados Ambassador Matthew Wilson took over as Coordinator of the Informal Working Group on Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) when Ambassador Jose Luis Cancela of Uruguay stood down after five years.

The MSME Group launched two compilations of good practice regarding MSMEs and international trade and a revamped version of the Trade4MSMEs website.

The third edition of the Small Business Champions competition produced three winners supporting smallholder farmers from Cameroon, Nigeria and the Philippines.

A silk weaver at work in
Luang Prabang, Laos.



Following five years as MSME Group Coordinator, Uruguay Ambassador Jose Luis Cancela announced his departure at the first Group meeting of 2023. Barbados Ambassador Matthew Wilson was appointed as chair.

The Group released a revamped version of the Trade4MSMEs website, together with “The Trade Game” on 27 June to mark MSME Day. Trade4MSMEs is an online resource aggregating trade information for MSMEs and policymakers with links to more than 600 verified trade resources. Changes include new member pages and improved searchability. The Trade Game, a joint undertaking with the Institute of Exports and International Trade, tests players’ ability to navigate the complexities of international trade under specific time and budgetary constraints.

The MSME Group launched two compilations of good practice regarding MSMEs and trade. One was on access to finance for women-led MSMEs, drawn up together with the International Trade Centre (ITC). Produced together with the WTO Group on Trade and Gender (see page 74), it summarizes initiatives by governments and international institutions to support access to finance for women-led MSMEs.

The second compilation covers authorized economic operator (AEO) programmes, which allow economic operators that comply with specific requirements to benefit from preferential measures aimed at facilitating customs clearance. The Group also agreed to create handbooks for MSMEs and policymakers on the Trade4MSMEs platform. The handbooks and the compilations were presented at MC13.

Together with the ITC and the International Chamber of Commerce, the Group held the third Small Business Champions competition with the theme “Helping Smallholder Farmers Go Global”. The winners were the agricultural cooperative COPROGNEY from Cameroon for its support to women cassava producers, Divasity.com from Nigeria, which provides a marketplace for start-ups and entrepreneurs to connect with tools for business growth,

and HeySuccess Virtual Assistants in the Philippines, which offers consultancy and professional services to small businesses.

The Group continued to implement the December 2020 package of six recommendations and declarations to help MSMEs trade more internationally. Seven members included MSME-related information in their 2023 Trade Policy Reviews (TPRs), one of the recommendations. The WTO Secretariat continued to update the database of MSME references in TPRs.

The Group also received regular updates on the Global Trade Helpdesk, a joint online resource of the ITC, UN Trade and Development and the WTO that aims to simplify market research for companies. The MSME Group held a third annual meeting with business representatives in April 2023.

The Trade4MSMEs Network held a second meeting with nine international organizations to discuss issues raised by MSMEs and the work that Network members have been doing to support small businesses. The Network was launched in 2022 to facilitate discussion among international institutions aimed at keeping the Trade4MSMEs website up to date and fostering cooperation among the participating organizations.

Launched by 88 WTO members at MC11, the Working Group currently has 98 members, accounting for around 90 per cent of world exports.



98

WTO members are participating in the Working Group, accounting for around 90 per cent of world exports

Domestic regulation of trade in services

New disciplines on services domestic regulation entered into force for 45 WTO members in February 2024. They are expected to lower trade costs by over US\$ 125 billion worldwide.

The announcement was made during the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) at an event attended by DG Okonjo-Iweala, MC13 Chair Thani bin Ahmed Al Zayoudi and participating members in the Joint Initiative on Services Domestic Regulation, represented by Costa Rica's Foreign Trade Minister, Manuel Tovar, and the European Commission's Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis.

"This is the first outcome on services trade in more than 25 years — a much-needed update to the WTO rulebook," said Mr Tovar.

The entry into force of new disciplines on services domestic regulation for 45 WTO members was announced on 27 February 2024 at MC13.

"This is the first outcome on services trade in more than 25 years — a much-needed update to the WTO rulebook," said the Foreign Trade Minister of Costa Rica, Manuel Tovar. "It represents a significant milestone because WTO members accounting for more than 92 per cent of world services trade are committed to implementing these good regulatory practices."

Welcoming the entry into force of the disciplines, DG Okonjo-Iweala said: "It is high time that recognized good regulatory practices on services trade have come within the ambit of the WTO. The implementation of the disciplines holds huge potential for developing economies."

In December 2021, 67 WTO members adopted a Declaration announcing the successful conclusion of negotiations on



services domestic regulation, aimed at increasing the transparency, predictability and efficiency of authorization procedures for service providers. These disciplines seek to mitigate the unintended trade-restrictive effects of measures relating to licensing requirements and procedures, qualification requirements and procedures, as well as technical standards.

Since the Declaration, participating WTO members have undertaken certification procedures under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to make the new disciplines legally binding as part of their services commitments.

The disciplines on services domestic regulation bring longstanding work on good regulatory practice for services within the framework of the WTO. With services representing the fastest growing sector of

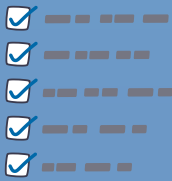
the global economy, this new set of disciplines will be applied on a “most-favoured nation” basis, meaning that they will benefit service suppliers from all WTO members. They will be particularly beneficial for small businesses and women entrepreneurs.

New WTO research finds that their implementation will help to reduce services trade costs by 10 per cent for lower-middle income economies and by 14 per cent for upper-middle income economies, with overall savings of over US\$ 125 billion. If all WTO members implement the disciplines, large welfare and trade increases are projected, especially for developing economies. By 2032, global real income is projected to increase by at least 0.3 per cent, representing over US\$ 300 billion, and global service exports are expected to rise by 0.8 per cent, amounting to US\$ 206 billion.

New disciplines on domestic regulation entered into force on 27 February 2024 at MC13.

Cutting red tape for trade in services

WTO members taking part in the Services Domestic Regulation initiative have developed disciplines aimed at improving the efficiency of authorization procedures for services trade and making it easier for services providers to access foreign markets.



45

New disciplines on services domestic regulation entered into force for **45 WTO members** in February 2024.



125

The new disciplines are expected to lower trade costs by over **US\$ 125 billion** worldwide.



92

A total of 72 WTO members and acceding countries accounting for over **92 per cent** of world services trade are committed to implementing the new disciplines.

25

It is the first WTO outcome on services trade in more than **25 years**.



206

If all WTO members implement the disciplines, global service exports are expected to rise by 0.8 per cent by 2032, amounting to **US\$ 206 billion**.



14

WTO research finds that implementation of the disciplines will help reduce services trade costs by up to **14 per cent** for participating economies.



Trade and environment initiatives

- Work in three WTO environmental initiatives – Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD), Dialogue on Plastics Pollution (DPP) and Fossil Fuel Subsidies Reform (FFSR) – made good progress, preparing outcomes for the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13).
- The initiatives – open to all members – complement work of the Committee on Trade and Environment and other relevant WTO bodies, with their participants sharing the objective of making trade part of the solution to addressing global environmental challenges.



Background

Groups of members have launched three environmental initiatives – on trade and environmental sustainability, plastics pollution and environmentally sustainable plastics trade, and fossil fuel subsidies reform. An additional group of members is seeking to intensify efforts to increase women's participation in global trade. The groups are open to all WTO members.

Dialogue on plastics pollution and environmentally sustainable plastics trade

Talks within the Dialogue on Plastics Pollution made significant progress in 2023 to deliver on a 2021 call by ministers from the group for “concrete, pragmatic and effective” results in support of efforts to curb plastics pollution no later than MC13.

The Dialogue, launched in November 2020, explores trade-related contributions to addressing plastic pollution. Open to all members, it had 76 co-sponsors at the end of 2023, accounting for some 85 per cent of global plastics trade.

Members advanced in three technical workstreams – cross-cutting issues (e.g. transparency, technical assistance and international cooperation), promoting trade to reduce and tackle plastics pollution, reduction of plastics use and circularity (reuse and recycling) for plastics.

In 2023, the Dialogue surveyed participants on their trade-related plastics measures to identify best practices and opportunities for future convergence. Another survey covered needs related to plastics pollution and sustainable plastics trade for developing economies.

The surveys along with a workshop jointly held in April with the United Nations Environment Programme on plastics reduction and meeting reports provided a basis for the Ministerial Statement launched at MC13 in February 2024.

The statement contains a series of principles and actions that should pave the way for trade to be a key contributor to tackling plastics pollution, including increasing the transparency of trade flows of plastics, reducing unnecessary or harmful plastics and promoting potential non-plastic substitutes, such as bamboo products. It also includes a factual compilation document outlining



76

WTO members were participating in the Plastics Dialogue as of end-2023.

trade-related practices already being adopted to address plastics pollution.

Trade and environmental sustainability

Participants in the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD), which are open to all WTO members, developed a package of outcomes, which were launched at MC13.

The package includes a statement by the TESSD co-convenors, Canada and Costa Rica, and an updated work plan presenting the evolution of the group since MC12 and outlining the way forward, with a view to delivering concrete results by the 14th Ministerial Conference.

Another element of the package is the outcome documents of the four TESSD informal working groups. The group on trade-related climate measures compiled members' practices to guide the design and implementation of these measures. The group on environmental goods and services consolidated discussions into an analytical summary providing indicative lists of renewable energy goods and services and opportunities for promoting their trade.

The working group on the circular economy mapped trade aspects along the lifecycle of products and identified areas for possible trade related action. Finally, the group on subsidies provided a compilation of experiences and considerations on the design of agricultural subsidies and subsidies related to a low-carbon transition.

By the end of 2023, TESSD had 76 co-sponsors from all regions and at all levels of development, representing more than 85 per cent of global trade.

Fossil fuel subsidies reform

WTO members seeking to phase out fossil fuel subsidies intensified work in 2023, examining in more depth the development and social issues associated with reform of these subsidies and focusing discussions on key areas for further work.



In their November meeting, the 48 co-sponsors of the Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform initiative elaborated concrete options for further work around three pillars: enhancing transparency, including through use of existing WTO mechanisms; ensuring temporary crisis measures are targeted, transparent and temporary; and identifying the types of subsidies that are most problematic from a trade and environment perspective and considering ways to address them.

At MC13, members presented a ministerial statement, which includes a comprehensive work programme and a list of standard questions on fossil fuel subsidies and subsidy reform for use in members' Trade Policy Reviews.

The initiative, which builds on a 2017 WTO ministerial statement urging "ambitious and effective disciplines on inefficient fossil fuel subsidies", emphasizes the WTO can play a central role in reducing trade and investment distortions caused by fossil fuel subsidies through effective disciplines. Proponents acknowledge that reform must take account of the specific needs and conditions of developing economies and minimize possible adverse impacts on their development.



76

WTO members were co-sponsors of TESSD as of end-2023, representing more than 85 per cent of global trade.



48

The initiative on fossil fuel subsidies reform has 48 WTO members as co-sponsors.

Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender

- The co-chairs of the Informal Working Group (IWG) on Trade and Gender launched a joint statement at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024, outlining specific action to take the work on trade and gender to the next level.
- MC13 also saw the launch of a “Compendium of Financial Inclusion Initiatives” identifying financial measures initiated by members, domestic and regional development banks and others to promote women entrepreneurs.
- The IWG launched the 2023-24 rolling work plan, outlining steps to be taken by WTO members to deliver concrete results for women’s economic empowerment.

The co-chairs of the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender launched a joint statement at MC13, outlining specific action to take the work on trade and gender to the next level.

The Abu Dhabi Ministerial Conference also saw the launch of a “Compendium of Financial Inclusion Initiatives” promoting financial inclusion of women entrepreneurs. The compendium identifies financial measures initiated by members, domestic and regional development banks and other international organizations to support small-scale businesses run by women entrepreneurs.

The IWG co-chairs worked jointly with the WTO’s Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) Group (see page 68), the WTO Secretariat and the International Trade Centre to create the compendium, which is available to all members. It is intended to serve as a policy tool and model when developing financial inclusion schemes for female entrepreneurs.

A technician conducts a test in a quality control laboratory in China.

WTO members of the Informal Working Groups on Trade and Gender and on Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises launched a compendium of initiatives at MC13 aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs’ access to finance.





Work plan

In June, the Group launched its 2023-24 rolling work plan through which members will continue to deepen activities on data collection methodologies on trade and gender, seek to further integrate gender issues into members' Trade Policy Reviews, develop a draft framework on how to apply a "gender lens" to the WTO and maintain work on female entrepreneurship and Aid for Trade (see page 141).

The IWG welcomed on 20 June the appointment of new co-chairs Ambassador Clara Manuela da Luz Delgado Jesus of Cabo Verde and Ambassador Simon Manley of the United Kingdom, who replace Ambassador Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme of Botswana and Ambassador Einar Gunnarsson of Iceland. Ambassador Ana Patricia Benedetti Zelaya of El Salvador remains as a co-chair.

IWG technical work

The Group's technical work focused on data collection for monitoring women's participation in trade and policymaking initiatives, seeking to capture where a gender perspective has been incorporated into the design and implementation of policies. Members also discussed women's empowerment through e-commerce, trade facilitation and intellectual property rights.

The IWG co-chairs also worked with the MSMEs Group and the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD) (see page 73) to organize a workshop – "Women-led MSMEs, Trade and Climate Change – Adapting and Investing for the Future" – which focused on addressing inclusivity at the WTO, establishing the connection between sustainability and inclusivity, and experience-sharing by MSMEs.

A total of 130 WTO members and five observers are participating in the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender.

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General Council

- Preparations for the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi and MC12 follow-up on WTO reform were major focuses of work in the General Council in 2023 and early 2024.
- WTO members elected Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade of the United Arab Emirates, as MC13 Chair.
- In October, the General Council adopted a decision on the extension of support measures for WTO members graduating from least-developed country status.

Background

The General Council is entrusted with carrying out the functions of the WTO and taking actions necessary to this effect between ministerial conferences in addition to carrying out the specific tasks assigned to it by the Agreement Establishing the WTO. As part of its oversight function, the General Council conducts a year-end review of WTO activities on the basis of annual reports from its subsidiary bodies.

Discussions in 2023

The General Council, chaired by Ambassador Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme of Botswana, was extremely active in 2023, with 17 plenary meetings in formal and informal sessions. WTO members discussed a range of topical matters, including WTO reform and preparations for the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in February 2024.



Athaliah Lesiba
Molokomme chairs
a meeting of the
General Council
in 2023.

In the context of reform, work has been underway since MC12 to improve the daily functioning of WTO councils, committees and negotiating bodies, with reports submitted to each regular meeting of the General Council.

WTO reform

Discussions in 2023 on WTO reform included four informal meetings which focused on development, the WTO's deliberative function and institutional matters, trade and industrial policy, and, at the Senior Officials Meeting in October 2023, trade and environmental sustainability.

On the occasion of the informal WTO reform-related meeting in June focusing on institutional matters, members also discussed the functioning of the General Council, the Trade Negotiations Committee and the conduct of ministerial conferences.

At a General Council meeting in July, the Chair outlined a "road map" for advancing reform of the WTO's deliberative function, highlighting seven potential milestones or "stations" where members would need to determine the topics to be addressed. Apart from that, the WTO membership reiterated, throughout meetings in 2023, that dispute settlement reform continues to remain a high priority.

At the informal WTO reform meeting in September focusing on the interface

between trade and industrial policy and on economic development, three main themes were addressed by members: policy space in support of industrialization in developing economies including least-developed countries; industrial subsidies - opportunities and challenges for the global trading system; and the way forward.

The General Council Chair said: "Although divergence still persists, this informal meeting has showed your willingness to work together with a view to finding mutually agreeable solutions. I urge all of you to build on this momentum."

In October, at a two-day meeting of senior trade officials at the WTO, the Director-General and the General Council Chair, who chaired the meeting, welcomed the positive engagement and constructive dialogue amongst the senior officials on the range of issues on the MC13 agenda.

At the December 2023 General Council, Ambassador Molokomme said: "As we inch closer to MC13, WTO reform has become an important element of our preparations to ensure a successful Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi."

Preparations for MC13

At the July General Council meeting, WTO members elected Minister of State for Foreign Trade of the United Arab Emirates Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi as MC13 Chairperson.

Minister Al Zeyoudi, who attended the meeting, said: “It has become clear that trade policy extends far beyond the scope of trade itself. It is about shaping our common future that takes into account the environment, global health and poverty. It is our collective responsibility to contribute to a predictable, rules-based and open trade and investment environment that creates prosperity for all.”

At a General Council meeting on 13 December, WTO members elected three Vice Chairs for MC13: Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana, Minister of Trade of Cameroon; Todd McClay, Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, Hunting and Fishing, and Trade of New Zealand; and Jorge Rivera Staff, Minister of Trade and Industry of Panama.

In November, the General Council Chair began consultations on a draft ministerial declaration, which culminated in the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration, adopted at MC13 on 2 March 2024.

On dispute settlement reform, members adopted a Ministerial Decision at MC13 recognizing the progress made on dispute settlement reform and reaffirming the commitment to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024.

COVID-19 and WTO response to the pandemic

The WTO response to the COVID-19 pandemic and preparedness for future pandemics was another follow-up area from MC12. A stocktaking exercise took place at the July General Council meeting, and in December the Chair provided an update on the work undertaken in various WTO bodies on this topic. A factual report was submitted to ministers in February 2024, in the run-up to MC13.

In the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration, ministers encouraged the relevant WTO bodies to continue their work to review and build on all the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and to build effective

solutions in case of future pandemics in an expeditious manner.

Implementation of Bali, Nairobi and Buenos Aires outcomes

The General Council continued its regular review of the implementation of decisions taken by ministers at MC9, MC10 and MC11. The reviews included the 2015 Nairobi decision to abolish export subsidies for farm exports (see page 87), the least-developed country (LDC) services waiver, extended at MC10 until 31 December 2030 (see page 112), the LDC preferential rules of origin decision (see page 104), the Trade Facilitation Agreement (see page 110) and Aid for Trade (see page 141).

LDC graduation

In October 2023, the General Council adopted a decision encouraging members that remove least-developed countries (LDCs) from their duty-free and quota-free preference programmes upon graduation from LDC status to provide a smooth and sustainable transition period for the withdrawal of these preferences after graduation.

LDC graduation refers to the point when an LDC meets certain United Nations (UN) development criteria and is no longer defined as an LDC. As the most vulnerable members of the international community, LDCs are accorded special treatment at the WTO, such as enhanced market access opportunities and flexibilities in adopting WTO rules.

At MC13, ministers adopted a decision on concrete measures to ease the path to graduation from the category of LDCs. In addition, ministers adopted a Ministerial Decision reaffirming a commitment to the Work Programme on Small Economies (see page 13).

Extension of the TRIPS waiver decision to therapeutics and diagnostics

Members discussed the extension of the TRIPS waiver decision at each regular meeting of the General Council in 2023. In December, the Chair of the Council on

Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), Ambassador Pimchanok Pitfield of Thailand, made a statement under her own responsibility related to discussions on paragraph 8 of the MC12 TRIPS Decision on whether to extend the scope of the decision to COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics.

Despite continued engagement from members, there was no consensus at that stage on whether to extend the MC12 Decision to COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics.

Work Programme on Electronic Commerce and moratorium

Ambassador Usha Dwarka-Canabady of Mauritius, the facilitator of the WTO Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, provided a report on the latest developments at the December General Council meeting. She acknowledged that more work was

needed on the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions to determine if the moratorium should be extended.

At MC13, ministers adopted a Ministerial Decision instructing the General Council to hold periodic reviews on the E-commerce Work Programme and to maintain the current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions until MC14 or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier (see page 13).

Other issues

Members agreed in December to increase the WTO's operational budget by 3.6 per cent — from CHF 197.2 million to CHF 204.9 million — for 2024 and 2025 in light of increased inflation and contractual obligations. This is the WTO's first increase in its operating budget in 12 years.

Table 1: Waivers under Article IX (decision-making) of the WTO Agreement

In 2023, the General Council granted the following waivers from obligations under the WTO agreements.

Member ¹	Type	Decision	Date of adoption	Expiry date
China	Introduction of Harmonized System 2002 Changes into WTO Schedules of Tariff Concessions	WT/L/1181	13 December 2023	31 December 2024
Argentina; Brazil; China; Dominican Republic; European Union; and Malaysia	Introduction of Harmonized System 2007 Changes into WTO Schedules of Tariff Concessions	WT/L/1182	13 December 2023	31 December 2024
Argentina; Brazil; China; Costa Rica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; European Union; Guatemala; India; Kazakhstan; Republic of Korea; Malaysia; Mexico; Philippines; Russian Federation; Singapore; Switzerland; Thailand; and United States	Introduction of Harmonized System 2012 Changes into WTO Schedules of Tariff Concessions	WT/L/1183	13 December 2023	31 December 2024
Argentina; Australia; Brazil; Canada; China; Colombia; Costa Rica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; El Salvador; European Union; Guatemala; Hong Kong, China; India; Kazakhstan; Republic of Korea; New Zealand; Norway; Pakistan; Paraguay; The Philippines; Russian Federation; Switzerland; The Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu; Thailand; United States; and Uruguay	Introduction of Harmonized System 2017 Changes into WTO Schedules of Tariff Concessions	WT/L/1184	13 December 2023	31 December 2024
Australia; Canada; China; Colombia; Costa Rica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; El Salvador; European Union; Guatemala; Hong Kong, China; India; Republic of Korea; Macao, China; Norway; Paraguay; The Philippines; Russian Federation; Switzerland; The Separate Customs Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu; Thailand; and United States	Introduction of Harmonized System 2022 Changes into WTO Schedules of Tariff Concessions	WT/L/1185 and Revision 1	13 December 2023	31 December 2024

¹ This table lists the initial beneficiaries of Harmonized System (HS) waivers. However, other beneficiaries may be added to the list.

Work Programme on e-commerce

- **WTO members met regularly in 2023 to advance work under the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, in particular its development dimension and discussions on the moratorium on customs duties.**
- **From December 2023, members began considering text-based proposals for a draft decision on the moratorium and the Programme at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13).**
- **At MC13, ministers renewed their commitment to the Work Programme and agreed to maintain the moratorium until MC14 or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier. The moratorium and the Work Programme will expire on that date.**

From January 2023, the facilitator, Ambassador Usha Dwarka-Canabady of Mauritius, regularly held discussions with members to address specific themes under the Work Programme, following up on an MC12 decision to reinvigorate work under the Programme and to intensify discussions on the moratorium on imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions.

Three sessions focused on the moratorium while in the other sessions members shared perspectives on consumer protection, the digital divide, legal and regulatory frameworks, facilitating digital trade and electronic transactions, digital industrialization, and e-commerce-related technology transfer.

Several members shared their experiences on the specific issues and their views on what the WTO could do in these areas. Some suggested the WTO could bring together relevant intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) working on e-commerce matters. In June, a workshop was held at the WTO with members and IGOs to focus on consumer protection, the digital divide,

the moratorium, and legal and regulatory frameworks on e-commerce.

E-commerce moratorium

In line with the MC12 Ministerial Decision, discussions focused on the scope, definition and impact of the moratorium. Members discussed questions about revenue implications, the need for policy space, and the technical feasibility of imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions. Delegations highlighted the need for analysis to better assess the impact of the moratorium on government revenue, businesses, consumer welfare and digital industrialization.

The facilitator made regular reports to the General Council on the discussions under the e-commerce Work Programme.

In December 2023, members began to consider text-based proposals for a draft MC13 ministerial decision. Four proposals were tabled. These shared some common elements regarding work under the Programme but diverged on whether the moratorium should be extended. Members did not manage to agree on a single text for a draft Ministerial Decision ahead of the Ministerial Conference. Therefore, the facilitator's report, delivered at a General Council meeting on 14 February 2024, was forwarded along with the four draft decisions to ministers for consideration at MC13.

MC13 outcome

Consultations at MC13 were facilitated by Minister Todd McClay of New Zealand. To aid progress, a Facilitator's text was issued based on the elements that emerged from discussions in Geneva and at ministerial level in Abu Dhabi.

At the end of the conference, members succeeded in adopting a Ministerial Decision, which includes a commitment to continue reinvigorating the Work Programme, with a particular focus on development, and an agreement to extend the moratorium until MC14 or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier. The moratorium and the Work Programme will expire on that date.

Trade in Goods Council

- The Council for Trade in Goods heard 12 new trade concerns in 2023. Although the number of new concerns declined, a large number of previously raised concerns continued to be discussed.
- The Council successfully fulfilled two MC12 mandates by adopting two reports – on the WTO response to the pandemic and future preparedness and on WTO reform, including a large number of improvements in the functioning of the Council and its subsidiaries.
- The Council continued considering a proposal by the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) Group to allow “graduated” LDCs to continue having the right to provide export subsidies under certain conditions.

Background

The Council for Trade in Goods is responsible for overseeing the implementation of all WTO agreements concerning trade in goods and reports to the WTO General Council. The Goods Council has 14 subsidiary bodies dealing with specific subjects, such as agriculture, market access, subsidies, technical barriers to trade, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, import licensing, customs valuation, trade facilitation and information technology products.

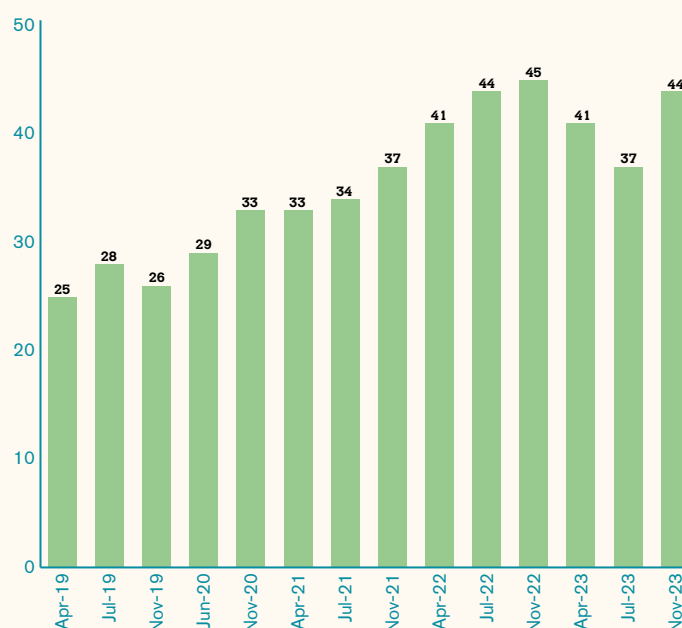
The Council for Trade in Goods (CTG) continued to discuss a large number of trade concerns raised by WTO members, with a peak of 44 raised at its November meeting, reflecting a persistent trend (see Figure 1). In total, the Council discussed approximately 40 trade concerns in each of its three meetings, 12 of which were raised for the first time in 2023.

Trade-related environmental measures continued to be discussed at the Council, generating a high number of concerns and interventions by members, as did international political tensions and measures adopted under national security provisions. Other concerns covered a wide array of measures, including quantitative restrictions, discriminatory taxation, technical regulations, subsidies, local content requirements, anti-dumping measures, and sanitary and phytosanitary measures.

MC12 implementation

The Council delivered on mandates from the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) by adopting two reports, one on the WTO

Figure 1: Trade concerns raised at the CTG, 2019-23



response to the COVID-19 pandemic and preparedness for future pandemics, including lessons learned, and the other on improvements to the functioning and efficiency of the Council and its 14 subsidiary bodies.

The report on the pandemic reflects stocktaking of work in multiple areas, such as transparency and notifications, pandemic-related trade concerns, experience-sharing sessions, inputs from external stakeholders and concrete outcomes.

On lessons learned and challenges experienced in trade in goods, the report covers questions such as improving coordination and cooperation, understanding trade-related measures during crises, enhancing transparency and experience-sharing at the WTO, improving data collection and sharing of information, the role of digitalization and the identification of essential goods.

The report on reform reflects 127 concrete improvements made to the deliberative function of the Council and its 14 subsidiary bodies. The Council itself agreed to 27 improvements, including the use of new digital tools – the trade concerns database (see page 83) and the eAgenda (see page 194) – to improve transparency and make information more accessible to all stakeholders. These changes seek to enhance the availability of information in all three WTO working languages and streamline participation in the Council, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and informed engagement by members and enhancing the possibility to reach decisions.

There was also recognition of the need for ongoing reviews and improvements to identify shortcomings and explore new enhancements – for instance, through annual information sessions on WTO digital tools.

Extension of waivers and other decisions

The Council approved five collective extension requests for waivers in connection with Harmonized System (HS) changes for 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2022 (see page 84).

The Council also approved a request by Canada to an extension of a waiver of its Caribbean Initiative (CARIBAN), requests by Armenia and the Kyrgyz Republic to extend by a further 12 months members' negotiating rights under Article XXVIII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994 and similar requests by the European Union and the United Kingdom to extend members' negotiating rights in their respective renegotiating procedures by a further six months.

Graduated LDCs

The Council continued considering a proposal by the LDC Group to allow LDCs that have “graduated” from LDC status under the UN definition to continue having the right to provide export subsidies if they meet the terms of Article 27 of the Subsidies and Countervailing Measures Agreement (i.e. having a GNP per capita of less than US\$ 1,000 per month in constant 1990 US dollars).

A member is considered to have graduated when its economy grows beyond certain limits set by the United Nations. LDCs get special treatment in the WTO, in particular with regard to enhanced market access opportunities and policy flexibilities.

Other issues

The Council discussed a new document submitted by the African Group on the interplay between trade and environmental policies. “Principles Guiding the Development and Implementation of Trade-Related Environmental Measures” highlights concerns over unilateral environmental measures and their potentially negative impacts on developing members. It calls for a balance between environmental protection and members' developmental needs.

The report on reform reflects 127 concrete improvements made to the deliberative function of the Council and its 14 subsidiary bodies.

Market access

- The Committee on Market Access adopted a document containing lessons learned from six experience-sharing sessions on trade in COVID-19-related goods aimed at helping WTO members respond to future emergencies.
- Members discussed 36 trade concerns, of which 12 were new.
- The Committee held the first of a planned series of thematic sessions on supply chain resilience, with the participation of other international organizations.



Background

The Committee on Market Access supervises the implementation of tariff and non-tariff measures not covered by any other WTO body. In addition, it seeks to ensure that WTO members' schedules of concessions are up to date, including changes required to reflect amendments to the Harmonized System (HS). The HS allows economies to classify traded goods on a common basis. Without this technical work at the Committee, it would be difficult to compare members' tariff obligations with the tariffs they apply in practice.

Trade concerns

Members raised 36 trade concerns in the Committee, similar to 2022's 37 and confirming the trend of recent years for high numbers of trade concerns. They covered a broad range of trade policy measures, including environmental measures, applied tariffs allegedly in excess of WTO commitments, measures in relation to national security, import quotas and non-tariff measures on a wide range of

products. Many had been raised previously but 12 were new.

All trade concerns discussed in the Committee are included in the WTO's Trade Concerns Database, a public platform containing information on trade concerns raised in WTO committees.

COVID-19 lessons learned

The Committee adopted in April 2023 a document reflecting lessons learned from trade in COVID-19-related goods and indicating practices members might consider for future emergencies. The document is the result of six experience-sharing sessions held since March 2022, including one specifically on LDCs.

Lessons learned included identifying "essential" goods and their tariff classification, improvements in data collection and the sharing of information, the need for better coordination and cooperation at domestic and international levels and the importance of digitalization of trade.

In addition, the Committee continued working with the Harmonized System Committee (HSC) of the World Customs Organization (WCO), which approves the customs classification of goods in international trade, to raise awareness of key challenges faced

by WTO members with the classification of COVID-19 essential goods. The Committee sent classification proposals to the HSC for certain critical medical goods, such as face masks and mobile clinics, which are being negotiated in the review of the 2028 version of the Harmonized System (see below).

Better functioning of the Committee

The Committee has introduced a number of new tools and practices in its work over the past years. In 2023, the Committee agreed on 12 additional improvements in the ways in which it functions as part of work towards WTO reform (see page 77). These include holding introductory and training sessions for delegates, improving the functionality of the eAgenda (see page 194) and holding thematic sessions.

Thematic session on supply chain resilience

The Committee held in November the first of a planned series of thematic sessions on supply chain resilience, with the participation of other international organizations. The objective was to better understand what is meant by supply chain resilience and so provide a conceptual framework under which members can take up topics and develop them among themselves within the framework of the Committee.

Quantitative restrictions

The Committee received quantitative restrictions notifications from 18 members in 2023. Notifications generally include information on prohibitions and other restrictions that do not take the form of a tariff, tax, fee or charge and that are allowed only in specific circumstances.

In 2023, the QR database contained information on 1,983 measures notified by 86 members, including export prohibitions and restrictions relating to COVID-19. A WTO Secretariat note was presented to the Committee in October showing that while the volume and quality of notifications have been increasing, compliance with notification requirements remains relatively low.

The Secretariat organized a capacity-building workshop on notifications in April 2023 attended by 29 capital-based officials from developing economies in charge of QR notifications.

Integrated Database

The WTO's Integrated Database (IDB) is the main source of official tariff and import data notified by members. In 2023, three members (Canada, Mauritius and Uruguay) submitted data automatically following the procedures outlined in the 2019 IDB Decision. This procedure significantly simplifies data notification both for members and the Secretariat.

Harmonized System

The Committee works to ensure that members' schedules of concessions reflect the latest amendments to the WCO's Harmonized System (HS), which classifies traded goods on a common basis.

The latest version – HS2022 – includes 233 sets of changes recognizing new product categories and addressing environmental and social issues, including health and safety, and the fight against illicit trade and terrorism. The Committee adopted the inclusion of HS2022 changes into schedules and a new collective HS2022 waiver, which allows members to continue having their WTO schedules in a previous HS version despite them already using HS2022 for their applied tariffs.

The HS96, HS2002 and HS2007 “transposition exercises” – amendments are typically referred to by the year in which they enter into force – have been nearly concluded for all members. The Committee made good progress on the HS2012 transposition, with the schedules of 105 members updated. In addition, 89 schedules were transposed to HS2017 and certified.

The Committee started to discuss a new “multiple transposition” procedure which would allow members whose schedule is an old version of the nomenclature (e.g. HS2002) to update it directly into the most recent version.

Agriculture

- The Committee on Agriculture received 403 notifications from WTO members about agricultural measures in 2023, the second-highest total ever and a sign of members' continued commitment to increasing transparency.
- Members for the first time could report verbally to the Committee on their non-recourse to agricultural export subsidies, which enabled them to clear a significant backlog of outstanding notifications on export subsidies.
- The working group on food security concluded deliberations on the concerns of least-developed countries (LDCs) and net food-importing developing countries (NFIDCs), assisted by international organizations, financial institutions and a range of stakeholders.

Background

The Agreement on Agriculture aims to reform trade and make WTO members' policies more market oriented. The rules and commitments apply to market access, domestic support and export competition as well as export restrictions and prohibitions. The Committee on Agriculture oversees the implementation of the Agreement. The Committee also monitors follow-up to a Marrakesh ministerial decision regarding LDCs and NFIDCs, which sets out objectives on the provision of food aid and other assistance.



Food security

Farmers gather hay in Hpa An, Myanmar

The working group on the food security concerns of LDCs and NFIDCs, established by the Committee on Agriculture in response to an MC12 declaration on food insecurity, continued its deliberations on four thematic areas. These were access to international food markets, financing of food imports, agricultural and production resilience of LDCs and NFIDCs, and horizontal or cross-cutting issues aimed at fostering collaboration.

The group focused in its seven meetings on identifying the needs and challenges of LDCs and NFIDCs to increase their resilience in responding to acute food instability. It drew on replies to a questionnaire, launched in December 2022, which focused on the specific needs of LDCs and NFIDCs. The group examined the best use of flexibilities under WTO rules to bolster agricultural production and enhance domestic food security. The discussions also benefitted from three workshops – one on agricultural and production resilience and two on high yield grain seed development and the green revolution, along with a session with experts on import finance.

International organizations, including the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Grains Council (IGC), collaborated in the workshops and expert session.

The working group concluded its work in November. Group coordinator Kjetil Tysdal of Norway presented a detailed report with potential areas of convergence and recommendations, but the Committee could not reach consensus on the report and the recommendations.

Follow-up to Bali TRQ decision

Members concluded the first triennial review of the operation of the Bali ministerial decision on tariff rate quotas (TRQs) in compliance with a General Council instruction of 2019. It marked the successful conclusion of several rounds of discussions that started in 2022. The agreed conclusions focused on improving the transparency of member-specific tariff quota utilization and quota administration arrangements. TRQs allow imports inside a quota to be charged lower duties.

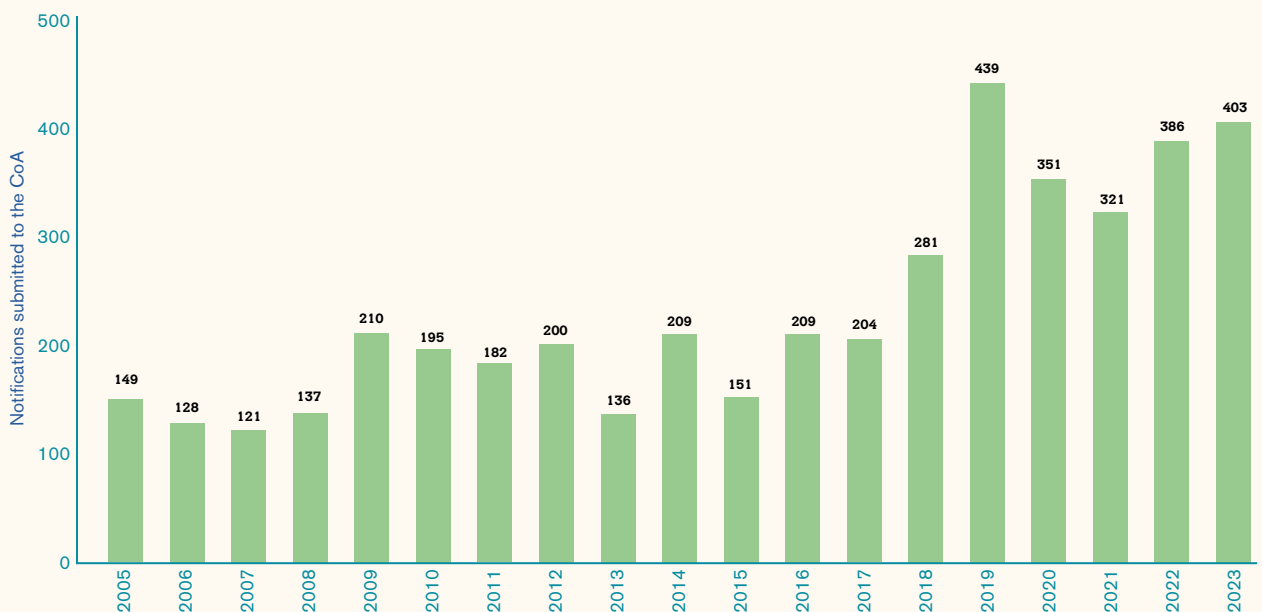
Notifications

In a sign of members' continuing commitment to increased transparency (see Figure 2), the number of annual notifications rose to 403, the second-highest figure ever, from 386 in 2022 and 321 in the year before.

However, compliance with notification obligations, particularly for domestic support (subsidies) and export subsidies, continued to be a concern for members. As of 31 December 2023, 34 per cent of domestic support notifications (971) and 24 per cent of export subsidy notifications (780) remained outstanding. Nineteen questions were raised concerning pending notifications from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Egypt, the European Union, India, Kazakhstan, Thailand, Türkiye and Uruguay.

Members continued their efforts to bring their notifications up to date. In 2023, for the first time, members used a simplified mechanism to report verbally their non-recourse to export subsidies. Nine members used this mechanism in 2023, clearing a backlog – when added together – of more than 190 years of outstanding export subsidy notifications. The mechanism

Figure 2: Agriculture notifications submitted by WTO members, 2005 to 2023



provides a simplified and additional avenue to members for addressing outstanding export subsidy notifications.

In 2023, members posed 320 questions on specific notifications during the Committee's review process, of which 84 per cent were related to domestic support issues and 12 per cent to market access. The Committee also discussed 129 specific implementation matters concerning members' agricultural policies under Article 18.6 of the Agreement on Agriculture, which allows members to raise questions on any matters relevant to the implementation of commitments.

COVID-19 and agriculture

The Committee continued to discuss "COVID-19 and agriculture", following up on an MC12 declaration emphasizing the importance of global food security in resilience building. In December 2022, the chair of the Committee together with the Secretariat had prepared a factual report on the Committee's activities in relation to COVID-19, which highlighted the work the Committee had done in carrying out its functions during the pandemic.

Export competition

The Committee at its June meeting conducted the annual dedicated discussions to follow up on the implementation of the 2015 ministerial decision on export competition. The Nairobi decision eliminates all forms of agricultural export subsidies and establishes disciplines on other export measures with equivalent effect. Venezuela continued to be the only member yet to submit its modified schedule of commitments incorporating the Nairobi decision.

Transparency tools

The WTO Secretariat launched in March 2023 an enhancement to the online agriculture information management system (AG-IMS) for the submission of the export competition questionnaire, part of the monitoring of the Nairobi decision, along with data extraction and reporting functions.

The Secretariat developed the first phase of an agricultural domestic support database enabling access to reports on the three WTO categories of subsidies that are exempt from limits, namely the green box, Article 6.2 (development programmes) and the blue box, based on members' notifications.

Improving the work of the Committee and transparency

Members continued to consider possible elements to enhance transparency and the efficient working of the Committee, in line with efforts towards overall WTO reform (see page 77). The Committee approved the use of an annotated agenda – one that includes descriptions of the points for discussion – for its meetings and agreed to extend the timelines for its agenda setting to allow additional preparatory time for delegations.

Technical assistance activities

The WTO Secretariat delivered the first phase of the 2023-24 advanced agriculture notification workshop in October, attended by 30 government officials. The second phase is scheduled to take place in September 2024 in Geneva. Other technical assistance activities included workshops in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Kazakhstan, Moldova and Nigeria.

Outreach and information exchange

The Secretariat continued its Trade Dialogues on Food, holding sessions on topics such as the Black Sea Grain Initiative, an agreement in July 2022 between the United Nations, Russia, Türkiye and Ukraine to allow commercial food and fertilizer exports from three key Ukrainian ports. Addressing the latter by video link, DG Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said trade has an "absolutely central" role to play in ensuring predictable, stable and fair trade in food. The Secretariat also organized the Annual Symposium on Illicit Trade in Food and Food Fraud.

Sanitary and phytosanitary measures

- As a follow-up to the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12), the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Committee concluded a work programme to address new opportunities and challenges in implementing the SPS Agreement on food safety and animal and plant health measures.
- WTO members adopted tools and recommendations regarding SPS approval procedures, including recommendations to foster the exchange of information and the use of new technologies.
- At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024, ministers adopted a decision on improving implementation of special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions for developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs) in the SPS Agreement and in the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT).

Background

The Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures establishes the rights and obligations of WTO members regarding measures taken to ensure food safety, protect human health from plant or animal-spread diseases, protect plant and animal health from pests and diseases, or prevent other damage from pests. Governments must ensure that their SPS measures are necessary for health protection and based on scientific principles.

SPS Declaration work programme

The SPS Committee completed a work programme to enhance the implementation of the SPS Agreement in light of new opportunities and emerging challenges, such as population growth, climate change, innovation, new technologies, pest/disease pressures and persisting obstacles to trade.

The programme was launched in 2022 in response to the SPS Declaration adopted at MC12 which instructed the Committee to look at the impact of changes to the global agricultural landscape since the SPS Agreement entered into force in 1995.

Members finalized a factual summary setting out the details of this work and continued efforts to build consensus on a report to MC13 setting out key findings and recommendations. A dedicated webpage helped members track meetings and written inputs.

MC13 decision on special and differential treatment

At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024, ministers adopted a decision on improving implementation of special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions for developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs) in the SPS Agreement and in the TBT Agreement.

The decision includes a request for improvements to training and technical assistance provided to developing economies to help them overcome the challenges they face in timely engagement on SPS and TBT matters.

SPS approval procedures

The SPS Committee Working Group on Approval Procedures, co-led by Canada and Paraguay, concluded its work, wrapping



A farmer sprays pesticide in a cabbage field in São Paulo, Brazil.

up discussions on key challenges, such as undue delays and lack of transparency, and on principles of approval procedures for food, animal and plant products.

The Committee adopted a document listing existing tools and resources to enhance the implementation of the SPS Agreement relating to approval procedures, which cover any procedure to check and ensure the fulfilment of SPS measures, such as SPS requirements of the importing economy.

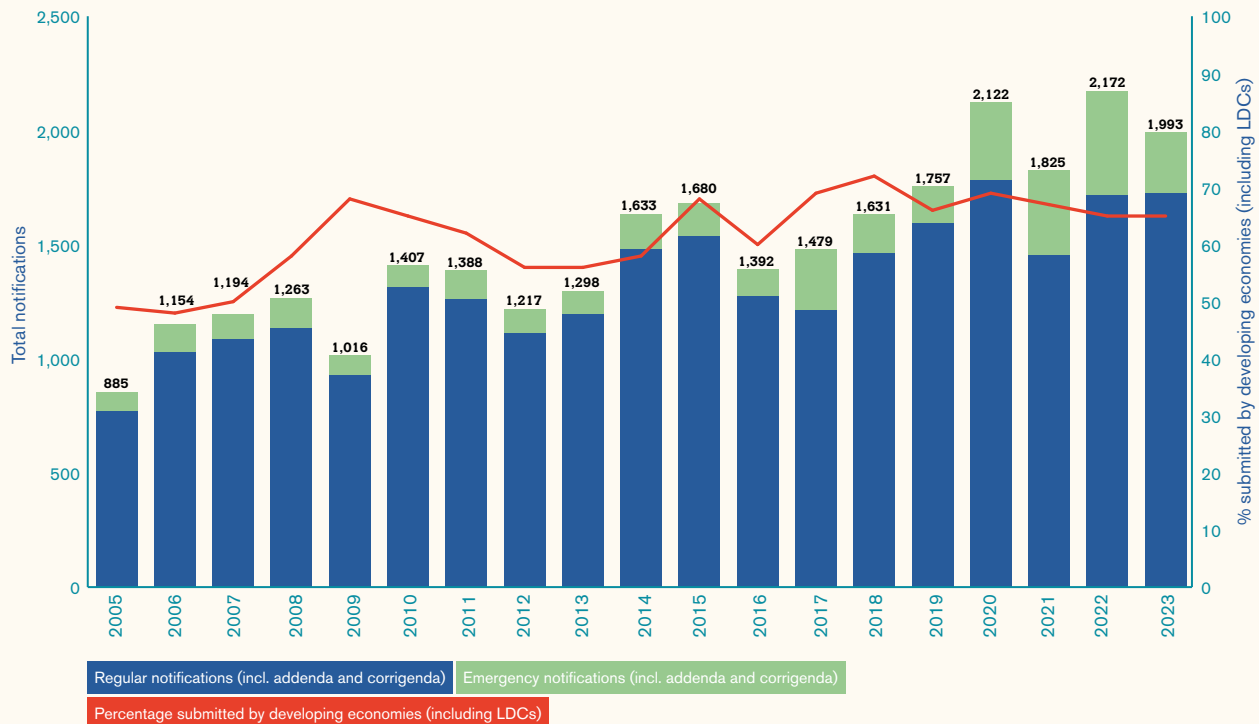
It also adopted several recommendations. Members are encouraged to make information available on official websites, ideally in multiple languages, and to use e-tools to provide clear and timely information, for example on up to date contact details and notifications of new or changed approval procedures.

Members are urged to provide information proactively at the start of the approval process and to maintain open and ongoing communication. Use of international tools for the electronic exchange of certificates is recommended. Members are also encouraged to engage in regulatory cooperation and to adopt approval procedures that make use of modern technologies and practices, such as remote audits.

Other work

The SPS Committee held a thematic session on risk communication, misinformation and disinformation, with an emphasis on public perceptions of issues concerning food technology, health and the environment. The session explored the concepts surrounding information manipulation and their relevance within the context of the SPS Agreement.

Figure 3: SPS notifications and percentage of notifications submitted by developing economies (including LDCs), 2005-23



Speakers discussed the evolution of misinformation and disinformation, including their possible effect on policy decisions, how they are being deployed around agricultural food safety issues and how members can identify and address them at early stages.

In addition, a procedure was adopted for the sixth review of the operation and implementation of the SPS Agreement to be conducted in 2024.

Specific trade concerns

The SPS Committee considered 17 new specific trade concerns raised by WTO members and 50 previously raised concerns (compared to 26 and 43, respectively, in 2022). New issues related to import restrictions on several products after the discharge of treated water from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant; pesticide maximum residue limits (MRLs); import restrictions on account of animal health and plant health concerns; and

delays, burdensome requirements, and communication issues in relation to SPS approval procedures.

Previously raised concerns discussed again in 2023 included regulatory approaches to pesticide MRLs, legislation on endocrine disruptors, which are chemicals that can interfere with hormone systems, maximum levels for contaminants in food products, legislation on veterinary medicinal products and COVID-19-related import restrictions.

The SPS Committee received its second-ever request for the good offices of the Chair under an ad hoc Committee procedure

In 2023, members notified 1,993 planned, new or changed SPS regulations, compared to a record high of 2,172 the year before.

introduced in 2014 to assist with the resolution of trade concerns. However, the member whose measure was the subject of this trade concern did not agree to the process and it did not go ahead.

About 54 per cent of all concerns raised in the SPS Committee since 1995 have been reported as resolved or partially resolved, with no information being provided for the remaining concerns.

Notifications

The SPS Agreement requires notification of draft regulations that are not “substantially the same” as an international standard. Other WTO members should be given sufficient time to submit comments on the notified draft regulation. Notifications are an important demonstration of members’ commitment to transparency in their SPS measures.

In 2023, members notified 1,993 planned, new or changed SPS regulations, compared to a record high of 2,172 the year before. Of these, 1,723 were regular notifications (up from 1,714 in 2022) and 270 were emergency notifications (down from 458 in 2022). As in the previous year, developing economies (including least-developed countries) submitted 65 per cent of SPS notifications (see Figure 3).

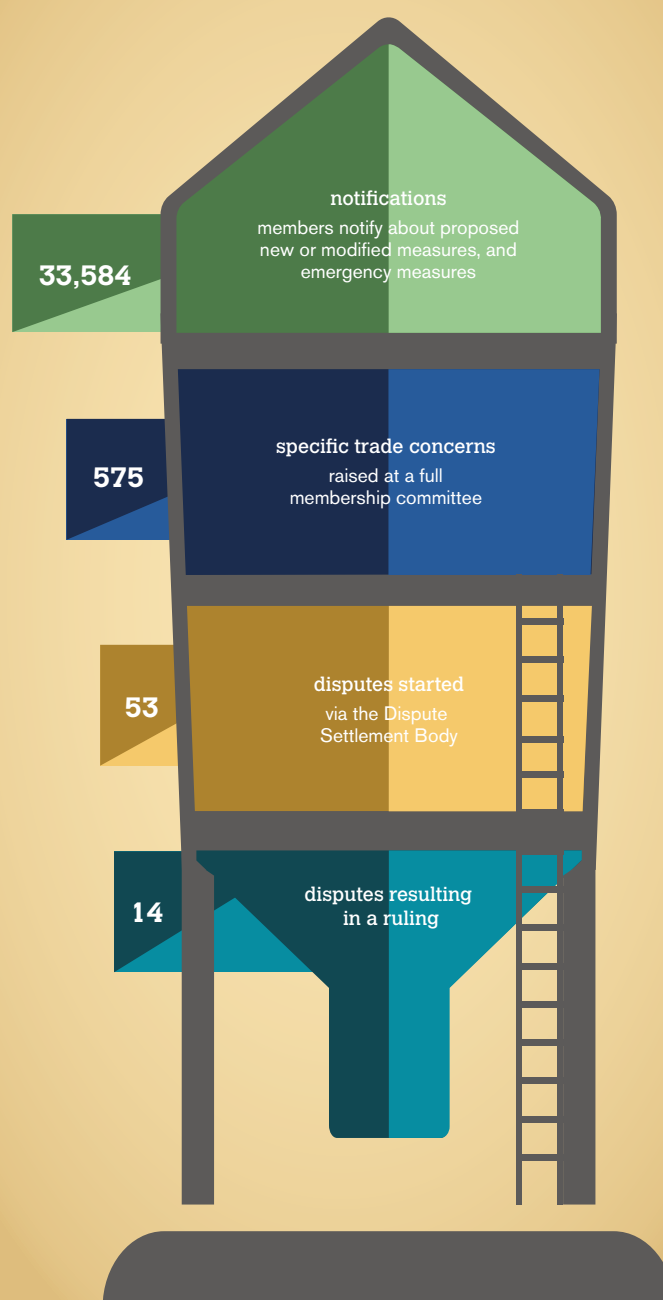
Capacity building

The WTO Secretariat undertook 20 SPS technical assistance activities. A follow-up session of the new “SPS Transparency Champions Course”, targeted at SPS notification authorities and enquiry points in Africa, took stock of improvements in domestic SPS transparency frameworks. An “Advanced SPS Course” benefited 26 government officials from 26 members and equipped them with tools to play an active role in improving the implementation of the SPS Agreement in their economies.

Numerous SPS outreach activities were conducted, including two briefing sessions for SPS delegates to facilitate the participation of new delegates in the work of the SPS Committee.

Box 1: SPS measures relating to food safety, animal health and plant health

Few concerns end in disputes: 1995-2023*



*until 20 November 2023.

Technical barriers to trade

- **The Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee continued implementing its 2022-24 workplan on themes such as good regulatory practice, regulatory cooperation, conformity assessment procedures, transparency and technical assistance, with the aim of ensuring a business-friendly and transparent trading environment.**
- **At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi, ministers adopted a declaration on strengthening regulatory cooperation to reduce technical barriers to trade.**

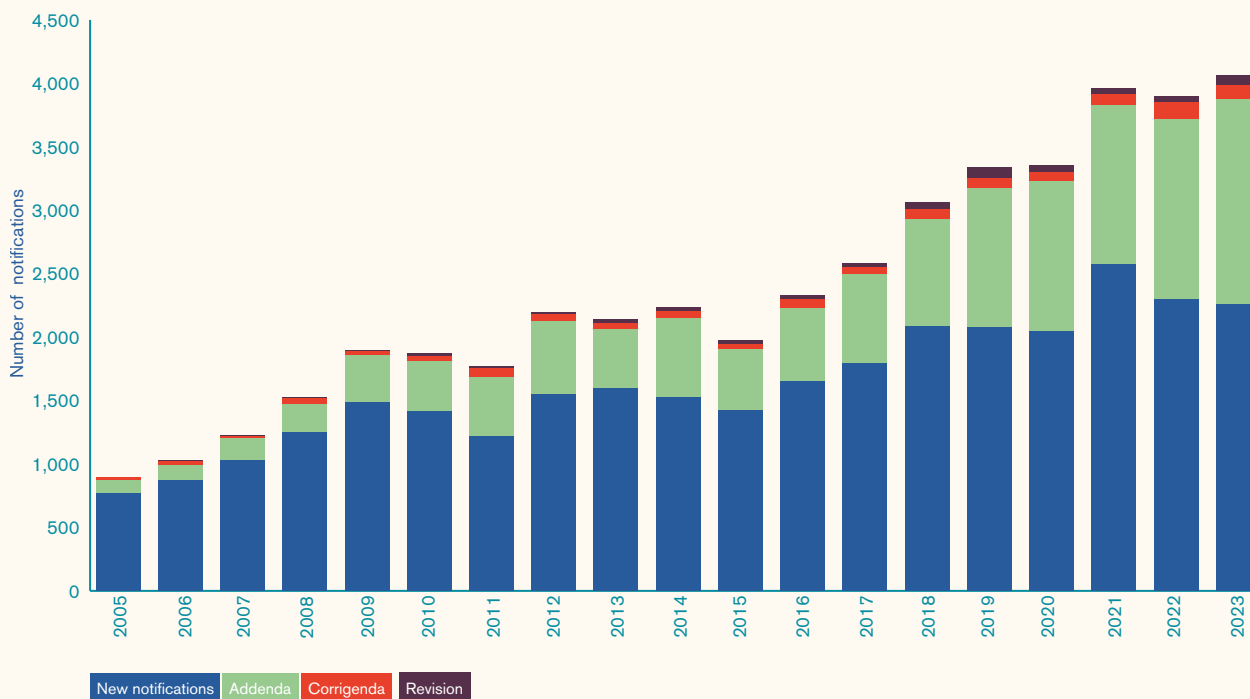
The TBT Committee continued implementing its 2022-24 workplan covering themes such as good regulatory practice, regulatory cooperation, conformity assessment procedures (e.g. certification), transparency and technical assistance. The Committee also held various thematic sessions, including on cooperation between members on standards and regulations that could contribute to addressing plastics pollution and climate change.

A focus in 2023 was on emerging digital technologies, with the Committee holding dedicated sessions about intangible digital products such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and the use of digital technologies in good regulatory practices. The Committee also discussed challenges

Background

The TBT Agreement aims to ensure that regulations, standards, testing and certification procedures followed by WTO members do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade. The number of regulations adopted by WTO members has continued to grow in response to consumers' demands for safe, high-quality products, the protection of health and the need to curb pollution and environmental degradation.



Figure 4: TBT notifications, 2005-2023

of performing conformity assessment in e-commerce, including practices that can ensure the safety and quality of online-purchased products.

The Committee agreed a timeline for the completion of its 10th Triennial Review by November 2024. The aim of this process is to review the operation and implementation of the TBT Agreement, taking into consideration new challenges regarding standards and regulations, and to develop a new work plan for the next three years.

The Committee intensified its ongoing work on the development of guidelines on the choice and design of conformity assessment procedures. The guidelines are intended to help regulators determine which conformity assessment procedures to apply in situations where risks associated with products are different.

Transparency continued to be another key topic of Committee work and progress. The Committee adopted a revised set of guidelines

to enhance information contained in members' notifications. It also began preparing a good practice guide on how to comment on members' notifications and developing a format to facilitate submission of notifications on general implementation of the TBT Agreement. By the end of 2023, an integrated ePing sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and TBT platform (see page 95) for tracking SPS and TBT notifications and specific trade concerns had over 23,000 registered users from 194 countries/territories.

Declaration on regulatory cooperation

At MC13, ministers adopted a declaration on strengthening regulatory cooperation to reduce technical barriers to trade. The declaration stresses the importance of a multilateral framework for cooperation on standards and regulations. It notes that engagement of this type will be fundamental to engaging with existing and emerging challenges in the area of environment (climate change), health (future pandemics) and the digital economy.

The declaration encourages members to engage in an early dialogue – when regulations are in draft form (notified). This makes it possible to make changes before the regulations become entrenched in legislation, and makes it easier to develop good practices, such as the use of international standards.

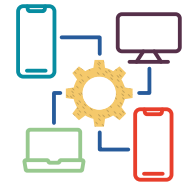
Specific trade concerns

In 2023, the Committee discussed 206 specific trade concerns regarding draft or adopted TBT measures. The number of new concerns decreased by 36 per cent to 34, compared with 53 in 2022, and the number of previously raised concerns also fell slightly to 172 from 188 previously. Ten concerns were reported by members as resolved.

The new concerns covered a wide range of issues, including digital regulations and cybersecurity, environmental protection (for example, deforestation, battery waste management, energy efficiency, electric vehicles), packaging and labelling requirements of various products (such as washing machines, hazardous substances, and alcoholic beverages).

Notifications

In 2023, WTO members submitted 4,098 notifications on product requirements, the highest number on record (see Figure 4). The number of notifying members in 2023 increased to 90 from 84 in 2022. The United States submitted the most notifications, while Burundi, Brazil, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda were among the top 10.



99%+

More than 99 per cent of TBT notifications are being submitted through the ePing online facility.



Safety checks at an automobile facility in Vung Tau, Viet Nam.

More than 99 per cent of TBT notifications are being submitted through the ePing online facility, enabling the WTO Secretariat to publish notifications within two days of receipt and increasing the time available for comments by other members and stakeholders. ePing also allows WTO members and the public at large to track and discuss notifications and receive email alerts on relevant notifications based on product and market preferences.

Special and differential treatment regarding standards and regulations

A declaration adopted by ministers at MC13 highlights the importance of technical assistance, training and special and differential treatment in the area of standards and regulations. It emphasizes that effective implementation of the TBT Agreement and SPS Agreement is key for promoting development but more needs to be done to help developing economies address the challenges they face.

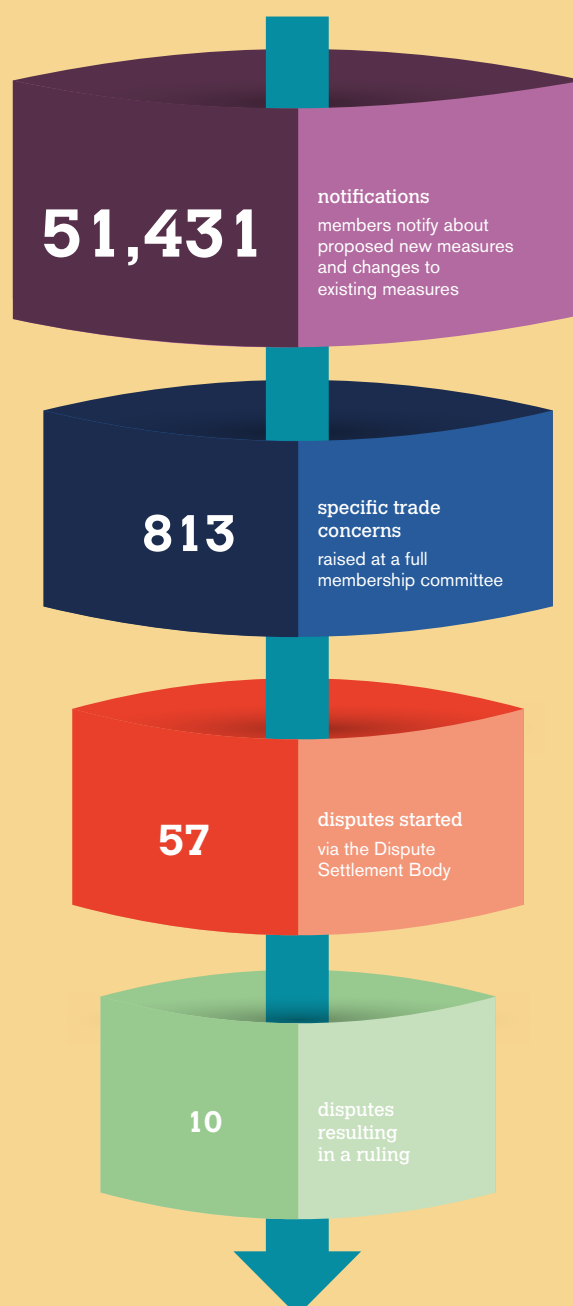
Capacity building

In 2023, the WTO Secretariat organized 13 member-specific or regional capacity building activities designed to help participants expand their understanding of the TBT Agreement and discuss implementation challenges.

In 2023, WTO members submitted 4,098 notifications on product requirements, the highest number on record.

Box 2: Technical requirements affecting trade in all products

Few concerns end in disputes: 1995-2023*



*until 20 November 2023.

Subsidies and countervailing measures

- The chairs of the Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) Committee reiterated concerns about continuing chronic low compliance with the transparency obligation to notify subsidies.
- Initiations of countervailing duty investigations decreased to 10 in the first half of 2023, from 17 in the same period of 2022.

Background

The Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) Agreement regulates WTO members' use of subsidies and countervailing measures on subsidized imports of a product found to be injuring domestic producers of that product. The SCM Committee reviews WTO members' notifications of specific subsidies, notifications of countervailing duty legislation, semi-annual reports of countervailing actions and ad hoc notifications of preliminary and final countervailing measures taken. It serves as a forum for members to discuss the implementation of the SCM Agreement and any matters arising from this.

In May, the IMF, OECD, World Bank and the WTO launched a Joint Subsidy Platform (JSP) to enhance transparency on the use of subsidies.

Chairs Sally Bardayan of Panama at the Committee's first regular meeting of the year and James Lester of New Zealand at the second drew attention to the chronic low compliance with the transparency obligation to notify subsidies, which constitutes a serious problem for the proper functioning of the SCM Agreement. As of 22 January 2024, 95 members had not submitted their 2023 notifications, due by 30 June 2023. Similarly, 84 members had not submitted their 2021 notifications.

The Committee continued to discuss ways to improve the timeliness and completeness of notifications and other information flows on trade measures. It returned to a revised proposal by the United States on procedures for questions and answers on subsidy programmes not included in members' notifications. The Committee also continued to discuss a joint proposal from Canada, the European Union, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States to amend the procedures for review of new and full subsidy notifications.

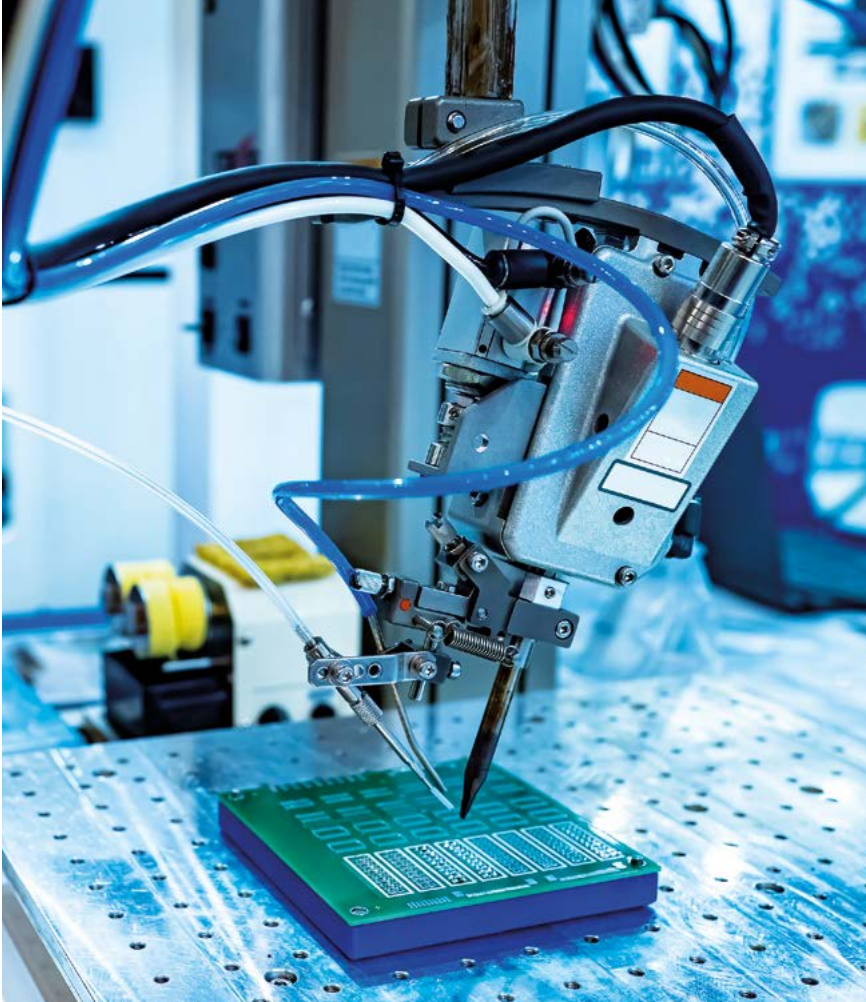
In December, the WTO Secretariat concluded a new technical assistance project aimed at enhancing the capacity of developing members to comply with subsidy notification requirements. In May, the IMF, OECD, World Bank and the WTO launched a Joint Subsidy Platform (JSP) to enhance transparency on the use of subsidies. In addition, the Secretariat launched the WTO Subsidy Database, which contains information from subsidy notifications submitted by members.

The chairs recalled the 31 December 2015 deadline for the extended transition period given to 19 developing members to eliminate export subsidies. Beneficiaries should have made their final transparency notifications by 30 June 2016 but only 15 had done so. Least-developed country members and nine developing members listed in Annex VII(b) of the SCM Agreement continue to be exempted from the export subsidy prohibition.

The Committee also reviewed notifications of countervailing actions taken (see Figure 5). Initiations of countervailing duty investigations decreased to 10 in the first half of 2023, compared with 17 in the same period of 2022. As of 30 June 2023, there were 292 notified measures in force, up from 289 at the same time in 2022.

The Committee continued its discussions on subsidies and overcapacity as well as China's publication and inquiry point obligations under China's Protocol of Accession, both of which were raised by Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. The Committee also considered China's requests for information from the United States regarding various US policies and measures.

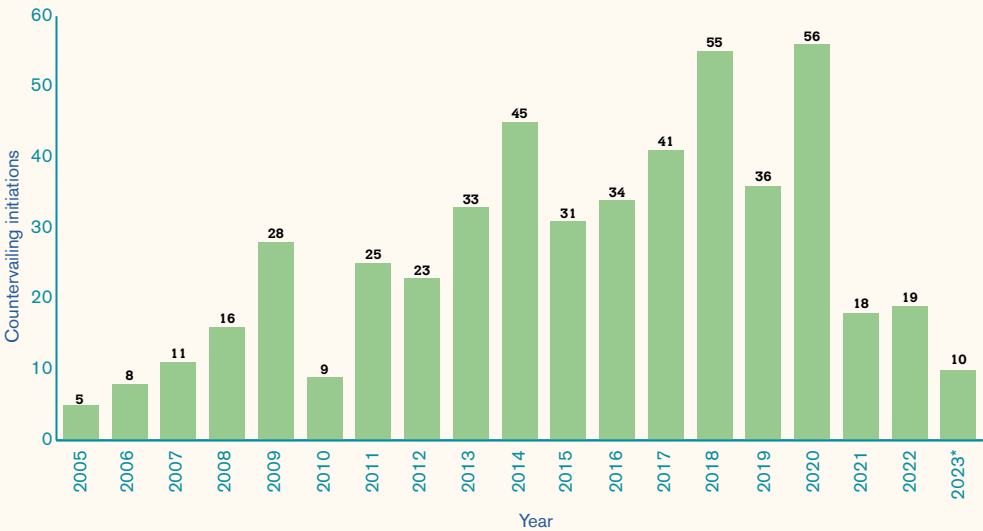
In 2023, the Committee agreed to improve its functioning by adopting several changes to the way it conducts its business, including the planning and organization of meetings. It also discussed a proposal submitted by Canada, Japan, Korea, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States to form an informal technical discussion group on issues under the SCM Agreement.



The Committee discussed a submission by the African Group entitled "A Case for Rebalancing the SCM Agreement – Policy Space to Promote Industrialisation in Developing Countries" and a proposal by the EU regarding WTO deliberations on state interventions in support of industrial sectors.

Automated production of printed circuit boards.

Figure 5: Initiations of new countervailing duty investigations, 1 January 2005 to end-June 2023



Note: Figure 5 covers initiations up to the end of June 2023 as notified by members. Data for the second half of 2023 are not yet available.

Anti-dumping practices

- WTO members initiated 77 new investigations from January to June 2023, a significant increase from 48 during the same period in 2022.
- The United States, followed by India, was the leading initiating member in 2023. Each initiated at least twice as many investigations as the previous year.



Background

WTO rules for the conduct of anti-dumping investigations and the application of anti-dumping measures are detailed in the Anti-Dumping Agreement. WTO members can apply anti-dumping measures on imports of a product where the exporting company exports the product at a price lower than the normal value - generally the price the company charges in its home market - and the dumped imports cause or threaten to cause injury to the domestic industry producing the "like" product in the importing member. The Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices discusses any matters relating to the Anti-Dumping Agreement.

In the first six months of 2023, the United States reported initiating 31 new anti-dumping investigations, compared with 14 in the first six months of 2022. India initiated 16 investigations, against eight in the same 2022 period.

The top initiating members were the United States (31), India (16), Argentina (six), Brazil, Indonesia and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) states (Armenia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and Russia) (four). The Republic of Korea reported three initiations while the

European Union and Mexico reported two initiations each.

Along with the United States and India, Argentina, Brazil, the EAEU states, the European Union, Indonesia and Mexico initiated more investigations than in the first half of 2022. Canada, Chinese Taipei and the Republic of Korea initiated fewer.

Members that had initiated anti-dumping investigations in the first six months of 2022, namely Australia, China, Morocco, Pakistan, South Africa, and the United Kingdom did not initiate any new investigations in the first half of 2023.

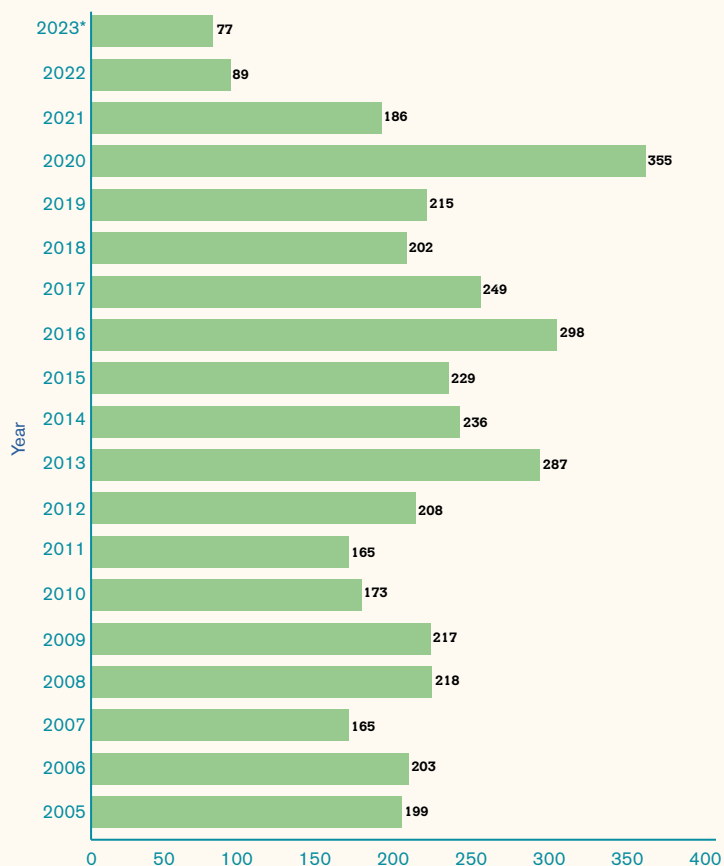
As of 30 June 2023, a total of 2,001 notified measures (definitive duties and undertakings) were in force.

As in the previous year, investigations involving steel products, which accounted for 14.5 per cent of all new investigations in the first six months of 2023, continued to be the subject of extensive debate in the Committee.

At its two regular meetings in 2023, the Committee reviewed semi-annual reports for July-December 2022 submitted by 44 members and semi-annual reports for the first half of 2023 submitted by 44 members. Committee chairs Juan Carlos Estrella of Ecuador and Ayşegül Sahinoğlu Yerdeş of Türkiye, at the May and October meetings, respectively, noted that some members had failed to submit semi-annual reports during the reviewed periods and urged them to comply with this notification requirement.

Investigations involving steel products accounted for 14.5% of all new investigations in the first six months of 2023.

Figure 6: Initiations of new anti-dumping investigations, 1 January 2005 to end-June 2023



Note: Figure 6 covers initiations up to the end of June 2023, as notified by members. Data for the second half of 2023 are not yet available.

The WTO Secretariat's online portal for submission of anti-dumping semi-annual reports continued to be heavily used. The "explore data" function allows members to review the data on all measures in force – those notified in their own semi-annual reports and those notified in the reports of other members. A new trade remedies data portal is also available, providing enhanced access to databases on anti-dumping and countervailing actions.

In 2023, the Committee agreed to improve its functioning by adopting several changes to the way it conducts its business, including in the planning and organization of meetings. The Working Group on Implementation met once, in May.

Safeguards

- In 2023, WTO members launched 12 safeguard investigations, up from four in 2022, and applied six measures, compared with two the year before when both initiations and applications were particularly low.
- Measures applied by the European Union and the United Kingdom continued to draw the most discussion.

Background

The Agreement on Safeguards sets forth the rules concerning safeguard investigations and the application of safeguard measures. WTO members may take safeguard actions (impose temporary additional duties, quantitative restrictions or other measures on an imported product) where an increase in imports of the product is causing, or threatening to cause, serious injury to the domestic industry of the importing member. Subject to certain exceptions for imports from developing members, safeguard measures are applied on imports of the product from all sources (rather than from a specific member or group of members).

During 2023, WTO members initiated 12 new safeguard investigations and applied six safeguard measures, compared with four and two, respectively, in 2022, when initiations of new investigations and the application of safeguard measures were among the lowest since 1995 (see Figure 7). Indonesia (five), Madagascar (four), India (one), the Philippines (one) and Türkiye (one) initiated the investigations. Madagascar (three), India (two) and Tunisia (one) applied measures during the year.

The number of safeguard measures in force (counted as of end-October each year) increased slightly, from 42 in 2022 to 45 in 2023

In total, the Safeguards Committee reviewed notifications relating to 56 specific safeguard investigations by WTO members at its regular meetings in April and October.

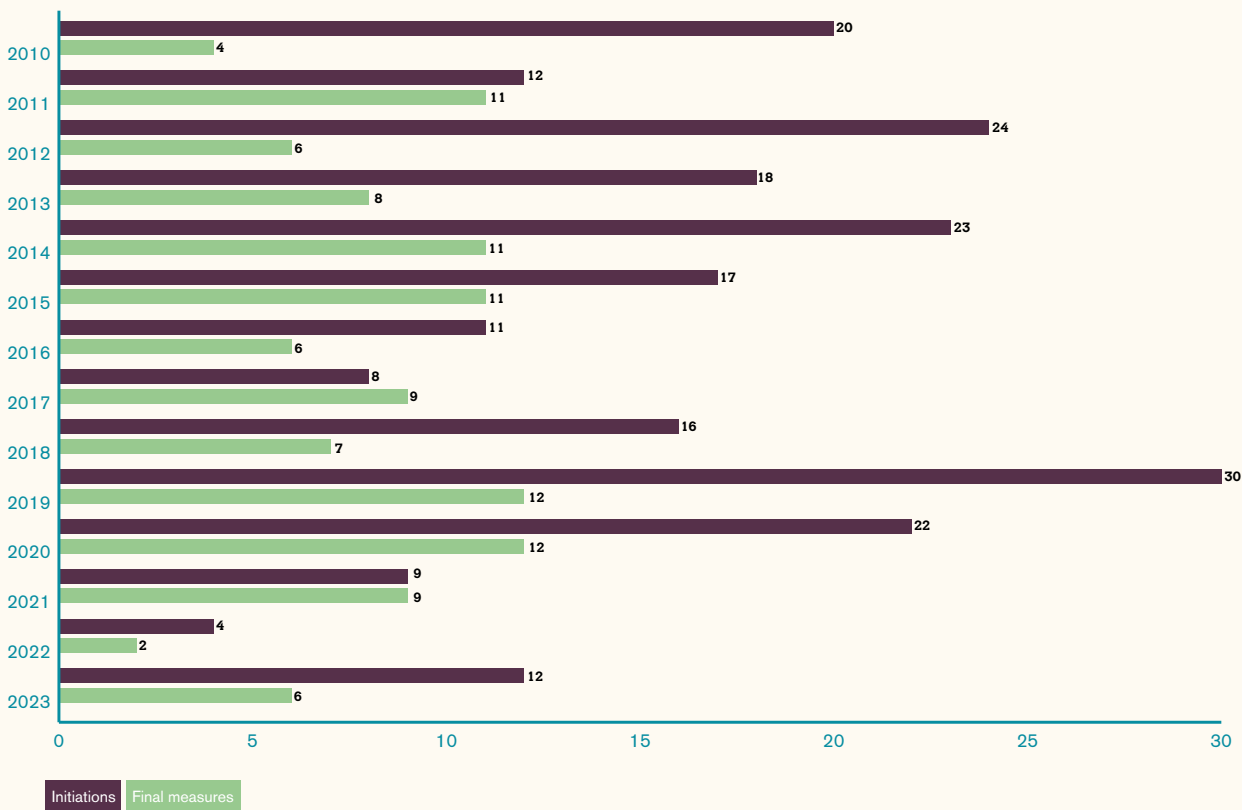
At both meetings, several members expressed concern over certain notified safeguard actions and called on members to strictly abide by the provisions of the Safeguards Agreement. Most members raising concerns stressed that the safeguard instrument was intended to address emergency situations. Other general issues raised concerned the

impact of safeguards on global trade and supply chains.

The measures that drew the most discussion were the European Union's safeguard measure on certain steel products, applied since February 2019, and the United Kingdom's safeguard measure on certain steel products, applied since the UK left the EU in February 2020.

The Committee approved its report to the Council for Trade in Goods (see page 81) regarding WTO reform, outlining efforts in this area and issues where agreement was reached. It also discussed a proposal submitted by Canada, Japan,

Figure 7: Initiations of new safeguard investigations and application of new final measures, 2010 to 2023 (for all WTO members)



Note: Some notifications are ambiguous about timing. For those notifications, members sometimes subsequently file an additional notification clarifying, ex post, the effective date of the measure. For this reason, the number of applications of measures indicated in the figure above can differ from the figures given in the previous Annual Report.



the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States to hold informal technical discussions regarding safeguard proceedings to take place in conjunction with formal meetings of the Committee.

The measures that drew the most discussion were the EU's and the UK's safeguard measures on certain steel products.

The number of safeguard measures in force increased from 42 in October 2022 to 45 in October 2023.

Information Technology Agreement

- Timor-Leste will become the third least-developed country (LDC) to join the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) and the second to join the ITA Expansion Agreement on its accession to the WTO, which was approved at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13).
- The WTO Secretariat organized the first Geneva based workshop on the ITA and digital transformation. Government officials from 30 developing economies took part.
- World exports of ITA products have more than quadrupled since 1996, reaching US\$ 2.5 trillion in 2021, according to the Secretariat. Exports of products under the ITA's Expansion Agreement are estimated at about US\$ 2.1 trillion.

Background

The Information Technology Agreement (ITA) requires participants to eliminate duties on IT products on a most-favoured nation basis, meaning that all WTO members benefit from it. The ITA covers a large number of ICT products, including computers, telecommunications equipment and semiconductors. The Committee of Participants on the Expansion of Trade in Information Technology Products oversees the Agreement and reviews its implementation. In 2015, over 50 members concluded the expansion of the Agreement (ITA II), which covers an additional 201 products valued at over US\$ 1.3 trillion a year. To date, the ITA has 83 participants (counting each EU member state).

Participants in the WTO's Information Technology Agreement (ITA) and the ITA Expansion Agreement approved in October Timor-Leste's participation in the ITA and the ITA Expansion Agreement. It will become the third LDC to join the ITA and the second to join the ITA Expansion Agreement on its accession to the WTO, which was approved at MC13 in February 2024 (see page 42).

Miguel Manetelu, Minister of Transport and Communication of Timor-Leste, said: "The workshops and training sessions provided have been invaluable in equipping us with the necessary knowledge and expertise required to engage effectively with the complexities of this plurilateral agreement."

The Secretariat organized in March 2023 the first Geneva based workshop on the ITA and digital transformation. Thirty government officials from 30 WTO developing members and governments in the process of WTO accession took part.

At the Committee's March meeting, the Secretariat made a presentation on recent trends in trade in ITA products. World exports of ITA products have more than quadrupled since 1996, reaching US\$ 2.5 trillion in 2021. The export of products under the ITA's Expansion Agreement is estimated at about US\$ 2.1 trillion, representing around 12 per cent of global merchandise exports.

The ITA Committee continued to engage with the business community, holding an informal dialogue with IT companies and associations in March 2023 in Geneva. Industry representatives presented a number of products and applications using the latest information and communication technologies (ICT) in business, logistics, infrastructure and medical care. They also shared their perspectives on the benefits of the ITA.

Participants held discussions on improvements to the Committee's functioning as part of work on WTO reform (see page 77). In September, the Committee agreed to extend the minimum time for circulating convening notices and the proposed list of



agenda items and to introduce eAgenda (see pages 194) on a trial basis.

The Committee discussed trade concerns relating to Indonesian and Egyptian import duties on ITA products at its meetings in March and October.

The Committee continued its deliberations on non-tariff measures. Regarding the electromagnetic compatibility (EMC) and the electromagnetic interferences (EMI) pilot project, Israel and Viet Nam submitted information for the first time on their conformity assessment procedures.

An engineer in an electronic manufacturing factory examines a circuit board.

Customs valuation

- **Five members notified the Committee on Customs Valuation of updates of their legislation. Three members made first-time notifications regarding their treatment of interest charges.**
- **The Committee reviewed the customs legislation and valuation practices of 37 members and concluded 11 of these reviews.**

Background

The WTO's Agreement on Customs Valuation seeks to establish a fair, uniform and neutral system for the valuation of goods for customs purposes, precluding the use of arbitrary or fictitious values. The Committee on Customs Valuation reviews implementation and administration of the Agreement and the Agreement on Preshipment Inspection.

In 2023, the Customs Valuation Committee received updated customs legislation notifications from five members – Bolivia, Colombia, Nigeria, Norway and the Philippines. First-time notifications were received from Bolivia, the Philippines and Tonga regarding their treatment of interest charges. Cambodia and the Philippines updated their notifications on the valuation of software on certain carrier media.

The Committee is the focal point for the review of the customs valuation practices of WTO members and requires that all customs legislation, including updates, be notified to the Committee. The Committee reviewed the legislation of 37 members based on notifications provided and concluded 11 of these reviews.

The total number of members to have notified their customs legislation stands at 112, and 78 have notified the checklist of issues related to their legislation (counting EU member states as one).

As part of the discussions on WTO reform, the Committee adopted a report on improvements of the functioning of the Committee. It contained six measures to enhance transparency and facilitate the preparation and follow-up of meetings.

The Committee also monitors the Agreement on Preshipment Inspection and reviews notifications on members' preshipment inspection measures. In November, it launched the sixth triennial review of the Agreement.



Rules of origin

- WTO members considered a new draft proposal to update notification requirements to ensure that non-preferential rules of origin are impartial, transparent, predictable and consistent.
- The Committee on Rules of Origin adopted a report highlighting members' work in addressing the concerns of least developed countries (LDCs) with regards to preferential rules of origin in favour of LDCs.

Background

Rules of origin are the criteria used to determine where a product is made. They are used in the implementation of many trade measures, including trade preferences, customs duties, labelling of "country of origin" and the application of anti-dumping measures. The main objective of the Agreement on Rules of Origin is to harmonize the rules that all WTO members use to determine origin in their non-preferential trade. This work is conducted by the Committee on Rules of Origin. The Committee also reviews the implementation of the 2013 and 2015 ministerial decisions on preferential rules of origin for LDCs.

Non-preferential rules of origin

WTO members considered at their June meeting a new draft proposal, drawn up by outgoing chair Laura Gauer (Switzerland), to update notification requirements to ensure that non-preferential rules of origin are prepared and applied in an impartial, transparent, predictable, consistent and neutral manner.

The draft sets out a template for members to notify rules of origin that they use when



applying most-favoured-nation tariff treatment to imported goods. At the end of the meeting, members elected Elia Mtweve of Tanzania as the new chair.

Mobile phone manufacturing plant in Uttar Pradesh, India.

Rules of origin define where a product is made and are used for the implementation of trade policy measures, such as quotas, anti-dumping or "made in" labels.

During the year, members attended two information-exchange sessions with representatives from academia and the private sector on trade-facilitating measures related to rules of origin and preferential rules of origin.

Preferential rules of origin

The Committee adopted in November a new report highlighting members' work in addressing the concerns of LDCs about preferential rules of origin in favour of LDCs.

The report calls on the Committee to continue its work to ensure that preferential rules of origin applicable to imports from LDCs

are transparent and simple and contribute to facilitating market access, in line with ministerial decisions. The chair described the report as an “important milestone” which showed the readiness of WTO members to address the challenges faced by LDCs.

The report says that the Committee has made substantial progress in making information available on preferential rules of origin applied to LDCs in the context of non-reciprocal trade preferences as well as in improving the availability of data on preferential tariffs and imports.

However, “significant gaps remain” that impact the ability of the WTO Secretariat to conduct a comprehensive analysis of current rates of preference utilization. One significant gap concerns the availability of information on imports entering under “other” preferential schemes, the report notes, whether these be regional trade agreements or other preferential arrangements.

An examination of import statistics for 2015-19 indicates that utilization of preferences can be improved in all preferential arrangements, the report notes. It also suggests that utilization rates vary significantly across different preference-granting members and also show significant annual variations.

The report highlights work on documentary requirements related to preferential rules of origin for LDCs, including proof of origin and trade facilitation measures for small consignments.

Other areas of work

Following discussions at the WTO's Goods Council (see page 81) on improving the functioning of WTO bodies, members adopted several measures, including holding periodic introductory sessions on rules of origin and use of the eAgenda (see page 194).

Import licensing

- **The Committee launched the import licensing notification portal, which aims to streamline notifications through online submissions and facilitate the collection and automatic dissemination of information through the import licensing website.**
- **The Committee on Import Licensing received or reviewed 170 notifications from WTO members under the Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures, which aims to ensure that licensing systems are transparent and do not restrict trade.**

Background

The Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures establishes disciplines on import licensing systems, with the objective of ensuring that the procedures applied for granting import licences do not in themselves restrict trade. It aims to simplify the administrative requirements necessary to obtain licences and to ensure fair and transparent administration of the procedures. The Agreement requires WTO members to notify publications and legislation on import licensing procedures and any changes as well as to submit an annual questionnaire on import licensing procedures.

In 2023, the Committee launched an import licensing notification portal, a new digital tool that allows for online submission of notifications. The portal streamlines the notification process by allowing various agencies to access it and provide input, consolidating the information in one place and authorizing a specific agency or agencies to submit notifications to the WTO Secretariat. It also facilitates the collection and eventual automatic dissemination of data to the import licensing



Production line for electronic products in Luannan County, China.

website and facilitates and improves the search of import licensing procedures on the website.

The Committee received 117 notifications from 15 members on new import licensing procedures or changes in these procedures, sharply higher than the 56 notifications received in 2022. The big jump is due to the number of notifications submitted by members that attended technical assistance activities on import licensing during the year. The Committee also reviewed 53 notifications from 36 members containing responses to the annual questionnaire on import licensing procedures.

As of the end of 2023, 13 WTO members had not submitted any notification on import licensing and 21 members had never submitted responses to the questionnaire. WTO trade monitoring reports have identified import licensing as one of the main trade-restricting measures introduced by governments.

WTO members raised several new and recurring specific trade concerns. China, Japan and the Republic of Korea questioned India's import licensing

measures on personal computers, tablets and other electronic products. Indonesia questioned India's import licensing on viscose staple fibre. The European Union and the United States questioned Angola's import licensing requirements, Egypt's import licensing on certain agricultural and processed products, and Indonesia's commodity balancing mechanism for issuing import licences.

The European Union, Indonesia, Japan, Chinese Taipei, Thailand and the United States questioned India's import licensing regime for pneumatic tyres. Canada, the European Union and the United States questioned Thailand's import procedures on feed wheat. Japan and the European Union questioned Indonesia's compulsory registration by importers of steel products, its import licensing regime for certain textiles products and its import restriction on air conditioners. The European Union questioned Dominican Republic's new import licensing system.

In September, the Secretariat conducted a workshop on import licensing and notifications, which was attended by 28 government officials from developing economies.

Balance-of-payments restrictions

- **The Committee on Balance-of-Payments Restrictions received no notifications during the year of measures taken by WTO members for balance-of-payments (BOP) purposes.**
- **Chair Salomon Eheth of Cameroon held informal consultations on the Committee's functioning.**

No measures taken for balance-of-payments (BOP) purposes were notified to the Committee in 2023.

At a meeting in November to approve the Committee's annual report, the chair – Salomon Eheth of Cameroon – reminded WTO members that any measure directly or indirectly taken to restrict imports due to BOP reasons must be notified to the Committee and must be the subject of consultations.

The chair called members' attention to the 12th Ministerial Conference Outcome

Background

The Committee on Balance-of-Payments Restrictions is responsible for the review of all import restrictions applied by WTO members for BOP purposes. Under WTO rules, measures can be taken to safeguard a member's external financial position and (in the case of developing economies) to ensure a level of reserves adequate for the implementation of programmes of economic development. When adopting BOP measures, members must give preference to those with the least disruptive effect on trade.

Declaration, which acknowledged the need to address the challenges that the WTO is facing and ensure its proper functioning. Members agreed that transparency was important for the stability of the multilateral trading system and that notifying measures adopted for BOP reasons was a transparency obligation.

During the year, the chair held informal consultations on the Committee's functioning.



Trade-related investment measures

- The Committee on Trade-related Investment Measures (TRIMs) examined one new measure in its discussions of concerns regarding alleged local content requirements or other alleged trade-related investment measures.
- The Committee adopted three measures aimed at improving its functioning.

Background

The TRIMs Agreement recognizes that certain measures aimed at promoting foreign or domestic investments can restrict and distort trade. It states that WTO members may not apply any trade-related investment measure that discriminates against foreign products or that leads to quantitative restrictions, both of which violate basic WTO principles. An illustrative list of prohibited TRIMs, which often take the form of local content requirements, is part of the Agreement. The TRIMs Committee monitors the implementation of the Agreement and allows members to consult on any relevant matters.

The Committee on TRIMs discussed investment measures which, according to the WTO members requesting these items, contained import restrictions or local content obligations – for example, the obligation to use domestically manufactured or supplied goods and services.

The Committee continued its discussion of the alleged implementation by Indonesia of local content requirements in a wide range of sectors – 4G mobile devices and base stations, telecommunication services, retail and franchising, and the pharmaceutical and



medical device sectors – together with alleged investment restrictions in its energy and mining sectors.

Fabric weaving in Rangkasbitung, Indonesia.

It discussed allegations of import restrictions by India on air conditioners and by Indonesia on carpets and other textiles and on air conditioners. It also discussed alleged local content obligations in China's recommended standard for office devices and in the revision of the Chinese Government Procurement Law. Kazakhstan's alleged preferences for domestic agricultural machinery were raised for the first time.

Regarding WTO reform (see page 77), the TRIMs Committee adopted three measures aimed at improving its functioning. It will organize introductory sessions on the Agreement and the functioning of the Committee, prepare verbatim minutes of regular Committee meetings and circulate the chair's factual summary of meetings, both on a trial basis.

At the request of the African Group, the Committee discussed a communication from the Group calling for "rebalancing" the TRIMs Agreement to give developing economies more policy space (room for manoeuvre) to promote industrialization and structural transformation.

State trading enterprises

- In 2023, the Working Party on State Trading Enterprises (STEs) reviewed 18 new and full notifications.
- WTO members' compliance with notification obligations remained poor.

Background

State trading enterprises are defined as governmental or non-governmental enterprises that have been granted exclusive or special rights or privileges giving them an influence on imports and/or exports of goods. Members are required not to use such enterprises to circumvent other WTO obligations. The Working Party on State Trading Enterprises reviews WTO members' notifications of state trading enterprises.



Trade in civil aircraft

- The Committee on Trade in Civil Aircraft agreed to Brazil's terms of accession to the Agreement on Trade in Civil Aircraft. Brazil will officially join after depositing its instrument of acceptance with the WTO Secretariat.

Background

The Agreement on Trade in Civil Aircraft is a plurilateral agreement that aims to achieve maximum freedom of world trade in civil aircraft, parts and related equipment – such as engines, radar, flight recorders and ground flight simulators – by, among other things, eliminating tariffs on goods listed in its product annex. The Committee on Trade in Civil Aircraft provides signatories with an opportunity to consult on any matters relating to the operation of the Agreement.

The Working Party on STEs reviewed 18 new and full notifications from 15 WTO members regarding the activities of their STEs during the most recent notification period or earlier notification periods. Members also asked questions about specific aspects of notifications made at previous meetings, and about failures to notify.

For the most recent notification period, covering 2020 and 2021, only 45 new and full notifications were received by end-December from the total of 137 WTO members – counting the European Union as one – subject to this obligation. Successive chairs of the Working Party have encouraged members to work to improve their notification record.

The Working Party also agreed a number of steps to improve its functioning in line with the WTO-wide call for reform of how committees do business.

The Committee on Trade in Civil Aircraft agreed on 17 November to Brazil's terms of accession to the Agreement on Trade in Civil Aircraft. Brazil will officially join upon depositing its instrument of acceptance with the WTO Secretariat after its Congress has taken action. Brazil submitted its application in June 2022.

As one of the foremost global players in the aeronautical sector and a longstanding member of the WTO, Brazil has taken a significant stride in advancing its integration into the global landscape, Deputy Minister and Executive Secretary of Brazil's Ministry of Development, Industry, Commerce and Services, Marcio Elias Rosa, told the Committee.

This is the first accession request to be reviewed by the Committee. All recently acceding WTO members took part in negotiations in the context of their accessions to the WTO. The number of signatories stands at 33.

The Committee continued the transposition exercise of the product annex of the Agreement, initiated in 2021. The purpose is to update the annex to reflect the latest amendments to the Harmonized System (HS), the system used to classify traded goods on a common basis (see page 84).

The Committee also continued to discuss how to strengthen transparency as the exact status of the obligations of each signatory is not easy to confirm due to the legally complicated nature of the Agreement.

Trade facilitation

- **The Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) led to a US\$ 231 billion increase in trade, particularly in agriculture, from 2017 to 2019, according to a working paper by WTO economists. Developing economies gained the most.**
- **WTO members continued to make progress in implementing the Agreement. Cambodia, the Maldives and Myanmar notified the early implementation of TFA commitments.**
- **The first project preparation grant (PPG) was approved for an LDC member under the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility.**

Background

The Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) entered into force in February 2017. It aims to expedite the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit, and establishes measures for effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues. The Agreement also contains provisions for technical assistance and capacity building. The Committee on Trade Facilitation oversees the TFA and reviews its implementation.

The Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) led to a US\$ 231 billion increase in trade, particularly in agriculture, from 2017 to 2019, the first two years after it came into force, WTO economists told the Committee on Trade Facilitation.

Developing members and least-developed country (LDC) members that have made commitments under the landmark agreement posted the most gains, according to a working paper presented to the Committee in March 2023. The TFA, which took effect in February

2017, contains provisions for expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit.

The working paper attributed a 1.17 per cent boost in global trade to the implementation of the TFA, driven by a 5 per cent rise in global agricultural trade and a 1.5 per cent increase in manufacturing trade. LDC members experienced significant trade increases, with agricultural, manufacturing and total exports rising by 17 per cent, 3.1 per cent and 2.4 per cent, respectively.

The estimates also indicated a 16-22 per cent increase in agricultural trade among developing members that had made TFA commitments.

The working paper was prepared in response to a request by the Committee for an update to the projected gains from the TFA in the 2015 World Trade Report, which saw an increase of up to 2.73 per cent in global trade flows by 2030. The latest estimates note that as the benefits of the Agreement continue to be realized, the trade and welfare gains are likely to expand.

Implementation of the TFA

Members continued to make progress in implementing the Agreement. Cambodia, the Maldives and Myanmar notified the early implementation of 24 TFA commitments. The rate of ratification remains at 95 per cent.

End-2023 marked the final deadline for developing and LDC members to notify definitive dates for implementing all commitments. As a result, the majority of members have now provided comprehensive roadmaps for implementation, increasing transparency on the overall implementation of the Agreement.

Dedicated sessions

The Committee held its annual dedicated session on technical assistance and capacity-building support for implementation of the Agreement. The session reviewed progress and explored avenues for further collaboration to support implementation.



Border crossing at Lao Cai, Viet Nam.

The Committee also held the second of four planned annual sessions to discuss transit issues of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs). Members highlighted the need to coordinate border management mechanisms and undertake capacity-building initiatives.

Three panel discussions on disaster preparedness were held to address trade facilitation issues faced by economies affected by emergencies and disasters. The sessions heard about the challenges of moving humanitarian goods across international borders during natural disasters and other emergencies. One session raised potential future work the Committee could undertake to expedite humanitarian shipments.

Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility

In 2023, the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility (TFAF) operated under a new framework, adopted by the Committee on Trade Facilitation in 2022.

The TFAF organized one regional and two member-specific workshops to strengthen members' trade facilitation committees. It also organized workshops to support two LDC members with their notification of definitive dates for TFA commitments that require technical assistance and capacity building (Category C commitments). In addition, the TFAF hosted one transit workshop for LLDC members and funded the participation of capital-based delegates from developing members to the Committee's session on assistance and capacity building in October.

In 2023, the first project preparation grant (PPG) for an LDC was approved – for Madagascar – and one expression of interest for grants and PPGs received a positive response by a development partner.

Trade in services

- As instructed by ministers, WTO members continued examining ways to promote the use of the services waiver for least developed countries (LDCs), which allows more favourable treatment for LDC services exporters, and tackled other services-related issues.
- The Council for Trade in Services received 22 notifications, covering new or revised measures that significantly affect trade in services, down from 35 in 2022.

Background

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) defines trade in services in terms of four types of transactions: mode 1 – cross-border supply (a supplier in one WTO member provides services to a consumer in another member's territory); mode 2 – consumption abroad (a consumer from one member consumes services in another member's territory); mode 3 – commercial presence (a foreign company provides services through establishment in another member's territory); and mode 4 – presence of natural persons (individuals move to supply services in another member's territory). The Council for Trade in Services oversees the operation of the GATS.

WTTO members followed up on outcomes from the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) regarding the LDC services waiver, which seeks to boost the participation of LDCs in services trade, the e-commerce work programme, the WTO response to pandemics and WTO reform. They also undertook the fifth review of exemptions to the most-favoured nation (MFN) principle, which bars discrimination

between services and service suppliers of different WTO members.

LDC services waiver

As instructed by ministers, WTO members examined ways to promote the operation of the waiver, introduced in 2011, which allows more favourable treatment for services and suppliers from LDCs. The WTO Secretariat circulated a note on how LDC services trade statistics can be improved, including through the development of surveys.

Members organized a workshop in October at which domestic statistical offices, the International Monetary Fund, UN Trade and Development, the United Nations Statistics Division and the World Bank explored with the WTO ways to improve LDC services export data. In December, the LDC Group put forward proposals on how to implement the MC12 mandate with regard to the waiver.

E-commerce

The Secretariat produced a compilation of information members had shared in the Council over recent months on their domestic experiences in the digital sphere. In October, the African Group circulated a communication on technology transfer and resilience building. Further information on recent domestic developments related to e-commerce was contributed by various members throughout the year.

Other MC12 mandates

Regarding the WTO pandemic response, the Council held three experience-sharing sessions on the impact of COVID-19 on services trade – in the transport, health and tourism sectors. Under discussion were the main challenges members encountered, the trade-facilitative measures governments introduced and the implications of the crisis, specifically for LDCs.

On WTO reform, members considered possible improvements to the Council's



functioning and agreed to use the eAgenda (see page 194) and to circulate meeting “airgrams” 15 days in advance.

5th Review of MFN exemptions

The Council undertook its fifth review of exemptions to the most-favoured nation (MFN) principle. Delegations examined whether the conditions creating the need for a member’s exemption still prevail.

Other issues

Japan and the United States reiterated concerns about cybersecurity measures of China and Viet Nam. China expressed concerns about Australian 5G measures, various US measures and Indian measures on certain mobile applications.

The Council received 22 notifications, down from 35 in 2022, of new or revised measures that significantly affect trade in services where the notifying members have commitments. Six other notifications dealt with economic integration agreements covering services trade.

Specific commitments

The Committee on Specific Commitments continued to consider a proposal from

Türkiye on implementation issues related to specific commitments and Article II (MFN) on cross-border supply of road transport services under the General Agreement on Trade in Services. Several organizations were invited to present their work on permit systems in cross-border road transport.

The Secretariat updated the Committee on the revised “Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade” (see page 177).

Trade in financial services

Following a proposal by Canada, co-sponsored by Chile, China, New Zealand, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea and Ukraine, the Committee on Trade in Financial Services organized a seminar on “Financial Services: Trade, Inclusion and Accessibility”. Participants looked at how financial services trade and digital technology can enhance access to financial services and women’s economic empowerment.

Following a proposal by India, co-sponsored by the Philippines and South Africa, the Committee agreed to organize a thematic seminar on the cost of remittance services in 2024.

Trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS)

- Namibia deposited its instrument of acceptance for the TRIPS protocol, taking to 137 the number of members that have accepted the amendment easing WTO members' access to affordable medicines.
- Members continued their discussions on whether to extend the scope of the MC12 TRIPS ministerial decision on COVID-19 vaccines to diagnostics and therapeutics but could not reach consensus.
- The Council adopted a report by TRIPS Council chair Ambassador Pimchanok Pitfield of Thailand on its current and future work on implementing the MC12 Ministerial Declaration on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparedness for Future Pandemics.

Background

The intellectual property system has become central to the debate about economic development and broader public policy questions, such as innovation policy and public health. The TRIPS Agreement is the most comprehensive international treaty governing the protection, administration and enforcement of intellectual property rights. The Council for TRIPS, a multilateral body also open to several observers, administers the TRIPS Agreement, provides a forum for debate on policy issues and reviews the intellectual property legislation of individual WTO members

Public health

Namibia deposited its instrument of acceptance for the protocol amending the TRIPS Agreement, taking to 137 the number of members that have accepted it.

The amendment, the first to a multilateral WTO agreement, created an additional legal avenue for developing economies and least-developed countries (LDCs) with no manufacturing capacity to procure affordable medicines from external sources.

The remaining 27 members continue to benefit from the 2003 decision that first established the mechanism. In December, the General Council decided to further extend the period for acceptances by members until 31 December 2025.

The linkages between TRIPS, trade and public health continued to be the focus of several technical assistance activities organized by the WTO Secretariat, in close collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). The three organizations held a webinar on technology transfer in July and hosted a symposium on climate change and human health in November (see page 155).

In November, the WTO Secretariat hosted its annual one-week in-person course for senior government officials on trade and public health, this time with a special focus on pandemic preparedness. A regional workshop for Arab and Middle Eastern members and observers took place in December.

TRIPS and COVID-19

Members continued their discussions on whether to extend the scope of the MC12 TRIPS ministerial decision giving members greater scope to diversify production of COVID-19 vaccines to diagnostics and



Vaccination campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

therapeutics but could not reach a consensus (see page 61).

In September, the Council held a first informal thematic session on the extension issue at which representatives from international organizations, civil society, businesses, and academics shared facts, evidence and experiences relevant to COVID-19 diagnostics and therapeutics.

As mandated by the MC12 Ministerial Declaration on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparedness for Future Pandemics, members continued their review of domestic intellectual property (IP)-related measures taken during the pandemic, based on a compilation maintained by the WTO Secretariat.

In February 2024, the Council adopted a report by the chair, Ambassador Pimchanok Pitfield of Thailand, noting that the Council will continue its work on lessons learned

and the challenges experienced during the pandemic, and on building effective solutions in case of future pandemics, in an expeditious manner.

The Council also reviewed a communication in October on intellectual property, voluntary licensing and technology transfer submitted by the United Kingdom.

Transparency and trade monitoring

In March 2023, the WTO Secretariat issued the third Annual Report on Notifications and Other Information Flows, which highlights notification trends and statistics regarding members' submissions and explains transparency mechanisms related to the TRIPS Agreement.

During 2023, 27 members notified the TRIPS Council of new or updated IP legislation. In addition, three members responded to the checklist notifying the essential elements of

their systems for enforcement of IP rights, eight notified contact points for cooperating with each other on eliminating trade in IP-infringing goods, and three submitted their contact points for technical cooperation.

The Council was briefed on TRIPS-related measures covered in the DG's G20 and WTO-wide Trade Monitoring Reports and on IP policy matters raised during members' Trade Policy Reviews. Topics included the evolution of members' domestic copyright, trademark, geographical indications and patent regimes, IP enforcement online and at the border and international cooperation on IP.

Technology transfer

In March 2023, the Council concluded its 20th annual review of reports provided by developed economies on incentives granted to promote the transfer of technology to least developed countries (LDCs). These discussions were preceded by a workshop that focused on the domestic implementation of technology transfer provisions, where capital and Geneva-based officials shared their experience.

Members reviewed submissions by the African Group and India on, respectively, the role of technology transfer in resilience building and reinvigorating the discussions on trade and transfer of technology, as well as on the relationship between trade and transfer of environmentally sound technologies.

TRIPS non-violation and situation complaints

The TRIPS Council continued its discussion on scope and modalities for so-called non-violation and situation complaints. This relates to the question of whether members can bring disputes where an expected benefit from the TRIPS Agreement has been nullified, even if there is no specific violation. Ministers agreed at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024 that the current moratorium on such complaints be further extended until MC14.

During 2023, 27 members notified the TRIPS Council of new or updated IP legislation.

Plant and animal inventions, biodiversity and traditional knowledge

Regarding the patentability of plant and animal inventions, the relationship between the TRIPS Agreement and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), and the protection of traditional knowledge and folklore, members continued discussions without substantive progress.

Technical cooperation and capacity building

In November, the WTO Secretariat hosted a workshop for government officials on technical cooperation to improve coordination and the matching of members' programmes with beneficiaries' needs.

Electronic commerce

The Council reviewed a submission by South Africa on operationalizing technology transfer in the context of the 1998 Work Programme on Electronic Commerce. The document emphasized that the Work Programme mandates the TRIPS Council to examine and report on e-commerce-related IP issues and called for them to be included again as a standing item on the agenda, facilitating a deeper discussion.

IP and innovation

On the basis of submissions by the group of Friends of IP and Innovation, the Council continued exploring best practices on IP and innovation, focusing on cross-border cooperation among IP offices, research collaboration across borders and incubators and accelerators' support of start-ups operating in a cross-border environment.

Trade and environment

- **The Committee on Trade and Environment continued to focus on enhancing its functioning as a standing forum dedicated to dialogue among members on the relationship between trade and environmental measures.**
- **In November, the Committee held its first thematic session on “Trade contributions to energy transition efforts concerning climate adaptation and mitigation”.**
- **The WTO Secretariat participated fully at the UN’s COP28 Climate Change Conference in Dubai, where, for the first time, trade featured as a specific theme.**

Background

Sustainable development and protection and preservation of the environment are fundamental goals of the WTO. The Committee on Trade and Environment is responsible for examining the relationship between trade and the environment

Enhancing the functions of the Committee

In 2023, the Committee on Trade and Environment with its chair, Ambassador José Valencia of Ecuador, continued to focus on ways to enhance the functioning of the Committee as a standing forum dedicated to dialogue among members on the relationship between trade and environmental measures.

A significant number of members, including the African Group, China, Colombia, the European Union, India, Paraguay, South Africa and the United Kingdom put forward proposals, underscoring the importance of incremental reforms, so-called “reform

by doing”, to improve the functioning of the Committee.

Suggestions for reinvigorating the Committee included enhancing transparency, updating and digitalizing its operational procedures and organizing thematic discussions. Some members suggested that the Committee focus its discussions on environmental measures that may create arbitrary discrimination.

In November, the Committee held its first thematic session on “Trade contributions to energy transition efforts concerning climate adaptation and mitigation”. This session involved various stakeholders, including the International Energy Agency, the private sector and academia. Members expressed interest in continuing the dialogue on energy transition and aligning it with the Committee’s work. The next thematic discussion will continue deliberations on this topic.

At a meeting of senior officials in Geneva in October, members recognized the importance of the interplay between trade, sustainable development and environmental sustainability at the WTO and the need to demonstrate that trade can be part of the solution to environmental challenges, including the climate crisis (see page 14). Senior officials stressed the importance of having ministers discuss trade and environment at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13).

Discussions at MC13

At MC13 in February 2024, trade ministers held, for the first time, dedicated discussions on sustainable development, reflecting members’ growing awareness of the role of trade in pursuing environmental policies. Members generally welcomed the initiative and recognized the importance of building on this dialogue.

In the MC13 Ministerial Declaration, ministers underlined the role the multilateral trading system can play in contributing towards

the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and underscored the importance of trade and sustainable development.

Key themes

The Committee continued to discuss topics such as fossil fuel subsidies reform, the circular economy, which emphasizes reuse and recycling of materials, sustainability, biodiversity, transfer of technology, climate change and carbon border adjustment mechanisms to address production switching to countries with lower carbon costs. The EU continued briefing members on various aspects of the European Green Deal, which aims at net zero greenhouse-gas emissions by 2050.

Discussions and briefings took place at every Committee meeting on the three member-led trade and environment initiatives – the Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade (see page 72), the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (see page 73) and the Fossil Fuel Subsidies Reform (see page 73).

Climate change and trade

The WTO Secretariat participated fully at the UN's COP28 Climate Change Conference in Dubai from 30 November to 13 December (see page 14), where for the first time trade featured as a specific theme.

The United Kingdom updated the Committee on the Forest Agriculture and Commodities Trade Dialogue, which brings together several key exporters and importers to discuss how to make agricultural trade more sustainable and prevent deforestation.

New Zealand provided an update on negotiations towards an Agreement on Climate Change, Trade and Sustainability, launched with Costa Rica, Fiji, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. The agreement would include removal of tariffs on environmental goods, disciplines to eliminate harmful fossil fuel subsidies and voluntary eco-labelling programmes.

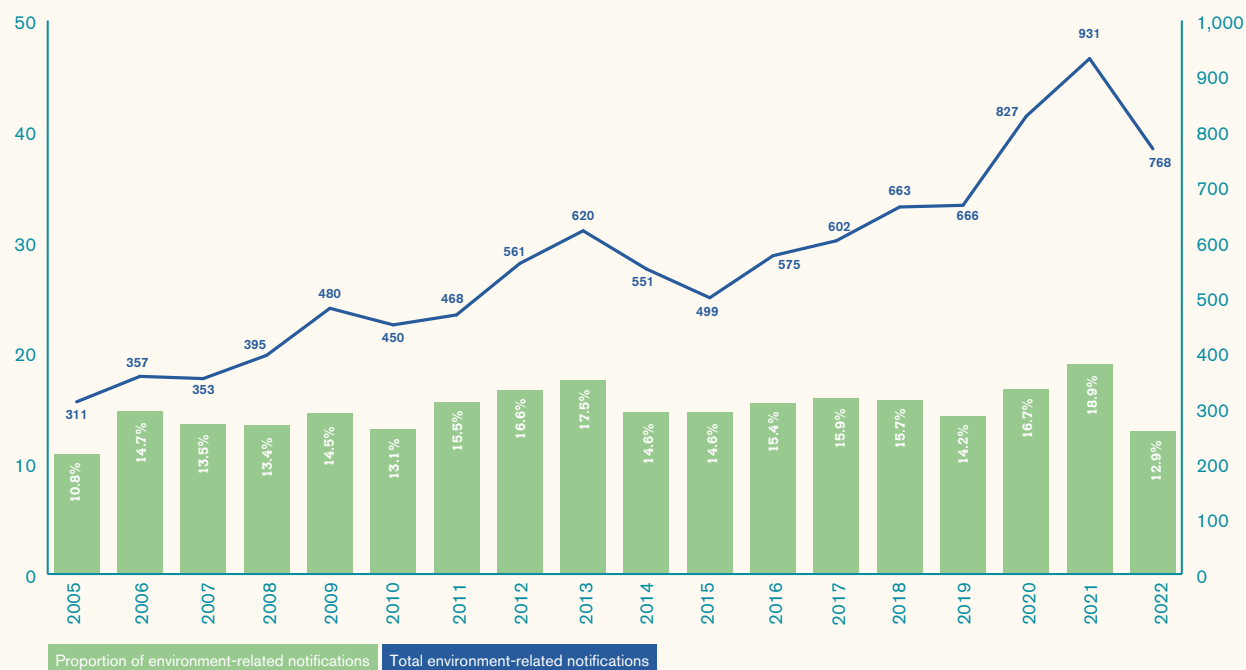
Australia and Singapore presented their Green Economy Agreement – highlighting a non-binding list of environmental goods and services which can be adapted and enhanced over time and which could contribute to multilateral discussion on liberalizing trade in environmental goods and services.

Biodiversity

The Committee heard statements and updates from the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the United Nations Environment Programme and the UN Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.

Wind turbines in San Pedro de Atacama, Chile.



Figure 8: Environment-related notifications, 2005 to 2022

Environmental database

The Secretariat briefed members on the latest information in the Environmental Database, which covers information on over 8,600 environment-related notifications, 18,000 measures notified under WTO agreements and 12,200 environment-related entries in members' Trade Policy Reviews (see Figure 8).

Outreach activities

The WTO Secretariat organized in March 2023 the first-ever WTO forum on decarbonization standards in the steel sector. The multi-stakeholder meeting debated the role of coherent and transparent standards in accelerating the global scale-up of low-carbon steelmaking technologies and avoiding trade frictions. It examined the potential role of the WTO in promoting international cooperation.

At COP28, the WTO launched, together with several partners, the "Steel Standards Principles", which include a commitment

to establish common methodologies on measuring greenhouse gas emissions within the steel sector (see page 15).

The WTO Secretariat, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum launched "Action on Climate and Trade" in April 2023, a capacity-building initiative to help developing economies use trade to support their climate change mitigation and adaptation goals.

WTO Trade and Environment Week

In June 2023, the WTO organized the fourth Trade and Environment Week, with 18 sessions looking at collective approaches to addressing problems generated by climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss. Topics included the energy transition, the circular economy, a net-zero steel industry, and trade-related climate measures and policies. It featured over 80 speakers and attracted over 1,000 participants in person and online.

Trade and transfer of technology

- WTO members considered new proposals by the African Group and the United Kingdom on steps to increase understanding of factors that facilitate technology transfer and increase the flow of technology to developing economies.
- The chair recommended considering a work programme to prioritize areas for technology transfer, mechanisms for cooperation and proposals for the Working Group to achieve outcomes.

Background

The Working Group on Trade and Transfer of Technology was established at the Doha Ministerial Conference in 2001 “to examine the relationship between trade and transfer of technology and to make recommendations on steps that might be taken, within the mandate of the WTO, to increase flows of technology to developing countries”.



The Working Group on Trade and Technology Transfer considered two proposals – by the African Group and the United Kingdom, respectively – on ways to increase the understanding of factors that facilitate technology transfer and increase the flow of technology to developing economies.

The African Group recommended restructuring the Working Group’s agenda to address the specific topics listed in the proposal, including trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS), trade facilitation, agricultural resilience and climate change.

The United Kingdom’s submission explores how the WTO can utilize, encourage and increase voluntary licensing and technology transfer partnerships and apply lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

India introduced a third communication, titled reinvigorating discussions on the relationship between trade and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing economies to address climate change. The proposal will be discussed at the next meeting of the Working Group in 2024.

Working Group chair, Ambassador Sofia Boza Martinez of Chile, invited members to consider a work programme to include prioritized areas for technology transfer, mechanisms for cooperation and proposals for outcomes. She also underscored the value of experience sharing within the Group to enhance understanding of the link between trade and the transfer of technology.

Electronics manufacturing factory in Uttar Pradesh, India.

Regional trade agreements

- The WTO received 13 notifications of regional trade agreements (RTAs) currently in force, compared with 17 in 2022. The new notifications concern eight RTAs, most of which involve the Asia Pacific region.
- Over 250 RTAs (including accessions to existing RTAs) have been reviewed by WTO members since December 2006 under the transparency mechanism for RTAs, involving 140 members.

Background

The Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (CRTA) monitors all RTAs notified to the WTO, except those notified under special provisions for agreements between developing economies (the Enabling Clause), which are considered by the Committee on Trade and Development (CTD). The CRTA and the CTD consider RTAs individually, and the CRTA also considers the systemic implications of RTAs for the multilateral trading system.

Notifications

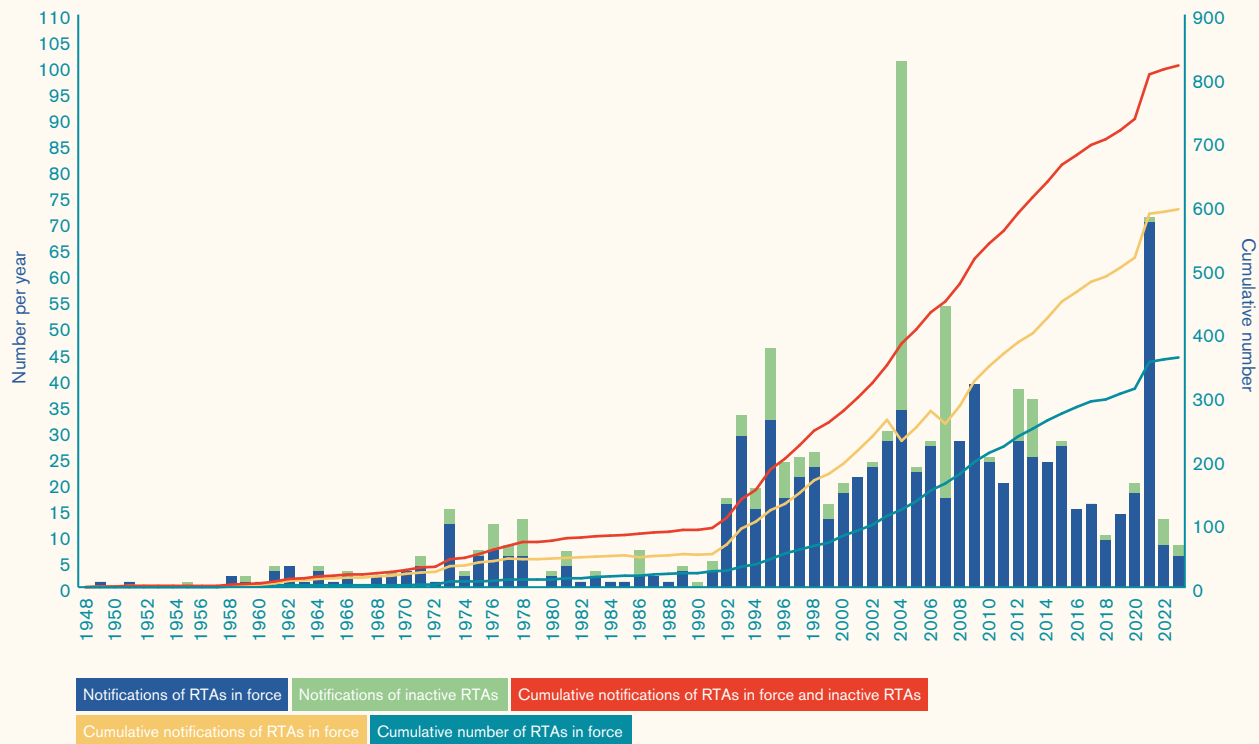
WTO members submitted 13 notifications of RTAs, which are reciprocal preferential trade agreements between two or more partners. The 13 notifications, compared with 17 in 2022, concern eight new RTAs, one of which involves trade in services of an already notified RTA in trade in goods.

Five RTAs are between developing partners, two between developed partners and one is between developing and developed partners. The Asia Pacific region was involved in the highest number of RTA notifications (seven), followed by Europe (three) and Africa, the Middle East and the Americas (one RTA



each). Five agreements covered members from two different regions.

Total RTA notifications stood at 820 on 31 December 2023, of which 594 concern RTAs in force (see Figure 9). The goods and services aspects of RTAs and accessions to existing RTAs are notified and counted separately. If all three elements are counted together, the notifications involved 564 individual RTAs, of which 361 were in force.

Figure 9: RTAs notified to the GATT/WTO (1948 to 2023) by year of entry into force

Note: For notifications, goods, services and accessions to an RTA are counted separately. The cumulative lines show the number of RTAs/notifications in force over time. Notifications of RTAs in force are shown by year of entry into force and notifications of inactive RTAs by the year they became inactive.

The number of RTAs not notified decreased by two to 56 compared to October 2022. The WTO Secretariat issues a list of RTAs in force but not notified before each meeting of the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (CRTA).

Monitoring RTAs

All notified RTAs are subject to the WTO's transparency mechanism for RTAs since December 2006. The mechanism provides guidelines on when a new RTA should be notified to the WTO Secretariat and the related information and data to be provided. It also requires the Secretariat to prepare a factual presentation on each RTA and for each RTA to be reviewed by WTO members.

By the end of 2023, over 250 RTAs currently in force (including accessions

to RTAs), involving 140 members, had been reviewed.

RTAs notified under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) are considered by the CRTA, while RTAs notified under the Enabling Clause (see page 136) are considered by the Committee on Trade and Development (CTD), based on the WTO Secretariat's factual presentation (see Table 2).

Under the transparency mechanism, WTO members are encouraged to inform the WTO Secretariat of agreements being negotiated or that have been signed but are not yet in force (early announcements). They are required to notify changes to a notified agreement and to provide a report once an agreement is fully implemented.

In 2023, the CRTA considered 30 notifications of RTAs, counting goods, services and accessions separately, compared with 26 in 2022 and 12 in 2021. The CTD considered two RTAs. No early announcements were made.

The CRTA also discusses end-of-implementation reports for RTAs on how liberalization commitments have been put into effect and whether RTAs accomplish what they set out to do. No such report was received in 2023. Chair Clare Kelly of New Zealand noted that reports had been due for 194 RTAs as of 1 March 2023, up from 180 the year before.

The General Council established the transparency mechanism on a provisional basis. Members are required to review the legal relationship between the mechanism and relevant WTO provisions on RTAs. The Negotiating Group on Rules started

the review in 2011. At the 10th Ministerial Conference in Nairobi in December 2015, ministers called on WTO members to work towards making the mechanism permanent.

Discussions on reform in the CRTA

During 2023, members began discussions to reform the functioning of the CRTA. They supported changes made by the Secretariat, including making the Committee's work programme available online and providing a draft summary of factual presentations as requested by members. Discussions were also held on the possibility of holding thematic sessions on RTAs and participation by other stakeholders in these sessions.

By the end of 2023, over 250 RTAs currently in force, involving 140 members, had been reviewed.

Table 2: RTAs (including accessions to existing RTAs) considered in 2023

CRTA
United Kingdom – Eastern and Southern Africa States, goods
United Kingdom – Japan, goods and services
European Union – United Kingdom, goods and services
India – Mauritius, services
Türkiye – Serbia, services
ASEAN – Hong Kong, China, goods and services
EFTA States – Türkiye, goods and services
Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) – entry into force for Peru, goods and services
United Kingdom – North Macedonia, goods and services
United Kingdom – Serbia, goods and services
United Kingdom – Central America, goods and services
United Kingdom – Southern African Customs Union and Mozambique, goods
United Kingdom – Republic of Moldova, goods and services
EFTA States – Ecuador, goods and services
EFTA States – Indonesia, goods and services
United Kingdom – Albania, goods and services
United Kingdom – Georgia, goods and services
CTD
India – Bhutan, goods
India – Mauritius, goods

Note: Nineteen agreements were considered, 13 of which involve trade in goods and services, four trade in goods and two trade in services only. Information on RTAs may be found in the WTO RTA Database: <http://rtais.wto.org>

Trade Policy Reviews

- In 2023, the Trade Policy Review Body reviewed the trade policies of 30 WTO members.
- Liberia was reviewed for the first time.
- The TPRB successfully completed the seventh appraisal of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism, delivering an outcome on WTO reform.

Background

The Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) is a key part of the WTO's transparency pillar, aiming to improve members' adherence to WTO rules and thus to the functioning of the multilateral trading system. Through its regular reviews, the mechanism enables members to collectively examine the trade policies and practices of individual members in all trade-related areas. Reviews are not intended to serve as a basis for the enforcement of obligations or for dispute settlement procedures.

The Trade Policy Review Body (TPRB) examined the trade policies of 30 members in 2023: Albania; Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (grouped as members of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States); Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia, and South Africa (grouped as members of the Southern African Customs Union); Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, and Gabon (grouped as members of the Central African Economic and Monetary Community); Chile; Dominican Republic; El Salvador; European Union; Fiji; Honduras; Hong Kong, China; Japan; Jordan; Liberia; Malaysia; Separate Customs

Territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen, and Matsu (Chinese Taipei); and Türkiye. It was Liberia's first review since joining the WTO in 2016.

All review meetings were conducted in hybrid format following initiatives taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In-person Secretariat visits to the member under review were resumed with the lifting of pandemic-related travel restrictions. The TPRB has conducted 580 reviews since 1989.

Most members' economies have recovered from the impacts of the pandemic, with trade playing a crucial role. But there have also been other external shocks, including higher food and energy prices, notably in relation to the war in Ukraine, volatility in commodity prices and the growing consequences of climate change.

Themes frequently discussed in TPRB meetings included members' efforts towards decarbonization, digital transformation, and increased participation in global and regional value chains. Members also regularly highlighted outstanding notification gaps and principal trade barriers.

The TPRB Chair's concluding remarks summarizing each review are available on the TPR gateway of the WTO website (www.wto.org/tpr).

Seventh appraisal of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM)

Members successfully concluded in July the 7th appraisal of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM), delivering a concrete outcome on WTO reform. Surveillance of members' trade policies is an important activity running through all the work of the WTO. At the centre of this work is the TPRM.

The TPRB agreed on a set of measures that will significantly strengthen the TPRM as a transparency tool, while making Trade



14

members are scheduled for review in 2024

Policy Reviews (TPRs) more efficient and less burdensome to WTO members.

DG Okonjo-Iweala congratulated the chair, Saqer Abdullah Almoqbel of Saudi Arabia. “I understand you worked tirelessly and inclusively to deliver this outcome. ... Thanks to you and members for getting the ball rolling with this important outcome.”

One priority is implementation of an improved information technology (IT) system to facilitate questions and answers during TPRs. In addition, members established an inclusive, member-led taskforce to work closely with the Secretariat on the IT system and provide support to delegations facing capacity challenges.

Members also agreed to exercise restraint in the number of advanced written questions they can pose in TPRs. This measure came in response to the rapidly increasing number of questions received by some of the largest economies. The outcome document also contains members’ recommendations on strengthening the TPR reports drafted by the WTO Secretariat, including preparing more concise reports focused on recent trade policy changes and on outstanding issues from a member’s previous TPR.

On trade monitoring, members agreed that the TPRB should play a greater role as a forum for sharing information on trade policies and practices, especially in times of global crises.

Programme for 2024

Fourteen members are scheduled for review in 2024: Angola, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, China, Iceland, Jamaica, Kazakhstan (first review), Malawi, Maldives, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Paraguay and Solomon Islands.

Trade monitoring reports

- **The latest WTO Trade Monitoring Report showed members introduced more trade-facilitating (303) than trade-restrictive (193) measures on goods unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic in the year to mid-October 2023, a period marked by multiple crises affecting the global economy, including inflation and rising geopolitical tensions.**
- **Most trade facilitation related to imports while most restrictions affected exports. The pace of implementation of new export restrictions increased significantly. Although some have been rolled back, many restrictions on food, feed and fertilizers remained in place.**
- **Overall, the implementation of new COVID-19 trade-related measures slowed significantly. Fewer non-COVID-19 trade restrictions were introduced but the stockpile of existing restrictions remained large.**

Background

The WTO began regular monitoring of global trade developments in early 2009, covering all trade-related measures implemented by WTO members and observers. Initially launched in the context of the global financial crisis, the trade monitoring exercise has become a regular function in the WTO. It further strengthens the transparency aims of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism by shedding light on the latest trends in the implementation of policy measures that facilitate as well as restrict the flow of trade. The trade monitoring reports are discussed by members at meetings of the TPRB.

WTO members introduced more trade-facilitating (303) than trade-restrictive (193) measures on goods unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic between mid-October 2022 and mid-October 2023. Most of the trade-facilitating measures were on import measures while most restrictions were export measures. The trade coverage of the trade-facilitating measures (see Figure 10) was estimated at US\$ 977.2 billion (down from US\$ 1,160.5 billion in the last annual report) and the coverage of trade-restrictive measures totalled US\$ 337.1 billion (up from US\$ 278 billion).

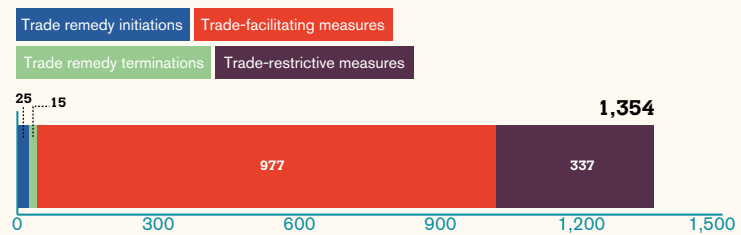
Presenting the report to the Trade Policy Review Body (TPRB) in December, DG Okonjo-Iweala welcomed the fact that “WTO members have been taking more practical steps to facilitate imports”. This “illustrates how reducing trade barriers and delays is a valuable tool for pushing back against inflationary pressures,” she said. She urged WTO members to roll back export restrictions, “which contribute to making food prices more volatile – and therefore to making life harder for poor people around the world”.

The period covered by the latest monitoring report saw multiple crises affecting the global economy, including inflation, the persistent consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, rising geopolitical tensions such as the crisis in the Middle East, and disasters related to climate change.

For the third time since the beginning of the trade monitoring exercise, the number of new export restrictions (99 or 51 per cent of total restrictions) outpaced import restrictions (93 or 48 per cent).

Overall, the pace of implementation of new export restrictions by members has increased significantly since 2020, first in the context of the pandemic and more recently because of the war in Ukraine and factors mentioned above. Although some of these restrictions have been rolled back, as of mid-October 2023, 75 export restrictions on food, feed and fertilizers were still in place globally, in addition to 20 COVID-19-related export restrictions.

Figure 10: Trade coverage of import and export measures introduced between mid-October 2022 and mid-October 2023 (US\$ billion)



Note: Values are rounded. Trade-facilitating and trade-restrictive measures cover import- and export-facilitating measures. COVID-19 trade-related measures are not included.

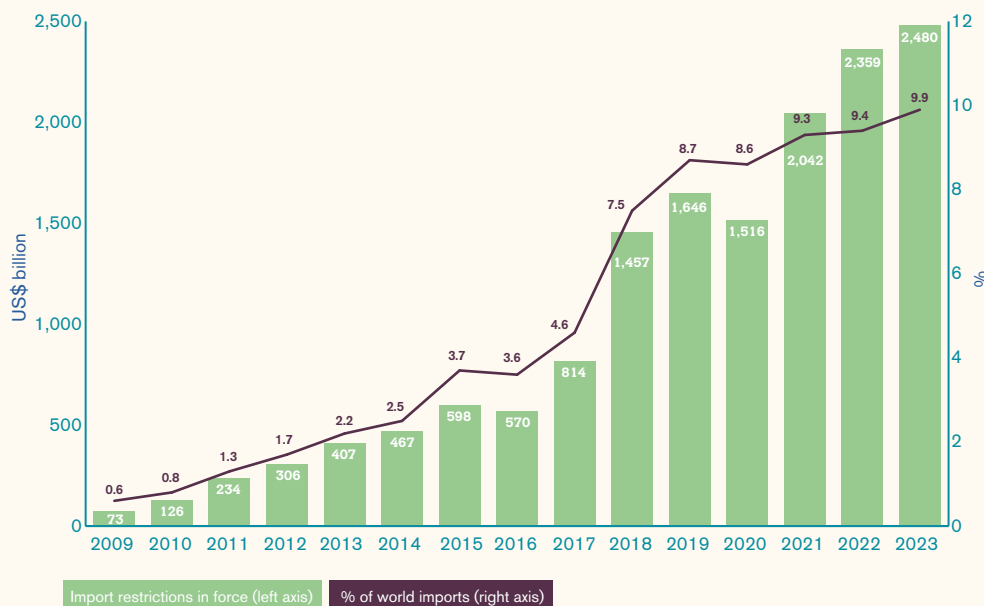
The stockpile of import restrictions implemented since 2009 continued to grow (see Figure 11). For 2023, the trade covered by import restrictions in force was estimated at US\$ 2,480 billion, representing almost one-tenth of total world imports.

The average number of trade remedy initiations, such as anti-dumping actions, by members was 12.1 per month during the review period, down from its 2020 peak of 36.1 initiations. The monthly average of trade remedy terminations during the same period was 8.3, the lowest average since 2012.

Trade remedy actions remain an important trade policy tool for many members, accounting for 33 per cent of all non-COVID-19-related trade measures on goods recorded in the latest report. Anti-dumping (see page 98) continues to be the most frequent trade remedy action in terms of initiations and terminations.

In the services sectors, 123 new measures were introduced by members, marking a sharp decline compared to the last two years. Half of these were horizontal policies affecting trade for many services sectors and/or multiple modes of supply, 30 per cent related to communications and Internet- and other network-enabled services, and 15 per cent to financial services. Most of these new measures were trade-facilitating, either liberalizing or moving towards an improved regulatory framework.

Figure 11: Cumulative trade coverage of import-restrictive measures on goods since 2009



Note: The cumulative trade coverage estimated by the Secretariat is based on information available in the TMDB on import measures recorded since 2009 and considered to have a trade-restrictive effect. The estimates include import measures for which HS codes were available. The figures do not include trade remedy measures. The import values are sourced from the UN Comtrade database.

The implementation of new COVID-19 trade-related measures by members decelerated further during the review period. These measures included extensions, renewals or terminations of measures. In the services sectors, no new COVID-19-related measures were reported. The number of new COVID-19-related support measures by members and observers fell sharply.

Since the outbreak of the pandemic, 458 trade and trade-related measures in goods have been implemented by WTO members and observers. Most of these were trade-facilitating (255 or 56 per cent) while the rest could be considered trade-restrictive (203 or 44 per cent).

Members continued to phase out their pandemic-related measures, especially restrictive ones. As of mid-October 2023, 84.7 per cent of the COVID-19-related trade restrictions had been repealed, leaving

20 export restrictions and nine import restrictions in place. The trade coverage of the pandemic-related trade restrictions still in place was estimated at US\$ 15.6 billion, sharply down from US\$ 134.6 billion in the previous annual report.

Status of the reports

The WTO Secretariat prepared four reports on global trade policy developments in 2023, including two on trade measures implemented by G20 economies. The reports have no legal effect on the rights and obligations of members and do not seek to pronounce on whether a trade measure is protectionist or question the right of members to take certain trade measures.

Trade, debt and finance

- **WTO members made progress in identifying areas of consensus on addressing access to trade finance, such as loans and guarantees, based on proposals by Côte d'Ivoire and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group.**
- **The WTO and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) launched a second joint report on trade finance, this time on the Mekong Region, covering Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam.**

Background

WTO ministers established in 2001 the Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance to look at how the WTO could contribute to finding a durable solution to the external debt problems of many developing economies and to avoid having WTO members' trade opportunities undercut by financial instabilities. The Working Group has focused its attention on a range of financial issues with an impact on trade, including issues related to the availability of trade finance and the relationship between exchange rates and trade.

The Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance made progress in identifying areas of consensus in on-going discussions on a proposal from Côte d'Ivoire and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group for a work programme aimed at facilitating trade finance, particularly for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

DG Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and IFC Managing Director Makhtar Diop launched a second joint report on trade finance, this time on the Mekong Region, covering Cambodia,

Lao PDR and Viet Nam. Significant bottlenecks in the provision of trade finance were observed, particularly affecting small producers in supply chains. As in West Africa, the subject of a 2022 joint report, no more than 20 per cent of trade is supported by trade finance, against 60 to 80 per cent in advanced economies.

Both studies calculated that doubling coverage to 40 per cent would increase trade flows by 8 per cent, on average, each year. The main gains would be for local MSMEs and second-tier local suppliers of international supply chains. More trade finance means more trade integration and more socioeconomic inclusion through trade.

The DG and the IFC Managing Director met leaders of multilateral development banks at the annual meetings of the IMF and World Bank in October 2023 to discuss initiatives on capacity building, narrowing trade finance gaps and bolstering financing for local supply chains. In 2023, multilateral development banks provided trade finance support to more than 10,000 trade transactions, such as loans and guarantees, in low-to-middle income countries, worth more than US\$ 40 billion.

DG Okonjo-Iweala called for increased efforts to strengthen collaboration between the WTO and multilateral development banks and for this collaboration to be extended to supply chain finance, green finance and capacity building.

In partnership with the Government of Rwanda, the IFC and the WTO held a workshop in March 2023 bringing together local banks, MSMEs and professional organizations to support new export clusters. The aim of the workshop was to share knowledge on trade finance and allow a dialogue between local producers and bankers. "Trade finance is the lifeblood of trade. Access to trade finance is key to a firm's competitiveness in international markets," the DG said in a video message.

Agreement on Government Procurement

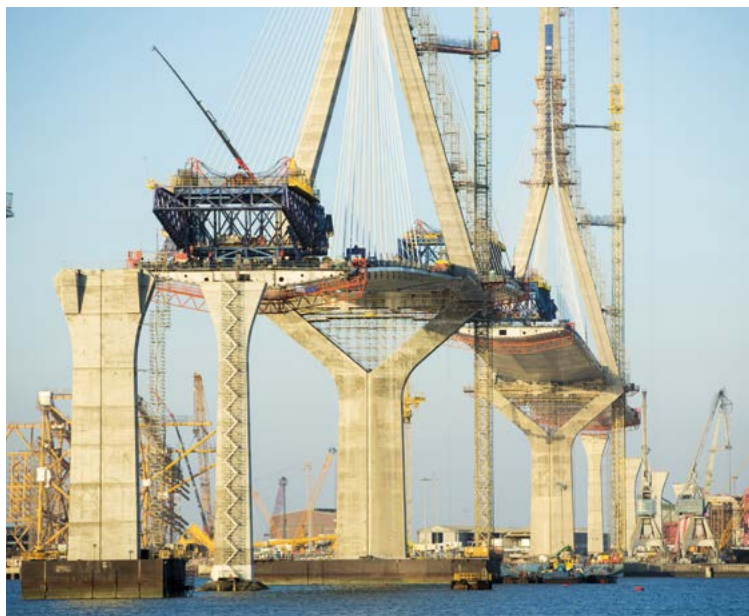
- North Macedonia became the 22nd party to the Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) 2012.
- Costa Rica began negotiations to join the GPA 2012 and Albania reactivated its accession negotiations.
- The Committee on Government Procurement (CGP) selected a new chair after a prolonged impasse and adopted new rules of procedure for chair selection.

Background

GPA 2012 aims to open up, to the extent agreed by its parties, parties' government procurement markets to suppliers from other parties, and to make government procurement more transparent and predictable. It provides legal guarantees of non-discrimination for the goods, services and suppliers of GPA parties with regard to government procurement covered by the Agreement. The GPA 2012 is a plurilateral agreement open to all interested WTO members and binding only on the parties to it. Currently, 49 WTO members are covered by GPA 2012 and there are 35 observers to the CGP.

Accessions to the Agreement

In October 2023, North Macedonia became the 22nd party to the GPA 2012 and the 49th WTO member covered by it. "The significance of this completed negotiation goes beyond the expected benefits for North Macedonia and other GPA parties. It confirms that WTO members can deliver binding market-opening outcomes," DG Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said.



Construction of a bridge in Cádiz, Spain.

Costa Rica initiated negotiations on accession to the GPA 2012 and Albania reactivated its GPA 2012 accession talks. No further progress was made on the GPA accession of Brazil, whose new government withdrew previously presented market access offers.

Work of the Committee

In May 2023, after about two years of impasse, the Committee achieved consensus on a new chair, appointing Martin Zbinden of Switzerland. The Committee also adopted some new rules of procedure to address issues that had arisen in the selection process. These include the possibility of appointing an interim chair when parties are unable to reach a consensus.

In line with WTO reform efforts and to enhance transparency, the CGP approved the derestriction of an initial list of historic GPA documents.

In November 2023, the CGP held its first-ever information-sharing workshop to enhance understanding of parties' government procurement laws, with a focus on labour standards. "Government procurement can help ensure that trade policy is responsive to people's concerns about global trade," DG Okonjo-Iweala said in opening remarks.

Dispute settlement

Dispute settlement activities in 2023

- WTO members filed six requests for consultations concerning allegedly WTO-inconsistent measures in 2023, compared with eight the previous year.
- Ten panel reports were circulated in 2023, including three reports where a mutually agreed solution had been reached. In 2023, nine reports were the subject of a notification of appeal to the Appellate Body. All seven positions in the Appellate Body remained vacant in 2023 and the Appellate Body was consequently unable to hear appeals.
- Informal discussions on dispute settlement reform continued during 2023. At the 13th Ministerial Conference in February 2024, members adopted a Ministerial Decision recognizing the progress made and renewing their commitment made at MC12 to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024.

Requests for consultations

During 2023, WTO members filed six requests for consultations concerning allegedly WTO-inconsistent measures (see Table 3), the first stage in the dispute settlement process, compared with eight in 2022. One request was also made under Article 21.5 of the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU), which concerns so-called compliance proceedings where a panel determines whether a party has complied with previous recommendations and rulings.

By the end of 2023, a total of 621 disputes had been initiated under the

Background

WTO members can bring disputes when they consider their rights are being infringed with respect to any agreement that is subject to the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (DSU). The General Council convenes as the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to deal with disputes. The DSB has authority to establish dispute settlement panels, to adopt panel and Appellate Body reports, maintain surveillance over the implementation of recommendations and rulings, and authorize suspension of concessions and other obligations in the event of non-compliance with those recommendations and rulings.

DSU since the entry into force of the WTO agreements in 1995 (see Figure 12).

Dispute settlement proceedings

If the parties to a dispute are unable to resolve their differences through consultations, the complainant can ask the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to establish a dispute settlement panel.

In 2023, the DSB established five original panels. It also referred one compliance dispute to the original panel in accordance with Article 21.5 of the DSU (see Table 4).

Table 3: Disputes initiated in 2023 (requests for consultations)

Dispute settlement number	Title	Date of request	Status on 31 December 2023
DS616	EU – CVD/AD on Stainless Steel Cold Rolled Flat Products	24/01/2023	Panel composed (13/09/23)
DS617	US – AD Measure on Oil Country Tubular Goods (Argentina)	17/05/2023	Panel established (26/10/23)
DS618	EU – CVDs on Biodiesel (Indonesia)	11/08/2023	Panel established (27/11/23)
DS619	Poland – Agricultural Products (Ukraine)	18/09/2023	In consultations
DS620	Hungary – Agricultural Products (Ukraine)	18/09/2023	In consultations
DS621	Slovak Republic – Agricultural Products (Ukraine)	18/09/2023	In consultations
DS577 (Article 21.5 proceeding)	US – Ripe Olives from Spain (Article 21.5 – EU)	28/04/2023	Panel composed (31/07/23)

With a view to providing for review of panel reports in the absence of a functioning Appellate Body, parties in three disputes informed the DSB during 2023 that they had agreed to resort to an alternative mechanism based on arbitration proceedings under Article 25 of the DSU to decide any appeal of

a final panel report (see Table 5). The parties to these disputes agreed to use the so-called multi party interim appeal arbitration arrangement (MPIA).

In March 2023, Japan informed the DSB that it had joined the MPIA. As of end-December

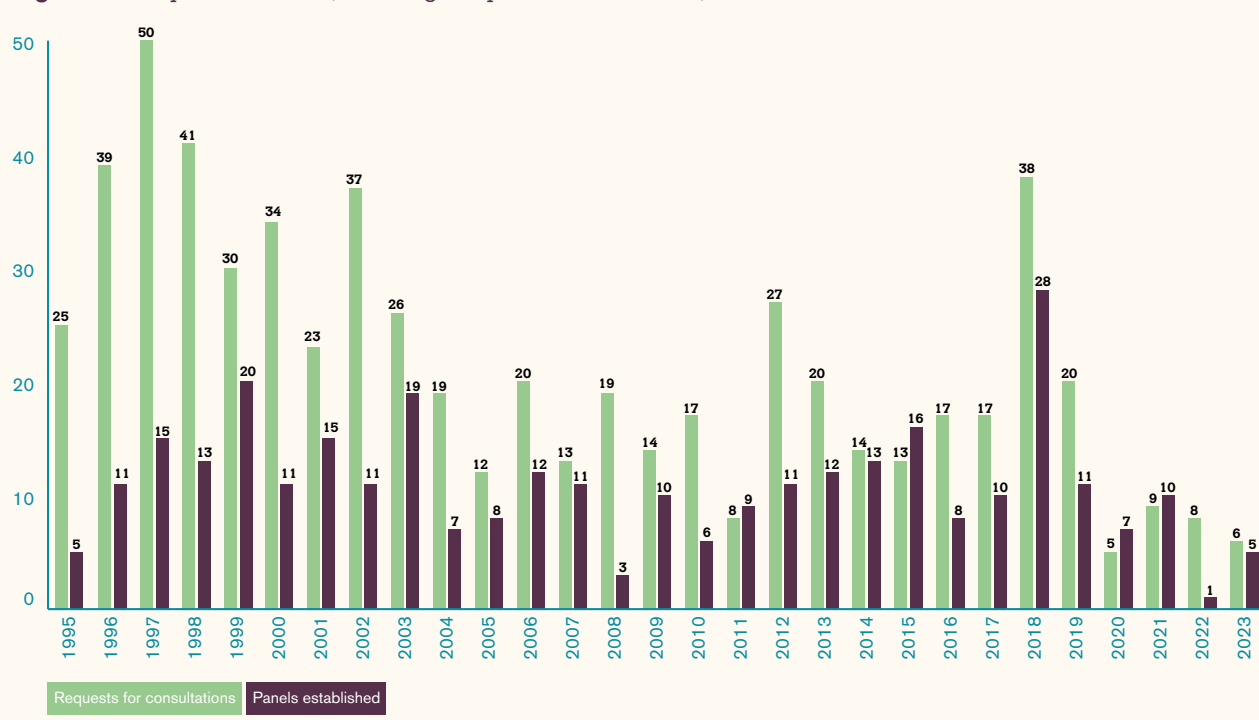
Figure 12: Disputes initiated, and original panels established, 1995 to 2023

Table 4: Panels established in 2023

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date of establishment (and composition)
DS610	China – Goods (EU)	27/01/2023 (composed 18/04/23)
DS611	China – IPRs Enforcement (EU)	27/01/2023 (composed 28/03/23)
DS616	EU – CVD/AD on Stainless Steel Cold-Rolled Flat Products (Indonesia)	30/05/2023 (composed 13/09/23)
DS617	US – AD Measure on OCTG (Argentina)	26/10/2023
DS618	EU – CVDs on Biodiesel (Indonesia)	27/11/2023
DS577 (Article 21.5 proceeding)	US – Ripe Olives from Spain (Article 21.5 – EU)	Referred to original panel 28/07/2023 (composed 31/07/23)

2023, WTO members participating in the MPIA were: Australia; Benin; Brazil; Canada; China; Chile; Colombia; Costa Rica; Ecuador; the European Union; Guatemala; Hong Kong, China; Iceland; Japan; Macao, China; Montenegro; Mexico; New Zealand; Nicaragua; Norway; Pakistan; Peru; Singapore; Switzerland; Ukraine; and Uruguay.

Panel reports

Ten panel reports were circulated in 2023 (see Table 6), including three reports where a mutually agreed solution had been reached. The DSB adopted two panel reports during this period (see Table 7) and nine panel reports were appealed (see Table 9).

Suspension/termination of dispute settlement proceedings

During 2023, the panels in three disputes notified the DSB that they had agreed to requests to suspend their work. In two disputes, the authority for the

Table 5: Disputes where parties agreed to resort to the MPIA in 2023

Dispute number	Short title	Date of notification
DS601	China – AD on Stainless Steel (Japan)	11/04/23
DS610	China – Goods (EU)	04/07/23
DS611	China – IPRs Enforcement (EU)	04/07/23

establishment of the panel lapsed as the panels had not been requested to resume work within 12 months of a request to suspend the proceedings.

In eight disputes, the parties notified the DSB that they had reached a mutually agreed solution on the matter at issue, including three disputes in which the appellants withdrew their appeals against panel reports.

If the parties to a dispute are unable to resolve their differences through consultations, the complainant can ask the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) to establish a dispute settlement panel. In 2023, the DSB established five original panels.

Table 6: Panel reports circulated in 2023

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date of circulation
DS582	India – Tariffs on ICT Goods (EU)	17/04/2023
DS584	India – Tariffs on ICT Goods (Japan)	17/04/2023
DS588	India – Tariffs on ICT Goods (Chinese Taipei)	17/04/2023
DS601	China – AD on Stainless Steel (Japan)	19/06/2023
DS605	Dominican Republic – AD on Steel Bars (Costa Rica)	27/07/2023
DS547	US – Steel and Aluminium Products (India)	08/08/2023
DS585	India – Additional Duties (US)	08/08/2023
DS558	China – Additional Duties (US)	16/08/2023
DS561	Turkey – Additional Duties (US)	19/12/2023
DS598	China – AD/CVD on Barley (Australia)	24/08/2023

Table 7: Panel reports adopted in 2023

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date adopted
DS546	US – Safeguard Measure on Washers	28/04/2023
DS601	China – AD on Stainless Steel (Japan)	28/07/2023

In one dispute, the complainant notified the DSB that it wished to terminate the panel composition process and formally withdrew its complaint (see Table 8).

Appeals

In 2023, nine reports were the subject of a notification of appeal to the Appellate Body (see Table 9) and the appeals in three disputes were withdrawn. This brings to 30 the number of disputes in which appeals were pending as of 31 December 2023.

Given the ongoing absence of consensus among WTO members on launching a selection process, all seven positions in the Appellate Body remained vacant in 2023 and the Appellate Body was consequently unable to hear appeals.

Dispute settlement reform

Members agreed at MC12 to conduct discussions with the view to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024. Informal discussions on dispute settlement reform continued during 2023.

On 14 February 2024, then DSB chair Petter Ølberg, Permanent Representative of Norway, together with Marco Molina, Deputy Permanent Representative of Guatemala and convenor of informal dispute settlement reform discussions, reported to the General Council on the status of the discussions. Mr Molina also presented a consolidated draft text on dispute settlement reform.

Table 8: Suspension/termination of dispute settlement proceedings in 2023

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date
Suspension of panel proceedings		
DS554	US – Steel and Aluminium Products (Russia)	23/06/2023
DS521	EU – Cold-Rolled Steel (Russia)	13/07/2023
DS602	China – AD/CVD on Wine (Australia)	30/10/2023
Lapse of panel's authority		
DS604	Russia – Domestic and Foreign Products and Services	08/03/2023
DS589	China – Canola Seed (Canada)	31/08/2023
Mutually agreed solution		
DS546	US – Safeguard Measure on Washers	28/04/2023
DS436	US – Carbon Steel (India)	13/07/2023
DS456	India – Solar Cells	13/07/2023
DS510	US – Renewable Energy	13/07/2023
DS541	India – Export Related Measures	13/07/2023
DS547	US – Steel and Aluminium Products (India)	13/07/2023
DS585	India – Additional Duties (US)	13/07/2023
DS598	China – AD/CVD on Barley (Australia)	11/08/2023
Withdrawal		
DS590	Japan – Products and Technology (Korea)	23/03/2023

On 2 March 2024, at MC13, ministers adopted a Ministerial Decision renewing their commitment made at MC12, recognizing the progress made, and instructing their officials to accelerate discussions in an inclusive and transparent manner, building on the progress already made. The Decision also instructed officials to work on unresolved issues, including issues regarding appeal/review and accessibility to achieve the objective by 2024 of having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members, as agreed at MC12.

On 18 April 2024, General Council chair Mr Ølberg informed the membership of the appointment of Usha Dwarka-Canabady, Permanent Representative of Mauritius,

as facilitator, thus signalling the formalization of the dispute settlement reform process.

One-page case summaries

The WTO issued an updated edition of “One-Page Case Summaries”, with succinct summaries of the key findings of every panel report up to the end of 2022 and, where applicable, the subsequent Appellate Body report.

John H. Jackson Moot Court Competition

In 2023, 70 universities participated in the regional rounds of the John H. Jackson Moot Court Competition on WTO Law, held between March and April 2023. The top 24 teams qualified for the final round.

Table 9: Panel reports appealed in 2023

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date of notice of appeal
DS597	US – Origin marking (Hong Kong, China)	26/01/2023
DS556	US – Steel and Aluminium Products (Switzerland)	26/01/2023
DS564	US – Steel and Aluminium Products (Turkey)	26/01/2023
DS552	US – Steel and Aluminium Products (Norway)	26/01/2023
DS544	US – Steel and Aluminium Products (China)	26/01/2023
DS584	India – Tariffs on ICT Goods (Japan)	17/05/2023
DS558	China – Additional Duties (US)	18/09/2023
DS605	Dominican Republic – AD on Steel Bars (Costa Rica)	18/09/2023
DS582	India – Tariffs on ICT Goods (EU)	08/12/2023

Students from the South Pacific region (University of the South Pacific) took part for the first time with the support of Australia and New Zealand. The participation of African teams was supported by various international and individual donors.

The WTO co-hosted the final oral round, which took place in Geneva in June. The University of Ottawa (Canada) and the National University of Singapore advanced to the Grand Final, with the University of Ottawa emerging as the winning team.

The competition is organized by the European Law Students Association, with technical

support from the WTO. Among other prizes, winners of individual and team awards have the opportunity to receive scholarships to study at the competition's academic supporter institutions: Georgetown University Law Center (United States), the World Trade Institute (Switzerland) and the European Public Law Organization (Greece).

The John H. Jackson Moot Court Competition simulates a dispute under the rules of the WTO dispute settlement system, involving exchanges of written submissions and adversarial hearings before panellists on international trade law issues.



The WTO co-hosted the final oral round of the John H. Jackson Moot Court Competition in Geneva in June.

Supporting development and building trade capacity

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Trade and development

- The Committee on Trade and Development began discussions on the developmental aspects of WTO reform. WTO members took note of a number of measures put in place to improve the functioning of the Committee.
- The Committee discussed initiatives to boost developing economies' trade capacities and to advance their integration into the global trading system – including in e-commerce.
- The biennial technical assistance and training plan for 2024 and 2025, which defines the strategy and priorities, was adopted by the Committee.

Committee on Trade and Development chair José R. Sánchez-Fung of the Dominican Republic held informal discussions with members on how to advance work on the developmental aspects of WTO reform (see page 77) and reported on the status of the work at formal meetings. The Committee also considered submissions by members. Delegations took note of a number of measures put in place to improve the functioning of the Committee.

The Committee discussed initiatives to boost developing economies' trade capacities and to advance their integration into the global trading system – including in e-commerce. Members shared information on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their trade and economies and made suggestions on work that could be done by the Committee to help developing economies build resilience to future crises. They continued their examination of duty-free, quota-free market access for least developed countries (LDCs).

Some of the other areas addressed by the Committee included food security and “policy space” for industrial development.

Background

The Committee on Trade and Development is the focal point for the coordination of all work on trade and development issues in the WTO. The Committee deals with a variety of issues, including all developmental issues, technical cooperation and training, and notifications under the Enabling Clause, which allows developed economies to give more favourable treatment to developing economies.



The African Group circulated a number of submissions making a case for “rebalancing” trade rules to promote industrialization and to address challenges such as climate change, concentration of production and digital industrialization.

Work continued on the link between trade and development, as instructed by trade ministers. The Committee looked at how to operationalize fully the mandate of the Committee to act as the focal point for development work within the WTO.

The Committee considered an updated report by the WTO Secretariat on the implementation of special and differential treatment (S&D) provisions for developing economies in WTO agreements and decisions. Provisions range from increasing trade opportunities for developing economies and LDCs to providing technical assistance.

Two dedicated sessions on the monitoring mechanism on S&D were held. The mechanism is designed to be a way to review the implementation of S&D provisions. However, the chair noted that there were no written submissions, which are required for the monitoring mechanism to become fully operational. He urged members to reach agreement on how to move forward with the mechanism.

Japan notified the Committee about its generalized system of preferences scheme

for developing economies and the United Kingdom submitted a notification about its developing economies trading scheme, under which preferential tariffs are granted to imports from these economies.

On regional trade agreements, documents relating to the Latin American Integration Association were considered by the Committee.

Technical cooperation and training

The WTO technical assistance annual report for 2022 was presented to the Committee. Face-to-face activities progressively returned in the second half of 2022, as COVID-19-imposed restrictions were lifted, increasing the number of activities organized compared to the previous biennium. This resulted in an increase in both the number of participants and the geographical and linguistic distribution of activities. For the first time, more women (51 per cent) than men participated in WTO technical assistance activities.

Several areas for improvement were highlighted by the latest annual report. These included enhancing the participation of LDCs, countries acceding to the WTO and observers in technical assistance activities. The biennial technical assistance and training plan for 2024 and 2025, which defines the strategy and priorities, was adopted by the Committee.

A metalworker uses a disc cutter in Muadzam Shah, Malaysia.

Least-developed countries

- The WTO Secretariat co-organized sessions at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5), held in Doha, Qatar, to discuss LDCs' trade priorities, including one exploring the challenges and opportunities for LDCs in digital trade.
- LDCs' share in world exports of goods and commercial services increased from 0.95 per cent in 2021 to 1.02 per cent in 2022.
- At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024, WTO members adopted a decision to extend support measures for least developed countries graduating from LDC status. Graduation refers to when a country meets certain United Nations development criteria and is no longer defined as an LDC.

Background

The Sub-Committee on LDCs, established in July 1995 as a subsidiary body to the Committee on Trade and Development, provides a platform for WTO members to examine opportunities and challenges facing LDCs in global trade. As of 31 December 2023, there are 45 LDCs, of which 35 are WTO members and seven are in the process of accession.

Fifth United Nations Conference on LDCs

The WTO Secretariat co-organized a number of sessions at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (LDC5), held in Doha, Qatar, from 5 to 9 March 2023, to discuss LDCs' trade priorities, including one exploring the challenges and opportunities for LDCs in digital trade.

DDG Xiangchen Zhang spoke at several sessions during the conference, which took stock of the implementation of the 2022-31 Doha Programme of Action for LDCs, of which trade is one of six priority areas. "Trade preferences for least developed countries (LDCs) made an important contribution to boosting LDC exports over the past decade We now need to keep exploring what can bring greater gains for LDCs," he told one session.

LDC graduation

WTO members agreed on measures to support LDCs graduating from LDC status. Graduation refers to when a country meets certain United Nations development criteria and is no longer defined as an LDC. A decision, adopted by the General Council in October, encourages members to provide a smooth transition period for graduated LDCs, no longer benefiting from duty-free, quote-free market access.

Welcoming this decision, DG Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said: "Today, WTO members reaffirmed their commitment to helping smooth this process for graduating LDCs to prevent any loss of the economic growth and development momentum that had propelled them to graduation."

At MC13 in February 2024, ministers adopted a decision to extend, for a limited period of time, support measures for countries graduating from LDC status.

Work on the remaining elements of the LDCs' graduation request continues in the Sub-Committee on LDCs.

In December 2023, WTO members celebrated the graduation of WTO observer Bhutan. "It is very positive to be witnessing members' goodwill and support for Bhutan's continued economic prosperity. We look forward to welcoming Bhutan as a fully-fledged member of the WTO," said Ambassador José R. Sánchez-Fung, chair of the Committee on Trade and Development.



Fishermen returning with a catch in Monrovia, Liberia.

LDC trade trends

LDCs' share in world exports of goods and commercial services increased from 0.95 per cent in 2021 to 1.02 per cent in 2022, according to a WTO Secretariat note issued in October. The share of merchandise (goods) exports stood at 1.15 per cent in 2022. Meanwhile, the share of commercial services exports remained marginal at 0.53 per cent. LDCs' merchandise exports remain highly concentrated among a few exporters, sectors and markets.

Other activities

In the Sub-Committee on LDCs, WTO members discussed LDCs' participation in supply chains, preferential rules of origin and ways to strengthen LDCs' capacity to trade. The second edition of the "LDC Success Stories" magazine was published with the stories shared by LDCs in the Sub-Committee in 2023.

Two workshops organized by the Secretariat and the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) (see page 144) were held in June and November on LDCs and the multilateral trading system.

At the workshop in June, LDC members and trade experts discussed how to deepen the link between trade and development and how to strengthen LDCs' participation in the WTO. In November, participants examined the findings of a study by the WTO and the EIF outlining LDCs' priorities in agriculture and services trade.

South-South dialogue

The sixth South-South Dialogue on LDCs and Development under China's LDCs and Accessions Programme took place in Lausanne, Switzerland, in September. Chairs of the General Council and several negotiating bodies and close to 80 delegates joined the event. The discussions focused on the negotiating priorities for MC13. Participants also explored ways for strengthening the WTO's development dimension and LDCs' integration into digital trade.

Small economies

- **The Committee on Trade and Development implemented MC12 instructions to continue work on the Work Programme on Small Economies in dedicated sessions.**
- **The WTO Secretariat prepared a background note on trade trends of small economies, the effects of COVID-19 and the challenges and opportunities in the post-pandemic recovery phase.**
- **Members adopted a decision at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024 on areas of work after the conference. These include addressing the challenges and opportunities for small economies in using e-commerce and digital ecosystems.**

Background

The Committee on Trade and Development – in dedicated sessions – oversees work on small economies and monitors the progress of proposals from small, vulnerable economies in the various WTO bodies and negotiating groups. Several small economies are small island states.

In 2023, the Committee on Trade and Development continued work on the Work Programme on Small Economies in dedicated session, as called for by MC12. Ministers instructed the Secretariat to provide relevant information and factual analysis for discussion, in particular on integrating small economies into the post COVID-19 economy – looking into the effects of the pandemic and the challenges and opportunities it generated.

A background note by the Secretariat on COVID-19 and the latest trends in goods

and services trade was discussed at a meeting in March 2023. At a meeting in October, members heard from the Commonwealth Secretariat, the South Centre, UN Trade and Development and the World Bank. Presentations were also made by three members of the Small, Vulnerable Economies Group – Ecuador, El Salvador and Sri Lanka.

At MC13 in February 2024, ministers adopted a decision on future areas of work. These include addressing the challenges and opportunities for small economies in using e-commerce and digital ecosystems to drive competitiveness, and addressing the importance of resilient, reliable and transparent supply chains for small economies, given food security issues and the impact of non-tariff measures on trade costs.

The dedicated session will also explore with other relevant WTO bodies how to integrate trade-related climate change adaptation and mitigation policies into the trade policies of small economies.

A potter producing clay cups in Eheliyagoda, Sri Lanka.



Aid for Trade

- Aid for Trade disbursements amounted to US\$ 51.1 billion in 2022, up from US\$ 47.8 billion in 2021. A total of US\$ 648 billion has been disbursed since 2006.
- WTO members agreed on a 2023-24 Work Programme titled “Partnerships for Food Security, Digital Connectivity, and Mainstreaming Trade”. This was also the theme of the ninth Global Review of Aid for Trade in June 2024.
- WTO members approved the launch of the Aid for Trade monitoring and evaluation (M&E) questionnaires, which lay the groundwork for the Global Review.

Background

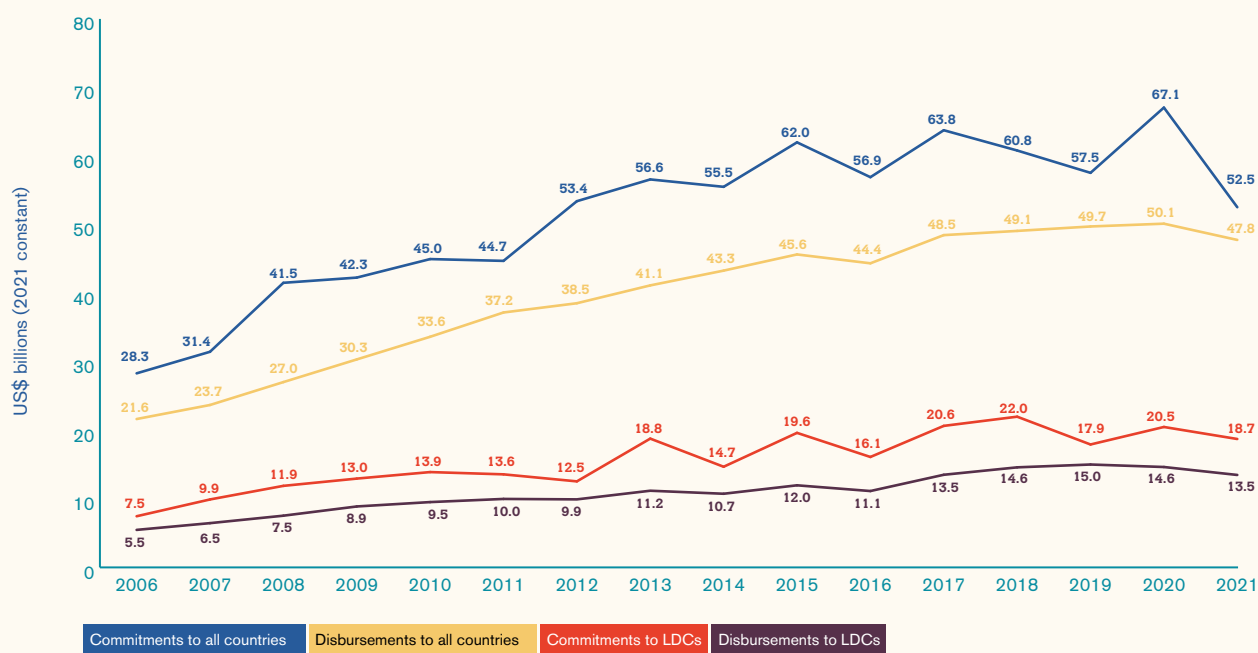
Aid for Trade helps developing economies, and particularly least-developed countries, trade. The WTO-led Aid for Trade initiative encourages developing economy governments and donors to recognize the role that trade can play in development. In particular, the initiative seeks to mobilize resources to address the trade-related constraints identified by developing economies and least-developed countries.

Aid for Trade financing

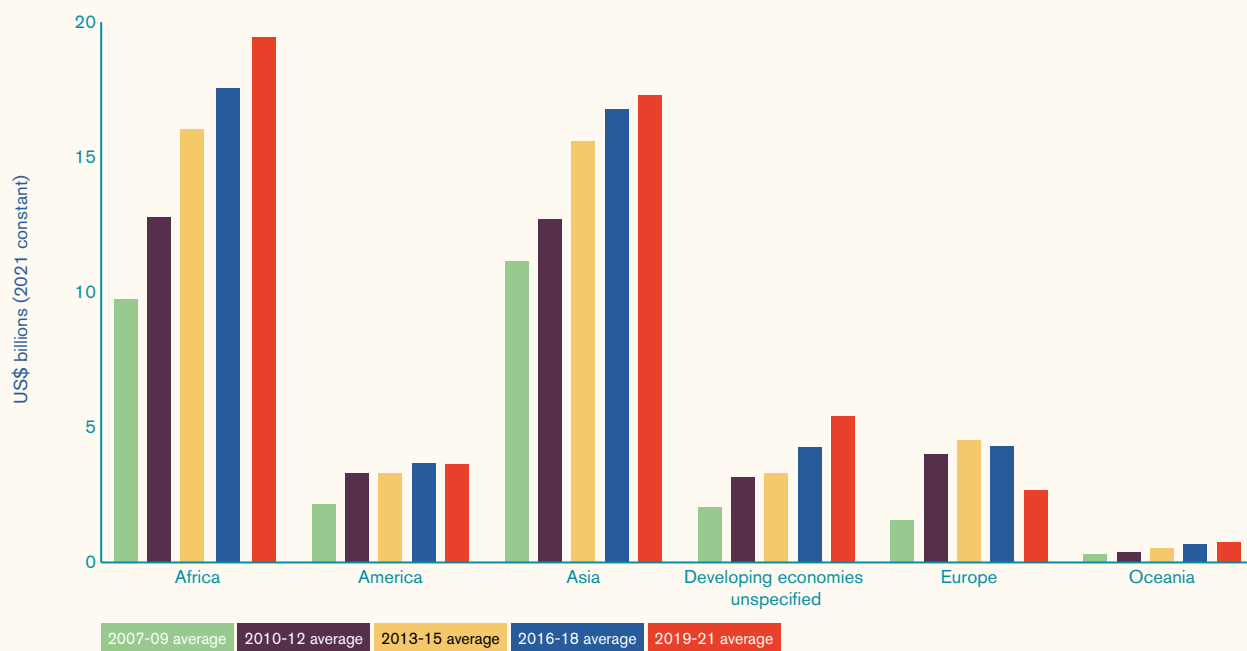
The most recent Aid for Trade data, published by the OECD, showed that total disbursements

amounted to US\$ 51.1 billion in 2022, the latest year for which figures are available, up from US\$ 47.8 billion in 2021 (see Figure 13), a 14 per cent increase in real terms.

Figure 13: Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements by income group (in US\$ billion, 2021 prices)



Source: OECD-CRS (Creditor Reporting System).

Figure 14: Aid for Trade disbursements by continent (in US\$ billion, 2021 prices)

Source: OECD-CRS (Creditor Reporting System).

Nearly all the disbursed amounts went towards building productive capacity and economic infrastructure, with Africa and Asia receiving over 70 per cent of this assistance, the OECD said. Least developed countries (LDCs) received 28 per cent of Aid for Trade disbursements in 2021-22, a slight decline that follows official development aid (ODA) trends. Aid for Trade disbursements to Asia increased by 22 per cent in 2022 while disbursements to Africa decreased slightly by 2.5 per cent. Commitments reached US\$ 65.0 billion in 2022, up 31 per cent.

Between 2006 and 2022, total Aid for Trade to developing economies and LDCs reached US\$ 648 billion. On aggregate, disbursements have increased across all regions since the launch of the initiative (see Figure 14).

Work programme

In February 2023, the Committee on Trade and Development launched the 2023-24 Aid for Trade work programme, titled “Partnerships for food security, digital connectivity, and mainstreaming trade”. This was also the theme

of the ninth Aid for Trade Global Review on 26-28 June 2024.

The work programme is intended to help developing economies and LDCs enhance their agricultural and agribusiness productive and trade capacity, with a view to promoting resilience and strengthening food security. It aims to emphasize the importance of digital connectivity to help developing economies and LDCs engage in global trade and leverage the opportunities for sustainable economic and export diversification as well as supply chain resilience.

As part of the work programme, two workshops were organized on the themes of food security and leveraging South-South assistance. Members, observers and institutional partners also provided updates on their Aid for Trade needs and activities during sessions of the Committee on Trade and Development.

The need to incorporate trade into members’ development strategies was



A community project in Papua New Guinea helps women working in subsistence fishing to develop sustainable, formal businesses.

emphasized at a November meeting of the Committee on Trade and Development dedicated to Aid for Trade. Two LDCs, The Gambia and Bhutan, made presentations on how they are using trade to promote economic growth and promote development goals.

Monitoring and evaluation

A new Aid-for-Trade monitoring and evaluation exercise was launched by the Committee in October. The aim of the exercise is to shed light on the trade and development priorities of developing economies and to examine

how development finance provided by partners is addressing these needs. The feedback provided the groundwork for the Global Review.

DDG Xiangchen Zhang emphasized the significance of the monitoring and evaluation exercise. “The exercise is a critical step to understand the trade and development priorities of developing economies and LDCs, donors, South-South partners and regional economic communities. The evaluation underscores the WTO’s commitment to making trade more inclusive,” he said.

The work programme is intended to help developing economies and LDCs enhance their agricultural and agribusiness productive and trade capacity, with a view to promoting resilience and strengthening food security.

Enhanced Integrated Framework

- EIF projects have generated over US\$ 815 million in additional exports since 2010, up from US\$ 600 million at end-2022, and helped create momentum for further trade reforms in least developed countries (LDCs).
- The EIF continued support for the WTO accessions of Bhutan, Comoros, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Timor-Leste.
- A taskforce of EIF donors and LDC representatives has been set up to investigate the establishment of a future programme of support.



Gender and the environment remain priority cross-cutting issues, with more than 150,000 women having benefited from EIF activities. More than 70 trade and investment-promoting regulations have been adopted by LDCs, reflecting the influence of more than 50 trade-related policies developed with EIF support.

Delivering on support to LDCs

By the end of 2023, just over US\$ 330 million had been invested in the two phases of the EIF programme, with EIF projects having leveraged a further US\$ 100 million in co-finance from LDC governments, development partners and the private sector.

Besides providing backing for institutional and policy reforms, EIF projects support the deeper engagement of LDCs in the WTO, implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area, increasing LDCs' participation in digital trade, promoting sustainable fisheries sectors, leveraging climate and trade financing and supporting women's economic empowerment.

Future programme of support

Following an independent evaluation, which ended in January 2022, the EIF partnership commissioned an investigation of possibilities for a future programme of support. A taskforce of EIF donors and LDC representatives was subsequently set up to focus on the establishment of the future programme.

Focus on WTO accession of LDCs

The EIF continued support for the WTO accession processes of Bhutan, Comoros, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Timor-Leste (see page 42). For Comoros, the EIF has given support by financing, among other things, the participation of Comoros at working party meetings and providing a study on the impact of accession to the WTO.

Background

The EIF is the only multilateral partnership dedicated exclusively to assisting LDCs in their use of trade as an engine for growth, sustainable development and poverty reduction. The EIF partnership of 51 countries, 24 donors and eight partner agencies works closely with governments, development organizations, civil society and academia. Together, they leverage know-how to tackle the world's most pressing trade-for-development issues. The WTO houses the Executive Secretariat of the EIF.

The EIF continued to focus on the twin pillars of institutional and policy support and catalysing productive capacity to further integrate LDCs into global trading systems. Since 2010, EIF projects have generated over US\$ 815 million in additional exports, up from US\$ 600 million at the end of 2022, improving the livelihoods of project beneficiaries and encouraging policy and institutional reforms in LDCs.



Learning and capacity building

Capacity building remained a central feature of EIF support. Over 3,500 officials from 17 LDCs received training in the last reporting year. A session at the WTO's Public Forum (see page 164) brought together 147 participants from LDC and EIF-donor capitals, Geneva missions and international agencies to look at lessons in mainstreaming trade into government policies, sustainable trade and other areas.

Fifty-five LDC officials were trained in a new methodology that assesses the sustainability of past projects.

Trade and climate change

At the COP 28 UN Climate Conference (see page 14), the EIF, the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and the WTO held an event at the Trade Pavilion focusing on climate change and trade for LDCs.

Trade and climate change investments continued to gather pace in the EIF countries,

such as through a dedicated analysis in Zambia's Diagnostic Trade Integration Study (DTIS) – DTISs identify constraints to overall competitiveness and supply chains and sectors of greatest export potential. Other investments include supporting access to climate funding in The Gambia and ongoing research into best practices for inclusion of trade and climate change in diagnostic studies.

Gender and digital trade

Implementation of the EIF's "Empower Women, Power Trade" initiative continued supporting the integration of women into the global economy. With the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the EIF launched global guidelines for integration of gender considerations into digital policies.

Findings from a dedicated study on gender dimensions in DTISs were discussed at a session of the WTO's Gender and Youth Summit (see page 152). To date, the EIF has supported more than 150,000 women in its projects, with women accounting for 61 per cent of EIF beneficiaries.

An agri-processing facility was established outside Addis Ababa as part of an EIF partnership with the Government of Ethiopia.

Standards and Trade Development Facility

- **The STDF Working Group approved US\$ 6.5 million for seven new projects and seven project preparation grants (PPGs) to help developing economies and least-developed countries meet international standards for food safety, animal and plant health, and to facilitate access to international markets.**
- **Lessons from the STDF's work were shared at over 80 events globally, reaching some 4,700 representatives of governments and industry as well as international and regional organizations.**
- **The STDF launched – and started to implement – a gender action plan to address gender needs, challenges and opportunities in its work.**

Background

The STDF helps developing economies improve food safety, animal and plant health and meet sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements for trade, based on international standards. It was established by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health, the World Bank, the World Health Organization and the WTO. The STDF's global partnership engages diverse organizations globally. It is funded by Australia, Canada, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States. Find out more: www.standardsfacility.org.

Catalysing innovative SPS solutions

In 2023, members of the STDF's global partnership of international organizations deepened their collaboration to find solutions to complex sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) challenges and to help shape domestic, regional and global agendas, guided by the 2020-24 STDF strategy – “Safe and inclusive trade horizons for developing countries”.

Supported by the STDF, governments in Asia and the Pacific, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean worked with micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), farmers and traders to build SPS capacity in over 23 projects. In 2023, the STDF Working Group approved US\$ 6.5 million for seven new projects and seven PPGs, two above the annual target.

In Southern Africa, an STDF project brought together government, industry and academia to more effectively control fruit flies that threaten production and trade in fruit, vegetables and plants in Mozambique and South Africa. Pest-free areas – so demonstrated by scientific evidence – and areas of low pest prevalence were set up. An online platform was launched for pest mapping and surveillance. Protocols and financing mechanisms were put in place to ensure sustainability.

STDF projects on electronic SPS certification are helping developing economies to improve transparency, reduce trade costs and speed up trade flows. An external evaluation completed in 2023 recognized how STDF ePhyto projects had been scaled up, with close to 90 economies using the ePhyto solution. The evaluation found that the ePhyto solution had been successfully implemented and had resulted in SPS capacity, trade facilitation and environmental benefits.

Addressing an STDF Policy Committee meeting in April 2023, DDG Jean-Marie Paugam emphasized the importance of the STDF in finding solutions and testing novel approaches for improving developing economies' capacity to meet SPS standards for agriculture trade. “Global partnerships like the STDF are crucial to help farmers, producers, traders and



US\$ 6.5 million

The STDF Working Group approved US\$ 6.5 million for seven new projects and seven project preparation grants

governments in developing countries address some of the main challenges the world is facing today,” he said.

Members of the STDF’s global partnership and project stakeholders helped spread knowledge on diverse SPS topics – from mainstreaming gender issues into STDF work to remote food inspection and good regulatory practices. Activities included a workshop at the WTO in March 2023 to share STDF safe trade solutions with WTO members and support implementation of the MC12 SPS Declaration “Responding to Modern SPS Challenges”.

Lessons from the STDF’s work were shared at over 80 events globally, reaching some 4,700 representatives of governments and industry as well as international and regional organizations and the private sector.

STDF gender action plan

The STDF launched its gender action plan at the first-ever event on gender mainstreaming for WTO SPS delegates in July. The plan provides a tool to promote a more inclusive approach to improving the results and impact of the STDF’s work,

including the aim of empowering women through STDF projects.

The plan includes gender analysis within projects and joint events, such as “Trade Regulations in the Digital Environment: Is there a gender component”? co-organized with UN Trade and Development and the Permanent Mission of Italy.

Climate change

The STDF issued a briefing note – “How is climate change affecting food safety, animal and plant health?” – in which it warned that climate change is expected to exacerbate the risks associated with the spread of plant pests, with potentially devastating effects on agricultural ecosystems, food security and the environment especially in developing economies. It is also affecting animal disease patterns, making outbreaks harder to control. Strengthening SPS systems in developing economies should be made a top priority in the climate change debate, it notes.

In Dubai, on the margins of COP28, it hosted a dialogue – “Trading safely: Why stronger SPS systems matter for climate change resilience”?



An STDF-funded project is helping farmers in Nigeria improve practices in pesticide application to increase access to export markets.



Technical cooperation and training

- In 2023, the WTO Secretariat fully resumed face-to-face technical assistance activities while continuing to offer virtual delivery methods.
- The Secretariat conducted 154 face-to-face activities, 28 per cent more than in 2022. WTO e-Learning courses increased from 139 to 147.
- Approximately 6,500 participants benefited from local, regional and global technical assistance activities, and over 6,800 completed e-Learning courses.
- Africa remained the region with the highest participation in WTO technical assistance activities in 2023 at 32 per cent.

Twenty-seven government officials from developing economies took part in an eight-week Advanced Trade Policy Course in Geneva in early 2024.

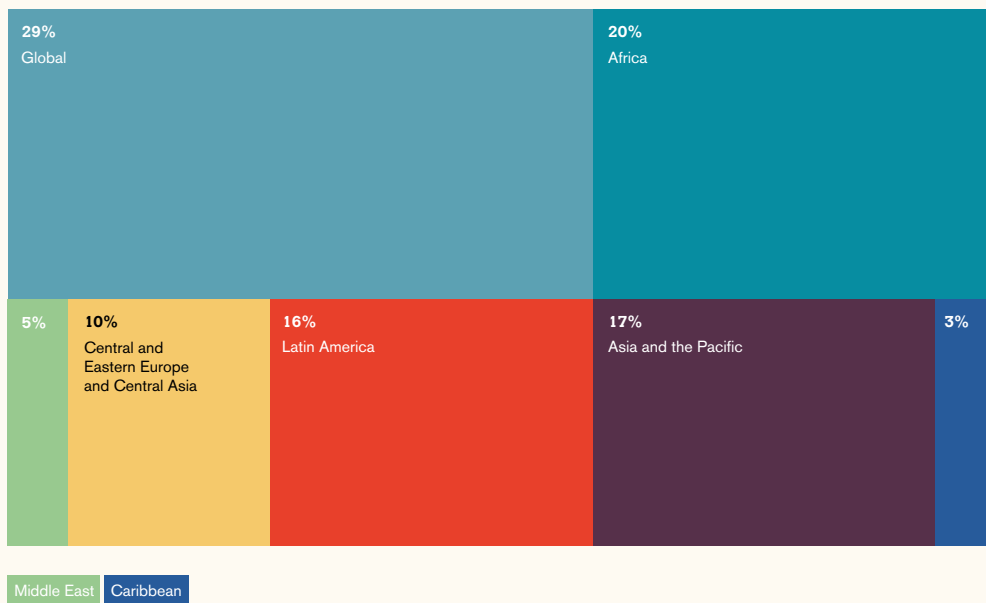
Background

The Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation coordinates the WTO's technical assistance programmes. Its activities include e-Learning, global and regional training courses, academic programmes, and workshops at local and regional level. The technical assistance programmes help WTO members better understand their rights and obligations in the multilateral trading system. This strengthens their capacity to benefit from participation in the system.

In 2023 the WTO Secretariat fully resumed face-to-face local, regional and global technical assistance activities while also using virtual methods of delivery. Total face-to-face technical assistance activities rose 28 per cent to 154. The number of WTO e-Learning courses increased from 139 to 147.

The overall number of training activities increased by 16 per cent to 301 and overtook the last pre-pandemic total of 278 events in 2019.

Figure 15: Technical assistance activities by region in 2023*



*Global activities are open to all WTO beneficiary members and observers.

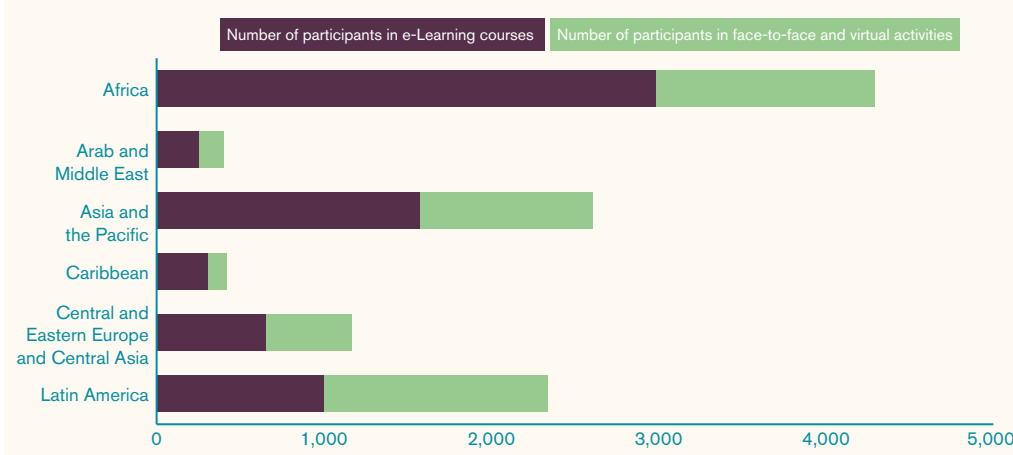
Africa again saw the highest percentage of face-to-face technical assistance activities (20 per cent), followed by the Asia-Pacific region (17 per cent) and Latin America (16 per cent). Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia had 10 per cent, the Middle East region 5 per cent and the Caribbean 3 per cent.

The largest proportion of activities implemented in 2023 (29 per cent) were

“global”, open to all WTO beneficiary members and observers (see Figure 15). The remaining 71 per cent were delivered at the local or regional level, in line with the WTO Secretariat’s demand-driven approach.

The 2022-23 Technical Assistance and Training Plan continued to take a “results-based management” approach to training activities. Guidelines and

Figure 16: Overall participation by region of origin



French and Irish Mission Internship Programme



David Mendy,
The Gambia

"My involvement in WTO negotiations, particularly in the WTO Negotiating Group on Fisheries Subsidies and the Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on Electronic Commerce, played a pivotal role in strengthening my understanding of negotiation processes and consensus-building among members. These experiences not only deepened my knowledge but also improved my ability to collaborate effectively with stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, a critical skill for engaging in international trade negotiations."

Netherlands Trainee Programme



David Kouasi,
Côte d'Ivoire

"I have gained invaluable insights that have deeply enriched my understanding of the multilateral trading system and its impact on developing economies. Participating in negotiation sessions and seeing the experts at work gave me priceless first-hand experience of the negotiation and diplomatic skills needed to reach fair and mutually beneficial agreements between members of an organization."

Advanced Trade Policy Course



Holy Randriamifidy,
Madagascar

"Thanks to the various activities on the course, in particular the round tables, negotiation simulations and participation in various WTO meetings, these two months have provided me with a lot of knowledge, experience, personal development and professional networking opportunities. What I have learnt during the course has exceeded my expectations."

benchmarks helped to maintain a high standard of content, consistent teaching methods and regular evaluation of all WTO technical assistance activities.

Participation in technical assistance activities

More than 6,500 participants took part in local, regional and global technical assistance activities, and over 6,800 completed e-Learning courses (with 64 per cent of participants doing multiple courses).

Africa had the highest percentage of participation (32 per cent) in technical assistance activities, followed by the Asia-Pacific region (20 per cent), Latin America (18 per cent), Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (9 per cent) and the Middle East and the Caribbean with 3 per cent each (see Figure 16). Africa also had the highest participation in e-Learning courses with 44 per cent.

Least-developed countries (LDCs) accounted for 38 per cent of participants in e-Learning. Women represented 49 per cent of participants for all WTO technical assistance activities.

Roughly 52 per cent of technical assistance activities (including e-Learning courses) was delivered in English, 23 per cent in Spanish, 21 per cent in French and the remaining 5 per cent in more than one language using interpretation.

Technical assistance continued to be provided for countries seeking to join the WTO (see page 44), either in person or virtually.

Internship programmes

In 2023, as in previous years, government officials completing WTO internships were mostly from LDCs and other low-income countries in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, with participation reflecting gender balance, in line with the objectives of the programmes.

Twenty-two participants (ten women and 12 men) completed the French and Irish Mission

Internship Programme (FIMIP), which offers a ten-month placement to a capital-based official at the selected member's mission in Geneva. Sixteen participants (eight women and eight men) completed the Netherlands Trainee Programme, which also runs for ten months. Four officials (two women and two men) participated in the Regional Coordinator Internship Programme, and three interns (two women and one man) were engaged in the Accession Internship Programme.

Seventeen young professionals (thirteen women and four men) were recruited for the Young Professionals Programme in 2023, using a merit-based selection process. The young professionals are recruited from WTO members with no more than two professional staff in the WTO Secretariat to improve opportunities for young professionals from members under-represented at the WTO (see page 189).

Financing technical assistance

The bulk of the technical assistance programme is financed by the Global Trust Fund through voluntary contributions from WTO members. The gradual decrease in unearmarked voluntary contributions observed over several years worsened. Unearmarked funds give the Secretariat the flexibility to adjust assistance activities to the needs and requests from beneficiaries.

In 2023, new contributions to the Global Trust Fund reached CHF 3.9 million, unchanged from 2022, of which 23 per cent were earmarked. This represents an increase in dedicated funds, which come with conditions for use set by the donors.

Other funding sources include the WTO regular budget for Geneva-based courses and local technical assistance activities – CHF 4.5 million for 2023 – and contributions from other trust funds, such as the French and Irish Missions Internship Programme and the Netherlands Trainee Programme, which totalled CHF 1.9 million, and the China LDCs & Accessions Programme, which amounted to CHF 405,900.

Young Professionals Programme



Kimonique Powell,
Jamaica

"Firstly, I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked for the WTO and in particular the Office of the Director General. My time here has resulted in both personal and professional development, which will undoubtedly shape the way I move forward in my career. I was able to delve deeper into the world of trade, to better understand the linkages between trade and politics and to test my communication skills by hosting Season Seven of the WTO's podcast, 'Let's Talk Trade'. To all the people I met and worked with on this journey, a big thank you!"

Regional Coordinator Internship



Thato Motlotlegi,
Botswana

"The RCI Programme has truly been a transformative journey for me, shaping both my career and character. Working at the Botswana Mission has exposed me to a multitude of experiences, allowing me to appreciate how missions handle regular WTO work and negotiations within a multilateral setting, while at the same time keeping the country in the know of what is happening. The knowledge and skills I have gained through this programme are truly invaluable. I have no doubt my capacity to deliver on my country's trade agenda has been greatly enhanced."

Trade and women's empowerment

- **The WTO and the Gender Research Hub organized the Youth Trade Summit on Gender to promote the next generation of trade and gender experts.**
- **In September 2023, the WTO issued a new publication on trade and gender, “Making Trade Work for Women: Key findings from the World Trade Congress on Gender”, building on the research presented at the first Congress held in 2022.**
- **At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024, the WTO and the International Trade Centre (ITC) launched a USD 50 million global fund to help women tap into opportunities in international trade and the digital economy.**

Youth Trade Summit on Gender

On 13-14 November 2023, the WTO and the Gender Research Hub organized the Youth Trade Summit on Gender in partnership with Spain, which held the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union. It brought together over 50 young researchers and professionals nominated by academic institutions or governments from around the world to exchange views on trade and gender issues and engage with WTO members, senior researchers and global stakeholders.

The Summit was held between the first edition of the World Trade Congress on Gender, which highlighted in December 2022 research on women's economic empowerment through trade, and a second edition of the Congress to be convened in June 2025.

Young researchers and professionals were able to deepen their knowledge on topics such as gender-based research data and gender aspects of trade finance. The Summit

also highlighted young people's perspectives on how to make trade work for women.

“Inclusive trade is at the heart of the WTO's work, and I believe that we can only move forward in this goal if we involve young people more in our work. This is what the Youth Trade Summit is all about, to collectively, with young men and women, work towards ending all forms of gender discrimination still in the place worldwide,” DDG Xiangchen Zhang said at the event's opening.

The Summit also included an awards ceremony to celebrate the contribution of two trade and gender equality pioneers: Simonetta Zarrilli, head of UN Trade and Development's Trade, Gender and Development Programme and member of the Gender Research Hub, and Judit Fabian, a member of the Hub and visiting researcher at the University of Ottawa.

The first Youth Trade Summit on Gender was held at the WTO in November 2023.



New WTO publication

A WTO book entitled “Making Trade Work for Women: Key findings from the World Trade Congress on Gender” was launched at the WTO Public Forum (see page 164). It stresses the need to help women overcome obstacles to participating in trade and reaffirms that making trade policy more responsive to gender issues improves inclusiveness and supports sustainable growth.

It highlights gender-relevant measures incorporated in governments’ trade policies and covers topics such as the experiences of women entrepreneurs, gender provisions in trade agreements, and the gender wage gap.

Promoting gender-responsive trade policymaking

The WTO’s Trade&Gender360° Strategy is a capacity building programme that aims to enhance officials’ knowledge on trade and gender equality, to equip them with gender-responsive policymaking tools and support them in mainstreaming gender issues in the WTO’s work. It seeks to reinforce the work and impact of the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender (see page 74) in line with WTO members’ priorities.

Evaluation surveys conducted after the strategy’s courses found that they helped

government officials to incorporate gender issues in their economies’ trade work and policy discussions. Officials said they had greater awareness of trade and gender issues and felt better equipped to advocate for more gender-responsive trade programmes in their ministries or missions.

“The WTO training course on trade and gender will help me to propose measures and take decisions that will integrate gender aspects into trade policy, in particular regarding the development of women’s entrepreneurship,” said Inès Monwanou of Benin’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In 2023, for the first time, the WTO also piloted a training course for Geneva-based delegates to help them mainstream gender issues into their WTO daily work.

Women Exporters in the Digital Economy Fund

The WTO and the ITC launched at MC13 in February 2024 a USD 50 million global fund to help women tap into opportunities in international trade and the digital economy. The Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund will help women-led businesses and women entrepreneurs in developing economies adopt digital technologies and expand the online presence of their enterprises.



The Women Exporters in the Digital Economy Fund was launched at MC13 in Abu Dhabi in February 2024.

Outreach

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Background

The WTO works closely with other intergovernmental and international organizations and regional bodies, especially those involved in trade-related issues. This cooperation helps to ensure coordinated action and a consistent approach to international trade policies.

Cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations

- DG Okonjo-Iweala attended the COP28 Climate Summit in Dubai, where a “Trade Day” was held for the first time. “This thematic day should inspire world leaders to make fuller use of trade as part of the climate action toolkit,” she said.
- The WTO, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum (WEF) launched “Action on Climate and Trade” (ACT), a new initiative to help developing economies and least developed countries use trade to meet their climate change mitigation and adaptation goals.
- Speaking to a ministerial gathering at the OECD in Paris, the DG said a strong and effective WTO is a vital tool for building resilience in an increasingly shock-prone global economy.

UN climate summit

DG Okonjo-Iweala attended the COP28 Climate Conference in Dubai (see page 14) in November, where trade was spotlighted for the first time as a specific conference theme. The WTO co-led a “Trade Day” with conference hosts the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and co-hosted the Trade House pavilion with the International Chamber of Commerce, the International Trade Centre and UN Trade and Development. Opening “Trade Day”, the DG stressed: “This thematic day should inspire world leaders to make fuller use of trade as part of the climate action toolkit”.

G20

During a meeting of G20 trade and investment ministers in Jaipur, India,

in August, DG Okonjo-Iweala called on the group of leading economies to do its part to ensure the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference in February 2024 delivered outcomes on important issues that WTO members were addressing.

Trade measures introduced by G20 economies had become more restrictive, according to the 30th WTO Trade Monitoring Report on G20 trade measures, issued in December. Between mid-May and mid-October 2023, G20 economies introduced more trade-restrictive than trade-facilitating measures on goods although the value of traded merchandise covered by facilitating measures continued to exceed that covered by restrictions.

World Bank and IMF

The DG attended the annual meeting of the World Bank Group and the IMF in Marrakesh, Morocco, in October. In an event co-hosted with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), she highlighted the importance of increasing access to trade finance for small businesses to assist their integration into global supply chains (see page 128). She urged multilateral development banks to intensify their efforts to reduce the overall gap between demand for trade finance and its supply.

In December, the WTO launched with the IMF, OECD and UN Trade and Development a joint publication on "Digital Trade for Development", which explores policy issues such as the WTO's moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions (see page 173).

Food security

In April 2023, the WTO joined the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Bank in urging the G20 to coordinate efforts on tackling the root causes of food insecurity. In a report, they called on the G20 to focus on improving the supply of development finance to support agriculture investments and to promote sustainable and inclusive economic growth in rural areas.



The DG emphasized the crucial role of trade in transforming food systems in an address centred on food security at a UN summit in Rome in July. "We cannot solve the food systems problems we face without trade. We cannot achieve the food systems transformation we need without reforming trade policy," she said.

The WTO and the FAO agreed in December to boost cooperation and collaboration on a range of issues in the area of food and agricultural trade and climate change.

Health, climate and trade

In November 2023, the World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the WTO held their 10th Joint Technical Symposium titled "Facing the Future: Human Health and Climate Change". The event underscored the importance of exploring the intersections between public health, trade and intellectual property to address the effects of climate change on human health, especially among the world's most marginalized populations.

The Directors-General of WHO, WIPO and the WTO agreed in September to shift the focus of trilateral cooperation from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic to

DG Okonjo-Iweala and FAO Director-General Qu Dongyu signed a MoU to support collaboration on areas of common interest.

increasing and broadening support for more effective and sustainable use of flexibilities in the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) (see page 114) to increase access to health technologies and to be better prepared for future pandemics.

The WTO, the World Bank and the World Economic Forum (WEF) in April 2023 launched “Action on Climate and Trade” (ACT), a new initiative that aims to help participating developing economies and least-developed countries to use trade to meet their climate change mitigation and adaptation goals.

OECD

Speaking to a ministerial gathering at the OECD in Paris in June 2023, the DG said a strong and effective WTO is a vital tool for building resilience in an increasingly shock-prone global economy. She called for a strategy of “re-globalization” which would

build greater resilience by bringing more marginalized countries and communities into the global economic mainstream.

The OECD and the WTO cooperate in a range of areas, including in the trade in value-added (TiVA) database and in improving the measurement of digital trade (see page 177).

United Nations

DG Okonjo-Iweala attended the spring and autumn meetings of the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB), composed of the executive heads of UN agencies, funds and programmes and the executive heads of the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO.

The WTO is part of the UN Secretary General-led High-Level Task Force, which brings together 23 UN agencies and international organizations to provide policy coordination and political leadership to achieve the UN Sustainable Development

DG Okonjo-Iweala, WIPO DG Daren Tang and WHO DG Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus renewed their commitment to tackling global health challenges.





Goals (SDGs). The role of trade in helping countries recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and meet the SDGs is highlighted in a WTO report submitted to the UN High-level Political Forum in September.

Also in September, the DG addressed the UN High-Level Dialogue on Financing for Development and called for bolstering the capacity of local lenders, strengthening correspondent banking relationships and improving data quality and availability.

High-level meetings

Turning away from open trade towards fragmentation “would be very costly”, leading to greater price volatility and inflationary pressures and weaker growth prospects overall, the DG told an economic policy symposium during the annual Jackson Hole, Kansas, meeting of leading central bankers, policymakers and economists in August.

DG Okonjo-Iweala and European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde in March 2023 highlighted the importance of continuing to strive for gender equality amid global pressures in a conversation held at the WTO to mark International Women's Day.

UN Trade and Development, ITC and other international organizations

UN Trade and Development, the International Trade Centre and the WTO jointly produced

the annual “World Tariff Profiles” (see page 177) and quarterly and annual statistics on trade in services. They also combined in statistical capacity building, including training and e-learning courses.

The DG gave a keynote address to the 13th World Chambers Congress in Geneva in June, telling delegates the multilateral trading system works but that parts of it need reform. She also underlined the risk to global prosperity if trade fragments into rival blocs.

FIFA

At an event titled “Making Trade Score for Women” held at the WTO on 1 May, the DG and FIFA President Gianni Infantino emphasized the part that football and international trade can play in empowering women.

DG Okonjo-Iweala and ECB President Christine Lagarde discussed the importance of gender equality on International Women's Day.

The role of trade in helping countries recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and meet the SDGs is highlighted in a WTO report submitted to the UN High-level Political Forum in September.

WTO cooperation with the World Bank and IMF



A high-level presentation at MC13 of the Digital Trade for Africa initiative, a joint WTO-World Bank project.

Cooperation with the World Bank Group and the IMF to achieve “greater coherence in economic policy making” is one of the core functions of the WTO. The three organizations have long-standing agreements for mutual cooperation and regular consultation. Recent areas of cooperation include:

Joint work on subsidies (WTO, IMF, OECD, WB): The four organizations launched in May 2023 a subsidy platform (see page 96) to facilitate access to information on subsidies they collect. In July, they organized a webinar on “Subsidies: Why do we care, what do we know, and what next?” to showcase key issues to tackle. A joint work programme for 2024 includes a research webinar and a policy dialogue event.

Digital trade and e-commerce moratorium (WTO, IMF, OECD, UN Trade and Development, WB): The five organizations jointly published “Digital Trade for Development”

in December 2023 (see page 173), looking at opportunities for developing economies arising from digital trade, the main barriers they face and how international cooperation can help to make gains from digital technologies more inclusive. It also looks into the economic impact of the e-commerce moratorium (see page 80).

Carbon pricing task force (WTO, WB, IMF, OECD): A carbon pricing task force has been set up to start exploring ways in which carbon prices and other climate change mitigation policies can be made more interoperable.

Trade finance gaps in developing countries (WTO-IFC): The DG and the Managing Director of the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation launched a second report on trade finance, covering the Mekong Region (see page 128). A third on Central America is planned for 2024. The reports include bank and firm-level

surveys, and analysis on how much more trade could be generated if trade finance were more available.

Digital trade for Africa

(WTO-WB): The WTO has partnered with the World Bank to help Africa close the divide in digital connectivity infrastructure and in regulation, supplementing ongoing efforts by African countries in the digital trade sphere. The work includes a “Policy Note”, confirming the huge potential of digital trade for Africa.

Contact with the business community

- The Director-General established a business advisory group to enable business representatives to share their perspectives with her on relevant international trade issues.
- Business organizations hosted 17 sessions at the WTO Public Forum on topics such as trade's role in helping countries deal with and adapt to climate change.
- Speaking at the opening of the Business Forum at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in February 2024, DG Okonjo-Iweala told the business community that its support and engagement are particularly important.

Background

Business and the WTO have always been closely connected. The private sector is a major beneficiary of transparent and predictable trade rules and obligations. Business is an important interlocutor for both governments and the WTO. It is actively involved in the multilateral trading system and participates in public activities of the WTO.

DG establishes advisory group

In 2023, the DG set up a business advisory group to enable business representatives to share their perspectives with her on relevant international trade issues.

Two meetings took place with the business group in 2023, in June and November. At the first meeting, participants discussed what trade can do to support digitalization, sustainability and small businesses. At the second meeting, advisory group members were briefed on



preparations for the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) and discussed with her the global economic and geopolitical situation and its possible impact on business. DG Okonjo-Iweala also met with her advisory group at MC13 in February 2024.

The Business Forum, jointly organized by the ICC and the WTO, was held at MC13 in Abu Dhabi.

Business Forum at MC13

Speaking at the Business Forum at MC13 in Abu Dhabi, DG Okonjo-Iweala told the business community that its support and engagement, as direct users of the WTO system, are particularly important. After the Forum, the DG and MC13 Chair Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi received from the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) its global business priorities for MC13.

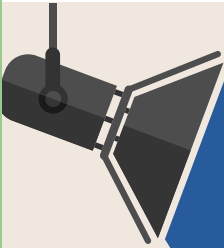
The Business Forum was organized jointly by the ICC and the WTO, bringing together officials and business leaders from around the world for a dialogue on the most pressing issues facing the WTO.

Business at the Public Forum

The Public Forum, whose theme was “The role of trade and the WTO in shaping a greener and more sustainable future”, featured 17 sessions hosted by business organizations. The sessions covered topics such as trade's role in helping countries deal with and adapt to climate change.

Other contact with business

Throughout the year, WTO officials, including the DG, met with members of the business community in Geneva or elsewhere. The issues most frequently discussed included the state of play in the WTO's trade negotiations, trade tensions and the Appellate Body impasse (see page 133).



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Presidential Lecture Series

The WTO hosted three Presidential Lectures in 2023, building on the success of Prime Minister of Barbados Mia Amor Mottley's 2022 address. The speakers were President Mokgweetsi E.K. Masisi of Botswana, former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and President Macky Sall of Senegal.



President Masisi of Botswana

At the first Presidential Lecture of 2023, DG Okonjo-Iweala highlighted Botswana's successes under President Masisi, including its large share of African merchandise exports. She noted the challenges Botswana and many African states face in terms of economic development, including export diversification, job creation, and building inclusive and environmentally sustainable economic growth.

President Masisi highlighted the WTO's importance to a rules-based, multilateral trading system, stating that the outcomes of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in 2022 had revitalized trust among members. He saw a key role for the WTO in ensuring that the multilateral trading system becomes more inclusive for developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs), pointing to the inequitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines as demonstrating the need for greater inclusivity.

He placed particular emphasis on the need to pay greater attention to the needs of LDCs, pointing to Botswana's own graduation from LDC status as an example to learn from. President Masisi concluded by addressing Botswana's efforts to promote gender- and youth-responsive trade policies, specifically via the WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender (see page 74) and its own National Youth Council.

Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown

Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, joining Dr Okonjo-Iweala during the 2023 Public Forum, called for a new multilateralism to face contemporary global challenges. He pointed to three seismic shifts that have shaken the multilateral system: the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world, the shift from neoliberal to neo-mercantilist economics, and the move from hyper-globalization to a yet-to-be-defined form of globalization. Mr Brown underlined the need for a new form of multilateralism, with leading roles for states from the Global South.

Mr Brown underscored that climate change, pandemics and financial contagion can only be addressed "by globally coordinated action involving us bearing in mind that despite today's wars, the biggest threats are no longer principally between or among nation states, but threats to humankind as a whole that know no national boundaries."



President Macky Sall of Senegal

For the third and final Presidential Lecture of 2023, the WTO hosted President Macky Sall of Senegal. DG Okonjo-Iweala stated that despite the variety of challenges the multilateral system presently faces, viable pathways are emerging towards robust, resilient growth, particularly in Africa.

Making use of these pathways will require action, which begins in the WTO, she said. DG Okonjo-Iweala recalled that when the WTO started the series, a key motivation was the hope that the distinguished guests would be a source of inspiration for members' own ongoing efforts to use trade to deliver for people and for the planet.

President Macky Sall spoke of the need for a more equal and inclusive multilateral trading system, where all states have a place. States need to engage their whole populations, particularly youth and women, by creating employment opportunities and enhancing value chains, he added.

Failing to achieve these goals, he said, will continue to push countries, communities and individuals to the margins, leading to issues such as surging international migration. President Macky Sall added that trade will only be sustainable when the laws governing it, which are embodied in the WTO, are not distorted to reflect the laws of the strongest in the system. He welcomed the ongoing work on WTO institutional reform (see page 77).



Background

The WTO's Presidential Lecture Series provides a platform for high-level guest speakers, including current and former heads of state, to address trade and its role in multilateral governance of global issues, with particular attention to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Relations with non-governmental organizations

- Over 200 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were accredited to the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), held in Abu Dhabi, 26-29 February 2024.
- In 2023, the Director-General established a civil society advisory group to provide an informal platform for civil society to share with her its perspectives on relevant international trade issues.

Background

The WTO maintains regular dialogue with civil society organizations to enhance cooperation and increase their awareness of WTO activities and the multilateral trading system. Continuing and strengthening the relationship with civil society remains important for increasing transparency and increasing public awareness of the work of the WTO.

DG Okonjo-Iweala meets with her newly established civil society advisory group at MC13 in Abu Dhabi.

Over 200 NGOs from around the world were accredited to the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), which took place in February 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

In 2023, DG Okonjo-Iweala established a civil society advisory group, comprised of individuals with varied professional backgrounds, to provide an informal platform for civil society to share with her its perspectives on relevant international trade issues. She met with the group twice in 2023.

The DG also met with the group at MC13. The group shared perspectives on how to make trade more inclusive and to ensure it can respond to pressing global challenges, such as climate change and inequality. The DG said: "Our discussions today were fruitful and enormously valuable. Civil society input is crucial. Today's discussion provides us with valuable inputs as we continue to build a WTO fit for the 21st century."

During the year, NGOs were invited to four briefings organized by the WTO Secretariat on major WTO meetings. Over 60 representatives from 30 NGOs benefited from these sessions on the WTO's work.

NGOs played a very active part in the WTO's Public Forum (see page 164), which focused in 2023 on how trade can contribute to a greener, more sustainable future. It co-organized almost 70 sessions on subjects such as decarbonization, digital trade and inclusivity.



Contact with parliamentarians

- The DG and the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) issued a joint letter in September to speakers of parliaments requesting their support for ratification of the 2022 Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.
- Speaking at the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in Abu Dhabi on 25 February 2024 on the eve of the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), DG Okonjo-Iweala said that parliamentary support for a successful MC13 is vital for WTO negotiators gathered in Abu Dhabi.

Background

Parliamentarians play an important role in the multilateral trading system. Any deal resulting from intergovernmental negotiations at the WTO will, in most cases, need approval from legislators. The WTO seeks to maintain an open dialogue with parliamentarians and to help them gain a deeper understanding of the organization and its work.

DG Okonjo-Iweala and the Secretary-General of the IPU, Martin Chungong, issued a joint letter in September to all speakers of parliaments represented at the IPU and the WTO requesting their support for the ratification of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, the landmark multilateral accord to curb harmful fisheries subsidies adopted by MC12 in 2022 (see page 55).

Addressing in April 2023 the Steering Committee of the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, co-chaired by the IPU and the European Parliament, DDG Angela Ellard



encouraged parliamentarians to deepen their support for the WTO, including by ratifying the Fisheries Agreement. “My plea to parliamentarians from all WTO members that require parliamentary ratification is to say ‘yes’ to this agreement so that it can start delivering its benefits for ocean sustainability as soon as possible”.

DG Okonjo-Iweala speaking at the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in Abu Dhabi in February 2024.

During the WTO Public Forum (see page 164), the Steering Committee also met and organized a panel on “Making trade work for the environment: The role of parliamentarians”. The panel included legislators from the European Parliament and the Federal Council of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), host to MC13, and senior officials from the WTO and the UN Environment Programme.

Speaking at the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in Abu Dhabi on 25 February 2024 on the eve of MC13, DG Okonjo-Iweala said that parliamentary support for a successful MC13 is vital for WTO negotiators gathered in Abu Dhabi. The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO is a joint annual event of the IPU and the European Parliament. Approximately 300 MPs attended the event.

The IPU Secretary-General spoke in May 2023 at an event for Asian-Pacific parliamentarians, co-organized by the WTO, the Rajaratnam School for International Studies in Singapore and the Singapore-based Temasek Foundation. He highlighted the increased engagement of parliamentarians with WTO issues. The WTO outreach event attracted 37 legislators from across the Asia Pacific region.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Public Forum 2023

Under the theme “It is time for action”, the 2023 Public Forum, held on 12-15 September at the WTO, drew more than 2,000 participants from WTO members, business, civil society, international organizations and academia to explore how trade and the WTO can help create a greener and more sustainable future.

More than 130 sessions were held, with four high-level panels, a Presidential Lecture, delivered by former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, book presentations and various exhibitions. The Forum, the WTO’s largest outreach event, also featured the launch of the WTO’s World Trade Report 2023 (see page 174).

Future of international trade

UN Special Envoy for Global Education and former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and DG Okonjo-Iweala kicked off the Forum with a discussion on the future of international trade amid economic, political and environmental uncertainty. The conversation followed a Presidential Lecture (see page 160) delivered to the Forum by the former premier.

Mr Brown underlined that international cooperation needs to be reimagined today. “I want to suggest now is the time for reconstruction, for a new era, even if it may seem at first sight we are striving against the odds,” said Mr Brown, highlighting the need to forge a “new multilateralism”.

Thanking him for his lecture, DG Okonjo-Iweala noted that he is one of the most respected voices regarding pressing issues of our time, such as global health, growth and development and climate change. “These are all the problems we are grappling with as we work here at the WTO to reimagine and revitalize globalization,” she said.

Forging trade for a sustainable future

A high-level panel delved into accelerating climate action within value chains and championing global policies and initiatives. Speakers emphasized the role of political will in advancing discussions on trade and climate change, acknowledging that ministers were already working in this direction, including at the WTO but that there was still a long way to go.

Panellists underscored the importance of removing impediments to trade in green goods and technologies – those that can help achieve environmental and climate protection goals – so that trade could become an agent for change when it comes to climate.

Several speakers underlined the need to address economic incentives that continue to distort trade in favour

of harmful practices, and in particular the need to phase out subsidies for fossil fuels (see page 73).

Route to transport decarbonization

Speakers in the high-level debate explored opportunities and challenges in adopting zero- and low-emission technologies. They highlighted the role of the WTO in delivering economic prosperity and growth, essential for start-ups to scale up and offer global solutions. Panellists emphasized the need to adopt new technologies and switch to alternative fuels but cautioned that these require large investments.

Public Forum participants in the Atrium of the WTO building.





Inclusive strategies for sustainable trade

Empowering vulnerable communities in decision-making processes is imperative for addressing the complex challenges posed by climate change, said participants in this high-level panel. They agreed that acknowledging and embracing the diversity of perspectives, voices and experiences is not only a moral imperative but a strategic requirement to address the complex and intertwined issues the world faces.

Rangimarie Hunia, Director of Te Ohu Kaimoana, an indigenous organization seeking to protect Māori fishing interests, and the first-ever indigenous group representative to participate in a Public Forum panel, said: “Look after the environment and the environment will look after you.”

Digital boost to innovation

This high-level discussion focused on the opportunities that digitalization presents for overcoming barriers to growth, enhancing access to trade and revolutionizing the delivery of goods and services. However, digitalization also poses challenges, such as defining and measuring digital trade and adapting existing trade rules to the new environment.

While highlighting the potentially transformative role of the digital economy, panellists drew attention to the digital divide separating economies with extensive access to modern information and communications technology (ICT) and those without it. Some 90 per cent of people in high-income economies are connected to the internet but less than a third have a connection in low-income economies.

A special session on “Conversations on the Trade, Global Economy and Climate Change nexus” opened the 2023 Public Forum.

Background

The Public Forum is the WTO’s largest annual outreach event. It provides a unique platform for heads of states, parliamentarians, businesspeople, students, academics and civil society to come together and debate a wide range of trade and development topics.

Trade for Peace Programme

- The Trade for Peace Programme focused on academic and institutional partnerships in 2023, delivering on the goal of providing more concrete research outputs analysing the trade-peace connection.
- Young leaders from the trade and peace communities met at the WTO in February 2023 to share experiences across disciplines and discuss solutions to current challenges in building peace.

Background

The goal of the Trade for Peace Programme is to assist countries in transitioning from fragility and conflict to stability and economic wellbeing. It aims to achieve these objectives through its four pillars: political engagement and partnerships; outreach and public dialogue; research; and training and capacity building.

The Trade for Peace Programme focused on academic and institutional partnerships in 2023, delivering on the goal of providing more concrete research outputs analysing the trade-peace connection. The programme calls for collaboration between the trade, peace and humanitarian communities to enhance opportunities to leverage the multilateral trading system as a driver of peace and stability.

The Interdisciplinary Master's (MINT) course on Trade for Peace, organized in partnership with the Geneva Graduate Institute, took place for the second time in 2023. The four-month course presented the linkages between trade and peace and explored the



cross-cutting issues of gender and private sector engagement, among other things.

At the conclusion of the course, DDG Xiangchen Zhang said: "Youth have an important role to play in bringing new ideas, innovating, opening up new conversations and forging links among different areas." He encouraged students to further explore the trade-peace nexus in their future endeavours.

A Trade for Peace consultancy project was organized in collaboration with the University of St. Gallen, resulting in various case studies, ranging from the effect of specific regional economic communities on regional peace to the effectiveness of resource-sharing agreements.

In collaboration with the Geneva Graduate Institute's TradeLab International Economic Law Clinic, a research project conducted by master's students delved into how trade and peace may be mutually reinforcing in agreements and negotiations.

Young leaders from the trade and peace communities met at the WTO in February 2023 to share experiences across disciplines and discuss solutions to current challenges in building peace in an event jointly organized by the Graduate Institute Peacebuilding Initiative and the WTO.

The g7+ Group adopted a declaration at MC13 calling for a dedicated work programme on trade for peace.



Contact with the media

- In 2023, the WTO press team focused on improving outreach to journalists in developing economies and least developed countries as a key element of its 2023 media strategy.
- The media team supported the WTO Secretariat's active role at the COP28 climate summit in Dubai, organizing press briefings and news releases highlighting trade's pivotal role in addressing the climate crisis.

Improving outreach to journalists in developing economies and least developed countries was a key objective for the WTO press team in 2023. The aim was to help journalists better understand the issues being addressed at the WTO and the challenges and opportunities facing the global trading system.

The press team organized four main outreach events. In Southeast Asia and the Pacific, 18 journalists from 10 countries were invited in April to a workshop in Bangkok, Thailand. DG Okonjo-Iweala gave a welcome message and the WTO Chief Economist, Ralph Ossa, briefed on global trade developments. Twenty journalists from 20 developing economies

and LDCs attended the Public Forum (see page 164) in September, with the press team organizing information sessions with the DG and trade experts.

In Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in September, 17 journalists from seven Arab countries participated in a workshop focusing on issues to be discussed at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi in February 2024. In October, 26 journalists from 16 Latin American countries attended a workshop in Bogota, Colombia, which included presentations by senior trade officials from the region.

The WTO held 37 WTO press briefings and other press events in Geneva in 2023. The press team also helped produce more than 560 news items for the WTO website. The launch of the annual trade forecast in April and the revised trade forecast in October once again attracted strong media interest and press coverage.

The media team supported the WTO Secretariat's active role at the COP28 climate summit in Dubai by organizing press briefings and news releases highlighting trade's pivotal role in addressing the climate crisis.

The WTO media team approved over 130 requests for registration to the online newsroom, where journalists can access press releases and publications under embargo. The total number of accredited journalists registered stood at 2,062 at the end of 2023.

Participants in an outreach event for Southeast Asian and Pacific journalists organized by the WTO in April 2023 in Bangkok, Thailand.

Contact with the public

- The WTO website attracted record monthly visits of over 3.5 million in 2023, over 9 per cent more than the previous high in 2021.
- WTO-produced video content published on the website and on social media rose 56 per cent in 2023 to a record 108 items.
- The WTO expanded the use of blogs on the website, launching a new series entitled “Data Blog” with interactive charts and access to underlying data.

WTO website

The WTO website attracted a record of over 3.5 million monthly visits in 2023, exceeding the previous high of 3.2 million in 2021. China accounted for the most visits, with 21 per cent, followed by the United States (12.7 per cent) and Russia (5.8 per cent). Total page views rose to 89.8 million, from 81.9 million in 2022. Over 560 news items were published on the site, up nearly 6 per cent from 2022.

Some of the most downloaded files were the WTO’s flagship publications, the “World Trade Statistical Review 2022” (103,000 downloads), the “Annual Report 2023” (over 91,000 downloads) and the “World Trade Report 2022” (87,000 downloads). A new publication – “Global Trade Outlook and Statistics” – was downloaded over 73,000 times and its October update 19,000 times.

WTO videos posted on the website were viewed over 263,000 times in 2023. The most popular video, with over 18,000 views, was “Public Forum Trade 2030: Opening debate”. The “Let’s Talk WTO” video was viewed over 15,100 times and the “Let’s Talk Tariffs” video was viewed over 6,100 times. The “Let’s Talk Trade” series aims at explaining trade topics in everyday language.

Figure 17: Users registered for email alerts by occupation, as of end-2023

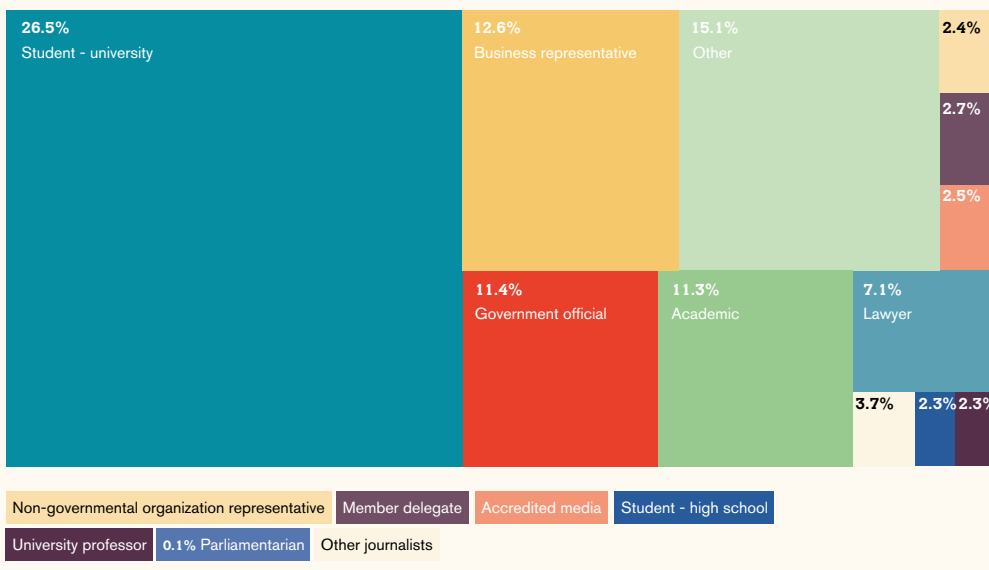
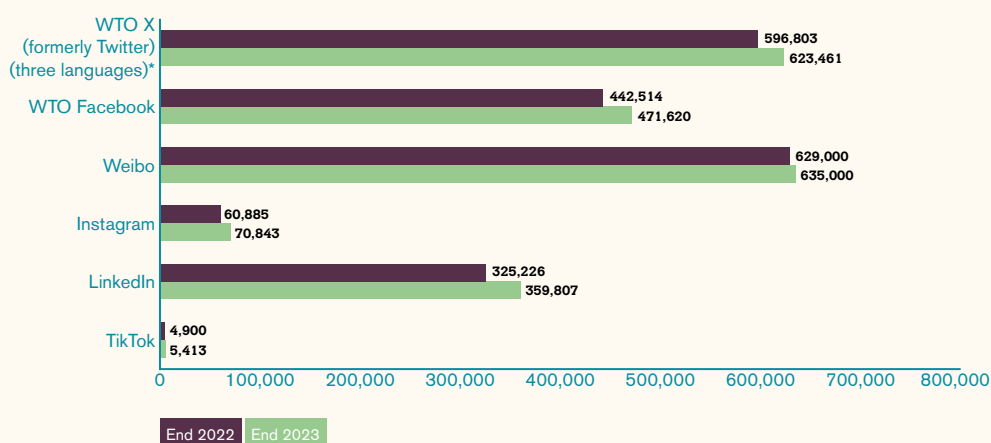


Figure 18: Percentage growth in the number of followers of the WTO on social media platforms



*Either in English only or together with French and Spanish

The WTO expanded the use of blogs on the website in 2023, launching a new series entitled “Data Blog” with interactive charts and comprehensive access to underlying data. A total of 23 blog posts were issued, covering topics ranging from food security to critical minerals. These were viewed 258,000 times. The most popular were “Two years at the WTO: My take on the future of the multilateral trading system” by former DDG Anabel González, viewed 23,650 times, and “What’s the outlook for global trade in 2023?” by Chief Economist Ralph Ossa, which was viewed over 18,100 times.

Some 81,700 people have registered to receive email alerts for WTO news items (see Figure 17). The largest number is from India (10.5 per cent), followed by the United States, Mexico, Peru, Colombia and the United Kingdom

Social media

The number of followers on X (formerly Twitter), LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Weibo and TikTok increased by 5.2 per cent, reaching 2 million (see Figure 18), with the most significant audience expansion occurring during the Public Forum (see page 164).

WTO videos on social media garnered over 1,790,300 views. The most popular featured

Switzerland’s acceptance of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (see page 55), which received over 25,900 views.

After posts covering the DG’s activities and the Public Forum, posts on the adoption of the Fisheries Agreement received the highest number of views and comments (see page 55).

Audio-visual products

There was an increase of 56 per cent in WTO-produced original video content published on the WTO website and social media channels in 2023, registering an all-time high of 108 items. The most viewed videos of 2023 were Switzerland’s acceptance of the WTO Fisheries Agreement (see above), the launch of the “One year of war in Ukraine” report (see page 172), the visit of Ethiopia’s Minister of Trade, Gebremeskel Chalaand, to the WTO in July and a video explainer on the Fisheries Agreement.

The “Let’s Talk Trade” video series resumed in 2023, with three new videos on climate change, food security and the Sustainable Development Goals. The “Let’s Talk Trade” podcast featured a new season focusing on micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and how they overcome trade obstacles.

Video content published with subtitles in English, French or Spanish, making the videos more accessible, registered a 42 per cent increase.

During 2023, the WTO published 32 videos for “Fish TV”, an installation showcasing members’ acceptances of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (see page 55) and contributions to the Fisheries Fund.

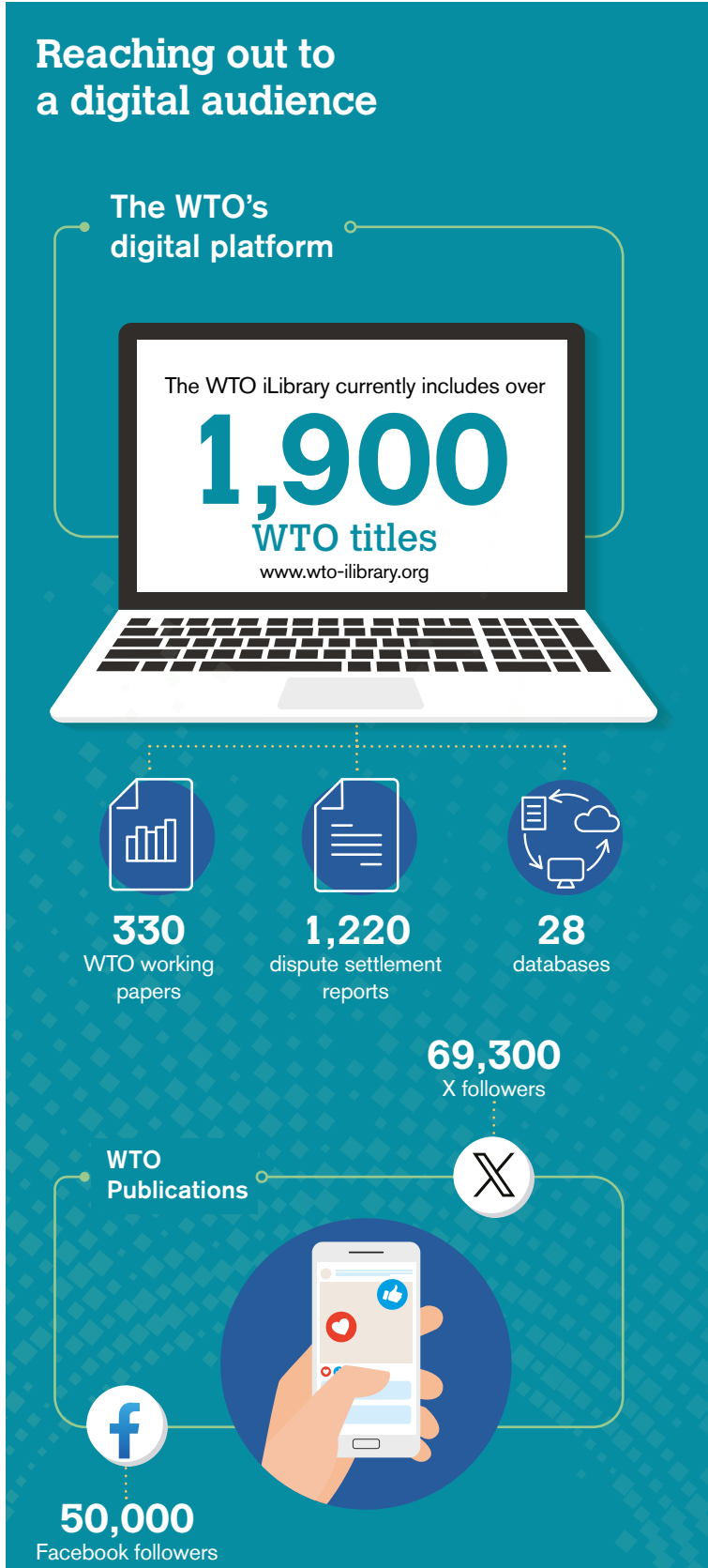
Student group presentations

The number of groups visiting the WTO’s headquarters, Centre William Rappard, rose significantly. In total, 174 presentations were delivered in person and three virtually, involving some 5,550 people, more than double 2022’s 81 presentations to 2,430 people.

The presentations mostly covered the history, functions and general activities of the WTO although a few dealt more specifically with legal affairs, development issues and career opportunities.

The majority of the presentations were held in English – 138. There were 13 in French, ten in Spanish, five in German, three in Korean, two each in Arabic, Russian and Portuguese and one each in Greek and Ukrainian.

There was an increase of 56 per cent in WTO-produced original video content published on the WTO website and social media channels in 2023, registering an all-time high of 108 items.



WTO publications

The WTO issued over 50 publications (in English, French and Spanish) in 2023 on topics ranging from measuring digital trade to trade finance. Most WTO publications can be downloaded freely from the WTO's website while printed copies can be purchased from the WTO Bookshop in Geneva and the WTO Online Bookshop. At the 13th Ministerial Conference in February 2024, a WTO Bookshop featured a variety of publications on global trade.

Flagship publications



Annual Report 2023

ISBN 978-92-870-7429-4 | CHF 60
A comprehensive account of the WTO's activities in 2022 and early 2023, looking at key events, such as the 12th Ministerial Conference, and WTO work in addressing global challenges, including climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and food security.



World Trade Report 2023: Re-globalization for a secure, inclusive and sustainable future

ISBN 978-92-870-7411-9 | CHF 60
The report examines how re-globalization – or increased international cooperation – could address the three major challenges facing today's global economy: national and economic security, poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability.



World Trade Statistical Review 2023

ISBN 9 78-92-870-7420-1 | CHF 60
A comprehensive overview of the latest developments in world trade, featuring key data on global trade in merchandise and commercial services.

Other annual publications



Trade Profiles 2023

ISBN 978-92-870-7393-8 | CHF 60
Key indicators on trade in goods and services for 197 economies. Highlights each economy's major exports and imports and its main trading partners.



World Tariff Profiles 2023

ISBN 978-92-870-7402-7 | CHF 60
Comprehensive information on tariffs and non-tariff measures imposed by over 170 countries and customs territories. Co-published with ITC and UN Trade and Development.



Trade Policy Reviews

CHF 70 per trade policy review
Fifteen Trade Policy Reviews (TPRs), analysing trade policies and practices, were issued in 2023 for Barbados, Brazil, Djibouti, Georgia, Ghana, Guyana, Mexico, Republic of Moldova, New Zealand, Pakistan, Panama, Seychelles, Switzerland and Liechtenstein, United Arab Emirates and United States.



Dispute Settlement Reports

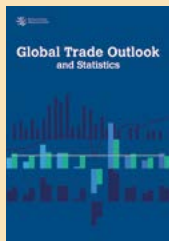
CHF 220
Three volumes were issued in 2023, providing the full texts of panel reports adopted by the WTO in 2022. Co-published with Cambridge University Press.

New publications



One Year of War in Ukraine: Assessing the impact on global trade and development

Digital only | Free
 The war in Ukraine is causing immense human suffering. At the same time, it has delivered another severe challenge to the global economy. This publication examines the implications of the war for global trade and development.



Global Trade Outlook and Statistics

Digital only | Free
 The WTO's April "Global Trade Outlook and Statistics" analyses up to the fourth quarter of 2022 and presents WTO forecasts for world trade in 2023 and 2024.



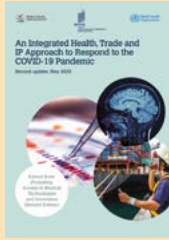
Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement: 10 key results from 2022

Digital only | Free
 This brochure draws together 10 key results from the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee's annual review of members' implementation of the TBT Agreement.



Trade in Services for Development: Fostering sustainable growth and economic diversification

ISBN 978-92-870-7541-3 | CHF 40
 This publication underlines the contribution that trade and investment in services can make to economic growth and development and the importance of re-energizing international cooperation on services trade. Co-published with the World Bank.



An Integrated Health, Trade and IP Approach to Respond to the COVID-19 Pandemic: Second update, May 2023

Digital only | Free
 An updated extract from the second edition of the trilateral study "Promoting Access to Medical Technologies and Innovation", jointly produced by the WHO, WIPO and the WTO.



WTO Dispute Settlement: One-Page Case Summaries (1995-2022)

ISBN 978-92-870-7202-3 | CHF 60
 Provides succinct summaries of every panel and Appellate Body report adopted by the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) up to the end of 2022 as well as summaries of panel reports circulated to WTO members but not yet adopted.



Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade (second edition)

ISBN 978-92-870-7360-0 | CHF 60
 Building on the first edition, the Handbook addresses challenges in measuring digital trade and seeks to establish consistent practices to allow for comparable data across countries. Jointly authored by the WTO, IMF, the OECD and UN Trade and Development.



WTO's Contribution to Attaining UN Sustainable Development Goals: 2023 update to the High-Level Political Forum

Digital only | Free
 The report indicates how trade and the WTO are contributing to SDG Goals 6 (Clean water and sanitation), 7 (Affordable and clean energy), 9 (Industry, innovation and infrastructure), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities) and 17 (Partnerships for the goals).



Making Trade Work for Women: Key findings from the 2022 World Trade Congress on Gender

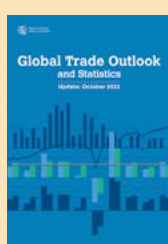
ISBN 978-92-870-4270-5 | CHF 60
 This publication builds on research presented at the World Trade Congress on Gender, held in 2022, which brought together trade and gender experts to present the latest findings on making trade policies more responsive to gender issues.



International Export Regulations and Controls: Navigating the global framework beyond WTO rules

ISBN 978-92-870-7508-6 | CHF 50

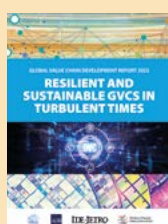
This publication looks into how particular international agreements and conventions operate in practice to regulate the export of high-risk and controlled goods and how these regulations co-exist with WTO rules.



Global Trade Outlook and Statistics – Update: October 2023

Digital only | Free

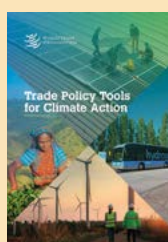
The October 2023 Update analyses up to the second quarter of 2023 and presents updated forecasts for 2023 and 2024.



Global Value Chain Development Report 2023: Resilient and sustainable GVCs in turbulent times

ISBN 978-92-870-7568-0 | CHF 60

This study explores approaches to build resilient GVCs and provides an overview of the most recent trends in GVCs. A joint publication by ADB, IDE-JETRO, UIBE and the WTO.



Trade Policy Tools for Climate Action

Digital only | Free

The publication covers ten policy areas where governments have introduced measures to support the transition to a low-carbon economy, improve the flow of climate-friendly goods and services, decarbonize supply chains, and build resilience to climate change. Launched at COP28 in Dubai.



Digital Trade for Development

ISBN 978-92-870-7544-4 | CHF 30

Digital Trade for Development explores the opportunities and challenges for developing economies arising from digital trade and discusses the role of international cooperation. Co-published by the IMF, OECD, UN Trade and Development, World Bank and the WTO.



International Trade and Green Hydrogen: Supporting the global transition to a low-carbon economy

ISBN 978-92-870-7564-2 | CHF 30

This publication explores how trade policies can support the development of markets in green hydrogen – hydrogen produced exclusively from renewable energy – and help match supply and demand for green hydrogen. Jointly produced by IRENA and the WTO.



Trade Finance in the Mekong Region: A study of Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam

ISBN 978-92-870-7512-3 | CHF 30

This publication presents the results of two surveys undertaken by the IFC in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam and an analysis of the data by the WTO. It is a follow-up to the 2022 publication "Trade Finance in West Africa". Jointly produced by IFC and the WTO.



WTO in Brief

Digital only | Free

This updated version describes, in brief, how the WTO works to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible.



WTO Ministerial Conferences: Key Outcomes (2nd edition)

ISBN 9781009444705 | CHF 40 (Paperback)

The publication contains all of the key outcomes – including ministerial decisions and chairs' statements – from the 12 WTO ministerial conferences held up until 2022. Co-published with Cambridge University Press.

Economic research activities

- The WTO's flagship "World Trade Report" explored how re-globalization – increased international cooperation and broader integration – can support security, inclusiveness and environmental sustainability.
- With the IMF, the OECD and the World Bank, the WTO launched the Joint Subsidy Platform (JSP) to enhance transparency in governments' use of subsidies.
- An IMF, OECD, UN Trade and Development, World Bank and WTO report discussed how international cooperation can help tackle the opportunities and challenges for developing economies arising from digital trade.

World Trade Report 2023: Re-globalization for a secure, inclusive and sustainable future

The WTO's flagship publication, the World Trade Report 2023, presents new evidence of the benefits of broader, more inclusive economic integration as early indications of trade fragmentation resulting from geopolitical tensions threaten to hamper growth and development.

The report examines the relationship between economic integration and three major challenges facing today's global economic order – security and resilience, poverty and inclusiveness, and environmental sustainability. It makes the case that re-globalization – a renewed drive towards integrating more people, economies and pressing issues such as climate change into world trade – is a more promising solution than fragmentation or unilateralism. "The WTO is not perfect – far from it. But the case for strengthening the trading system is far stronger than the case for walking away from it," DG Okonjo-Iweala said in her foreword to the report.

Introducing the report at the WTO's Public Forum in September, WTO Chief Economist Ralph Ossa said: "The main conclusion is that we need to embrace trade instead of rejecting it if we want to overcome the most pressing challenges of our time."

Subsidies, trade and international cooperation

The IMF, the OECD, the World Bank and the WTO launched the Joint Subsidy Platform (JSP) – www.subsidydata.org – to enhance transparency regarding governments' use of subsidies. The platform is intended to facilitate access to information on the nature, size and economic impact of subsidies.

Digital trade for development

A joint IMF, OECD, UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), World Bank and WTO report – "Digital trade for development" – was launched in December at UNCTAD eWeek 2023. It delves into the transformative effects of digital trade on developing economies and the pivotal role of international cooperation in harnessing the opportunities that come with it, while addressing the accompanying challenges.

In July, the WTO and the World Bank presented a joint policy note – "Turning digital trade into a catalyst for African development" – examining the challenges and opportunities and laying out the activities the international community is undertaking.

Trade Cost Index

In a working paper, the Economic Research and Statistics Division used the WTO Trade Cost Index to estimate the impact of digital technology adoption and digital regulation on trade costs, emphasizing the role of an open regulatory framework, including open access, for reaping the benefits of digital technologies. The index was also used to show how Trade Facilitation Agreement (see page 110) commitments significantly facilitated trade in manufactured products between high-income economies and low- and middle-income economies.

Wheat dashboards and food security

In May 2023, a series of dashboards on wheat maritime trade were released. The dashboards, developed jointly with the International Grain Council (IGC), provide comprehensive weekly updates on international seaborne wheat trade flows, which constitutes more than 80 per cent of total traded volumes.

The dashboards respond to WTO members' request for regular updates on trade and market developments, included in the MC12 declaration on the emergency response to food insecurity.

Global value chains

Global value chains (GVCs) continued to expand in 2022. This bodes well for

spreading the benefits of trade to more firms, workers and developing economies, according to the GVC Development Report 2023, issued in November. The report was compiled by the Asian Development Bank, the Institute of Developing Economies – Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO), the Research Institute for Global Value Chains at the University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, and the WTO.

However, the report also flags increasing risks from dependence on a small number of economies for certain products and highlights the vulnerability of GVCs to rising trade tensions and global crises. On sustainability, the report provides a framework that traces greenhouse gas emissions along GVCs and proposes a conceptual approach to make GVCs more environmentally friendly.

Key findings from the 2023 World Trade Report



Scepticism towards international trade in global policymaking has been growing, leading to setbacks in regional trade integration efforts and a shift towards unilateral trade policies. The impact of rising trade tensions is evident in current trade flows slowly becoming reoriented along geopolitical lines.



Despite these developments, claims of de-globalization are exaggerated. International trade has exhibited remarkable resilience, recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and adapting to the war in Ukraine. Trade policy has made significant progress, and the WTO has played an important role in this progress.



Re-globalization offers immense potential for inclusive growth. Trade plays a pivotal role in promoting global economic convergence, poverty reduction and economic inclusion. It can offer environmental dividends by encouraging inherently greener trade methods.





WTO Chief Economist Ralph Ossa presents WTO Essay Award for Young Economists to Xiao Ma of Peking University.

WTO Essay Award for Young Economists

The winner of the 2023 WTO Essay Award for Young Economists was Xiao Ma of Peking University HSBC Business School for his paper “College Expansion, Trade, and Innovation: Evidence from China”. He was presented with his prize of CHF 5,000 at the annual meeting of the European Trade Study Group at the University of Surrey in Guildford (United Kingdom) on 14 September.

Xiao Ma’s paper looks into the link between trade openness and education policy. He shows that China’s education policy – and in particular the dramatic expansion of college enrolment since 1999 – led to a considerable increase in manufacturing firms’ innovation, especially among exporting firms.

He calculates that the influx of college-educated workers accounts for 72 per cent of the increase in China’s manufacturing research and development (R&D) between 2003 and 2018 and also triggered a sizeable portion of the skills upgrading of exporters. The paper shows that without trade openness, the impact of this education policy change on China’s innovation and production would have been 10-30 per cent lower. In the view of the selection panel, Xiao Ma’s paper increases understanding of the policies that can lead to more technologically sophisticated exports.

Xiao Ma is Chinese. He received his Ph.D. in Economics from the University of California, San Diego, in 2021. He is currently Assistant Professor of Economics at Peking University HSBC Business School.

Selection panel

The Selection Panel comprised Beata Javorcik (Professor of Economics, University of Oxford), Ralph Ossa (Director, Economic Research and Statistics Division, WTO), Robert Staiger (Professor of Economics, Dartmouth University) and Alberto Trejos (Professor of Economics, INCAE Business School). Roberta Piermartini (Economic Research and Statistics Division, WTO) coordinated the work of the panel.



Statistics activities

- The WTO, with the IMF, OECD and UN Trade and Development, published a revised “Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade” to address demand for better statistics on digital trade.
- The WTO Secretariat launched the first dataset on digitally delivered services exports showing that global exports rose almost fourfold since 2005 to reach US\$ 3.82 trillion in 2022.
- The WTO released with the OECD a Balanced Trade in Services dataset covering bilateral services exports and imports of over 200 economies.

Background

The Economic Research and Statistics Division supports WTO members and the WTO Secretariat with data on economic and trade policy issues, technical advisory services on market access negotiations and the maintenance of schedules of commitments. The division is the principal supplier of WTO trade statistics and information on tariffs and non-tariff measures. It provides technical assistance and is the focal point for contributions to inter-organizational statistical activities.

Statistical developments

The WTO, with the IMF, OECD and UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), published a revised “Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade”, first issued in 2019. Its goal is to meet demand for better statistics on digital trade and to ensure that developing economies are not left behind in this regard.

The WTO Secretariat launched the first ever dataset on digitally delivered services, including business, professional and computer services, showing that global exports recorded an almost fourfold increase in value since 2005 to reach US\$ 3.82 trillion in 2022, representing 54 per cent of total global services exports.

The WTO and the OECD released the Balanced Trade in Services dataset, covering bilateral services exports and imports of over 200 economies from 2005 to 2021, for 17 categories of services.

The WTO released a series of information notes on trade in intermediate goods to monitor trends in supply chains, with a special note focusing on Africa. The latest data covering 2010 to 2021 indicates an expansion in Africa’s trade in intermediate goods but with exports concentrated in a few economies and a comparatively narrow range of products.

The “World Trade Statistical Review 2023”, the WTO’s flagship statistical publication, provided a series of key indicators on trade in goods and services while “World Tariff Profiles 2023” provides information on tariffs and non-tariff measures. The special topics of the publication

Chief Economist
Ralph Ossa
announces the
WTO’s trade forecast
at a press conference
in October 2023.

were the evolution of market access over 16 years of “World Tariff Profiles” and an analysis of how the product classification system used by the WTO for trade statistics simplifies the analysis of trade trends.

Several data blogs were launched in 2023 in cooperation with other divisions of the WTO, covering issues such as trade in medical goods, seaborne wheat and energy-related critical minerals.

In May 2023, the WTO launched the Global Trade Data Portal, allowing users to monitor supply chain activities. It gives advance warning of potential disruptions with the release, among other things, of new dashboards on seaborne trade in wheat (see page 175) to improve market transparency at a time of food insecurity.

Statistical capacity building and international cooperation

Under the joint WTO-OECD-UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) project which concluded in July 2023 statistical training and technical assistance was provided to expand coverage of Africa in trade in value added databases.

The WTO Secretariat organized the first regional workshop on measuring digital trade for Arab countries, with the IMF, OECD and UNCTAD, and in cooperation with the United Nations Statistics Division, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia and the Arab Institute for Training and Research in Statistics.

WTO statisticians contributed to joint online courses with UNCTAD, the United Nations and statistical agencies in developing economies, sharing knowledge on best practice in data collection and analysis of trade statistics.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Trade Monitor, launched by the WTO, UNCTAD and the ITC in 2020, was regularly updated. The monitor aims to improve understanding of the relationship between trade and development.

Knowledge management

- The Knowledge Management Division extended its knowledge retention and handover initiative, which seeks to mitigate the loss of critical knowledge through employee departures and internal transfers.
- The Division prioritized collaboration and knowledge-sharing, with its Knowledge Management Section (KMS) conducting 21 knowledge-sharing events.

During 2023, work advanced on the Knowledge Retention, Transfer and Handover (KRTH) initiative, which seeks to mitigate the risk of critical knowledge loss through employee departures or internal transfers. A total of 27 retirees across 13 WTO divisions participated in interviews, offering insights into their extensive experience, or completed the Knowledge Codification Tool, a valuable resource for documenting and organizing retiring staff’s expertise.

KMD finalized the KRTH Guide and Toolkit publications, which were launched in early 2024. These publications will help staff with knowledge management and transfer within their units.

The KMD prioritized collaboration and knowledge-sharing through various outreach events. It conducted 21 knowledge-sharing events. These included various “*Entre nous*” sessions, where WTO experts share reflections on topics such as trade finance and trade’s role in the SDGs, and supporting the Presidential Lecture Series (see page 160) in collaboration with other divisions. It also co-hosted “Book Talks” with the Library, which provided authors with an opportunity to share their research with Secretariat staff.

In 2023, the KMD/WCP Research and Knowledge Hub seminar series, a key platform for engagement between the WTO Secretariat and external partners,



including academics and the WTO Chairs Programme (see page 180), covered critical topics such as world trade and investment law, environmental law, gender equality and the SDGs. Over 1,000 people attended the various events, most of them online.

DG Okonjo-Iweala and Kim Stanley Robinson, author of *The Ministry for the Future*, discuss the international trade system and the climate crisis.

Records and archives management

The Records and Archives Management Section (RAMS) is in the second phase of implementing an electronic document and records management system. This is a key aspect of the 2024 digital transformation workplan and is designed to integrate electronic records and archives management into work processes to increase operational efficiency.

In 2023, RAMS also contributed to enhancing transparency by improving digital access to historic GATT documents.

WTO Library

The Library's digital transformation continued with over 800 new posts on its website, with recommendations for what users might want to read and resources they might find useful. The Library has posted over 3,300 such recommendations since 2019. Both the trade resources portal, which includes trade monitoring, news and trade data, and the member resource pages, with links to the latest information on WTO members, continued to expand in 2023.

Together with the Information and External Relations Division and the Agriculture Division, the Library co-organized "Meet the Author" events, hosting sessions open to external participation.

Cooperation with academic institutions

- The WTO Chairs Programme (WCP) issued a call for applications in October to expand the programme's network of academic institutions from developing economies and least-developed countries.
- The Annual WCP Conference in June focused on the latest developments in implementation of MC12 outcomes, enabling the chairs to align their work with the priorities of WTO members.

Background

The WTO Chairs Programme (WCP), launched in 2010, aims to promote research relating to international trade by academics that responds to the needs of policymakers in developing economies and least developed countries. Chair-holders are selected through a competitive process. The main objectives of the WCP are to create a network fostering research on trade issues, to provide teaching support for the development of courses on trade policy, to organize outreach activities to disseminate research, and to provide policy advice to governmental and other stakeholders. The WCP is funded by the WTO's Global Trust Fund, with contributions from Australia, Austria, France and the Republic of Korea.

Global and regional academic networks

The WTO Chairs Programme issued a call for applications in October to expand the programme's network of academic institutions from developing economies and least-developed countries in a number of



DG Okonjo-Iweala speaking at the Annual Conference of the WTO Chairs Programme in June 2023.

target regions currently under-represented in the Chairs Programme.

Attending a meeting of the network of Latin American and Caribbean chairs, hosted by the Universidad Nacional de Costa Rica, DDG Xiangchen Zhang stated: "As members work to implement MC12 outcomes and deliver more results at MC13 and beyond, the Chairs Network has a vital role to play in relaying to us the real problems and needs on the ground that should inform our agenda in Geneva."

Hosted by the chair in Mauritius, the network of African WTO chairs organized a virtual conference addressing digital trade issues in Africa, with Ambassador Usha Dwarka-Canabady (Mauritius), facilitator of the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce (see page 80), participating.

In Asia, the chairs in Viet Nam and Chinese Taipei each organized a high-level conference focusing on the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement (see page 55). In addition, the network of WTO chairs from Asia also gathered at the 22nd Annual Conference on the WTO and China to discuss issues concerning WTO reform and the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13). On a visit to Viet Nam, DG Okonjo-Iweala acknowledged the "very constructive role" the chair at the Foreign Trade University, Viet Nam, had played in supporting the government in securing outcomes at MC12 in June 2022.

The Annual Conference of the WCP in Geneva in June 2023 brought together new and long-standing programme chairs, as well as members of the WCP Academic Advisory Board. It focused on the latest developments in implementation of MC12 outcomes, enabling the chairs to align their work with the priorities of WTO members, particularly on fisheries subsidies, digital trade and e-commerce, investment facilitation and sustainability.

DG Okonjo-Iweala urged chairs to support their governments in ratifying the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement. The chairs and board members also met with WTO ambassadors from various WTO trade groups to discuss members' priorities for research, customized training and targeted outreach.

Activities of the Chairs Programme

In 2023, the chairs implemented numerous new courses on international trade, resulting in the highest number of students pursuing trade-related studies at WTO chair universities since the inception of the programme. Over 4,200 students benefited from the 55 new courses introduced at these universities.

The chairs' advice to governments spanned different emerging issues in preparation for MC13, including digital trade and e-commerce, food security and agriculture subsidies, and global value chains.

Impact of the WTO Chairs Programme



“ I believe there would be benefit in admitting a smaller number of candidates more frequently. This will allow us to make the Programme even more representational, enhance its visibility and generate more momentum in the Chairs network and with members.”

Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

“ France is a major donor to the WCP, a programme that we very much appreciate. Firstly, because we want to encourage a reasoned, scientific debate on trade policy. This cannot remain the business of a few experts in Geneva. It is through the exchange and confrontation of our respective experiences, of our divergences of approaches ... that we will be able to develop common solutions.”

Ambassador Etienne Oudot de Dainville, Permanent Representative of France to the WTO

“ Austria’s contribution (to the WTO Chairs Programme) is of utmost importance for strengthening the understanding of trade issues in developing countries and LDCs. Keeping markets open and promoting a level playing field in multilateral trade – especially during these challenging times – can strongly contribute to boosting economic growth and creating jobs in these countries, for the benefit of all.”

Cynthia Zimmerman, Director-General of Austria’s Ministry for Labour and Economic Affairs

“ The WCP creates institutional competence by training the trainers of government officials. The aim is to ensure that the officials’ expertise ... (remains) even if they move. This focus on sustainability and endurance is a distinct strength of the Chairs Programme.”

Ambassador Seong Deok Yun, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea to Geneva

“ The Chairs’ work helps to inform us all, not just developing countries, but also developed countries and developed country donors in order to make better policy decisions and to have our deliberations be more effective, more informed and more targeted towards the needs of our stakeholders in country and globally.”

Jeremy Green, Deputy Permanent Representative of Australia to the WTO

Academic support programmes

In 2023, four students from Brazil, India, Nigeria and Uzbekistan participated in the WTO’s PhD support programme. This programme aims to enhance academic expertise in developing economies on WTO-related matters, to improve the

quality of research undertaken and to establish links between PhD students and Secretariat staff and Geneva delegations.

The WTO co-hosted the final round of the 21st edition of the John H. Jackson Moot Court Competition on WTO Law, which took place in June (see page 135).

Universities participating in the WTO Chairs Programme



Phase I and II chairs established in 2010 and 2014

1 Argentina

Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences

2 Barbados

University of the West Indies

3 Benin

University Abomey-Calavi

4 Brazil

Getulio Vargas Foundation, São Paulo School of Economics

5 China

Shanghai University of International Business and Economics

6 Chile

University of Chile

7 Indonesia

Universitas Gadjah Mada

8 Jordan

University of Jordan

9 Kenya

University of Nairobi

10 Mauritius

University of Mauritius

11 Mexico

Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México

12 Morocco

Mohammed V University Souissi

13 Oman

Sultan Qaboos University

14 Russian Federation

St Petersburg State University

15 Senegal

Cheikh Anta Diop University

16 Singapore

National University of Singapore

17 South Africa

North-West University

18 Tunisia

University of Tunis, Tunis Business School

19 Türkiye

Istanbul Bilgi University





Phase III chairs established in 2021

- Phase I and II chairs established in 2010 and 2014
- Phase III chairs established in 2021

20 Cameroon
 Université de Yaoundé II

21 China
 University of International Business and Economics

22 Colombia
 Universidad de los Andes

23 Costa Rica
 Universidad Nacional

24 Ecuador
 Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar Sede

25 Egypt
 Cairo University

26 India
 Indian Institute of Foreign Trade

27 Lesotho
 National University of Lesotho

28 Nepal
 Kathmandu University School of Management

29 Pakistan
 Lahore School of Economics

30 Peru
 Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

31 Rwanda
 University of Rwanda

32 Chinese Taipei
 "National Taiwan University"

33 Tanzania
 Trade Policy Training Centre in Africa

34 Uzbekistan
 The University of World Economy and Diplomacy of Uzbekistan

35 Viet Nam
 Foreign Trade University



4

Who we are



The WTO is run by its member governments. All major decisions are made by the membership as a whole, either by ministers (who meet at least once every two years) or by their ambassadors

or delegates (who meet regularly at the WTO's headquarters in Geneva). Decisions are normally taken by consensus. The WTO Secretariat coordinates the activities of the WTO.



A meeting of the Trade Negotiations Committee in December 2023.

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In brief



Director-General

Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala took office as WTO Director-General on 1 March 2021. She is the first woman and the first African to serve as Director-General.



Membership

The WTO has 164 members, accounting for 98 per cent of world trade. All members have joined the system as a result of negotiations and therefore membership means a balance of rights and obligations.

Over 20 countries are currently negotiating to join the organization.



Budget

The WTO derives most of the income for its annual budget from contributions by its members. These contributions are based on a formula that takes into account each member's share of international trade.



WTO Secretariat

The WTO has approximately 630 staff on its regular budget and is headed by a Director-General. The main duties of the Secretariat are to support the WTO's various councils and committees, to provide technical assistance to developing economies, to monitor developments in world trade, to disseminate information about WTO activities and to organize ministerial conferences. The Secretariat also provides legal assistance in the dispute settlement process and advises governments wishing to join the WTO.

Secretariat staff include individuals representing 84 nationalities. It is composed mostly of economists, lawyers and specialists in international trade policy, communications, statistics, language services and other areas. The working languages of the WTO are English, French and Spanish.



How the organization is structured

Unlike some other international organizations, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, power is not delegated to a board of directors or the organization's head. The WTO's main decision-making body is the Ministerial Conference, which meets usually every two years.

The General Council, which meets several times a year in Geneva, is the highest decision-making body outside of ministerial conferences. It meets as the Dispute Settlement Body to oversee procedures for settling disputes between members and as the Trade Policy Review Body to discuss members' trade policies and practices. Numerous councils, committees, working groups and working parties deal with the individual WTO agreements and other specific issues, such as the environment, development and membership applications.

The Atrium of the WTO building.



WTO Secretariat

- The Transformation Office, established in 2022, implemented targeted policy and process improvements to ensure a more adaptive and agile WTO Secretariat to meet evolving work needs.
- As of 31 December, the WTO employed 604 staff members on fixed-term and regular contracts, down from 623 the year before. Of the professional staff, 49 per cent were women, up from 48 per cent in 2022.

Background

As international civil servants, WTO staff members are required to discharge their duties solely with the interest and objectives of the WTO in view. Staff members may neither seek nor accept any instruction relating to the performance of their duties from any government or other entity or person external to the WTO. The recruitment policy of the WTO aims to attract and retain staff with the highest standards of competence, efficiency and integrity.

The Transformation Office introduced a series of targeted improvements in policies and processes across the Secretariat in 2023 (see below).

The WTO's recruitment activity in 2023 resulted in 27 fixed-term appointments. As of 31 December, the WTO employed 604 staff members on fixed-term and regular contracts funded from the regular budget, down from 623 in 2022.

Figure 1: WTO staff on regular budget by grade and gender, as of 31 December 2023



Professional staff account for 64 per cent of the total regular budget staffing, and support service staff for 36 per cent. Women continue to outnumber men at the WTO, by 334 to 270 (see Figure 1). Of the professional staff, 49 per cent are female and 51 per cent male (see Figure 2), compared to 48 and 52 per cent, respectively, in 2022. Men outnumber women at director levels (see Figure 1).

WTO Secretariat staff come from 84 different WTO members, showing the geographical diversity of WTO staff (see Figure 4).

Figure 2: Percentage of WTO staff by professional/support category



Positions continued to be systematically advertised through social media outlets, such as LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter) and Facebook, to attract a deep pool of qualified candidates. Out of 28 external vacancies issued in 2023, there were on average 320 applicants for every vacancy.

Seventeen young professionals joined the Young Professionals Programme in January 2023 (see page 151). The group included professionals from Barbados, Côte d'Ivoire, Guatemala, Guyana, Jamaica, Kenya, Moldova, Nepal, Nigeria, Panama, Saint Lucia, Singapore, South Africa, Chinese Taipei, Togo, Ukraine and Zimbabwe. They were selected from more than 3,000 candidates following a competitive selection process. The programme aims to increase the number of professionals from under-represented developing economies and least-developed countries.

The second phase of the Workday Implementation and Service Enhancement (WISE) project, a cloud-based platform launched in 2021, is extending its scope to include performance management, rewards and recognition, and learning and development. WISE underscores a commitment to modernize HR operations for increased effectiveness, transparency and adaptability.

New recruit Maimouna Diatta



**French Translator –
Language and
Documentation
Services Division**

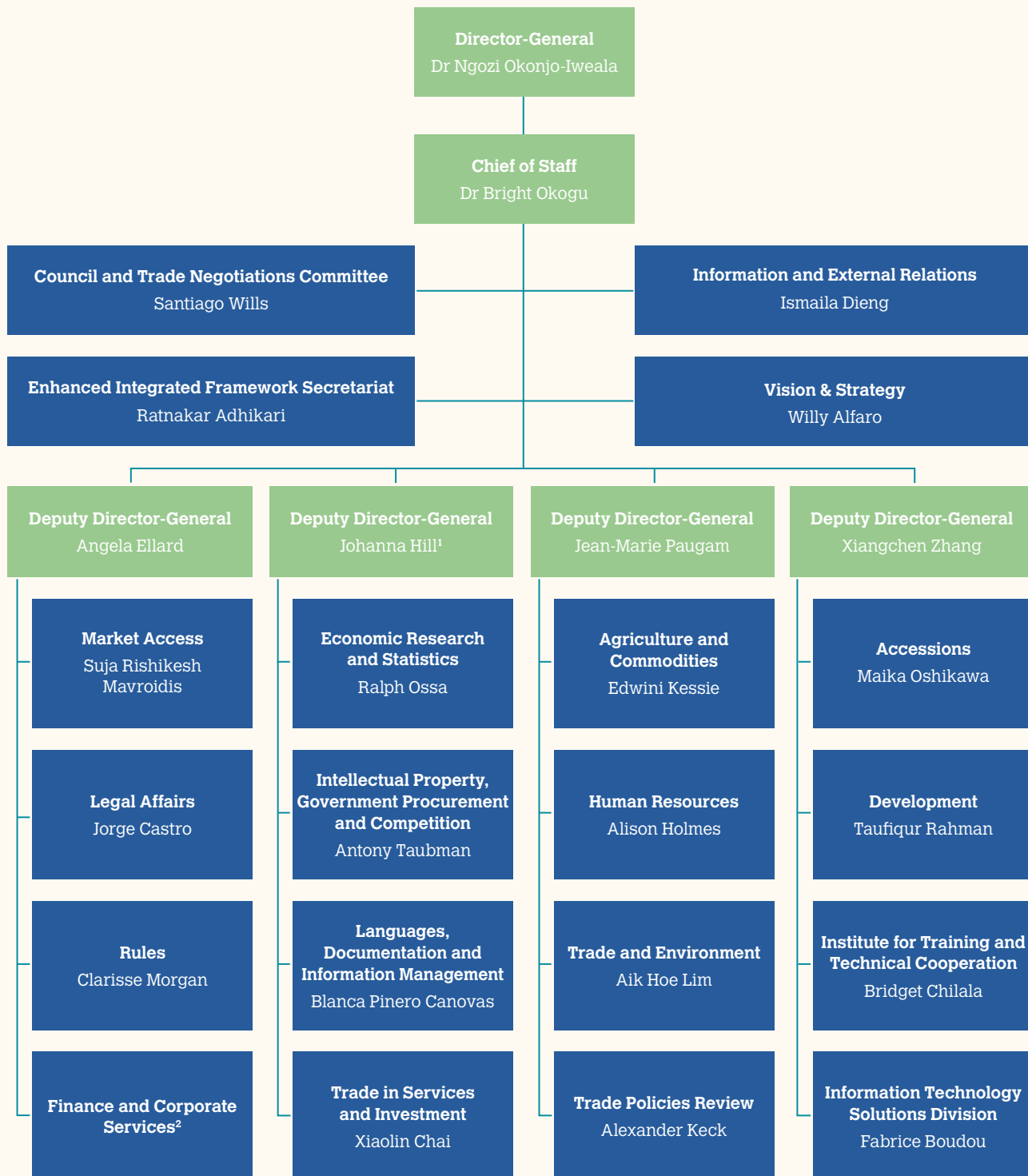
Nationality:
Senegalese
Joining date:
1 June 2023

I joined the Language and Documentation Services Division (LDS) in 2023. I work with the French translation section, where I translate from English and Spanish into French a wide range of documents relating to topics covered at the WTO.

Before relocating to Geneva, I worked for the Language Services Unit of the Africa Rice Center (AfricaRice), an international agricultural research organization, headquartered in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Its purpose is to develop innovations and transform agrifood systems in the rice sector to contribute to food self-sufficiency and fight poverty in Africa in the light of the current climate crisis.

Working with my colleagues from LDS expands continuously my knowledge and understanding of the WTO and its activities. I am proud to be part of this team, where I contribute to the production of multilingual official documents intended for all WTO members.

Figure 3: WTO Secretariat organizational chart, as of May 2024



¹ Ms Anabel González was DDG until August 2023.

² Nthisana Phillips was Director until 23 June 2023.

Figure 4: WTO staff on regular budget by member and gender as of 31 December 2023

Regional group	Member	Women	Men	Grand Total
Africa		22	22	44
	Benin	–	3	3
	Burundi	–	1	1
	Cameroon	1	–	1
	Congo, Democratic Republic of the	2	2	4
	Egypt	3	1	4
	Gambia	2	–	2
	Ghana	1	–	1
	Guinea	–	1	1
	Kenya	3	–	3
	Malawi	–	1	1
	Mauritius	–	3	3
	Morocco	–	3	3
	Nigeria	1	1	2
	Rwanda	–	1	1
	Senegal	1	1	2
	South Africa	–	1	1
	Tanzania	2	–	2
	Tunisia	2	2	4
	Uganda	1	1	2
Zambia	1	–	1	
Zimbabwe	2	–	2	
Asia		25	39	64
Armenia	1	–	1	
Bangladesh	–	1	1	
China	7	6	13	
India	2	10	12	
Japan	2	4	6	
Jordan	1	–	1	
Korea, Republic of	4	–	4	
Malaysia	–	2	2	
Nepal	–	1	1	
Pakistan	–	3	3	
Philippines	5	7	12	
Singapore	–	1	1	
Sri Lanka	2	–	2	
Tajikistan	–	1	1	
Türkiye	1	3	4	
Europe		229	151	380
Austria	1	2	3	
Belgium	3	2	5	
Bulgaria	2	4	6	
Croatia	1	–	1	
Czech Republic	1	–	1	
Denmark	1	1	2	
Latin America		33	29	62
Estonia	1	–	1	
Finland	2	2	4	
France	89	63	152	
Germany	9	15	24	
Greece	4	1	5	
Hungary	1	2	3	
Ireland	11	–	11	
Italy	14	11	25	
Lithuania	–	1	1	
Netherlands	–	3	3	
Poland	1	2	3	
Portugal	–	4	4	
Romania	4	–	4	
Russian Federation	5	1	6	
Spain	35	10	45	
Sweden	2	2	4	
Switzerland	10	11	21	
Ukraine	2	–	2	
United Kingdom	30	14	44	
Argentina	5	3	8	
Bolivia	–	2	2	
Brazil	6	7	13	
Chile	2	1	3	
Colombia	2	5	7	
Costa Rica	1	1	2	
Dominica	1	–	1	
Dominican Republic	1	–	1	
Ecuador	2	1	3	
El Salvador	2	–	2	
Guatemala	2	–	2	
Honduras	2	–	2	
Jamaica	1	–	1	
Paraguay	1	–	1	
Peru	3	4	7	
Saint Lucia	–	1	1	
Trinidad and Tobago	2	–	2	
Uruguay	–	1	1	
Venezuela	–	3	3	
North America		23	22	45
Canada	4	9	13	
Mexico	2	5	7	
United States of America	17	8	25	
Oceania		2	7	9
Australia	2	7	9	
Grand Total		334	270	604

Learning and development programme

In 2023, the learning and development programme continued to advance key recommendations from the transformation exercise (see below). With respect to digitalization, webinars were conducted on trade policy and digitalization, demystifying AI and data visualization.

A skills identification exercise was undertaken via a series of focus groups involving stakeholders at all levels of the Secretariat. The aim was to define current and future skillsets and develop an inventory of technical skills, building on the work undertaken by the Transformation Office.

Regarding diversity and inclusion, a series of webinars and other activities were conducted to highlight various international awareness days, including “What it means to be LGBTQ” (Zero Discrimination Day – 1 March) and “Shifting Perceptions” (International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination – 21 March).

A new Advanced Coaching Programme for Managers aimed at improving managers’ ability to enhance staff performance.

Transformation exercise

The transformation exercise aims to equip the WTO Secretariat with the required skills, experience and tools to serve members’ needs effectively, and the capacity to evolve as those needs and the world change.

The Transformation Office is responsible for driving the overall transformation programme and ensuring staff engagement and the implementation of change. Programme oversight is provided by the Transformation Steering Committee chaired by the DG and composed of the Chief of Staff and the four DDGs.

Phase 1 of the programme was launched in 2022. In 2023, new procurement and rewards policies were implemented, and progress was made in the drafting of new promotion and recruitment policies.

The Transformation Office and small teams of staff volunteers also worked on career pathways and initiatives to increase staff mobility. A new Chief Ethics, Risk and Compliance Officer was recruited. Notable progress was made in digital transformation (see below).

Vision & Strategy

Phase 2 of transformation work began in March 2023. A Director of Vision & Strategy was appointed to lead this part of the work. Wide-ranging consultations with staff, members and external experts helped shape this phase and identify key elements for future work. As a first outcome, the Steering Committee adopted a Secretariat Strategy House, including vision and mission statements.

The Strategy House provides a framework and future direction for the Secretariat. The five strategic pillars underpin the Secretariat’s vision and mission. They are interconnected, long-term goals and guiding principles that reflect existing strengths and activities and inform how the Secretariat will operate going forward. All of the pillars are supported by two foundations, or “enablers”, which aim to ensure the Secretariat has the right people, skills, workplace culture, data and technological tools to achieve its vision and mission.

The Strategy House provides the starting point for developing a Secretariat Strategy 2030, which members have requested. Over 80 staff members worked together to consider evolving global trends, what these could mean for the WTO and the work of the Secretariat, and to further develop the strategic pillars and enablers in light of these considerations.

The Secretariat completed its research phase into how AI could be used in tandem with modern search engines to make content in WTO documents and databases more accessible.

Table 1: Allocation of posts by division, as of 31 December 2023 (number of posts)*

	Grades 1-10	Senior Management and Directors	Total
Senior Management (DG, DDGs and their advisors & assistants)	8.0	5.0	13.0
Accessions Division	11.0	1.0	12.0
Finance and Corporate Services Division	65.0	1.0	66.0
Agriculture and Commodities Division	20.8	1.0	21.8
Council and TNC Division	13.0	1.0	14.0
Development Division	18.6	1.0	19.6
Economic Research and Statistics Division	37.4	1.0	38.4
Human Resources Division	27.0	1.0	28.0
Information and External Relations Division	29.3	1.0	30.3
Information Technology Solutions Division	39.8	1.0	40.8
Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation	30.3	1.0	31.3
Intellectual Property, Government Procurement and Competition Division	16.3	1.0	17.3
Knowledge and Information Management, Academic Outreach and WTO Chairs Programme	16.8	1.0	17.8
Language and Documentation Services Division	98.7	1.0	99.7
Legal Affairs Division	31.0	1.0	32.0
Market Access Division	20.0	1.0	21.0
Office of Internal Oversight	2.0	0.0	2.0
Office of the Director-General	15.8	2.0	17.8
Office of Vision and Strategy	0.0	1.0	1.0
Rules Division	35.6	1.0	36.6
Trade and Environment Division	19.6	1.0	20.6
Trade in Services and Investment Division	14.1	1.0	15.1
Trade Policies Review Division	48.4	1.0	49.4
Grand Total	618.5	27.0	645.5

*Includes posts not yet filled. Figures in decimals indicate staff members who work a percentage of the working week (e.g., 80 per cent).

New recruit

Tomasz Gonciarz



**Data Analyst,
Economic Research
and Statistics
Division**

Nationality:

Polish

Joining date:

16 October 2023

Before joining the WTO, I was a data scientist with a major airline and a food manufacturer, working with large databases, delivering impactful data insights and building sophisticated machine learning models.

Despite not having a background in international trade, I have been warmly welcomed by my colleagues, who generously share their expertise. The collaborative environment has allowed me to deepen my understanding of trade policies.

New technologies will change the way the world trades. I'll be very happy to help our division stay at the forefront of evolving technologies and try to implement them in our processes. Since joining, I've been involved in implementing automated external data sourcing, conducting statistical analysis of most-favoured nation terms in global trade and processing integrated database submissions.

As a proud representative from Poland, I am honoured to be part of an organization with a global impact, and I look forward to contributing to the WTO's mission in the years to come.

These inputs will serve as a basis for developing the Secretariat Strategy 2030, which will be delivered in 2024.

WTO members received updates on the transformation exercise through regular reports to the General Council and the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration.

Digitalization initiatives

The WTO Secretariat extended the use of eAgenda, which supports information exchanges between WTO members ahead of meetings, to various committees in 2023, including the Council for Trade in Goods, the Committee on Rules of Origin and the Committee on Government Procurement.

Tools to help members submit notifications and raise specific trade concerns were improved, including for the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Committee and the Technical Barriers to Trade Committee, where the tool is known as ePing.

The Secretariat relaunched the digital "questions & answers" tool allowing members to ask questions about trade policies and to reply ahead of Trade Policy Review meetings (see page 124). It also unveiled the first phase of the new e-Delegate platform, a tool allowing delegates to register interest in specific committees and indicate the services they wish to receive.

The Secretariat completed its research phase into how AI could be used in tandem with modern search engines to make content in WTO documents and databases more accessible.

For translation services and documents control, the Secretariat made progress in developing a new custom-built system which will replace the current system in 2024. The Secretariat will also keep investigating how generative AI – AI capable of creating text, images or other data – could be deployed to streamline work processes.

Several international organizations were targets of serious cybersecurity attacks in 2023. The Secretariat collaborated with its UN counterparts to share knowledge and continued upgrading its defences and enhancing staff vigilance.

The Secretariat created a digital transformation advisory group with staff from various divisions to advise management on priority projects for improving services to the Secretariat's stakeholders and achieving efficiency gains.

Office of Internal Oversight

The Office of Internal Oversight (OIO) is an independent office, both functionally and operationally. It assists the DG in fulfilling her oversight responsibilities in respect of management, staff and resources by conducting internal audits, inspections, investigations, evaluations and other forms of independent assessment.

The Office reports annually to the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration (see page 196).

In 2023, the Office worked with the WTO Secretariat to strengthen internal controls, improve financial efficiency and effectiveness and promote a culture of integrity. The OIO promoted the WTO's independent confidential reporting line, the Integrity Line, which enables staff and anyone else with a concern to speak up safely, including anonymously, to raise issues and to help strengthen a culture of integrity.

New recruit

Christian Steidl



Economic Affairs Officer, Development Division

Nationality:

German

Joining date:

11 September 2023

Prior to joining the WTO, I worked at the OECD, mainly doing research on industrial policies, including subsidies, and their relation to trade. The interlinkages between those policies, WTO rules and members' stances played a major role in my work.

With my knowledge from this experience about the functions and the importance of the WTO, I wanted to join the Organization to expand and deepen my analytical skills and my understanding of various trade issues, while at the same time directly engaging with members and learning more about their positions.

In the Development Division, I support the work of the Committee on Trade and Development (CTD), where I am responsible for preparing reports with background analyses to present to members. I very much value the many new insights I gain by contributing to the CTD, since the development dimension of trade extends to virtually all areas of WTO work. I am looking forward to an exciting time ahead, collaborating with my amazing colleagues in the division and across the Organization.

Budget, finance and administration

- The General Council approved the 2024 and 2025 budgets upon recommendations of the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration. After a period of 12 years of zero nominal growth, the budget was increased by 3.9 per cent for 2024.
- The General Council approved the use of the 2021 accumulated budgetary surplus for certain non-recurring expenses and for it to be applied against members' contributions for 2024 on the recommendation of the Committee.

Background

The Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration monitors the WTO's budgetary and financial matters. It considers issues concerning human resources management, hears progress reports on the WTO pension plan and deals with financial and administrative matters concerning the WTO Secretariat. The Committee reports to the General Council.



The General Council approved the 2024 and 2025 budgets for the WTO and the International Trade Centre and the 2024 scale of assessed contributions to the WTO budget upon recommendations of the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration. After a period of 12 years of zero nominal growth, the budget was increased by 3.9 per cent for 2024.

The General Council approved the use of the 2021 accumulated budgetary surplus for certain non-recurring expenses and for it to be applied against members' contributions for 2024 upon recommendation of the Committee.

The Committee also reviewed and recommended the 2024-25 biennial technical assistance and training plan, which was subsequently approved by the General Council.

The Committee endorsed transfers between budgetary sections during 2022 and the 2022 WTO audited financial statements, which were subsequently approved by the General Council.

The Committee also took note of the 2022 WTO pension plan audited financial statements and the external auditors' reports for the WTO's and WTO pension plan's financial statements.



It noted outstanding contributions to the WTO budget from WTO members and observers and invited the General Council to urge those under administrative measures to liquidate their arrears.

The Committee approved a request to draw funds from the Building Renovation Fund to update the audio-visual equipment in the WTO conference rooms.

Quarterly financial reports were considered by the Committee and taken note of, as were updates from the chair of the WTO pension plan management board. The Committee also took note of the actuarial valuations of the WTO pension plan as at the end of 2022 and considered a proposal from the WTO pension plan management board to address an actuarial imbalance. A decision on this proposal was deferred to 2024 for further consideration.

Reports on human resources matters were presented to the Committee, such as the 2023 WTO salary survey and dependency allowances, the annual report on diversity, the annual report on grading structure and the learning and development programme for 2022.

The Committee reviewed the status of the WTO medical insurance plan and after service health insurance, the status of implementation of external audit recommendations, the annual strategic facilities plan, and an update on the replacement of Documents Online.

The Office of Internal Oversight presented its report on internal audit activities for 2022-23, the audit and evaluation plan for 2023-24 and the launch of the internal control framework setting out the principles, policies and procedures that help the WTO to achieve its strategic and operational objectives.

Regular updates on the WTO Secretariat transformation exercise (see page 192) were provided at each Committee meeting by DDG Angela Ellard.

WTO budget 2024

The WTO derives its income from annual contributions from its 164 members (see Table 3) and miscellaneous income.

The WTO's budget for 2024 is CHF 204,928,900 (see Table 2).

Table 2: Consolidated budget for 2024
(in CHF thousands)

Section	Total
Staff expenditure (including staff remuneration, pension and post employment benefits, health and invalidity insurance, family and international benefits)	135,965
Temporary assistance (including short-term staff, consultants, panellists and Appellate Body member fees)	19,025
General services (including telecommunications and post, contractual services and maintenance, energy and supplies, documentation and publication)	17,276
Travel and hospitality	7,607
Implementing partners (includes any activity or event partly/jointly/fully funded by the WTO but executed by a third-party organization)	213
Capital expenditure (including procurement of fixed assets and rental and leasing of equipment)	3,095
Financial expenditure (including bank and interest charges and building loan reimbursement)	1,580
Contributions to International Trade Centre and special reserves (including the Building Renovation Fund and the Ministerial Conference Operating Fund)	20,168
Total	204,929

Table 3: WTO members' contributions to the consolidated budget 2024 (in CHF)

Member	2024 contribution CHF	2024 contribution %	Member	2024 contribution CHF	2024 contribution %
Afghanistan	36,558	0.018%	Ecuador	211,224	0.104%
Albania	46,713	0.023%	Egypt	534,153	0.263%
Angola	233,565	0.115%	El Salvador	83,271	0.041%
Antigua and Barbuda	30,465	0.015%	Estonia	194,976	0.096%
Argentina	635,703	0.313%	Eswatini	30,465	0.015%
Armenia	46,713	0.023%	European Union ¹	0	0.000%
Australia	2,626,083	1.293%	Fiji	30,465	0.015%
Austria	2,018,814	0.994%	Finland	891,609	0.439%
Bahrain, Kingdom of	213,255	0.105%	France	7,463,925	3.675%
Bangladesh	450,882	0.222%	Gabon	46,713	0.023%
Barbados	30,465	0.015%	The Gambia	30,465	0.015%
Belgium	3,781,722	1.862%	Georgia	77,178	0.038%
Belize	30,465	0.015%	Germany	14,529,774	7.154%
Benin	34,527	0.017%	Ghana	194,976	0.096%
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	87,333	0.043%	Greece	674,292	0.332%
Botswana	60,930	0.030%	Grenada	30,465	0.015%
Brazil	2,240,193	1.103%	Guatemala	150,294	0.074%
Brunei Darussalam	60,930	0.030%	Guinea	48,744	0.024%
Bulgaria	363,549	0.179%	Guinea-Bissau	30,465	0.015%
Burkina Faso	42,651	0.021%	Guyana	30,465	0.015%
Burundi	30,465	0.015%	Haiti	30,465	0.015%
Cabo Verde	30,465	0.015%	Honduras	81,240	0.040%
Cambodia	184,821	0.091%	Hong Kong, China	5,629,932	2.772%
Cameroon	64,992	0.032%	Hungary	1,102,833	0.543%
Canada	4,774,881	2.351%	Iceland	85,302	0.042%
Central African Republic	30,465	0.015%	India	4,864,245	2.395%
Chad	30,465	0.015%	Indonesia	1,708,071	0.841%
Chile	706,788	0.348%	Ireland	4,023,411	1.981%
China	22,704,549	11.179%	Israel	958,632	0.472%
Colombia	469,161	0.231%	Italy	5,087,655	2.505%
Congo	50,775	0.025%	Jamaica	50,775	0.025%
Costa Rica	174,666	0.086%	Japan	7,490,328	3.688%
Côte d'Ivoire	115,767	0.057%	Jordan	150,294	0.074%
Croatia	257,937	0.127%	Kazakhstan	463,068	0.228%
Cuba	93,426	0.046%	Kenya	125,922	0.062%
Cyprus	168,573	0.083%	Korea, Republic of	5,534,475	2.725%
Czech Republic	1,519,188	0.748%	Kuwait, the State of	519,936	0.256%
Democratic Republic of the Congo	138,108	0.068%	Kyrgyz Republic	34,527	0.017%
Denmark	1,632,924	0.804%	Lao People's Democratic Republic	56,868	0.028%
Djibouti	36,558	0.018%	Latvia	182,790	0.090%
Dominica	30,465	0.015%			
Dominican Republic	178,728	0.088%			

¹The European Union is not subject to contributions. However, its 27 members are assessed individually. The total share of members of the European Union represents 31.05% of the total assessed contributions for 2024.

Member	2024 contribution CHF	2024 contribution %	Member	2024 contribution CHF	2024 contribution %
Lesotho	30,465	0.015%	Rwanda	30,465	0.015%
Liberia	30,465	0.015%	Saint Kitts and Nevis	30,465	0.015%
Liechtenstein	69,054	0.034%	Saint Lucia	30,465	0.015%
Lithuania	349,332	0.172%	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	30,465	0.015%
Luxembourg	1,129,236	0.556%	Samoa	30,465	0.015%
Macao, China	225,441	0.111%	Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of	1,890,861	0.931%
Madagascar	34,527	0.017%	Senegal	48,744	0.024%
Malawi	30,465	0.015%	Seychelles	30,465	0.015%
Malaysia	1,886,799	0.929%	Sierra Leone	30,465	0.015%
Maldives	30,465	0.015%	Singapore	5,177,019	2.549%
Mali	42,651	0.021%	Slovak Republic	820,524	0.404%
Malta	176,697	0.087%	Slovenia	363,549	0.179%
Mauritania	30,465	0.015%	Solomon Islands	30,465	0.015%
Mauritius	46,713	0.023%	South Africa	883,485	0.435%
Mexico	4,155,426	2.046%	Spain	3,832,497	1.887%
Moldova, Republic of	42,651	0.021%	Sri Lanka	176,697	0.087%
Mongolia	69,054	0.034%	Suriname	30,465	0.015%
Montenegro	30,465	0.015%	Sweden	2,095,992	1.032%
Morocco	398,076	0.196%	Switzerland	3,907,644	1.924%
Mozambique	62,961	0.031%	Chinese Taipei	3,178,515	1.565%
Myanmar	134,046	0.066%	Tajikistan	30,465	0.015%
Namibia	42,651	0.021%	Tanzania	79,209	0.039%
Nepal	67,023	0.033%	Thailand	2,412,828	1.188%
Netherlands	6,005,667	2.957%	Togo	30,465	0.015%
New Zealand	473,223	0.233%	Tonga	30,465	0.015%
Nicaragua	52,806	0.026%	Trinidad and Tobago	77,178	0.038%
Niger	30,465	0.015%	Tunisia	174,666	0.086%
Nigeria	540,246	0.266%	Türkiye	2,071,620	1.020%
North Macedonia	71,085	0.035%	Uganda	62,961	0.031%
Norway	1,230,786	0.606%	Ukraine	568,680	0.280%
Oman	324,960	0.160%	United Arab Emirates	2,961,198	1.458%
Pakistan	394,014	0.194%	United Kingdom	7,419,243	3.653%
Panama	217,317	0.107%	United States of America	23,206,206	11.426%
Papua New Guinea	69,054	0.034%	Uruguay	127,953	0.063%
Paraguay	117,798	0.058%	Vanuatu	30,465	0.015%
Peru	444,789	0.219%	Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	296,526	0.146%
Philippines	885,516	0.436%	Viet Nam	2,323,464	1.144%
Poland	2,648,424	1.304%	Yemen	38,589	0.019%
Portugal	844,896	0.416%	Zambia	75,147	0.037%
Qatar	645,858	0.318%	Zimbabwe	46,713	0.023%
Romania	891,609	0.439%	TOTAL	203,100,000	100%
Russian Federation	3,422,235	1.685%			

How the WTO is structured

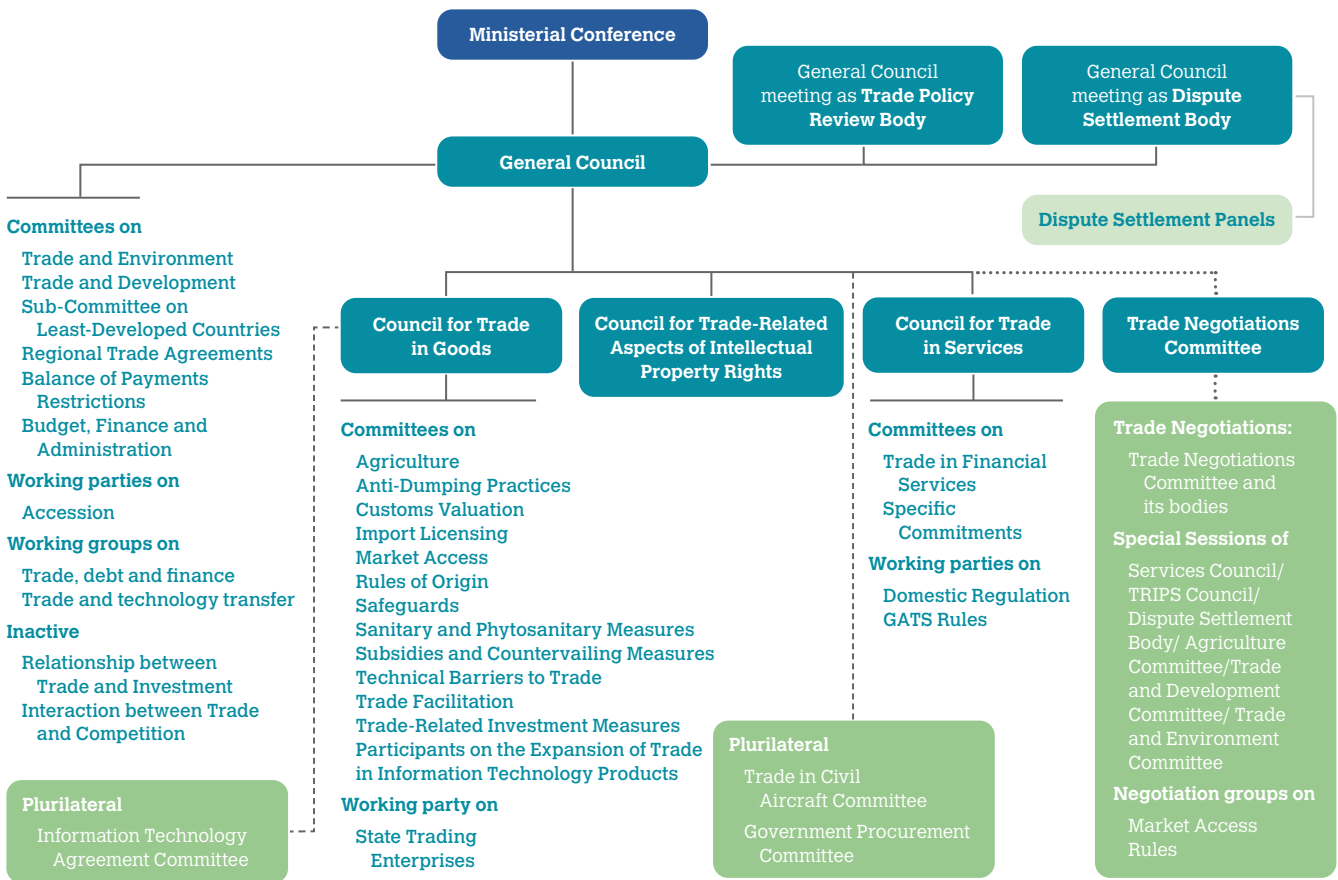
The WTO's top-level decision-making body is the Ministerial Conference, which usually meets every two years.

At the next level, the Goods Council, Services Council and Intellectual Property (TRIPS) Council report to the General Council.

Below this is the General Council (normally ambassadors and heads of delegation in Geneva, and sometimes officials sent from members' capitals), which meets several times a year in the Geneva headquarters. The General Council also meets as the Trade Policy Review Body and the Dispute Settlement Body.

Numerous specialized committees, working groups and working parties deal with the individual agreements and other areas such as the environment, development, membership applications and regional trade agreements.

All WTO members may participate in all councils and committees, with the exceptions of the dispute settlement panels and plurilateral committees.



Key

- Reporting to General Council (or a subsidiary)
- Reporting to Dispute Settlement Body
- - - - - Plurilateral committees inform the General Council or Goods Council of their activities, although these agreements are not signed by all WTO members
- Trade Negotiations Committee reports to General Council

WTO Chairpersons (as of 31 December 2023)

Chairpersons of the General Council and bodies reporting to it		Chairpersons of subsidiary bodies of the Council for Trade in Goods	
General Council	Ambassador Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme (Botswana)	Committee on Agriculture	Mr Kjetil Tysdal (Norway)
Dispute Settlement Body	Ambassador Petter Ølberg (Norway)	Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices	Mrs Aysegül Şahinoğlu Yerdeş (Türkiye)
Trade Policy Review Body	Ambassador Saqer Abdullah Almoqbel (Saudi Arabia)	Committee on Customs Valuation	Mr Omar Cisse (Senegal)
Council for Trade in Goods	Ambassador Adamu Mohammed Abdulhamid (Nigeria)	Committee on Import Licensing	Mr Nat Tharnpanich (Thailand)
Council for Trade in Services	Permanent Representative, Mrs. Tsvetelina Georgieva Dimitrova (Bulgaria)	Committee on Market Access	Ms Renata Cristaldo Oviedo (Paraguay)
Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights	Ambassador Pimchanok Pitfield (Thailand)	Committee on Rules of Origin	Mr Elia Mtwewe (Tanzania)
Committee on Trade and Development	Ambassador José Sánchez-Fung (Dominican Republic)	Committee on Safeguards	Mr Eungkil Jeon (Republic of Korea)
Committee on Trade and Environment	Ambassador José Valencia (Ecuador)	Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures	Mr Tayutic Mena Retana (Costa Rica)
Sub-Committee on Least-Developed Countries	Ambassador Erik Brøgger Rasmussen (Denmark) ¹	Committee on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures	Mr James Lester (New Zealand)
Committee on Balance-of-Payments Restrictions	Ambassador Eheth Salomon (Cameroon)	Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade	Ms Anna Vitie (Finland)
Committee on Regional Trade Agreements	Ambassador Clare Kelly (New Zealand)	Committee on Trade Facilitation	Mr Carlos Guevara (Ecuador)
Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration	Ambassador Bettina Waldmann (Germany)	Committee on Trade-Related Investment Measures	Mr Po-Feng Huang (Chinese Taipei)
Working Group on Trade and Transfer of Technology	Ambassador Sofia Boza Martinez (Chile)	Working Party on State Trading Enterprises	Ms Laura Ulda Calligaro (Italy)
Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance	Mr. Felipe Llantada Soldi (Uruguay)	Committee of Participants on the Expansion of Trade in Information Technology Products	Mr Don Spedding (Australia)
Trade Negotiations Committee	Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala		
Chairpersons of bodies established under the Trade Negotiations Committee		Chairpersons of subsidiary bodies of the Council for Trade in Services	
Negotiating Group on Rules	Ambassador Einar Gunnarsson (Iceland)	Committee on Trade in Financial Services	Mr Gabriel Bautista (Philippines)
Special Session of the Council for Trade in Services	Ambassador Zhanar Aitzhanova (Kazakhstan)	Working Party on Domestic Regulation	Ms Christiane Daleiden (Luxembourg)
Special Session of the Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights	Ambassador Alfredo Suescum (Panama)	Committee on Specific Commitments	Mr Devabrata Chakraborty (Bangladesh)
Special Session of the Dispute Settlement Body	Ambassador Kokou Yackoley Johnson (Togo)	Working Party on GATS Rules	Mr Moawiah Atiat (Jordan)
Special Session of the Committee on Agriculture	Ambassador Alparslan Acarsoy (Türkiye)		
Sub-Committee on Cotton	Ambassador Alparslan Acarsoy (Türkiye)	Chairpersons of Committees of Plurilateral Agreements	
Special Session of the Committee on Trade and Development	Ambassador Kadra Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti)	Committee on Trade in Civil Aircraft	Mr Jean-Marie Meraldi (Switzerland)
		Committee on Government Procurement	Mr Martin Zbinden (Switzerland)

¹Ambassador José R. Sanchez-Fung (Dominican Republic), the Chairperson of the Committee on Trade and Development, chaired the meetings of the Sub-Committee on LDCs from September 2023 onwards, pending the election of a new Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on LDCs.

WTO Senior Management

As of end-May 2024



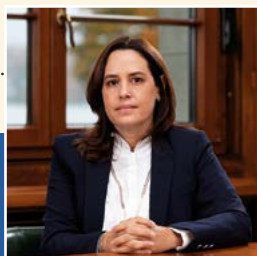
Director-General
Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala



Chief of staff
Dr Bright Okogu



Deputy Director-General
Angela Ellard
(United States)



Deputy Director-General
Johanna Hill
(El Salvador)



Deputy Director-General
Jean-Marie Paugam
(France)



Deputy Director-General
Xiangchen Zhang
(China)

Areas of responsibility

- Legal Affairs
- Rules
- Finance and Corporate Services
- Market Access

- Economic Research and Statistics
- Intellectual Property, Government Procurement and Competition
- Languages, Documentation and Information Management
- Trade in Services and Investment

- Agriculture and Commodities
- Trade and Environment
- Trade Policy Reviews
- Human Resources

- Development
- Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation
- Information Technology Solutions
- Accessions

Membership of the WTO: 164 members (as of 31 December 2023)

Member*	Year of accession	Member*	Year of accession	Member*	Year of accession
Afghanistan	2016	Cyprus	1995	Israel	1995
Albania	2000	Czech Republic	1995	Italy	1995
Angola	1996	Democratic Republic of the Congo	1997	Jamaica	1995
Antigua and Barbuda	1995	Denmark	1995	Japan	1995
Argentina	1995	Djibouti	1995	Jordan	2000
Armenia	2003	Dominica	1995	Kazakhstan	2015
Australia	1995	Dominican Republic	1995	Kenya	1995
Austria	1995	Ecuador	1996	Korea, Republic of	1995
Bahrain, Kingdom of	1995	Egypt	1995	Kuwait, the State of	1995
Bangladesh	1995	El Salvador	1995	Kyrgyz Republic	1998
Barbados	1995	Estonia	1999	Latvia	1999
Belgium	1995	Eswatini	1995	Lao People's Democratic Republic	2013
Belize	1995	European Union	1995	Lesotho	1995
Benin	1996	Fiji	1996	Liberia	2016
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	1995	Finland	1995	Liechtenstein	1995
Botswana	1995	France	1995	Lithuania	2001
Brazil	1995	Gabon	1995	Luxembourg	1995
Brunei Darussalam	1995	The Gambia	1996	Macao, China	1995
Bulgaria	1996	Georgia	2000	Madagascar	1995
Burkina Faso	1995	Germany	1995	Malawi	1995
Burundi	1995	Ghana	1995	Malaysia	1995
Cambodia	2004	Greece	1995	Maldives	1995
Cameroon	1995	Grenada	1996	Mali	1995
Canada	1995	Guatemala	1995	Malta	1995
Cabo Verde	2008	Guinea	1995	Mauritania	1995
Central African Republic	1995	Guinea-Bissau	1995	Mauritius	1995
Chad	1996	Guyana	1995	Mexico	1995
Chile	1995	Haiti	1996	Moldova, Republic of	2001
China	2001	Honduras	1995	Mongolia	1997
Colombia	1995	Hong Kong, China	1995	Montenegro	2012
Congo	1997	Hungary	1995	Morocco	1995
Costa Rica	1995	Iceland	1995	Mozambique	1995
Côte d'Ivoire	1995	India	1995	Myanmar	1995
Croatia	2000	Indonesia	1995	Namibia	1995
Cuba	1995	Ireland	1995	Nepal	2004

Member*	Year of accession	Member*	Year of accession	Observers** (as of 31 December 2023)
Netherlands	1995	Slovenia	1995	Algeria
New Zealand	1995	Solomon Islands	1996	Andorra
Nicaragua	1995	South Africa	1995	Azerbaijan
Niger	1996	Spain	1995	Bahamas
Nigeria	1995	Sri Lanka	1995	Belarus
Norway	1995	Suriname	1995	Bhutan
North Macedonia, Republic of	2003	Sweden	1995	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Oman	2000	Switzerland	1995	Comoros
Pakistan	1995	Chinese Taipei	2002	Curaçao
Panama	1997	Tajikistan	2013	Equatorial Guinea
Papua New Guinea	1996	Tanzania	1995	Ethiopia
Paraguay	1995	Thailand	1995	Holy See
Peru	1995	Togo	1995	Iran
Philippines	1995	Tonga	2007	Iraq
Poland	1995	Trinidad and Tobago	1995	Lebanese Republic
Portugal	1995	Tunisia	1995	Libya
Qatar	1996	Türkiye	1995	São Tomé and Príncipe
Romania	1995	Uganda	1995	Serbia
Russian Federation	2012	Ukraine	2008	Somalia
Rwanda	1996	United Arab Emirates	1996	South Sudan
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1996	United Kingdom	1995	Sudan
Saint Lucia	1995	United States	1995	Syrian Arab Republic
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	1995	Uruguay	1995	Timor-Leste
Samoa	2012	Vanuatu	2012	Turkmenistan
Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of	2005	Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	1995	Uzbekistan
Senegal	1995	Viet Nam	2007	
Seychelles	2015	Yemen	2014	
Sierra Leone	1995	Zambia	1995	
Singapore	1995	Zimbabwe	1995	
Slovak Republic	1995			

*Members are mostly states but can also be separate customs territories with full autonomy over their external commercial relations.

**With the exception of the Holy See, observers must start accession negotiations within five years of becoming observers.

Abbreviations

ADP	anti-dumping practices	MEAs	multilateral environmental agreements
CTD	Committee on Trade and Development	MFN	most-favoured nation
DSB	Dispute Settlement Body	MSMEs	micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
DSU	Dispute Settlement Understanding	NAMA	non-agricultural market access
EIF	Enhanced Integrated Framework	NGO	non-governmental organization
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization	NTMs	non-tariff measures
FDI	foreign direct investment	OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services	PTAs	preferential trade arrangements
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade	RTAs	regional trade agreements
GDP	gross domestic product	SCM	Subsidies and Countervailing Measures
GIs	geographical indications	SG	Agreement on Safeguards
GPA	Government Procurement Agreement	SPS	sanitary and phytosanitary measures
HS	Harmonized System	STDF	Standards and Trade Development Facility
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce	SVE	small, vulnerable economy
ILO	International Labour Organization	TBT	technical barriers to trade
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union	TNC	Trade Negotiations Committee
ISO	International Organization for Standardization	TPR	Trade Policy Review
ITA	Information Technology Agreement	TPRM	Trade Policy Review Mechanism
ITC	International Trade Centre	TRIMs	trade-related investment measures
ITTC	Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation	TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
ITU	International Telecommunication Union	WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
IUU	illegal, unreported and unregulated [fishing]		
LDCs	least-developed countries		
MC12	12th WTO Ministerial Conference		
MC13	13th WTO Ministerial Conference		

0 is zero or became zero due to rounding.

Billion means one thousand million.

Minor discrepancies between constituent figures and totals are due to rounding.

Unless otherwise indicated, (i) all value figures are expressed in US dollars; (ii) trade figures include the intra-trade of free trade areas, customs unions, regional and other groupings.

Note This report covers the WTO's activities in 2023 and early 2024. The word "country" may be used to describe WTO members, whereas a few members are officially "customs territories", and not necessarily countries in the usual sense of the word.

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