

# Annual Report 2025



# About this report

This report covers WTO activities in 2024 and the early part of 2025. 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. 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](http://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.

### Disclaimer

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# Annual Report

## 2025

# WTO



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# 1

## 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.

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# Message from Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

**T**hirty years ago, the Uruguay Round agreements transformed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade into the WTO. The reinvented organization had a clear objective set out in its founding agreement: harnessing world trade to raise living standards, create better jobs and promote sustainable development.

Since its creation, open and predictable international markets anchored in WTO rules and norms have made a major contribution to strengthening the global economy. Rich and poor countries have benefited from increased growth, purchasing

power and macroeconomic stability. Trade helped lift 1.5 billion people out of extreme poverty.

Nevertheless, the global trading system is today experiencing its worst disruptions since the Second World War. Multilateral cooperation itself is being called into question.

While the volume of merchandise and services trade grew by 2.9 per cent and 6.8 per cent respectively in 2024 – the main period covered by this report – the picture for 2025 looks very different. At time of writing in mid-July, amid new tariff

announcements, WTO economists have downgraded expectations for merchandise trade volume growth by nearly three percentage points and now expect a 0.2 per cent contraction in 2025. In light of the high levels of policy uncertainty, this still reflects the considerable – and welcome – resilience trade continues to exhibit. Nevertheless, downside risks abound.

Additional cause for concern comes from potential signs of fragmentation in world trade. If trade fractures along geopolitical lines, there will be detrimental consequences for global economic growth, with low-income economies suffering the worst welfare losses.

One silver lining of the current disruptions is that they have reminded many governments, businesses and households why the predictable trading conditions they had come to take for granted are so valuable. They have led to a renewed appreciation for the stability the WTO continues to provide to global trade: even with all the trade measures introduced since the start of 2025, core WTO most-favoured-nation tariff terms underpin about 74 per cent of global merchandise trade.

It is vital for WTO members to shore up these foundations and build on them so that trade can continue to deliver for people and for the planet.

The WTO has an important role to play as a forum where all 166 of our members can share their trade concerns and propose solutions. WTO committees dealing with health and safety standards and technical regulations protect consumer safety while enabling members to minimize trade frictions. Other committees work to accelerate the flow of goods across borders, promote trade in services, protect intellectual property or make government procurement processes more open, transparent and competitive. World trade is about much more than just tariffs – and so is the WTO.

This report looks into the work in 2024 and early 2025 of WTO councils and committees responsible for overseeing the implementation of

WTO agreements and for negotiating new deals.

The major event of last year was the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi in February. We welcomed two new members there – Comoros and Timor-Leste. The Conference confirmed members' commitment to a

forward-looking reform agenda for the organization. It also took some important decisions on improving assistance to developing economies and graduating least-developed countries, and on extending both the moratorium against imposing duties on cross-border digital flows and the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce.

**The WTO has an important role to play as a forum where all 166 of our members can share their trade concerns and propose solutions.**

Another important achievement at MC13 was the conclusion of negotiations on the plurilateral Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement. This new accord aims to make it easier for signatories – particularly developing economies – to attract foreign investment, with the aim of fostering sustainable development. Parties to the Agreement – representing more than three-quarters of the WTO's membership – have requested integration of the accord into the WTO legal framework, but consensus has yet to be achieved.

Negotiations on a separate plurilateral Agreement on Electronic Commerce also concluded in 2024. This agreement, which already has over 70 sponsors, would establish the first-ever set of global baseline rules on e-commerce. The parties to this agreement are also seeking its integration into the WTO's rulebook, but again consensus is elusive. I urge all members to take a fresh look at the benefits offered by these two agreements, which would help modernize the WTO rulebook and boost economic growth, while not binding members who do not feel ready to sign up to them.

With respect to agriculture, members were unable to make a breakthrough either before or at MC13. Negotiations continue in Geneva, under the leadership of a new Chair, Ali Sarfraz Hussain of Pakistan, with the aim of advancing work across all pillars of the talks ahead of the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Cameroon in March 2026.

Members are also seeking to build on the advances they have made on dispute settlement system reform.

At the request of General Council Chair Ambassador Saqer Abdullah Almoqbel of Saudi Arabia, the Dispute Settlement Body Chair, Ambassador Clare Kelly of New Zealand, has been holding low-key informal consultations with members on how to move this work forward.

In the meantime, members continue to make active use of the dispute settlement system. Ten new disputes were initiated last year. Perhaps most significantly, members are increasingly choosing to seek negotiated solutions or comply with panel reports. Six disputes were formally resolved in 2024: three through mutually agreed solutions; two that were suspended by the complainant; and one case in which, after the panel report, the responding party informed it had fully implemented the DSB's rulings.

Most importantly, we are getting extremely close to the entry into force of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, the WTO's first agreement to have environmental sustainability at its core. Only a handful of ratifications are still needed for the Agreement to take effect and start delivering benefits for marine fish stocks and livelihoods in coastal communities across the world. As soon as the Agreement enters into force, the WTO's Fish Fund is poised to provide technical and financial support to developing economies to help them improve fisheries management and implement the new disciplines.

Addressing the needs of developing economies remains core to the WTO's work. In addition to members' efforts to reform rules to better support economic integration and development, the WTO also works to address supply-side constraints that hinder participation in trade.

The Aid for Trade initiative shines a spotlight on trade-related development assistance, now being affected by wider aid cutbacks. Through the Enhanced Integrated Framework and the Standards and Trade Development Facility, the WTO helps farmers, craftspeople and entrepreneurs in developing economies to export globally – and this report highlights some recent success stories.

A related focus is empowering women to benefit from world trade. At MC13, the WTO Secretariat and the International Trade Centre jointly launched the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy Fund. The multi-donor fund has already invited women-led businesses to apply for grants, technical assistance, training, mentorship and access to networks to help boost their export capabilities and grow through international trade and digitalization.

The WTO also provides training to government officials from developing economies to help them improve their understanding of the WTO agreements, a prerequisite for framing policies to better capitalize on trade opportunities. Over 7,000 took part in these training activities in 2024, while over 10,000 participants completed e-Learning courses, with Africa once again having the highest level of participation.

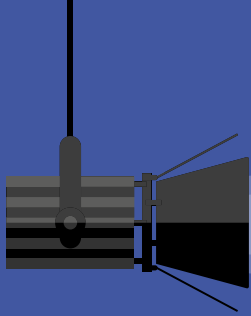
Another exciting initiative launched last year was the Young Trade Leaders Programme. Eight young people were selected out of more than 2,000 candidates to bring fresh perspectives to trade debates and to bring young people closer to the work of the WTO. A new cohort has already been selected for this year.

Finally, I want to thank WTO members, who in 2024 reappointed me for a second term, starting on 1 September 2025, as Director-General. I thank them for their confidence. I remain fully committed to working with all members to support the steps they are taking to reform the organization and reposition it for the changing needs of the 21st century.

Another silver lining of the present crisis is that members are finally grappling with valid criticisms of the trading system that had previously not received the attention they deserved. I hope we can seize this opportunity to deliver the deep reforms needed to build a more inclusive and equitable multilateral trading system, starting with a successful MC14.



**DR. NGOZI OKONJO-IWEALA**  
DIRECTOR-GENERAL



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# 13th Ministerial Conference

WTO members concluded the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi on 2 March 2024 with the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration setting out a forward-looking, reform agenda for the organization. Ministers also took a number of ministerial decisions, including renewing the commitment to have a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system and to improve use of the special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions for developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs). They also agreed to continue negotiations in all areas where convergence was elusive at MC13.

The Ministerial 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. Initially scheduled for 26-29 February 2024, the Conference was extended in a final push to reach outcomes on the various issues at stake.

DG Okonjo-Iweala thanked members for their efforts to seek convergence on difficult issues and against a global backdrop of economic and geopolitical uncertainty. "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," she said.

In their declaration, ministers pledged to preserve and strengthen the ability of the multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core, to respond to current trade challenges. They also underlined the centrality of the development dimension in the work of the WTO.

Members recognized the importance of services, which generate more than

two-thirds of global economic output and accounts for over half of all jobs. They encouraged WTO bodies to continue their work to review and build on all the lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and to build effective and expeditious solutions in case of future pandemics.

On dispute settlement reform, members recognized progress made towards having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members. Ministers instructed officials to accelerate discussions, build on

this progress and work on unresolved issues (see page 120).

Ministers called for improved technical assistance for developing economies and LDCs to assist them in engaging in sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and technical barriers to trade (TBT) matters. They also urged enhanced implementation of special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions for developing economies and LDCs. "This is a win for development, one that will help enable developing countries, especially LDCs, fulfil their WTO commitments, exercise





Dr Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi of the United Arab Emirates chaired MC13 in Abu Dhabi.

their rights and better integrate into global trade,” said DG Okonjo-Iweala.

In another first, ministers discussed how trade relates to two 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”.

Ministers approved the WTO membership terms of Comoros and Timor-Leste, the first new members in almost eight years (see page 40).

Additionally, MC13 saw agreement to reinvigorate work under the Work Programme on E-commerce (see page 74) and to maintain a moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions until MC14,

set for 26-29 March 2026 (see page 72). Ministers also extended a moratorium on “non-violation and situation complaints” under the TRIPS Agreement (see page 107).

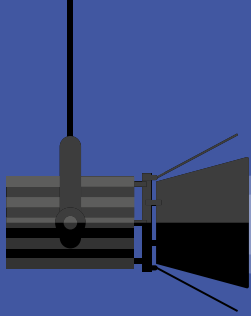
Ministers adopted a ministerial declaration on strengthening regulatory cooperation to reduce technical barriers to trade (TBT) (see page 86). They also reaffirmed the commitment to the Work Programme on Small Economies (see page 128) and issued a ministerial decision on concrete measures to ease the path to graduation from LDC status (see page 126).

Members could not conclude a “second wave” of negotiations to add new provisions – on curbing subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing – to the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (see page 52). 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.”

On agriculture, despite intense negotiations during MC13, members were not able to find convergence. Divergences remained, notably on public stockholding for food security purposes (see page 49). “At MC12, we couldn’t even agree on a text. Even though there are challenges, for the first time we have a text. We couldn’t finish the work on it here. So let us get back to Geneva and deliver!” the DG said.

MC13 also 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 (see page 63). Additionally, ministers representing 123 WTO members issued a Joint Ministerial Declaration marking the finalization of the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement (see page 61). Participants in the IFD initiative represent three-quarters of the WTO membership, including close to 90 developing economies and 26 LDCs.

Co-sponsors of three environmental initiatives at the WTO presented at the Ministerial Conference the next steps they are taking to advance work on environmental sustainability, plastics pollution, and fossil fuel subsidy reform.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# Global trade developments and outlook

World trade saw strong growth in 2024 (see Figure 1), with a 2.9 per cent increase in the volume of merchandise trade and a 6.8 per cent rise in the value of commercial services trade. Sustained trade expansion was initially expected for 2025, but rising tariffs and trade policy uncertainty have caused WTO economists to downgrade their forecasts for both merchandise and commercial services trade in volume terms.

## Merchandise trade

In 2024, world merchandise trade volume growth (2.9 per cent) was stronger than world GDP growth at market exchange rates (2.8 per cent) for the first time since 2017, excluding the rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. All regions recorded positive growth in exports and imports except for Europe,

where both contracted. In particular, trade within the European Union fell 3.2 per cent, which weighed down on regional and global totals. World trade growth excluding intra-EU trade was even stronger at 4.3 per cent, well above global GDP growth.

In value terms, world merchandise trade rose 2 per cent to US\$ 24.43 trillion in 2024, after falling by

4 per cent in 2023. China was the largest exporter (US\$ 3.58 trillion) while the United States remained the largest importer (US\$ 3.36 trillion). The European Union was the second largest trader on both the export side and the import side. Merchandise exports of least developed countries rose 5 per cent, to US\$ 275 billion, after dropping 2 per cent in 2023.

**Figure 1:** World merchandise and commercial services trade, 2019Q1-2024Q4  
Indices, 2019=100

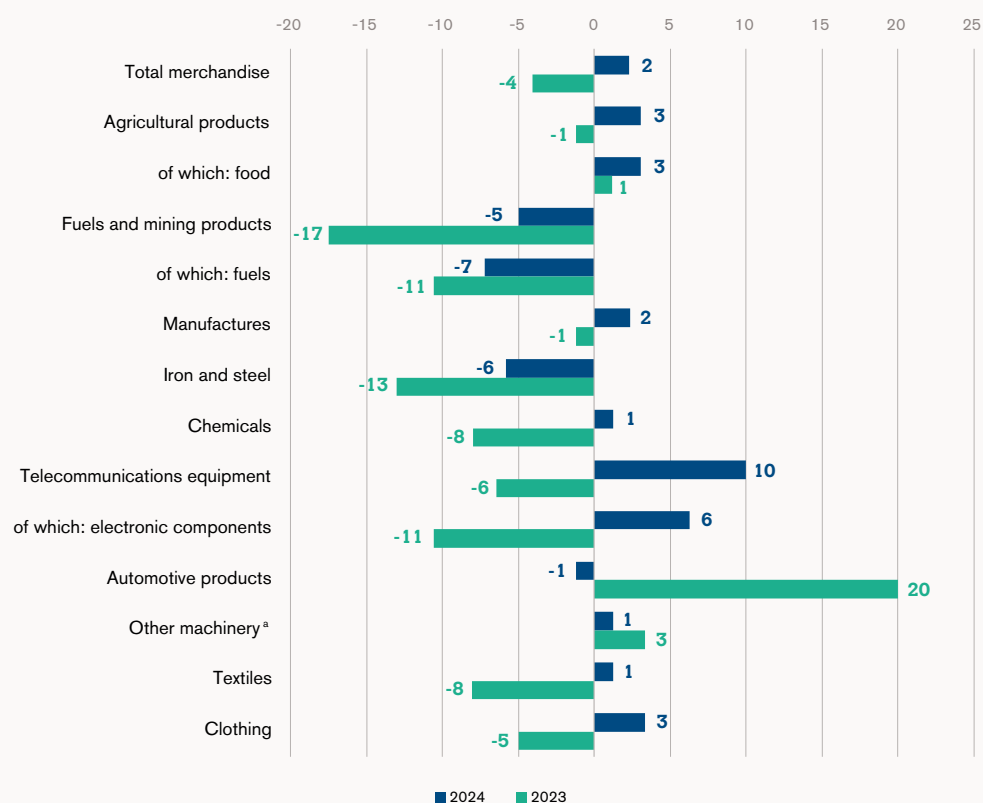


Source: WTO and UNCTAD for merchandise trade, WTO for services.

Note: Merchandise trade volume refers to the average of exports and imports. Merchandise and commercial services trade values refer to exports.

**Figure 2: Merchandise trade growth by product**

Annual % change in US\$ values



<sup>a</sup> Includes electrical machinery, non-electrical machinery and power generating equipment.

Sources: WTO-UNCTAD estimates for total merchandise, WTO Secretariat estimates for products.

One notable development last year was the widening of China's merchandise trade surplus, which grew around 20 per cent to US\$ 990 billion as weak consumer demand dampened imports. China's surplus with the United States registered a smaller-than-average increase of around 7 per cent, while other trading partners saw larger increases, including the European Union at 12 per cent.

World trade growth in value terms was moderate in most product categories last year, which is illustrated by Figure 2. Trade in manufactured goods grew in line with total merchandise trade at 2 per cent. Meanwhile, trade in

agricultural products grew slightly faster at 3 per cent. Trade in fuels and mining products declined by 5 per cent. Trade in office and telecommunications equipment rose sharply (up around 10 per cent), while trade in iron and steel contracted (down 6 per cent). Trade in most product categories has risen sharply since the pre-pandemic period, leaving total merchandise exports up 27 per cent between 2019 and 2024.

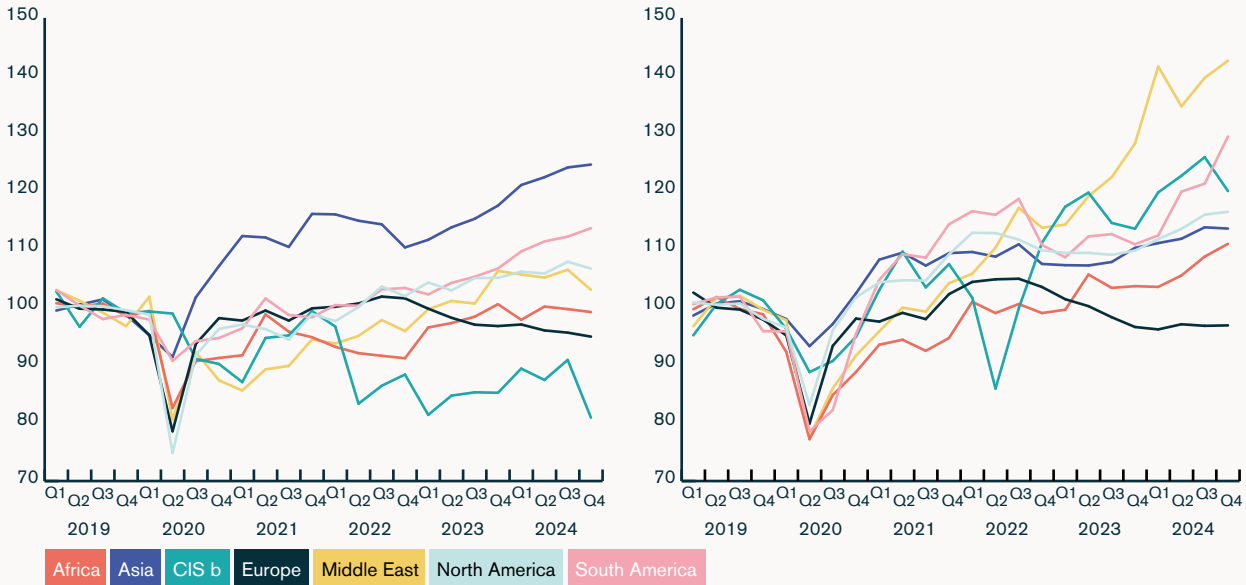
Asia's growth in merchandise export volume in 2024 was stronger than expected at the start of the year. Meanwhile, import volume growth exceeded expectations in North America. Outside of Europe, where

trade contracted, the region with the weakest merchandise trade growth was Africa, where exports and imports were up just 1.3 per cent and 1.8 per cent respectively for the year (see Figure 3).

At the start of 2025, WTO economists expected growth in world merchandise trade volume to remain steady at 2.7 per cent for the year. However, rising tariffs and increased trade policy uncertainty prompted the WTO Secretariat to downgrade its forecast – to a -0.2 per cent contraction – in the Global Trade Outlook and Statistics report issued in April 2025. Since then, tariffs have continued to fluctuate, with each policy shift having an impact

**Figure 3: Merchandise export and import volume by region, 2019Q1-2024Q4**

Seasonally-adjusted indices, 2019=100



a Refers to South and Central America and the Caribbean.  
 b Refers to Commonwealth of Independent States, including certain associate and former member states.  
 Sources: WTO-UNCTAD.

on the trade forecast. The Secretariat continuously monitors these policy developments and issues updated projections at regular intervals.

**Services trade**

In 2024, services trade increased by 9 per cent in value terms, mirroring growth in 2023 (see Figure 4). All broad sectors contributed to the rise, including transport (up 8 per cent), travel (up 13 per cent), goods-related services (up 5 per cent) and other commercial services (up 8 per cent). By the end of 2024, global tourist arrivals were just 1 per cent below pre-pandemic levels, according to UN Tourism.



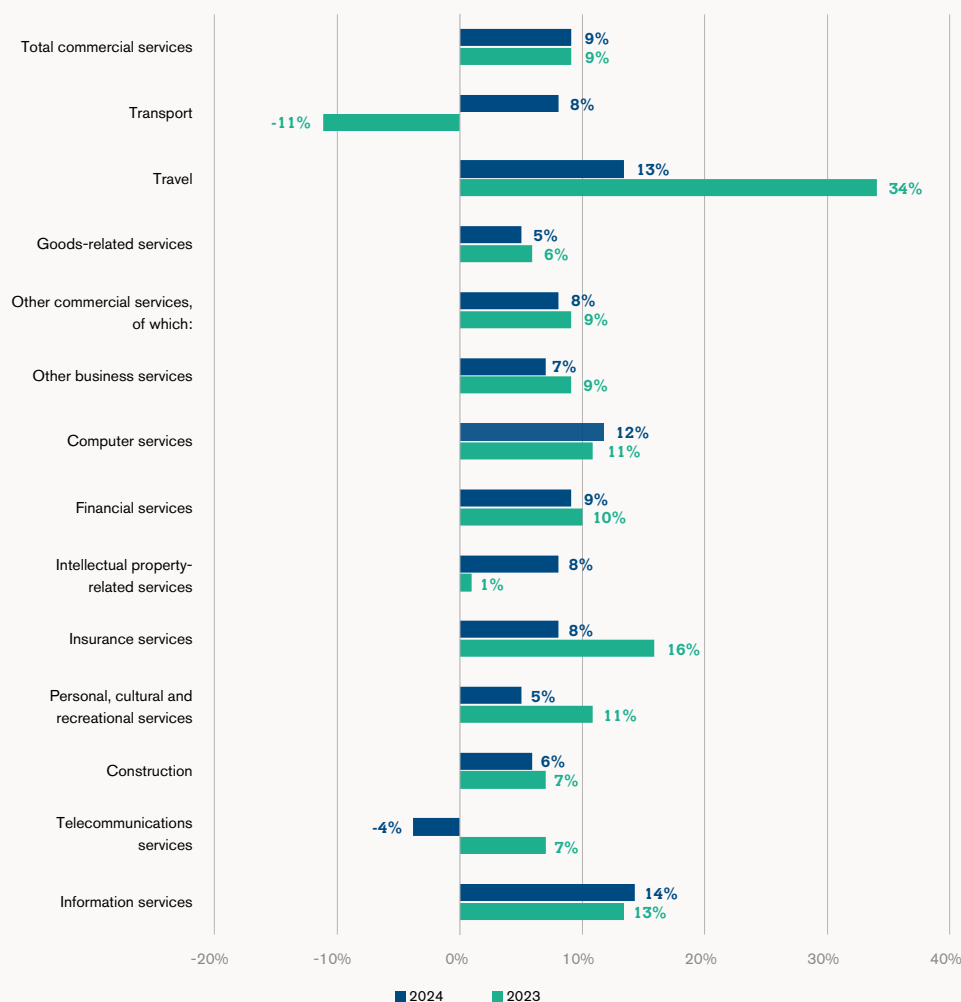
The category “other commercial services”, which accounts for around 60 per cent of total services trade, expanded by 8 per cent in 2024. The category encompasses a wide variety of sub-sectors, including digitally deliverable

services such as computer, financial, business and insurance services. Computer services, in particular, recorded an impressive increase in 2024, surging 12 per cent and reaching the US\$ 1 trillion mark.

Global exports of digitally delivered services rose by 8.3 per cent in 2024, reaching US\$ 4.64 trillion in 2024. The share of these services is increasing, accounting for 14.5 per cent of world exports of goods and services.

**Figure 4: Commercial services trade growth by sector, 2023-2024**

Annual % change



Note: Services trade measured as exports. Other commercial services are ranked according to their relative share in services trade.

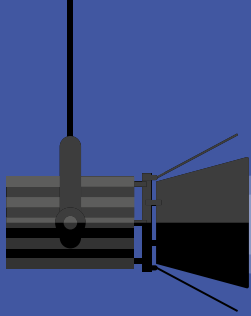
Note: WTO Secretariat estimates for subsectors of other commercial services. WTO-UNCTAD for total commercial services and main sectors

Many major traders reported commercial services export growth roughly equal to the world average of 9 per cent in 2024. This includes Europe at 8 per cent, North America at 8 per cent, and South and Central America and the Caribbean at 9 per cent. Asia saw stronger growth, at 13 per cent. Only 3 per cent growth was achieved in Africa while the Middle East saw a contraction of 1 per cent.

For 2025, the Secretariat predicted 4.0 per cent growth in services trade

volume – down from 5.1 per cent under a “low tariff” baseline scenario – in the April 2025 edition of Global Trade Outlook and Statistics. Although not directly subject to tariffs, services trade is expected to be adversely affected by tariff increases. A decline in goods trade as a result of higher tariffs tends to weaken demand for related services such as transport and logistics while slower economic growth and heightened trade policy uncertainty would deter spending on travel and investment-related services.

Policy changes since April have lifted the services trade forecast slightly. As with goods trade, the Secretariat monitors trade policy developments on an ongoing basis and regularly evaluates their impact on services trade.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# Director-General selection process

The General Council agreed on 29 November 2024 by consensus to reappoint Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as Director-General for a second four-year term, set to begin on 1 September 2025.

The reappointment process, initiated on 8 October 2024, was overseen by Ambassador Petter Ølberg of Norway, Chair of the General Council. With no additional nominations submitted by the 8 November 2024 deadline, Dr Okonjo-Iweala stood as the sole candidate. The process was conducted in a fully open and transparent manner, adhering to the WTO's "Procedures for the Appointment of Directors-General".

During a special General Council meeting on 28-29 November, Dr Okonjo-Iweala outlined her vision for the WTO. Following her presentation and a question-and-answer session with members, the Council formally endorsed her reappointment by consensus.

"The General Council commends Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala for her outstanding leadership during her first term. Amid significant global economic challenges, she strengthened the WTO's ability to support its members and set a forward-looking agenda for the organization. Her leadership was instrumental in securing meaningful outcomes at pivotal moments, including the 12th and 13th ministerial conferences, where major milestones were achieved," Ambassador Ølberg said following her reappointment.



He continued: "As we look ahead, the Council fully supports Dr Okonjo-Iweala's commitment to ensuring that the WTO remains responsive, inclusive and results-driven. Her leadership will be critical as the organization continues to advance a resilient, rules-based and equitable global trading system."

Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala first assumed office as Director-General on 1 March 2021, becoming the first woman and first African to lead the WTO. She is the seventh Director-General of the WTO. Her reappointment highlights strong support for her efforts to enhance the WTO's relevance and



Dr Okonjo-Iweala outlined her vision for the WTO at a special General Council meeting in November.

capacity in addressing the evolving challenges of global trade.

“I am deeply honoured by the trust and support of the WTO General Council and its 166 members. It is a privilege to continue serving as Director-General for a second four-year term,” Dr Okonjo-Iweala said in her statement to the General Council.

“In recent years, the WTO has played a vital role in helping members navigate pressing global challenges, including the pandemic, conflict and heightened geopolitical tensions. I commend members for their hard work and determination in achieving progress despite unprecedented levels of uncertainty and rapid economic shifts.

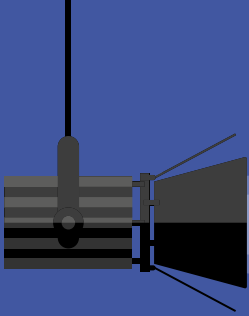
“As we look ahead, I remain firmly committed to delivering results that matter – results that ultimately improve the lives of people around the world. By promoting trade as a driver of economic growth and resilience, the WTO will continue to provide a collaborative platform for members to address shared global challenges.

“I am deeply committed to working alongside the talented and dedicated staff of the WTO to build a more inclusive, equitable and rules-based multilateral trading system that benefits all,” she said.

Dr Okonjo-Iweala twice served as Nigeria’s Finance Minister

(2003-2006 and 2011-2015) and was briefly Foreign Minister in 2006, the first woman to hold both positions. She had a 25-year career at the World Bank as a development economist, rising to the No. 2 position of Managing Director, Operations.

The process for the appointment of a new DG was launched after the African Group circulated a proposal in July 2024 asking her to make herself available for a further term. At a General Council meeting of July 2024, many delegations intervened under an item dedicated to this request, all in support of the proposal.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# World trade success stories



Comoros Moringa has seen strong export growth with the support of a grant from the Enhanced Integrated Framework.

## COMOROS

### Plant-based products boost local economy

Founded in 2017 by Mohamed Anazra, Comoros Moringa offers plant-based moringa products, ranging from food supplements to cosmetics.

Moringa is often called the drumstick tree because of its thin, long pods. Almost all of it can be eaten, including the seeds, flower and leaves.

The company, which is based in Mutsamudu, Anjouan, focuses on the production and processing of

moringa, which is grown in its own fields or locally. It works with a hundred local producers – women and young people – with the aim of boosting living standards and reducing inequalities.

In 2018, the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) (see page 134) awarded a grant of over US\$ 5,000 to Comoros Moringa as part of an initiative targeting small businesses in Comoros, enabling the company to achieve several key goals. These included a European organic certification, guaranteeing environmental and organic quality, brand protection

through the African Intellectual Property Organization and investment in a variety of packaging to diversify its product range.

As a result of EIF support, the company has exported to La Réunion and France, which would not have been possible previously. The company is now targeting new distributors on the African continent. It has also diversified its product range to offer eight moringa-based products, including capsules, oil and soaps and moringa-lemongrass infusions.

Source: Enhanced Integrated Framework.



## ECUADOR

### “Toquilla” straw hats producer sees spectacular export growth

By harnessing the dynamism of e-commerce, an Ecuadorian family-owned business specializing in the sale of “toquilla” straw hats, has experienced spectacular export growth.

Ecuadorian Taytta is dedicated to the production, marketing and export of premium toquillas and wool hats. It is 100 per cent Ecuadorian and its hats are 100 per cent handmade.

“When I was younger, I discovered the vast potential of talented Ecuadorian artisans who produce straw hats with unique designs, colours and sizes. In response, I set up a family business,” said company co-founder

Marjorie Lorena Reyes Palacios. The toquilla straw hat is woven from fibres from a palm tree characteristic of the Ecuadorian coast.

The company works with 400 women artisans from the Ecuadorian provinces of Azuay, Cañar and Manabí. These women have passed the skills of hat making from generation to generation, constantly innovating and improving weaving techniques.

“Take hat headbands, for example. We work with Zuleta women who do the embroidery. Amazonian women weave the headbands from natural fibres and paint them with vegetable dyes. And women from Tumbaco, a small community in Eastern Quito, use the textile waste, known as “trapillo”, giving fibres a second life,” Marjorie explains.

The main challenge the company faced was how to package, transport

and deliver toquilla straw hats and how to position the hats on the world stage as an artisanal and cultural product. The solution was participation in the eTrade Alliance programme – a public-private sector alliance supported by Aid for Trade that aims to increase the number of developing economy micro, small and medium-sized enterprises engaged in international trade.

The programme helped the company learn how to use e-commerce platforms and implement digital marketing strategies to diversify its products and increase its international visibility. “Since completing the programme, I have been applying the knowledge and techniques acquired, and our online sales have grown exponentially,” says Marjorie.

Source: Aid for Trade Initiative.

## MOROCCO

## Basketry cooperative empowers women to benefit from global trade

Doum for Women, a women-led cooperative founded in Marrakesh by a mother-daughter duo, employs over 250 rural women to develop handmade products, enabling them to achieve financial independence.

Using traditional craftsmanship and eco-friendly materials such as raffia or doum palms, Doum for Women creates handmade products highly sought after in global markets. Trade has created new opportunities for their know-how, giving communities the possibility to benefit from the transformative impact of global trade.

“We primarily use natural materials, such as raffia or doum, which is a type of Mediterranean palm and 100 per cent Moroccan,” said Yasmine Erguibi, the daughter half of the duo.

“The Doum for Women cooperative has enabled all these women to be financially independent and to become a major pillar for their families. They have become an inspiration for their communities and for future



generations,” declared her mother, Samira Madrane.

The cooperative has set up a training centre run by the most-experienced women, who pass on their knowledge to the younger women in the cooperative.

One of the main challenges has been obtaining production certificates regarding social and environmental practices. Doum for Women became the first Moroccan basketry cooperative validated by the Sedex Members’ Ethical Trade Audit (SMETA), which focuses on labour, safety, environmental and business ethics, allowing them to extend their reach to global markets.

Source: WTO.

Doum for Women has created opportunities for the local community to use traditional skills to access global export markets.



## VIET NAM, LAO PDR AND CAMBODIA

### Boosting food safety and market access for peppercorn farmers

Peppercorn farmers in Viet Nam, Lao PDR and Cambodia face significant challenges in meeting international food safety standards due to microbial contaminants and pesticide residues. The STDF-funded “Safer Spices” project has introduced innovative solutions to enhance food safety and market access for peppercorns.

Implemented by the Centre for Agricultural Biosciences International (CABI) with local partners, the project developed a code of practice for producers, collectors and input providers. This code was harmonized with national standards and tailored to local conditions, ensuring the production of high-quality, safe peppercorn.

A key innovation was the grassroots public-private partnerships model, which facilitated collaboration among

farmers, buyers and public sector advisors, enhancing compliance with the code and improving market access.

The project significantly improved peppercorn quality and safety. In Viet Nam, 100 per cent of samples from participating farmers met international export standards and in Lao PDR farmers enhanced their production practices. Cambodian farmers reported no rejections of their produce, and the country achieved a milestone by exporting peppercorn to China for the first time in 2024. The adoption of biocontrol methods reduced pesticide use, contributing to environmental sustainability.

The impact of the project extended to others in the value chain, with significant income improvements due to increased yields and higher prices. “The coaching we received on food hygiene certification is already opening doors to new markets in Viet Nam, China and Thailand,” noted a stakeholder from Lao PDR.

Source: Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF).

Peppercorn farmers in Southeast Asia have reached new export markets with the support of the Standards and Trade Development Facility.

# 30 Years

The WTO reached a significant milestone in 2024, marking 30 years since the signing of the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO, which led to the birth of the organization on 1 January 1995.

The WTO welcomed two new members – Comoros and Timor-Leste – in 2024, bringing its total membership to 166.

Over the past three decades, the WTO has helped to bring about a major expansion in global trade, with the objective of raising living standards, creating jobs and promoting sustainable development.



DG Okonjo-Iweala gives the opening remarks at the launch of the World Trade Report, which opened the 2024 Public Forum.



A Trade Negotiations Committee meeting chaired by DG Okonjo-Iweala.

## Trade negotiations and discussions



- At the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi in early 2024, five days of intense negotiations ended with ministers adopting ten multilaterally agreed decisions and declarations, covering development, dispute settlement reform and many other areas, such as e-commerce. Members agreed to continue negotiations in all areas where convergence could not be reached.



- Comoros and Timor-Leste became the newest members of the WTO following the approval of their accession terms at MC13 and the completion of their domestic ratification processes.



- WTO members made substantial progress on negotiating additional provisions on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies, building on the 2022 Fisheries Subsidies Agreement, which will enter into force once it has been formally accepted by two-thirds of WTO members. However, talks on the additional provisions currently remain deadlocked.



- In December, the Chair of the General Council, Ambassador Petter Ølberg of Norway, welcomed “significant progress” in the dispute settlement reform negotiations. He encouraged members to find a pathway towards reconciling their different interests on core issues, such as an appeal/review mechanism.



- Ministers from 124 WTO members participating in investment facilitation for development (IFD) talks issued a joint declaration announcing the finalization of the IFD Agreement. Their request to incorporate the Agreement into the Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO is yet to achieve consensus.

For more on trade negotiations, see page 46.



General Council  
Chair Petter  
Ølberg (Norway).

## Implementation and monitoring



- As part of efforts to advance reform of the WTO, the General Council began a series of retreats looking into areas such as the WTO's decision-making processes and trade as a tool for development.



- In November 2024, the General Council reappointed Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as Director-General for a second four-year term beginning on 1 September 2025. Dr Okonjo-Iweala first assumed office as Director-General on 1 March 2021, becoming the first woman and first African to lead the WTO.



- The Agriculture Committee adopted recommendations on how to help least-developed countries (LDCs) and net food-importing developing countries (NFIDCs) respond to acute food insecurity, fulfilling ministerial instructions to develop a work programme focusing on the food security needs of these countries.



- The WTO's latest trade monitoring report shows that from October 2023 to October 2024 the trade covered by new restrictions was US\$ 888 billion, half a trillion dollars more than the coverage of restrictions introduced in the preceding period.



- WTO members agreed in December 2024 that the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) will take place from 26 to 29 March 2026 in Cameroon.

For more on implementation, see page 70.



Ambassador Saqer Abdullah Almoqbel (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia) chaired the Dispute Settlement Body in 2024.

## Dispute settlement



- WTO members maintained a high level of dispute settlement activity in 2024, filing ten requests for consultations – the first stage in the dispute settlement process – compared with six the previous year.



- Five dispute panel reports were circulated, including one indicating that the parties had reached a mutually agreed solution.



- Three panel reports were adopted by the Dispute Settlement Body while one report was appealed to the Appellate Body. The latter is currently unable to hear appeals due to all seven positions in the Body remaining vacant and the ongoing lack of consensus among WTO members on launching a selection process.



- At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), members adopted a decision instructing their officials to accelerate dispute settlement reform discussions, with a view to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024. Members were unable to meet this deadline but consultations are ongoing.



- Formalized discussions on dispute settlement reform, starting in April 2024, resulted in draft texts on several issues under discussion. In December, the General Council Chair welcomed “significant progress” in the negotiations.

For more on dispute settlement, see page 120.

Twenty-seven government officials from developing economies took part in an introductory Trade Policy Course in Geneva in April 2024.



# Supporting development and building trade capacity



- A WTO Secretariat report revealed that developing economies' merchandise exports rose from US\$ 7.7 trillion in 2020 to US\$ 11.3 trillion in 2022. The share of least developed countries (LDCs) in world trade has nearly doubled over the past 30 years, from 0.59 per cent in 1995 to 1.17 per cent in 2023.



- A retreat in January 2025 allowed members to address the challenges faced by developing economies when they engage in international trade and to propose action to be taken in the lead-up to the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in March 2026.



- Aid for Trade disbursements climbed to a record high of more than US\$ 50 billion in 2022. Since the start of the initiative in 2006, US\$ 648 billion has been invested to help developing economies participate more fully in global trade.



- The multi-agency Enhanced Integrated Framework concluded the second phase of its programme, which has financed 175 projects in 49 countries in support of boosting LDC exports.



- Approximately 7,000 participants benefited from WTO trainer-led technical assistance in 2024 while over 10,000 completed e-Learning courses, a 14 per cent rise. Africa accounted for 42 per cent of total participants in 2024.

For more on development, see page 124.

# Outreach



- Under the theme “Re-globalization: Better Trade for a Better World”, the 2024 Public Forum gathered close to 3,000 participants, a record number, to explore how to make trade more inclusive and to ensure its benefits reach more people.



- The WTO launched the Young Trade Leaders Programme to bring young people closer to the work of the WTO, selecting eight young leaders for the year-long programme.



- The WTO Open Day, organized on 9 June 2024, offered around 4,000 visitors the opportunity to explore the WTO’s historic headquarters, learn about its work and interact with WTO staff.



- The WTO Secretariat’s first report on artificial intelligence (AI), “Trading with Intelligence”, explores the impact of AI on international trade and discusses the critical role of the WTO in promoting AI and mitigating its risks.



- The WTO website attracted a record of over 4.4 million monthly visits in 2024, exceeding the previous high of 3.5 million in 2023. WTO-produced video content reached an all-time high, with an 18.5 per cent increase compared with the previous year.

For more on outreach, see page 142.

DG Okonjo-Iweala  
meets with the WTO’s  
Young Trade Leaders.



154



WTO OMC

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION  
ORGANISATION MONDIALE DU COMMERCE  
ORGANIZACIÓN MUNDIAL DEL COMERCIO

Centre William Rappard  
in Geneva, headquarters  
of the WTO.



# 2

## What we stand for

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.

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# In brief

Simple, fundamental principles form the foundations of the multilateral trading system.



## 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.



## 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.



## 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.



### 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.



### 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.



### 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.



### 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.

# 30 years of the WTO

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 been instrumental in strengthening the global economy, helping its members to use trade to improve living standards, create jobs and support sustainable development. As the WTO celebrates its 30th anniversary, we look back at some of its major achievements across 13 ministerial conferences.

### WTO holds first Ministerial Conference

9-13 December 1996; Singapore

Ministerial Declaration renews commitment of WTO to “sustainable growth and development for the common good”.

1995



#### JANUARY

The WTO is born on 1 January 1995.

1996



1998



### 2<sup>nd</sup> Ministerial Conference

18-20 May 1998; Geneva, Switzerland

Conference marks 50 years of the GATT, bringing together world leaders to debate achievements and challenges of the multilateral trading system.





1999

**3<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Conference**

30 November – 3 December 1999;  
Seattle, United States

Ministers reaffirm central role of rules-based trading system despite breakdown in negotiations amid public protests.



2001

**4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

9-13 November 2001;  
Doha, Qatar

Ministers launch new round of trade negotiations – the Doha Development Agenda.



**5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

10-14 September 2003;  
Cancún, Mexico

WTO welcomes Cambodia and Nepal as first LDCs to join organization since its establishment.

2003

2005

**6<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

13-18 December 2005;  
Hong Kong, China

Ministers launch Aid for Trade initiative aimed at boosting growth in developing economies.



2009

**7<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

30 November – 2 December 2009;  
Geneva, Switzerland

Stocktaking conference reaffirms WTO's contribution to world growth and commitment to needs of developing economies.



2011

**8<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

15-17 December 2011;  
Geneva, Switzerland

Ministers agree on expansion of Government Procurement Agreement, increasing market access coverage.



2013

**9<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

3-6 December 2013; Bali, Indonesia  
Ministers conclude negotiations on landmark Trade Facilitation Agreement aimed at easing flow of goods across borders.



**10<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

15-19 December 2015;  
Nairobi, Kenya

Ministers agree “Nairobi Package”, including abolition of agricultural export subsidies, decisions in support of LDCs, and expansion of Information Technology Agreement to cover more goods.

2015



**13<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

26 February – 2 March 2024;  
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Members adopt Ministerial Declaration with forward-looking, reform agenda.

Ministerial decisions cover dispute settlement, needs of developing economies and LDCs, e-commerce, other topics.

2024



2017

**12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

12-17 June 2022; Geneva, Switzerland

Ministers conclude landmark Fisheries Subsidies Agreement aimed at curbing harmful subsidies.

Geneva Package also covers food security, pandemic preparedness, e-commerce, other topics.

2022

**11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference**

10-13 December 2017;  
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Ministers launch new areas of negotiations and discussions, covering e-commerce, investment facilitation, and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.





The WTO General Council reappoints Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as Director-General for a second term in November 2024.



# 3

## What we do

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.

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# In brief

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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.

Fishermen spreading nets in Phu Yen, Viet Nam.



### 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 52).



### 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 116).



### 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 120).



### 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 130).



### 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 142).

# Joining the WTO

- In 2024, the WTO saw its first membership expansion since 2016, with Comoros and Timor-Leste becoming the 165th and 166th members.
- Accession negotiations in Central Asia continued to be active. Uzbekistan injected renewed momentum into its accession. Azerbaijan demonstrated continued engagement. The two countries hosted DG Okonjo-Iweala in June 2024. Turkmenistan took a first step towards accession by preparing its Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime.
- Iraq resumed its accession process after 16 years. Efforts to prepare documentation advanced in Somalia, Ethiopia and Equatorial Guinea.

## 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 submit an application and establish a working party. It concludes when WTO members and the acceding government accept negotiated terms of accession.

## Comoros

Ambassador Sultan Chouzour handed over Comoros's instrument of acceptance of its Protocol of Accession and of the Agreement on Fisheries (see page 52) to DG Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala on 22 July 2024. "Comoros's membership will add a valuable voice to the multilateral trading system as it has shown commitment to the values of the WTO and has clearly demonstrated willingness to adapt to its rules and principles," the DG said.

The Union of the Comoros applied for accession in February 2007. The working party was established in October 2007, but did not meet until December 2016. The 10th and final meeting was on 9 January 2024. Comoros became the 165th member of the WTO on 21 August 2024.

## Timor-Leste

Deputy Prime Minister Francisco Kalbuadi Lay handed over Timor-Leste's instrument of acceptance of the Protocol of Accession and of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies to the DG on 22 July 2024. The DG congratulated the government and people of Timor-Leste, noting that "the WTO

The WTO membership terms for Comoros were adopted at MC13 in February 2024.





Timor-Leste's membership terms were adopted at MC13 in February 2024.

membership can help realize the potential of Timor-Leste as it seeks to diversify its economy. It also complements its efforts to join the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN)."

Following independence in 2002, Timor-Leste submitted its application for accession in November 2016. The working party was established in December 2016 and met for the seventh and last time on 11 January 2024. Timor-Leste became the 166th WTO member on 30 August 2024.

#### **Uzbekistan makes progress with accession**

Uzbekistan advanced its accession in 2024 with two working party meetings in May and December. At the ninth meeting in December, Deputy Prime Minister Jamshid Khodjaev reaffirmed Uzbekistan's commitment to its reform agenda, pointing to its accelerated work on bringing several laws into conformity with the WTO agreements.

He noted Uzbekistan aspires to join the WTO by 2026. In 2024, Uzbekistan signed bilateral protocols on the conclusion of market access negotiations with Brazil, the Dominican

Republic, El Salvador, Israel, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Uruguay. It also concluded negotiations with Argentina, China, India and the United States.

#### **Azerbaijan steps up accession talks**

In 2024, Azerbaijan continued to advance its WTO accession process. At the 16th working party meeting in September 2024, new chief negotiator and Deputy Minister of Economy Samad Bashirli highlighted recent reforms, noting that "these steps will lead to the achievement of important successes in the direction of ensuring a stable economy, accelerating the integration of Azerbaijan into the global economy and fulfilling international obligations".

#### **Iraq resumes engagement**

The resumption of Iraq's accession process followed a 16-year absence from Geneva and years of dedicated preparation. This resumption, strongly supported by Iraq's neighbours and partners, has inspired others in the Arab region, one of the most under-represented regions in the WTO.

The working party on Iraq's accession met in July 2024. The delegation was led by the Minister of Trade Atheer Dawood Salman Al Ghrairi, who reiterated that despite ongoing security, political and regional challenges, the Government was committed to pursuing reforms to enhance trade policies, boost the business environment and create favourable conditions for investment.

Iraq submitted several key documents, including its initial market access offers on goods and services. Its efforts were commended by members who highlighted the significance of its accession.

#### **Turkmenistan takes first step in accession process**

In 2024, the Secretariat continued to assist Turkmenistan in the preparation of its Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime, the first step in the accession process, allowing the WTO to start examining Turkmenistan's foreign trade regulations. Turkmenistan wants to hold its first working party meeting in 2025.

#### **Somalia intensifies engagement**

Somalia intensified its engagement on WTO accession, demonstrating an eagerness to build on its recent entry into the East African Community in March 2024. The Secretariat assisted Somalia in the circulation of a revised Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime and advised on the process for replying to questions from members and preparing relevant legislation. The first working party meeting took place in February 2025.

#### **Ethiopia works towards reactivating accession negotiations**

In 2024, Ethiopia worked to reactivate its WTO accession process four years after its fourth working party meeting in January 2020. Updated technical inputs were circulated in December. Bilateral negotiations are ongoing. A fifth working party meeting took place in March 2025. Ethiopia has set 2026 as its target for finalizing accession.

#### **Equatorial Guinea takes steps in preparing documentation**

The Secretariat provided technical assistance to Equatorial Guinea on documentation to work towards a first working party meeting in 2025. Equatorial Guinea applied for WTO accession in 2007, and its working party was established the following year.

#### **Bosnia and Herzegovina works to finalize outstanding issues**

Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession process is technically advanced, with only a few outstanding issues, such as the conclusion of bilateral market access negotiations. A visit by the Chair of the accession working party, Ambassador Anita Pipan (Slovenia), accompanied by the Secretariat, to Sarajevo in November 2024 provided greater clarity on the next steps Bosnia and Herzegovina and members must take, such as finalizing the draft Working Party Report outlining its specific commitments on joining the WTO.

#### **Technical assistance and outreach**

Bringing together government officials from five Central Asian countries and Azerbaijan, the Second Central Asia Trade Policy Forum in Almaty on 3-5 June 2024 was co-organized by the WTO, the Government of Kazakhstan, the Asian Development Bank and the International Trade Centre.

The Secretariat delivered many training activities in collaboration with technical assistance partners such as the World Bank and the IMF. A training course on market access negotiations on goods was held in October for 23 officials from nine acceding governments. In 2024, the Secretariat also organized technical assistance activities for Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The Informal Group of Acceding Governments met with the DG in April 2024 to share accession-related concerns and suggestions.

For a full list of WTO members and observers, see page 195.



**22**

In total, 22 countries are seeking to join the WTO.

# The WTO expands its membership

Comoros and Timor-Leste became the two newest members of the WTO in 2024. Membership terms for both of these least-developed countries (LDCs) were approved at the 13th Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi.

## Comoros

**165**

Comoros became the **165th** WTO member on 21 August 2024.

**850,000**

Comoros, a country of three islands off Africa's east coast, has a population of approximately 850,000.

**31**

Merchandise exports totalled **US\$ 31 million in 2023**. Cloves, essential oils and vanilla are among its most exported goods.

**121**

Commercial services exports totalled **US\$ 121 million in 2023**. Tourism and transport are among its most exported services.

**28.8%**

The main export partners in 2021 were the European Union (28.8 per cent), India, Tanzania, the United States and Madagascar.

**17**

Comoros joined the WTO after **17 years** of negotiations with WTO members.

**10**

Comoros is the **10th LDC** to join the WTO since it was established in 1995.



## Timor-Leste

**166**

Timor-Leste became the **166th** WTO member on 30 August 2024.

**1,384,000**

Timor-Leste, in Southeast Asia, has a population of approximately **1,384,000**.

**294**

Merchandise exports totalled **US\$ 294 million in 2023**. Coffee, clothing and vegetable extracts are among its most exported goods.

**69**

Commercial services exports totalled **US\$ 69 million in 2023**. Tourism, business travel and financial services are its most exported services.

**25.4%**

The main export partners in 2017 were Indonesia (25.4 per cent), the United States, the European Union, China and Australia.

**7.5**

Timor-Leste joined the WTO after **seven and a half years** of negotiations with WTO members.

**11**

Timor-Leste is the **11th LDC** to join the WTO since 1995.



# A global membership

The WTO's 166 members represent 98 per cent of world trade.

The two newest WTO members, Comoros and Timor-Leste, acceded to the WTO on 21 and 30 August 2024, respectively, marking the first expansion of the WTO membership since 2016.

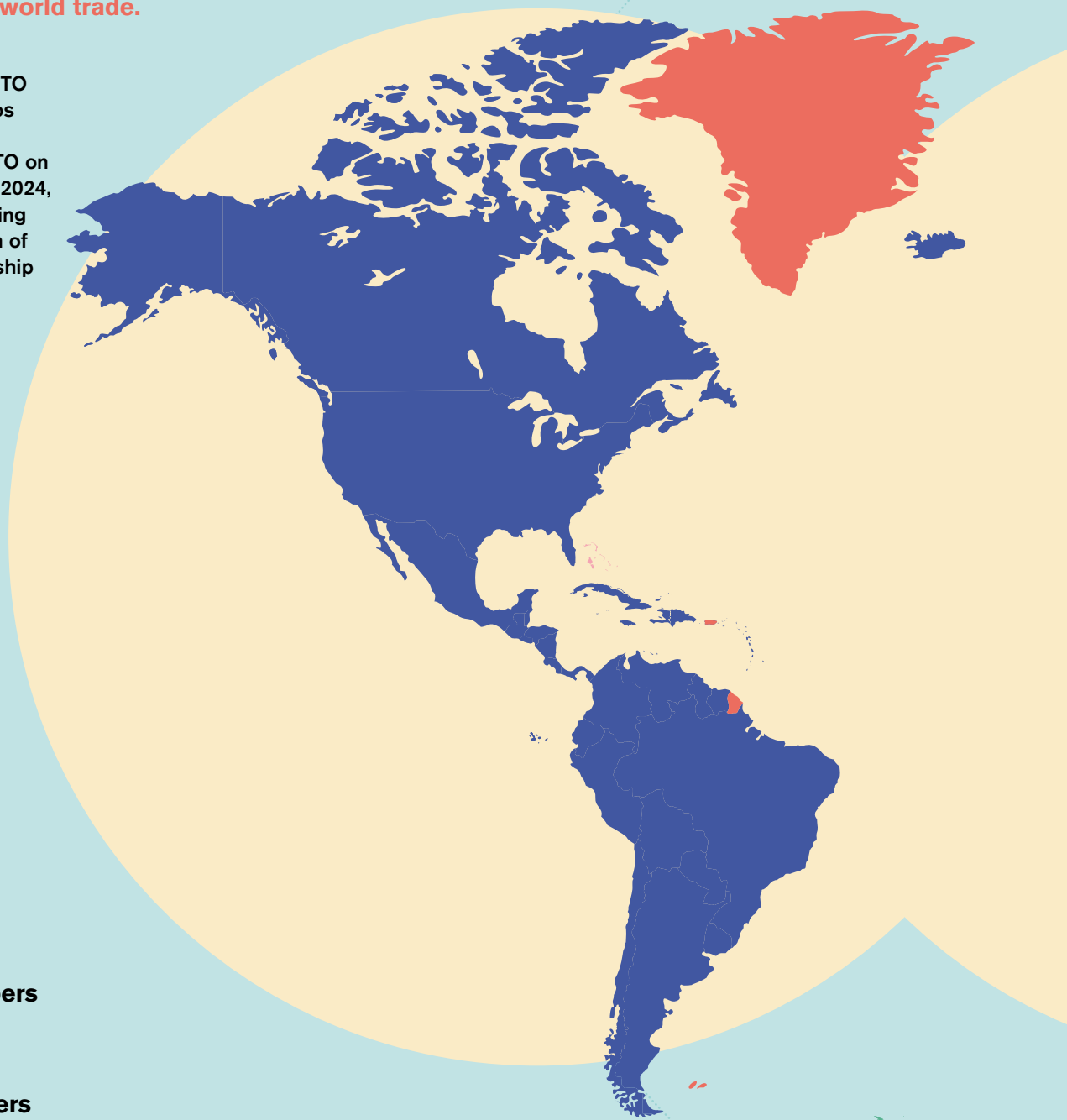
 **WTO members**

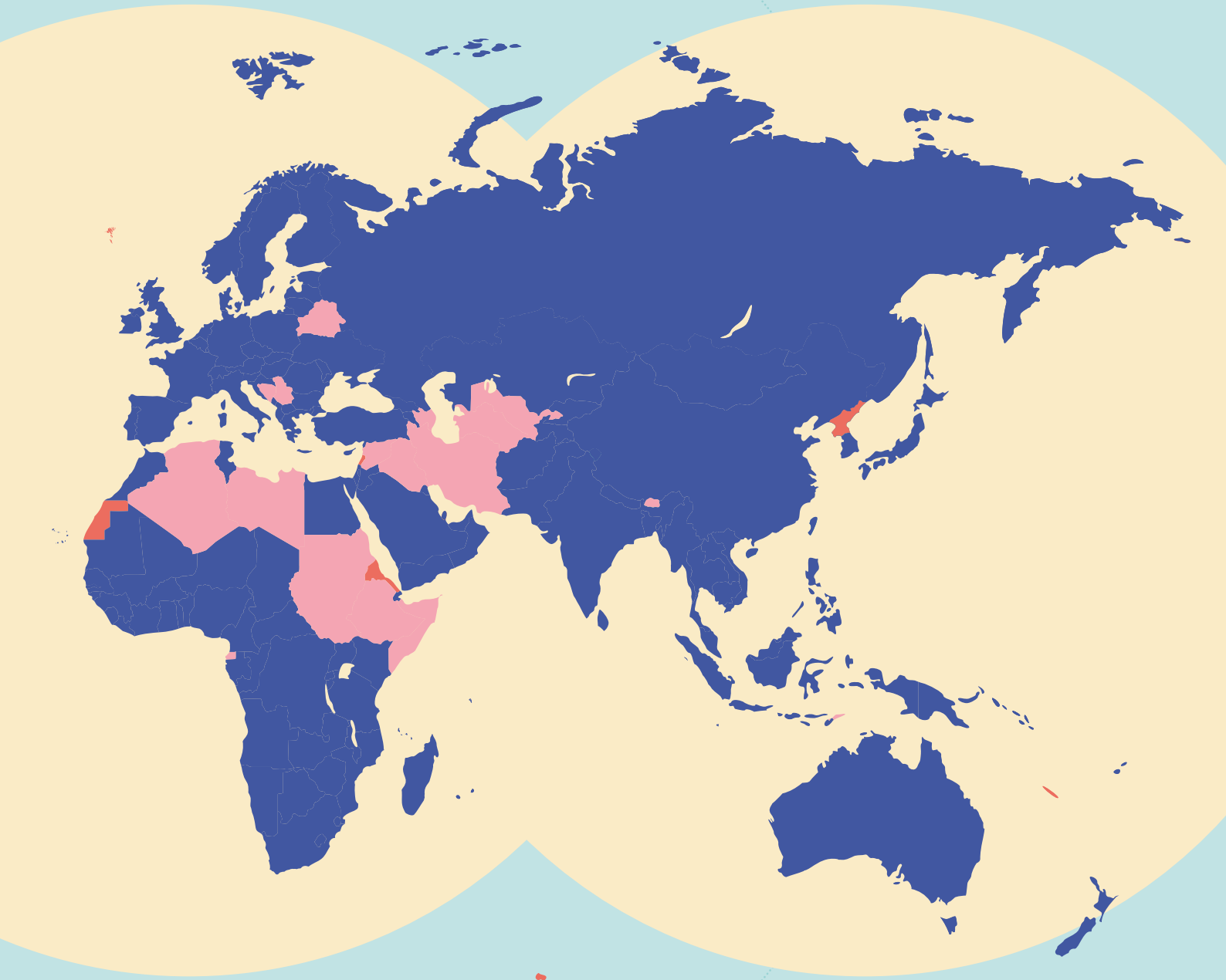
 **Observers**

 **Non-members**

For a full list of WTO members and observers, see page 195.

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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**We need to focus on delivering outcomes wherever and whenever possible.**

DG Okonjo-Iweala

## Trade negotiations and discussions in 2024

- At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in early 2024, five days of intense negotiations ended with ministers adopting ten multilaterally agreed decisions and declarations, covering development, dispute settlement reform and other areas.
- The Director-General, as Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) Chair, called on members to take a fresh approach to advancing WTO negotiations, with an emphasis on compromise, flexibility and engagement. “We have to deliver results for the people,” DG Okonjo-Iweala said.
- With the importance placed by WTO members on delivering on agriculture at MC14, set for March 2026, the DG called on them to use the first part of 2025 to conclude or make significant progress in as many areas as possible so as to devote more time for agriculture negotiations and to ensure that ministers at MC14 have a manageable and productive agenda.

Decisions taken by ministers at MC13 included renewing a commitment to have a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system (see page 10) and to improving use of the special and differential treatment (S&D) provisions for developing economies and least-developed countries (LDCs). They also agreed to continue negotiations in all areas where convergence was elusive at MC13 (see page 10).

At meetings with WTO members throughout the year, DG Okonjo-Iweala encouraged



them to work together to advance the various negotiating areas and deliver meaningful outcomes for people – especially given the current global and domestic challenges confronting them. At a TNC meeting in July, the DG told members: “Now is the time to walk the talk and move from reflection and brainstorming to action.”

Acknowledging that engagement has been consistent, the DG cautioned that mere engagement is not meaningful negotiation. “If we are to remain resilient at the WTO and responsive in a changing world, then we must remain faithful to the organization’s negotiating DNA,” she said, underscoring the need for flexibility, compromise and an openness to different approaches.

Agriculture reform negotiations were at the heart of WTO members’ discussions throughout the year. While WTO members actively engaged in these negotiations in the lead-up to, during and after MC13, a meaningful agriculture outcome remained elusive. Given the importance of the agriculture sector to people across the globe, a lot of attention was devoted to how to advance these negotiations.

Ambassador Alparslan Acarsoy of Türkiye, the outgoing chair of the agriculture

negotiations, noted efforts to build a roadmap for progress, referencing various WTO member-led initiatives, including the Brazil-led process, the collaboration between the Cairns Group and the African Group and submissions by the African Group and other WTO members (see page 49). However, he acknowledged that achieving consensus would require fresh ideas and sustained commitment.

The DG convened a formal TNC meeting in October focused on agriculture. She said she detected a “meeting of minds” on an initiative from Ambassador Acarsoy to advance discussions through group configurations and a facilitator-led process, with these efforts then channelled back to the Committee on Agriculture in special session.

While some WTO members expressed enthusiasm for these options, others raised concerns about the process. “We need to start somewhere,” the DG affirmed, acknowledging that while there are still questions, there is a palpable “appetite” for moving forward. In December, the DG asked the outgoing chair of the negotiations to see whether the hybrid approach could be a way forward.

The DG called on members to use the first part of 2025 to conclude a “second wave”

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

of fisheries subsidies negotiations (see page 52), find a mutually agreeable solution for incorporating the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement (IFDA) into the overall WTO Agreement (see page 61), achieve meaningful dispute settlement reform, make significant progress in development issues and advance work in other areas. Early progress in these areas would allow more time to be devoted to the challenge of advancing the agriculture negotiations and would help to ensure that ministers at MC14 have a manageable agenda for achieving results, she said.

On fisheries subsidies, Ambassador Einar Gunnarsson of Iceland, the outgoing Chair of the Negotiating Group on Rules, reported that despite extensive work, the negotiations on additional provisions for a comprehensive agreement on curbing harmful fishing subsidies had reached a near standstill. While a revised draft in late November 2024 found broad support, some WTO members still had significant reservations. "Save for any last-minute solution, it seems to me that the negotiations have reached a stalemate," he noted.

Despite the challenges, the DG remained hopeful, noting that a large majority of WTO members were eager to conclude the second wave of fisheries subsidies negotiations as soon as possible. "We have come a long way," she remarked, urging those with lingering doubts to take the time to consider the revised draft and provide feedback.

Concerning special and differential treatment (S&D), Ambassador Kadra Hassan of Djibouti, the Chair of the Committee on Trade and Development in special session, reported that progress was continuing on implementing the MC13 declaration calling for improved implementation of S&D for developing and LDC members. She also acknowledged that 2025 would be a critical year to make tangible progress and prepare for MC14.

Ambassador Alfredo Suescum of Panama, chair of the negotiations on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights, noted that negotiations on the multilateral register for geographical indications for wines and

spirits had seen little substantive negotiation in over a decade.

During the year, WTO members bade farewell to Ambassador Zhanar Aitzhanova of Kazakhstan, former chair of the services negotiations (see page 55), and welcomed Ambassador Eunice M. Tembo Luambia of Zambia as Chair of the Committee on Trade and Environment in special session.

Ambassador Luambia reported a reluctance from delegations to engage on trade and environment issues. The DG encouraged WTO members to seize the opportunity to shape the direction of work and for the respective chairs to continue to engage to see with WTO members what they want to do in these areas.

The DG repeatedly called on WTO members to adopt a spirit of negotiation in good faith for the common good. "We need to focus on delivering outcomes wherever and whenever possible," the DG said, emphasizing that effective negotiations demand a dynamic approach that considers each issue on its merits.

In the December TNC meeting, Ambassador Petter Ølberg, Chair of the General Council, said that the "stalemates" in the fisheries subsidies talks and the agricultural negotiations were quite different. On the former, 95 per cent of the membership was ready to accept the latest draft text whereas on agriculture members are not even able to agree on a process.

"We need some kind of a new approach," the GC Chair urged, stressing the need for fresh thinking to overcome the deadlock. The DG echoed this sentiment, calling for a new approach in terms of substance, process and attitude. "We have to deliver results for the people who have sent us here to do the work," she stressed.



**10**

At MC13, ministers adopted ten multilaterally agreed decisions and declarations.

## Agriculture

- The Chair of the Agriculture Committee Special Session, Alparslan Acarsoy of Türkiye, called for “fresh thinking” to break the deadlock in the agriculture negotiations after ministers at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) failed to reach consensus on a way forward.
- A workshop in July 2024 explored promoting a more sustainable food and agriculture system along with new avenues in the negotiations.
- Consultations began on finding a new Chair for the Special Session after Ambassador Acarsoy announced his departure.
- The Cotton-4 Group – Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali – reiterated its concern at the slow progress in cotton trade negotiations, which have been ongoing for over two decades.



The Chair called for “fresh thinking” to break the deadlock in the agriculture negotiations after ministers at MC13 failed to reach consensus on a way forward. From April, much of the discussion focused on a Brazilian proposal for talks to proceed across the various agriculture negotiation topics. The proposal, presented as a draft decision to be adopted by the General Council, was largely inspired by draft texts circulated for the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Conference.

While many WTO members supported the Brazilian draft, some opposed the approach, particularly on the procurement of food at administered prices for public stockpiles in developing economies, a long-standing issue to which they seek a standalone decision on a permanent solution.

Brazil also proposed in June 2024 to initiate a cross-sectoral dialogue on how the multilateral trading system could better support sustainable and resilient agriculture and food systems. This dialogue would

### Background

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

A coffee plantation in Brazil.

involve several bodies in the WTO, under the umbrella of the General Council.

In July 2024, the WTO Secretariat organized a workshop to explore approaches to promoting a more sustainable food and agriculture system along with new avenues to consider in the farm negotiations. Addressing the workshop, DG Okonjo-Iweala called on trade officials to find the political will to make the trade-offs needed to achieve progress in

the talks. “We should use every single means to try and get a breakthrough,” she said.

The Cairns Group of agricultural exporting countries and the African Group held discussions during 2024 aimed at identifying common ground and drafting a deal across all agriculture negotiating topics. The talks focused initially on domestic support (subsidies) and on procuring food at administered prices for public stocks. Participants said their goal was to secure agreement head of MC14, set for March 2026.

Following the mid-year break, the Chair presented two options for making progress in the negotiations, based on some preliminary consultations with members. One option was to encourage informal discussions on various topics, led by key proponents. The second was for the Chair to appoint facilitators to lead such thematic negotiations.

The discussions on how to organize such a process while respecting past decisions were moved to the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) (see page 46). But members were unable to agree on a way forward, again due notably to different views on food stockpiles.

At the December 2024 meeting of the TNC, Chair Acarsoy and the DG emphasized the urgent need for members to engage in substantive evidence-based negotiations in early 2025 so that ministers at MC14 could focus primarily on addressing a limited number of unresolved issues. “2024 has been a year of discussing the process, 2025 should be a year of substance,” the Chair told a special session in December.

After Chair Acarsoy announced he would leave Geneva in early 2025, consultations began on finding a successor to chair the agriculture negotiations in the run-up to MC14 and beyond.

### Cotton

At meetings in November, WTO members assessed the latest developments and pressing challenges facing the global cotton sector. The discussions encompassed



Harvesting cotton in Maharashtra, India.

the 42nd round of the DG’s Consultative Framework Mechanism on Cotton and the 22nd dedicated discussion on trade-related issues, including market access, domestic support and export competition for cotton.

Speakers underscored the critical role of cotton in global trade and its untapped potential to drive sustainable development and combat poverty, calling for immediate and collaborative action.

Following national consultations in the Cotton-4 Group (C4+) – Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Côte d’Ivoire – the “Partenariat pour le coton” initiative will support the C4+ with resource mobilization and fostering commercial interest in the region’s cotton-textiles-clothing sector for meaningful development impact.

The C4+ emphasized how subsidies distort global markets and hinder growth, calling for reforms to ensure fair trade practices. A key concern was the slow progress in global trade negotiations on cotton, which have been ongoing for over two decades.

The C4+ remained open regarding the process to be followed in the negotiations provided it preserved cotton’s specificity and past mandates. Several members supported addressing cotton separately but stressed the need for alignment with broader agriculture negotiations.

## Dispute settlement reform

- **At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), WTO members recalled the commitment they made at MC12 “to conduct discussions with the view to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024”. They instructed their officials to accelerate discussions on this in an inclusive and transparent manner.**
- **Ambassador Usha Dwarka-Canabady, Permanent Representative of Mauritius, was appointed as facilitator as part of a drive to advance discussions on dispute settlement reform. Draft texts were produced with respect to several issues under discussion.**
- **In December 2024, Ambassador Ølberg – Chair of the General Council – welcomed the progress in the negotiations. He said he intended to hold consultations with interested delegations on how to further advance the work.**

**O**n 2 March 2024, at MC13, members adopted a Ministerial Decision recalling their commitment made at MC12 “to conduct discussions with the view to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024”. The decision took “note of the works done thus far” and instructed “officials to accelerate discussions in an inclusive and transparent manner, build on the progress already made, and work on unresolved issues, including issues regarding appeal/review and accessibility”.

On 18 April 2024, the General Council Chair – Mr Petter Ølberg – informed the membership of the appointment of Ambassador Usha Dwarka-Canabady, Permanent Representative of Mauritius, as facilitator for a process of formalized discussions, with the support of six co-convenors to lead technical discussions.

During 2024, extensive work was carried out at the technical level, with heads of delegation

meetings convened to hear updates on the technical work and to allow members to share views on how to take the work forward. Draft texts were produced with respect to some issues, while other issues required more work at the technical level. Since Ambassador Dwarka-Canabady’s departure in November, the GC Chair has continued to directly oversee this work.

In December 2024, the GC chair summarized the state of play in the negotiations. On accessibility, Ambassador Ølberg said that members had a substantive, near-final draft of a chapter addressing capacity building and technical assistance. This recognized the special needs of developing members and least-developed countries (LDCs) and instructed the WTO Secretariat to undertake additional tailored activities and support. It established a dialogue between members and the Secretariat and established a review and reporting mechanism to the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB).

Ambassador Ølberg added that the more contentious area of costs and funding had also seen significant progress, with a first draft table produced capturing the interests and concerns of members.

On appeal/review, Ambassador Ølberg stated that members had a draft negotiating text that would narrow claims reviewable on appeal/review to those that would have a material impact on the respondent’s implementation obligations. It would clarify adjudicators’ roles with respect to reviewing the panel’s objective assessment of the facts of the case. It would make changes to the existent interim review stage of the panel process so that it provides a more meaningful opportunity for the panel to correct factual or legal errors. It would also clarify members’ expectations with respect to adherence to timeframes.

Members were unable to conclude negotiations on dispute settlement reform by the end of 2024, but the GC Chair stated the intention to hold consultations with interested delegations in 2025 to hear views on how to build on progress made in a manner that would further advance the work.

## Fisheries subsidies, other WTO rules

- The Negotiating Group on Rules made substantial progress in 2024 in narrowing gaps on key issues in negotiations on additional provisions for a comprehensive agreement on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies.
- By mid-July 2025, 106 WTO members (representing more than 95 per cent of the required two-thirds of WTO members) had accepted the 2022 Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, bringing it closer to entry into force.
- At the Ninth Global Review of Aid for Trade, the WTO Secretariat highlighted how the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies will contribute to global food security, emphasizing the need for enhanced international cooperation to rebuild fish stocks.
- The WTO's Fish Fund, which will assist eligible developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs) meet their obligations under the Agreement, approved a 2025 budget and workplan. Disbursements are contingent upon the Agreement's entry into force.

### 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 (S&DT) for developing economies.



Fishing in Saint Martinâs Island, Bangladesh.

At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), WTO members came close to concluding a “second wave” of negotiations on additional provisions for a comprehensive agreement on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies. They broadly signalled their commitment to continue negotiations after the Ministerial Conference, with a view to concluding the talks as soon as possible.

At MC12, ministers adopted a binding multilateral Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, disciplining subsidies that harm the sustainability of fisheries and contribute to the depletion of the world’s fish stocks.

The Agreement enters into force once it has been formally accepted by two-thirds of WTO members. By mid-July 2025, 106 members, representing more than 95 per cent of the required number, had accepted it.

Ministers at MC12 also mandated the Negotiating Group to conduct a second



A ceremony at MC13 welcomed the growing number of acceptances of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.

round of negotiations, with a view to making recommendations to MC13, focusing largely on subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing.

Building on the significant progress at MC13, the Negotiating Group continued extensive engagement in various configurations throughout 2024. Members narrowed the gaps in negotiating positions, as reflected in the Chair's texts circulated in April, July and December 2024, particularly on subsidies for fishing outside a subsidizing member's jurisdiction, issues related to LDC graduation, and characterizing small-scale and artisanal fishing.

However, talks on the additional provisions currently remain deadlocked. The 2022 Agreement recognizes the needs of developing economies and LDCs to implement the Agreement. The WTO Fish Fund, a voluntary funding mechanism, was established in November 2022 to provide technical assistance and capacity building to support eligible members in implementing their obligations.

The Fish Fund's 2025 budget and workplan were approved, including planning for disbursement of its funding. The workplan anticipates two calls for proposals in 2025, with targeted disbursements of approximately US\$ 2.5 million for each round. Funds will be disbursed only when the Agreement enters into force.

The Fish 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 a steering committee composed of representatives of donors and beneficiaries.

In 2024, members also made progress in developing documents, procedures and practices for the Committee on Fisheries Subsidies, which will oversee the Agreement once it enters into force.

The WTO Secretariat organized national technical assistance and capacity-building workshops focused on the Agreement and the second wave of fisheries subsidies negotiations for Honduras, Namibia, Nigeria and the Maldives.

At the Ninth Global Review of Aid for Trade (see page 132), the Secretariat organized a session on the contribution of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies to food security. At the session, Deputy DG Ellard launched a Secretariat report, "Leveraging Global Partnerships to Implement the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies for a Sustainable and Food-secure Future". She highlighted the need for enhanced international collaboration to achieve sustainable fisheries management practices and to rebuild fish stocks for a food-secure future.

# 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 once it enters into force.

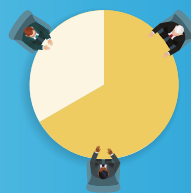
**106**

As of mid-July 2025, **106 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".



**1st**

It is only the second multilateral agreement reached at the WTO since 1995, and the **first WTO agreement** with environmental sustainability at its core.



**15**

The Fish Fund will help developing economies implement the Agreement. The Fund has received close to **US\$ 15 million** in contributions from WTO members.



**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.



**2nd**

Members have advanced work on concluding a **"second wave"** of negotiations on additional provisions to the Agreement.



**27.7%**

The **increase in the percentage** of stocks fished at unsustainable levels, from 1974 to 2021.



Source: WTO Secretariat and 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 2024 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.

The MC13 Ministerial Declaration recognized that services play a critical role in supporting economic growth.



## Services

- At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), WTO members committed to reinvigorate work on trade in services, including through thematic discussions.

In February 2024, in the lead-up to MC13, the chair of the special session of the Council for Trade in Services, Zhanar Aitzhanova of Kazakhstan, reported to the Trade Negotiations Committee on discussions in the special session since the previous Ministerial Conference.

She noted that the contribution of services to the global economy and trade has increasingly gained in importance and expressed the hope that WTO members could reinvigorate work and intensify discussions after MC13.

The Ministerial Declaration adopted at MC13 recognized that services play a critical role in providing a stable environment for economic growth and development and in tackling global challenges. It also acknowledged the importance of the work undertaken in both the regular and special sessions of the Council for Trade in Services as well as subsidiary bodies. Members committed to reinvigorate work on trade in services within existing mandates, including through thematic discussions.

Ambassador Aitzhanova stepped down as chair after MC13, returning to Kazakhstan. No further meetings of the special session were held in 2024. On 18 February 2025, the General Council noted consensus on appointing Dr Adamu Mohammed Abdulhamid of Nigeria as chair of the special session.

## Trade and development

- At the 13th Ministerial Conference in February 2024, ministers called for improved implementation of special and differential treatment (S&D) provisions for developing economy members in the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement and the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement, including enhanced training and technical assistance.
- The special session of the Committee on Trade and Development (CTD) continued work on ten Agreement-specific proposals to strengthen existing S&D flexibilities for developing members put forward by the G90 Group of developing economy WTO members.
- The Chair, Kadra Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti), told the special session in December that 2025 would be “a pivotal year” for continuing to make progress ahead of the next Ministerial Conference.

### 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.

**A**t MC13, ministers agreed to continue WTO work towards enhancing the implementation of flexibilities known as special and differential treatment (S&D) for developing members in the Sanitary and



Weaving of baskets for export in Namdinh, Viet Nam.

Phytosanitary Agreement (SPS) (see page 82) and the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement (see page 86). They called for improved training and technical assistance to help developing economy members, including least developed countries (LDCs), overcome the challenges they face in “timely engagement on SPS and TBT matters”.

They also agreed to continue to work in the special session of the Committee on Trade and Development and other WTO bodies on improving the application of S&D provisions and to report on progress to the General Council before the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14), to be held at the end of March 2026.

The special session has been examining ten Agreement-specific proposals to strengthen existing S&D for developing members put forward by the G90. According to the group, SPS and TBT measures together account for over 95 per cent of members’ non-tariff measures affecting trade.

The Chair named three facilitators to assist the Committee in exploring ways forward on the G90 proposals. One facilitator is working on SPS and TBT and another on aspects of the Agreement on Trade-related Investment Measures (TRIMS) (see page 100). The third area concerns technology transfer under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) (see page 105).

At a formal session in October, the three facilitators updated members on their consultations. The chairs of the SPS and TBT committees, Cecilia Risolo of Argentina and Daniela García of Ecuador, also informed members of work undertaken in their respective committees regarding implementation of the MC13 declaration.

In December, Ambassador Hassan told the special session that 2025 would be “a pivotal year” for continuing to make progress. “This progress will be instrumental for the preparations of MC14. The next phase will require continued engagement from all members to identify practical and concrete solutions to the challenges raised by the G90,” she said.



## 10

The Committee on Trade and Development has been examining ten Agreement-specific proposals to strengthen special and differential treatment for developing economies.

## Trade and environment

- **Ambassador Eunice M. Tembo Luambia (Zambia) was officially confirmed as Chair of the Committee on Trade and Environment special session.**

### Background

The negotiations cover the relationship between existing WTO rules and specific trade obligations set out in multilateral agreements (MEAs), procedures for regular information exchange between MEA secretariats and the relevant WTO committees, and the reduction and, as appropriate, elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to environmental goods and services.

**I**n November, the Committee on Trade and Environment confirmed the appointment of Ambassador Eunice M. Tembo Luambia of Zambia as Chair of the special session.

No new consultations or proposals have been made at the special session for several years.

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

- Ahead of the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), WTO members continued discussions on whether a landmark MC12 ministerial decision on TRIPS and COVID-19 vaccines for export should be extended to diagnostics and therapeutics, but no consensus was reached.
- Members continued to discuss IP measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of being prepared for future health emergencies and ensuring equitable access to health products and technologies.

In preparation for MC13 in February 2024, members adopted two reports on two key issues under discussion in the Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) since MC12 in 2022.

The first report recognized the considerable efforts that members had made to support a fact- and evidence-based discussion on paragraph 8 of the landmark MC12 ministerial decision on TRIPS and COVID-19 vaccines regarding the possible extension to cover COVID-19 therapeutics and diagnostics. It also acknowledged that despite these efforts, consensus could not be reached.

The second report noted that the TRIPS Council would continue its work, as directed by MC12, to review and build on all the lessons learned and the challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, and to build effective solutions in case of future pandemics in an expeditious manner.

During 2024, members continued to discuss IP measures in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of being prepared for future health emergencies and ensuring equitable access to health products and technologies, as requested by ministers at MC13. They discussed a submission by the United Kingdom on IP and technology transfer and a joint proposal from Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt and India addressing TRIPS-related issues (see page 105).



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

- **The chair of the negotiations, Ambassador Alfredo Suescum (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.**
- **An informal meeting open to all members of the special session of the TRIPS Council was held in September 2024, allowing members to share their ideas on the way forward.**

### 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.

**T**he chair of the negotiations, Ambassador Alfredo Suescum (Panama), had 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. He convened a meeting open to all members of the special session of the TRIPS Council in September.

In his subsequent report to the Trade Negotiations Committee (see page 58),

the chair reminded members that substantive negotiations have not taken place for over 12 years, despite the growing interest in GIs. The chair indicated that progress in this area depends on proactive leadership from proponents. He continued contacting delegations to monitor any potential developments.

Members' longstanding positions remain unchanged. They still disagree on the legal effects a potential register should have and whether it should create obligations for all WTO members or only those choosing to participate. Members 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.



## 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, and domestic regulation in services trade. The groups are open to all members.

### Joint statement initiative on e-commerce

- After five years of negotiations, participants in the Joint Statement Initiative on Electronic Commerce published in July 2024 a so-called “stabilized” or finalized text of the agreement.
- Participants asked the General Council to incorporate the text into the WTO legal framework under Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement covering plurilateral accords.
- The agreement establishes the first-ever set of global baseline rules on e-commerce, with the aim of creating a more stable business environment for digital trade and strengthening the multilateral trading system.

In 2024, participants in the talks made substantive progress in negotiating rules on trade-related aspects of electronic commerce. They “stabilized” the text, meaning final agreement has been reached for most areas under discussion.

Co-convenors of the joint statement – Australia, Japan and Singapore – issued a statement in July announcing the stabilized text, which is aimed at facilitating electronic commerce, ensuring an open environment for digital trade and promoting trust in e-commerce.

The agreement strengthens the rules-based multilateral trading system by establishing

the first ever set of global baseline rules on e-commerce, with the aim of creating a more stable business environment for digital trade.

Seventy-one WTO members initiated work towards future WTO negotiations on e-commerce in the margins of the 11th Ministerial Conference (MC11) in 2017. An inclusive and transparent process got underway under the leadership of the three co-convenors. Negotiations started in January 2019, expanding to include a diverse group of 91 participants, including five least developed countries (LDCs), and accounting for over 90 per cent of global trade. Participation remains open to all WTO members.

With over 60 per cent of global GDP now linked to digital transactions, the agreement responds to the urgent need for setting global rules to support and govern the rapidly evolving and growing digital trade landscape and to address the resulting fragmented approaches to digital trade regulation.

The agreement also has provisions on cooperation and development. In 2024, the co-convenors hosted a series of development-related information sessions, where various international organizations shared information on their programmes and how they can support the implementation of the commitments contained in the agreement. A capacity-building and needs assessment exercise is being developed to support developing economies and LDCs in implementing the provisions of the agreement.

While some participants are still consulting domestically, 71 WTO members had confirmed their support for the text as of December 2024. Joint statement participants asked the General Council in February 2025 to incorporate the text into the WTO legal framework under Annex 4 of the WTO Agreement covering plurilateral accords.



91

A total of 91 WTO members are participating in the joint initiative on e-commerce, accounting for over 90 per cent of global trade.



**The e-commerce agreement establishes the first-ever set of global baseline rules on e-commerce.**



At MC13, members participating in the investment facilitation for development (IFD) initiative announced the finalization of the IFD Agreement.

## Investment facilitation for development

- On the eve of the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), ministers from 124 WTO members participating in the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement – representing three-quarters of the WTO membership, including at that time 88 developing economies – issued a joint declaration announcing the finalization of the plurilateral IFD Agreement and making it publicly available.
- At MC13, participants requested the incorporation of the Agreement into the 1994 Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO, a request that requires consensus. Following MC13, discussions continued in the General Council. By mid-January 2025, participation in the IFD Agreement had risen to nearly 130 members.
- In parallel, needs assessments got underway to assist developing and least developed country (LDC) members in identifying implementation gaps and individual technical assistance and capacity building needs to enable them to effectively implement the Agreement.

Ministers representing 124 WTO members issued on 25 February 2024 a Joint Ministerial Declaration marking the finalization of the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement and made it available to the public.

As a plurilateral agreement, it is binding only on its parties while remaining open for all WTO members to join. The purpose of the Agreement is to facilitate and increase the flow of foreign direct investment, particularly to developing economies and LDCs, with the aim of fostering sustainable development.

Following the declaration, issued in Abu Dhabi, participating members asked the Ministerial Conference to add the Agreement to Annex 4 of the 1994 Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO. Annex 4 covers plurilateral accords, such as those on civil aircraft (see page 101) or government procurement (see page 119).

The request for the incorporation of the IFD Agreement continued to be discussed in the General Council. Throughout 2024, the co-coordinators of the IFD Agreement, ambassadors Sofía Boza of Chile and Jung Sung Park of the Republic of Korea, presented the request at each regular meeting of the Council.

Participating members stress that incorporation of the IFD Agreement into the WTO is critical to ensuring it delivers its full benefits, notably for developing and LDC members in greatest need of more sustainable and impactful investment flows. Embedding the Agreement within the WTO is also seen as a catalyst for mobilizing international support for national and regional investment facilitation efforts.

Three members have expressed concerns in the General Council regarding the proposed incorporation of the IFD Agreement. Consultations with these members continued throughout 2024, with the aim of addressing their concerns. A decision on incorporating the IFD Agreement requires the consent of all WTO members.

In parallel, needs assessments got underway to help developing and LDC members prepare to implement the Agreement. Building on the Agreement's dedicated section on special and differential treatment (S&D), the process will help members identify implementation gaps, the time required to implement each provision and individual technical assistance and capacity-building needs to effectively utilize the Agreement's S&D provisions.

In 2024, seven pilot needs assessment projects were successfully concluded, with the support of partner international organizations and donor members. More information on IFD needs assessments is available on the dedicated IFD portal on the WTO website.

The Investment Facilitation for Development initiative was officially launched in December 2017 by 70 signatories to a ministerial statement. By mid-January 2025, the initiative had close to 130 members – representing three-quarters of the WTO membership. Amongst them, there are 90 developing economies, of which 27 are LDCs.

The Agreement has 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.

Notably, the Agreement explicitly excludes market access, investment protection and investor-state dispute settlement.



**126**

The IFD initiative boasts the participation of 126 WTO members.

Parties to the IFD Agreement reiterated their aim to incorporate it into the WTO framework at a meeting in March 2024.



## Domestic regulation of trade in services

- New disciplines on services domestic regulation, which entered into force at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), are expected to lower trade costs by over US\$ 125 billion a year worldwide.
- As of February 2025, the disciplines are in force for 53 participating members of the Joint Initiative on Services Domestic Regulation, covering more than 90 per cent of world services trade.

The entry into force of new disciplines on services domestic regulation, announced at MC13, is expected to lower trade costs by over US\$ 125 billion a year worldwide. The announcement was made in Abu Dhabi by DG Okonjo-Iweala, the MC13 Chair, United Arab Emirates Trade Minister Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi and participating members in the Joint Initiative on Services Domestic Regulation.

Welcoming the new disciplines, the DG said: “Services are the largest generator of jobs – particularly for women and young people, and they have in most recent years been the biggest driver of commercial growth. It is therefore high time that 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.”

As of February 2025, the disciplines had entered into force for 53 members of the joint initiative as part of their services commitments under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). For the remaining 19 participants, the disciplines will become part of their WTO commitments on completion of all relevant WTO and domestic procedures. The two most recently acceded WTO members – Comoros and Timor Leste – have also committed to apply the disciplines following their graduation from LDC status (see page 126).

The disciplines bring longstanding work on good regulatory practice for services within the ambit 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” (MFN) basis, meaning that they will benefit service suppliers from all WTO members.

Currently, the disciplines apply to more than 90 per cent of world trade in services. 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.

If all WTO members were to implement the disciplines, large welfare and trade increases would ensue, especially for developing economies. By 2032, the disciplines have the potential to raise global real income by at least 0.3 per cent, representing over US\$ 300 billion, and global service exports by 0.8 per cent, amounting to US\$ 206 billion.

The 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. They promise to increase the transparency, predictability and efficiency of authorization procedures for service providers, and will be particularly beneficial for small businesses and women entrepreneurs.

At MC13, new disciplines on services domestic regulation entered into force for members participating in the initiative.



**72**

A total of 72 WTO members and observers are committed to implementing new disciplines on domestic regulation of trade in services.

## Trade and environment initiatives

- The three WTO environmental initiatives – Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD), the Dialogue on Plastics Pollution (DPP) and Fossil Fuel Subsidies Reform (FFSR) – delivered important outcomes at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13).
- The outcomes reflected substantial advancements in technical work and laid the ground for further outcomes by MC14 in March 2026.



### 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. The initiatives complement work of the Committee on Trade and Environment and other relevant WTO bodies, with participants sharing the objective of making trade part of the solution to addressing global environmental challenges. The groups are open to all WTO members.

### Trade and environmental sustainability

At MC13, the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD) presented outcome documents from its four informal working groups. The discussions are open to all WTO members and co-convened by Canada and Costa Rica.

The working group on trade-related climate measures compiled members' practices in the development of such measures to guide their design and implementation. The group on environmental goods and services consolidated discussions into an Analytical Summary identifying indicative lists of renewable energy goods and services, and opportunities for promoting their trade.

The working group on the circular economy, which emphasizes re-use and recycling of materials, 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.

The MC13 package also included a statement by the TESSD Co-convenors and an updated TESSD work plan for the working groups, focusing on enhancing transparency, integrating development perspectives, and identifying best practices and opportunities for policymaking towards concrete outcomes by MC14.

In 2024, members advanced work in such areas as climate adaptation, renewable energy, decarbonization of buildings and construction, circularity in the transport sector, subsidies related to biofuels, industrial decarbonization and critical mineral value chains.

At a stocktaking on 4 December, members reviewed progress and discussed priorities and possible outcomes towards MC14, with a focus on development perspectives.

By the end of 2024, TESSD had 78 co sponsors from all regions and at all levels of development, representing more than 85 per cent of global trade.



78

A total of 78 WTO members participate in the initiative on trade and environmental sustainability.

### Dialogue on plastics pollution and environmentally sustainable plastics trade (DPP)

The Dialogue's co-sponsors issued a ministerial statement at MC13 with a series of principles and actions to pave the way for trade to be a key contributor to tackling plastics pollution. These include increasing the transparency of plastics' trade flows, matching funding with trade-related needs, reducing unnecessary or harmful plastics and promoting potential non-plastic substitutes.

The statement, which also contains a compilation of trade-related practices already being adopted to address plastics pollution, calls for further "concrete, pragmatic and effective outcomes" by MC14, set for March 2026.

Work on such outcomes immediately followed, with members agreeing on eight "points of focus" for 2024 and 2025. They cover issues such as supporting work to better estimate volumes of plastics embedded in traded goods and facilitating access to technologies and services, including for environmentally sound waste management technology.

The Dialogue, launched in November 2020, explores trade-related contributions to addressing plastic pollution. Open to all members, it had 83 co-sponsors at the end of February 2025, accounting for some 90 per cent of global plastics trade.

### Fossil fuel subsidies reform

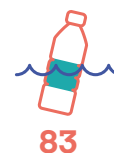
The Fossil Fuel Subsidy Reform initiative, which has 48 co-sponsors, issued an updated ministerial statement at MC13 that included a comprehensive work programme and a non-exhaustive list of standard questions on fossil fuel subsidies and subsidy reform for use in members' trade policy reviews (TPRs – see page 114).

Over the rest of 2024, members deepened their examination of specific kinds of subsidies with harmful trade and environmental impacts, beginning with production subsidies. The initiative also advanced the use and refinement of a non-exhaustive list

of questions, which has been applied in 14 TPRs since March 2024. Additionally, members shared experiences with the review and phasing-out of temporary crisis measures and made progress in discussions on developing an information paper documenting such experiences.

The initiative, which builds on a 2017 WTO ministerial statement urging ambitious and effective disciplines on "inefficient fossil fuel subsidies", seeks to achieve the rationalization, phase-out or elimination of harmful fossil fuel subsidies through the use of existing mechanisms or the development of new pathways to reform. It emphasizes the WTO can play a central role in reducing trade and investment distortions caused by fossil fuel subsidies.

Work has been organised around three main pillars: enhancing transparency, including through the use of existing WTO mechanisms; ensuring that crisis support measures are targeted, transparent and temporary; identifying the types of fossil fuel subsidies that are most problematic from a trade and environment perspective and considering pathways to address them.



83

A total of 83 WTO members participate in the initiative on plastics.



48

A total of 48 WTO members participate in the initiative on fossil fuel subsidies reform.



## Informal Working Group on Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

- **The Informal Working Group on Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) issued compilations of good practices for the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) on access to finance for women-led MSMEs and on special provisions for MSMEs in authorized economic operator programmes, which aim at facilitating customs clearance through preferential measures.**
- **Members proposed areas for future work, including on improving information sharing between local business and international organizations, good regulatory practices, access to finance and trade digitalization.**
- **Five new members joined the MSME Group, bringing total membership to 103.**

### Background

MSMEs face a number of obstacles when seeking to participate in international trade. To address these obstacles, 88 WTO members signed a statement at the WTO's 11th Ministerial Conference in December 2017 declaring their intention to create an Informal Working Group on MSMEs to explore ways in which WTO members could better support MSMEs' participation in global trade. The Informal Working Group met for the first time in March 2018. Participation is open to all WTO members

**T**he MSME Group launched two joint compilations of good practices on the eve of MC13. The first, on access to finance for women-led MSMEs, was a collaboration with the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender (see page 68) and the International Trade Centre (ITC) to help

policymakers design gender-responsive trade policies to enhance women entrepreneurs' financial inclusion.

The second was on special provisions for MSMEs in authorized economic operator (AEO) programmes, which aim at facilitating customs clearance through preferential measures. It was compiled with the World Customs Organization (WCO).

The Group also held a joint event at MC13 with the Group on Trade and Gender and the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD) (see page 64) on plans for strengthening inclusive trade and making trade work for women, MSMEs and the environment.

Following MC13, new proposals were submitted on improving information sharing between local business and international organizations and developing compilations on good regulatory practices to promote MSME trade inclusion and on educational programmes for women entrepreneurs. Proposals were also submitted on continuing work on access to finance for women-led MSMEs, digital and paperless trade, low-value shipments, the informal sector and MSME references in regional trade agreements (RTAs) (see page 112).

The Group continued to implement the December 2020 package of six recommendations and declarations to help MSMEs trade more internationally. Six WTO members included MSME-related information in their 2024 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, UNCTAD and the WTO aiming to simplify market research for companies.

The MSME Group, together with the Group on Trade and Gender and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), organized a second Joint Solutions Lab on leveraging intellectual property as a business tool for women-led enterprises.



**103**

A total of 103 WTO members participate in the Informal Working Group on MSMEs.



The Group held a fourth annual meeting with business representatives in July 2024. A third meeting of the Trade4MSMEs Network, which facilitates collaboration among international organizations, discussed trade digitalization and trade outside the formal sector.

Together with the ITC, the International Chamber of Commerce and WIPO, the Group held the fourth Small Business Champions competition, with the theme 'Empowering Indigenous Peoples' Economic Development through International Trade'.

The winners were the San Salvador-based Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fairtrade Small Producers and Workers, a network representing 1,000 Fairtrade-certified organizations in 24 economies in Latin

America and the Caribbean, and O'KANATA of Canada, an organization focused on the empowerment of indigenous youth.

Launched by 88 WTO members at MC11, the Working Group currently has 103 members, with Cabo Verde, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Maldives, Mauritius and Mozambique joining in 2024.

A small textile factory in Lima, Peru.



**The MSME Group launched two compilations of good practices at MC13, covering access to finance for women-led MSMEs and facilitating customs clearance.**



## Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender

- The Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration provided a ministerial mandate for the WTO to address trade and gender issues by recognizing that women's economic empowerment and participation contribute to economic growth and sustainable development.
- At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender jointly launched the Compendium of Financial Inclusion Initiatives for Women-led Small Businesses to aid policymakers in developing gender-responsive trade policies.
- The Working Group awarded its first International Prize for Gender Equality in Trade, which seeks to promote gender-responsive trade policies and foster the exchange of best policy practices among WTO members.

## Ministerial breakthrough for gender equality in trade

The adoption of the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration at MC13 marked a milestone by providing a ministerial mandate for the WTO to actively address trade and gender issues. The declaration acknowledged that women's participation in trade helps drive economic growth and sustainable development. It emphasized the importance of capacity building and experience-sharing – two central pillars of the Working Group's work on trade and gender.

At MC13, the IWG co-chairs issued a joint statement on "Promoting Inclusive and Sustainable Trade Growth through Gender Equality and Building a Gender-Responsive WTO", containing key commitments to mainstream gender issues within the WTO. They committed to work with their respective governments to ensure that trade policies supporting women's economic empowerment are included in their Trade Policy Review reports (see page 114). Other steps identified include developing tools and initiatives to strengthen gender-responsive policies.

A technician examines medical equipment in Colombia.

**New policy tool for women’s economic empowerment**

Launched jointly with the WTO’s Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) Group at MC13, the “Compendium of Financial Inclusion Initiatives for Women Entrepreneurs” is a practical tool for policymakers to develop gender-responsive trade policies that address the financing gap faced by women-led MSMEs.

It highlights financial initiatives undertaken by governments, international organizations, financial institutions and civil society. The compendium has been converted into a searchable database to allow policymakers to easily locate specific initiatives, making it a valuable resource for developing targeted policies.

**Promoting gender-responsive trade policymaking**

In 2024, the IWG launched the International Prize for Gender Equality in Trade to recognize WTO members and observers that implement the most effective gender-responsive national trade policies, export programmes or Aid for Trade projects.

The inaugural prize recognized five winners. Pakistan’s Khadijah Program supports women entrepreneurs in accessing international markets. In Spain, the DESAFÍA San Francisco Program helps women-led start-ups expand globally. Chile’s Gender Chapters in Trade Agreements promote equitable policies, financial inclusion and entrepreneurship. In Colombia, the She Exports to Africa programme connects women-led businesses with African markets. Finally, Australia’s Investing in Women Program fosters workplace gender equality and encourages “gender lens” investments across Southeast Asia.

**Experience-sharing**

Members shared experiences and insights into integrating gender issues into other high-level international discussions, such as the G20 group of developed and developing economies and APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation). Some members presented initiatives such as the Gender-Responsive Trade Action Group Agreement (GTAGA), an initiative from APEC’s Inclusive Trade Action Group, designed to improve women’s access to trade opportunities.



**130**

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

At MC13, the Informal Working Group jointly launched a compendium on financial inclusion for women entrepreneurs.



# Implementation and monitoring

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## General Council

- Issues discussed by the General Council in 2024 included following up on ministerial decisions and declarations adopted at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) and previous conferences.
- The General Council organized two retreats: one in July 2024 on the WTO's decision-making processes and a second in January 2025 on trade as a tool for development.
- WTO members agreed that the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) will take place from 26 to 29 March 2026 in Cameroon.

### 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 2024

Chaired by Ambassador Petter Ølberg of Norway, meetings of the General Council in 2024 included a special meeting in February to prepare for MC13, which took place from 26 February to 2 March in Abu Dhabi (see page 10). Over the rest of the year, other meetings covered a range of matters, including following up on ministerial decisions and declarations at MC13 and previous conferences.



Speaking at the General Council in March 2024, DG Okonjo-Iweala commended members for concluding a package of ten outcomes at MC13 and urged them to deliver results on the remaining issues as soon as possible. She highlighted the formal approval of WTO membership terms for Comoros and Timor-Leste (see page 40) and the outcomes on trade and development, including on special and differential treatment (S&DT) for developing members, on supporting least-developed countries (LDCs) graduating from LDC status (see page 126) and on trade opportunities for small economies (see page 128).

The DG addressed the Council regularly during the year in her capacity as Chairperson of the Trade Negotiations Committee (TNC) (see page 46). In October 2024, she urged members to “continue to be constructive” in addressing outstanding issues on the WTO work agenda, such as agriculture (see page 49), fisheries subsidies (see page 52), development (see page 56) and dispute settlement reform (see page 51).

### Implementation of Ministerial Conference outcomes

The General Council continued its regular review of the implementation of decisions taken by ministers at MC9, MC10, MC11, MC12 and MC13. The reviews included the 2015 Nairobi decision to abolish export subsidies for farm exports, the LDCs services waiver, the LDC preferential rules of origin decision, the Trade Facilitation Agreement (see page 102) and Aid for Trade (see page 130).

A meeting of the General Council in May 2024.



**DG Okonjo-Iweala urged members to “continue to be constructive” in addressing outstanding issues on the WTO work agenda, such as agriculture, fisheries subsidies, development and dispute settlement reform.**



Ambassador Petter Ølberg of Norway chaired the General Council in 2024.

### Dispute settlement reform

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

The General Council heard reports on dispute settlement reform (see page 51) from the facilitator of the process, Ambassador Usha

Dwarka-Canabady of Mauritius, following her appointment in April 2024, and from the General Council Chairperson, Ambassador Ølberg in December 2024.

The Chairperson noted in December that, despite not meeting the 2024 deadline, significant work had been done. He said members had a draft negotiating document on appeal/review reforms and had a near-final draft chapter addressing capacity building and technical assistance, a key pillar of the negotiations. While the progress was positive, the Chairperson urged members to “find a pathway towards reconciling their different interests and concerns on core issues”.

Ambassador Ølberg, who oversaw the talks after Ambassador Dwarka-Canabady’s departure in November, said he would consult members on the way forward.

### MC14 to take place in March 2026

WTO members agreed that MC14 will take place from 26 to 29 March 2026 in



**Members agreed that the WTO’s 14th Ministerial Conference will take place in Cameroon in March 2026. It will be the second ministerial conference to be hosted in Africa.**

Cameroon. The dates were endorsed at the December General Council meeting. Members had agreed in December 2022 to a proposal from the United Arab Emirates and Cameroon to host consecutive ministerial conferences. MC14 will be the second ministerial conference to be hosted by an African country, following MC10 in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2015.

### Members' retreats

As part of efforts to advance work in Geneva, members held a retreat in July 2024 to reflect on how work is carried out in Geneva, how ministerial conferences can be optimized and how ongoing work can be carried forward in the various workstreams. The goal was to “ensure the WTO remains a forward-looking organization – mindful of the pending, long overdue workstreams that require our attention,” Chairperson Ølberg said.

Members attended a second retreat in January 2025 to look at ways of responding to the challenges that developing economies and LDCs face when engaging in trade. In an opening address, DG Okonjo-Iweala said: “The development dimension remains central to furthering the organization’s purpose of raising living standards, creating jobs and advancing sustainable development.”



**“The development dimension remains central to furthering the organization’s purpose of raising living standards, creating jobs and advancing sustainable development.”**

DG Okonjo-Iweala

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

In 2024, the General Council granted the following waivers from obligations under the WTO agreements.

Member	Type	Decision	Date of adoption	Expiry date
China*	Introduction of Harmonized System 2002 Changes into WTO Schedules of Tariff Concessions	WT/L/1208	16 December 2024	31 December 2025
Argentina, Brazil, China, Dominican Republic, European Union, and Malaysia*	Introduction of Harmonized System 2007 Changes into WTO Schedules of Tariff Concessions	WT/L/1209	16 December 2024	31 December 2025
Argentina, Brazil, China, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, European Union, Guatemala, India, 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/1210	16 December 2024	31 December 2025
Argentina; 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; Paraguay; Philippines; Russian Federation; Switzerland; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; United States; and Uruguay*	Introduction of Harmonized System 2017 Changes into WTO Schedules of Tariff Concessions	WT/L/1211	16 December 2024	31 December 2025
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; Philippines; Russian Federation; Switzerland; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; and United States*	Introduction of Harmonized System 2022 Changes into WTO Schedules of Tariff Concessions	WT/L/1212	16 December 2024	31 December 2025
Australia, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Côte d'Ivoire, European Union, Guyana, India, Israel, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Norway, Russian Federation, South Africa, Switzerland, Thailand, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom, and United States	Extension of Waiver concerning Kimberley Process Certification Scheme for Rough Diamonds	WT/L/1213	16 December 2024	31 December 2030

\* 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

- At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), ministers renewed their commitment to reinvigorate the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, with a particular focus on its development dimension. They also agreed to maintain a moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions until MC14 or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier.
- Based on discussions since MC13, the new facilitator of the Work Programme, Ambassador Richard Brown (Jamaica), presented a workplan containing members' suggestions and recommendations with priority interventions or action points.

At MC13, ministers agreed to continue reinvigorating the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, with a particular focus on the development dimension, and to deepen discussions on e-commerce-related topics, building on previous work. They also called for continued cooperation with other international organizations and engagement on the main trade-related challenges faced by developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs).

Ministers further decided to extend a moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions until MC14, which is set for 26–29 March 2026, or 31 March 2026, whichever is earlier, and to continue discussions on the moratorium's scope, definition and impact.

In July, Ambassador Richard Brown of Jamaica was appointed as the new facilitator of the Work Programme. Based on discussions among members since MC13, the facilitator presented a workplan in November containing suggestions and recommendations put forward by members and priority interventions or action points that could be taken. The workplan includes examples of initiatives by international organizations addressing e-commerce. The goal is to present recommendations for



action under the Work Programme at MC14, as instructed by ministers in Abu Dhabi.

The topics that members aim to address in the plan are legal and regulatory frameworks, digital trade facilitation, the digital divide, the moratorium and other issues, such as emerging technologies and climate change. Ambassador Brown said: "I am hoping that from this workplan, we will be able to work on some specific, targeted priority deliverables for MC14."

Members welcomed the workplan. They underscored the importance of prioritizing specific topics, such as the moratorium, capacity building and bridging the digital divide.

Discussions on the moratorium restarted in December 2024 with an information session focusing on reviewing existing literature on the impact of the moratorium, discussing its scope and definition and examining related taxation issues.

The facilitator said he intended to organize workshops with the participation of international organizations and other stakeholders during 2025. At a meeting on the Work Programme in January 2025, members exchanged views on what is needed to bridge the digital divide across the WTO membership, focusing on digital infrastructure, connectivity and internet access.

## Council for Trade in Goods

- **The Council for Trade in Goods heard nine new trade concerns in 2024. Although the overall number of new concerns declined, a large number of previously raised and unresolved concerns continued to be discussed.**
- **The Council considered various proposals to improve its future work, including on transparency and the way trade concerns are discussed.**

### 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.

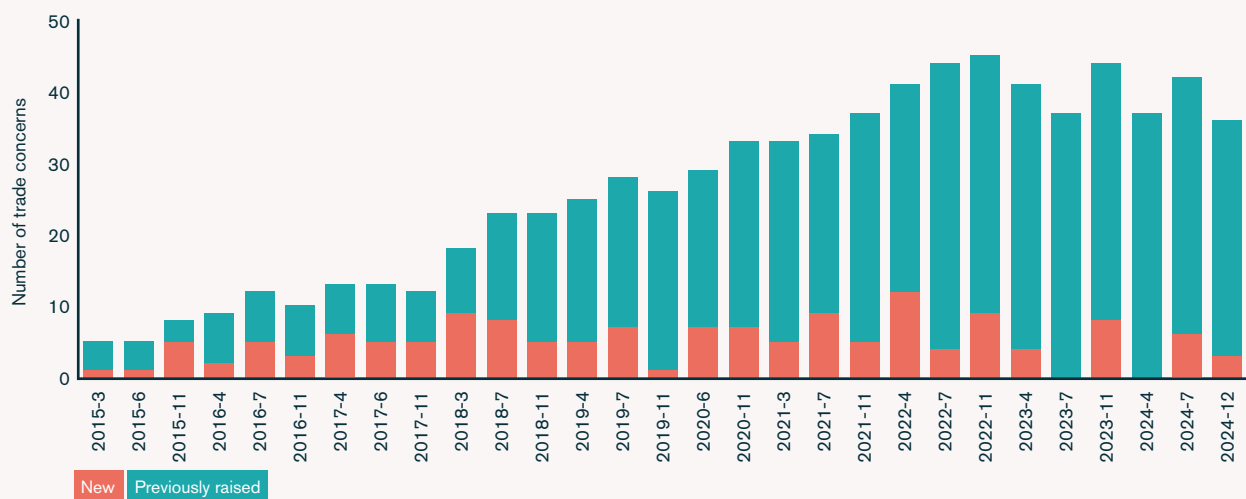
The Council for Trade in Goods discussed many trade concerns raised by WTO members, with a peak of 42 raised at its July meeting, reflecting a persistent trend in the high number of trade concerns considered at each meeting (see Figure 1). Nine concerns were raised for the first time, down from 12 the year before. Part of the reason for this reduction is that some trade concerns became disputes under the Dispute Settlement Understanding.

Trade-related environmental measures continued to generate 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 (see page 100), anti-dumping measures (see page 91) and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures (see page 89).

### Future work of the Council

Discussions on the future work of the Council were a prominent feature of the agenda in 2024, with members exchanging views on enhancing the effectiveness of the Council's

**Figure 1:** Trade concerns raised at the Council, 2015–24



deliberative functions. The Council considered several types of proposals: actions that members could take independently; actions for the Council itself; and measures to enhance the role of the Council Chair.

These proposals highlighted the importance of addressing trade concerns more effectively and improving the Council's responsiveness to emerging challenges. They also highlighted the need to improve notification compliance, with particular attention to the quality and timeliness of notifications. The Council asked the WTO Secretariat to prepare an analytical report on the status of notifications on goods, which could be used by members as a tool for identifying gaps and improving transparency.

The Council also looked at strengthening coordination across its subsidiary bodies. Members expressed support for continuing these discussions in 2025, with a view to adopting recommendations for improving the functioning of the Council.

The Council held a first informal session with experts from the WTO Secretariat on the availability and use of new digital tools, as agreed in 2023. Members will have the opportunity to provide feedback and suggestions on possible improvements. These sessions are to take place annually at the time of the first formal Council meeting of the year.

### Extension of waivers and other decisions

At its meeting in December, the Council considered extending by an additional six years the waiver for the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme aimed at supporting legitimate diamond trade. This was subsequently approved by the General Council (see page 70). In addition, it approved five collective extension requests for waivers in connection with Harmonized System (HS) changes for 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017 and 2022 (see page 78).

### Graduated LDCs

The Council continued considering a proposal by the Least Developed Countries (LDCs)

Group to allow LDCs that have "graduated" from LDC status under the UN definition to continue using export subsidies (see page 126) 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

In December, the WTO Secretariat informed members that it had launched a new section of the WTO website to improve transparency and the information available to members on Secretariat-initiated activities.

An industrial valve manufacturing and assembly factory in Johannesburg, South Africa.



## Market access

- A first thematic session was held on “greening” the Harmonized System (HS) of classifying traded goods and how the HS could be adapted to help WTO members achieve their environmental objectives.
- The Committee on Market Access held in January 2025 the last of four sessions on supply chain resilience, with inputs from experts from WTO members and international organizations.
- Members raised 43 trade concerns, up from 36 in 2023.

### 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.

### Thematic sessions

A first thematic session on “greening” the Harmonized System (HS) of classifying traded goods, discussing how the HS could be amended to better identify goods of policy interest and support environmental policy needs, took place in June 2024 in collaboration with the World Customs Organization (WCO), based on a proposal by Ecuador.

Also on HS classification, members welcomed progress on a joint effort by the WCO, the World Health Organization

(WHO) and the WTO to establish new HS tariff headings for vaccines, which will facilitate trade policymaking. Currently, there is only one subheading for “vaccines for human medicine”, under which all vaccines traded are classified. This has complicated the adoption of targeted trade policy measures and the collection of international trade statistics, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In January 2025, the Committee held the last of four planned thematic sessions on supply chain resilience. Members discussed their domestic experiences in building resilient supply chains and heard from experts from WTO members and international organizations. The WTO Secretariat will draft a report reflecting the outcomes of the discussions to be shared with the Committee for members' review and comments.

Once finalized, the Secretariat's note could become a document by the Committee to indicate practices members might consider in building resilient supply chains.

### Trade concerns

Members raised 43 trade concerns, of which 11 were new, up from 37 in 2023, extending a trend for high numbers of concerns. Environmental policies continued to be the subject of numerous interventions in the Committee, together with restrictions relating to national security and concerns related to increased applied tariffs and discriminatory internal taxes and regulations.

### Quantitative restrictions

The Committee received quantitative restrictions (QR) notifications from 26 members, up from 18 the previous year. 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. A WTO Secretariat note was presented to the Committee showing that while the volume and quality of notifications have been increasing, the overall level of compliance with the notification requirement remains relatively low.



WTO members raised 43 trade concerns in 2024, up from 36 in 2023.



Members welcomed progress on establishing new tariff classifications for vaccines.

In 2024, the Secretariat released a new online notification portal that allows members to modify information and data on their qualitative restrictions and submit notifications online.

### **Better functioning of the Committee**

The Committee implemented improvements to its functioning in 2024 as part of work towards WTO reform. These include improvements in the annotated agenda for meetings and the adoption of the new “airgram” for convening meetings.

### **Integrated Database**

The WTO’s Integrated Database (IDB) is the main source of official tariff and import data notified by members. In 2024, six members (Canada, Côte d’Ivoire, Madagascar, Mauritius, Norway 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.

In early 2025, the Secretariat launched a revamped tariff and trade platform, which provides comprehensive tariff and import data for more than 150 economies. It brings

together official information about applied tariffs and import data notified by WTO members to the IDB, supplemented by information from other sources such as the International Trade Centre.

### **Harmonized System**

The Committee worked 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.

After almost two years of negotiations, the Committee adopted 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 (e.g. HS 2022) through a single and streamlined process.

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.

## Agriculture

- The Committee on Agriculture reviewed 610 questions from WTO members concerning individual notifications and specific implementation matters in 2024, the second-highest number on record.
- Members adopted a report and recommendations on helping least developed countries (LDCs) and net food-importing developing countries (NFIDCs) respond to acute food insecurity.
- The Committee on Agriculture concluded the third triennial review of the Nairobi decision on export competition by agreeing to update and streamline export competition transparency requirements.

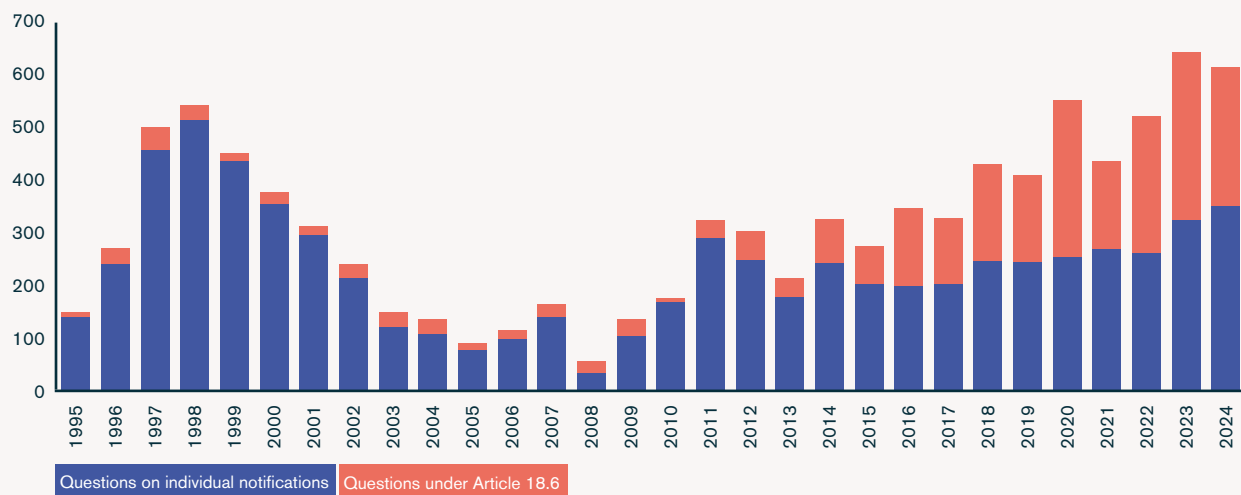
In 2024, the Committee on Agriculture reviewed 610 questions from WTO members concerning individual notifications or under Article 18.6 of the Agreement on Agriculture, also referred to as specific implementation matters (SIMs). This allows members to raise any matter relevant to the implementation of commitments at any time. It is the second-highest number of questions raised under the Committee's review process.

### 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 and appropriate mechanisms for the provision of food aid and other assistance to these countries.

Under SIMs, members can seek greater detail on a measure or request information on a policy under consideration. Members' recourse to SIMs has been on the rise since 2016 and the process's share of overall questions has averaged 44 per cent, compared with 15 per cent in earlier years (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Questions raised in the Committee concerning individual notifications and under Art. 18.6 (SIMs), 1995 to 2024



Members' compliance with notification obligations, particularly for domestic support and export subsidies, was a subject of specific scrutiny by the Committee. Notifications fell to 351 from 403 in 2023 (see Figure 3). Thirty-four per cent of domestic support notifications (1,030) and 24 per cent of export subsidy notifications (802) remained outstanding as of 31 December 2024. Seventeen questions were raised concerning pending notifications from Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, India, Paraguay, Tanzania, Thailand, the United States and Uruguay.

Despite these numbers, members have maintained a strong commitment to increased transparency. The number of annual notifications, an important source of transparency, has trended upward since 2018, hitting a high of 440 in 2019. Efforts to catch up on overdue notifications were also evident in 2024 as members cleared backlogs from multiple years. Among members making notifications in 2024 were LDCs such as Rwanda and Haiti, which submitted 28 outstanding notifications on export subsidies and 12 on domestic support, respectively.

The new and simplified mechanism letting members report verbally their non-recourse

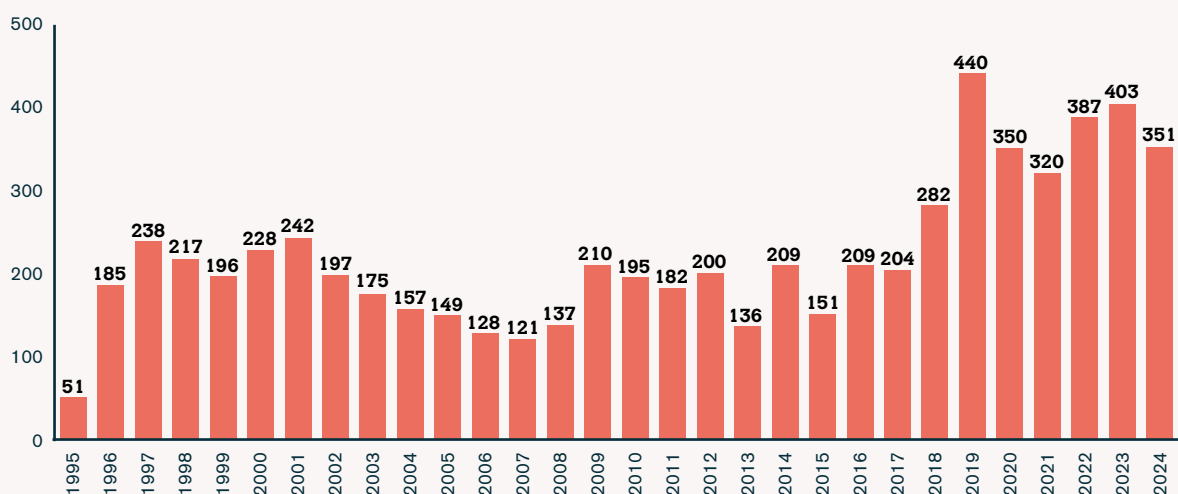
to export subsidies continued to contribute to improved transparency in export subsidy notifications. As of end 2024, 11 members had used this additional avenue to report their non-use of export subsidies, covering close to 200 reporting years.

### Food security

At a special meeting in April 2024, the Committee adopted a report containing recommendations on how to help LDCs and net food-importing developing countries (NFIDCs) respond to acute food insecurity. The then Chair of the Committee Kjetil Tysdal (Norway) congratulated members for reaching consensus on addressing the food security concerns of the most vulnerable WTO members.

It marked the successful implementation of instructions from the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) for a dedicated work programme focusing on the food security needs of LDCs and NFIDCs. Recommendations cover several key thematic areas, including access to international food markets, financing of food imports and agricultural and production resilience of LDCs and NFIDCs, along with issues such as inter-agency collaboration on food security.

**Figure 3:** Agriculture notifications submitted by WTO members, 1995 to 2024



Notifications submitted to the Committee on Agriculture

Several international organizations, including the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), showed strong commitment to supporting the deliberations under the work programme and the subsequent follow-up to the agreed recommendations.

### Follow-up to Bali decision

Members continued to review market access notification formats for tariff rate quotas (TRQs), which allow imports inside a quota to be charged lower duties. The main focus was on implementing the specific provisions of the 2013 Bali ministerial decision related to members' TRQ administration practices. Under the Decision, members should also notify the Committee of the extent to which their quotas are being filled. Unfilled quotas mean lost export opportunities.

### Export competition

The Committee successfully concluded the third triennial review of the Nairobi Ministerial Decision on Export Competition in 2024. As part of this, it adopted a decision to update and streamline export competition notification requirements by integrating the questionnaire annexed to the Nairobi Decision into a unified export competition notification. The 2015 decision on export competition eliminated agricultural export subsidies and established disciplines on other export measures with equivalent effect. Venezuela continued to be the only member yet to submit its modified schedule incorporating the decision.

### Technology transfer

The Committee held three thematic sessions on technology transfer in 2024. Experts from international organizations, farm organizations and member governments explored issues related to the creation of technologies and their dissemination and absorption across the farm value chain. They also delved into ways to make technology transfer more relevant to building agricultural resilience in the face of recurring food security challenges that disproportionately affect import-dependent developing economies and LDCs, most of which are in Africa. Some members proposed more



targeted discussions on the theme along with experience-sharing among members.

Harvesting of spring onions in Kundasang Saba, Malaysia.

### Technical assistance activities

The WTO Secretariat delivered its annual agriculture notification workshop in October 2024 in Geneva. Other technical assistance activities were carried out in several members, including Albania, Cabo Verde, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Jamaica, Malaysia and Seychelles.

### Outreach and information exchange

The Secretariat continued its Trade Dialogues on Food, holding sessions on topics ranging from COP28 to food trade. It also organized a symposium on nutrition in collaboration with the FAO and concluded a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the organization on cooperation, including in agriculture and fisheries.

The Secretariat also issued a new publication entitled "Illicit Trade in Food and Food Fraud" in cooperation with the private sector, international organizations, civil society and academia. The publication looks into the challenges of combating illicit practices, such as smuggling and counterfeiting, and the role the WTO can play.

## Sanitary and phytosanitary measures

- **The Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Committee agreed on findings and recommendations following a two-year work programme looking at challenges and opportunities facing international trade in food, animal and plant products.**
- **WTO members made progress with the Sixth Review of the SPS Agreement, with draft recommendations to define priorities for the work ahead.**
- **SPS notifications from developing economies reached a record high of 1,608, increasing transparency about trade measures.**

### 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 work programme

The Committee adopted findings and recommendations of a two-year work programme looking at the implementation of the SPS Agreement in the light of new opportunities and modern challenges, such as population growth, climate change, innovation and new pest/disease pressures. This work programme had been initiated to implement an SPS declaration adopted at the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in June 2022.

The report reaffirms the continued importance of the SPS Agreement for ensuring safe international trade in food, animal and plant products. It calls for the use of international standards and highlights the relevance of science, research and innovation to address SPS issues and sustainably increase production. Other key findings relate to the need to adapt SPS measures to regional conditions and the importance of technical assistance, capacity building and South-South cooperation.

WTO members recommended continuing targeted discussions and reflections on the implementation of the SPS Agreement in light of emerging challenges and opportunities, a recommendation that was taken up in the Sixth Review of the SPS Agreement.

### Sixth Review of SPS Agreement

The Committee began the Sixth Review of the Operation and Implementation of the SPS Agreement, discussing proposals and considering draft recommendations to define priorities for the work ahead.

Draft recommendations include setting up a working group on transparency, exploring a mentoring system for developing economy WTO members, and fostering engagement with developing economy members through technical assistance, capacity building and South-South cooperation. Recommendations for thematic work included new technologies and digital tools and innovative regulatory approaches to regionalization, where a region of a country is regarded as pest- or disease-free or with low prevalence, and maximum residue limits (MRLs) for pesticides.

### MC13 declaration on special and differential treatment

At MC13, ministers adopted a declaration on improving implementation of special and differential treatment (S&D) provisions for developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs) in the SPS Agreement and the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Agreement (see page 86).



**1,608**

SPS notifications from developing economies reached a record high of 1,608 in 2024, improving transparency about members' trade measures.



The declaration includes a request for improvements to training and technical assistance for developing economies to overcome the challenges they face in “timely engagement” on SPS and TBT matters. SPS Committee Chair, Cecilia Risolo, reported on Committee actions to address the concerns of developing economy members, including on access to training.

### Thematic work

The SPS Committee held thematic sessions covering digital tools, emerging SPS risks and new technologies, and voluntary third-party assurance (vTPA) programmes, which are quality/conformity assurance systems that can be used by companies or individuals in the food business.

The session on digital tools explored technological solutions in the SPS field, including electronic phytosanitary certificates

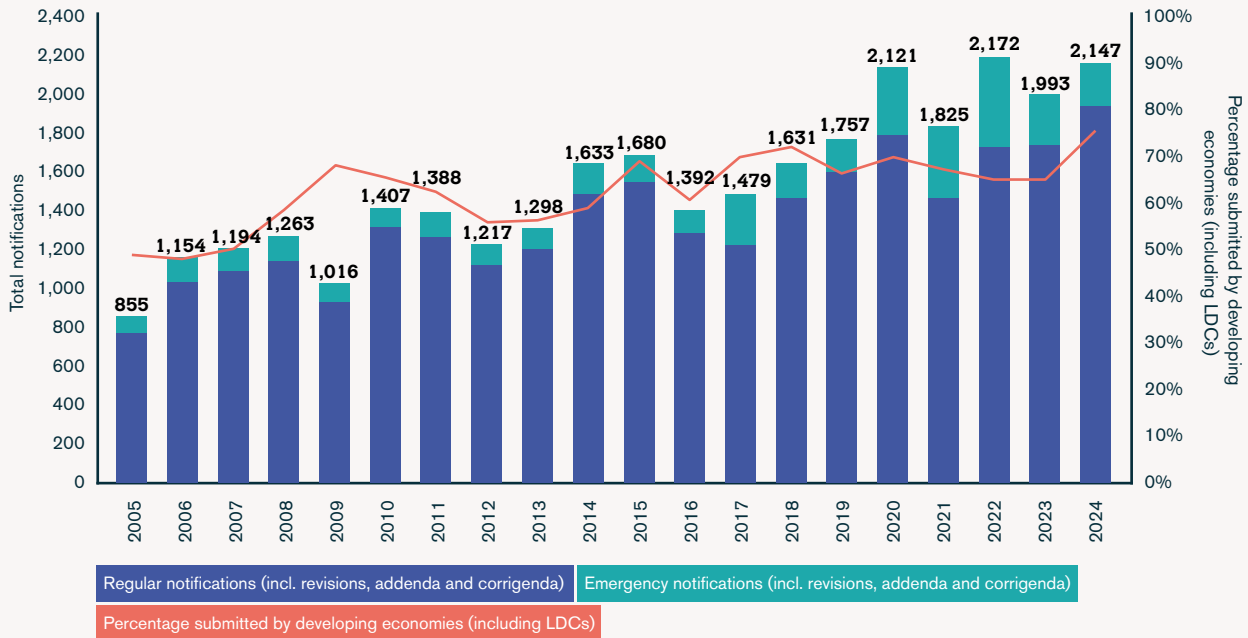
and AI-based tools. On emerging risks and new agricultural technologies, the discussions ranged from the uptake of e-commerce and changes in disease and pest pressures to automated processes and the safety of novel treatments. The event highlighted the crucial role of the SPS Committee in examining emerging SPS challenges and innovation.

A third thematic session considered the implementation of Codex guidelines for vTPA programmes, intended to assist competent authorities in considering the integrity and credibility of vTPA programmes and the reliability of the information and data they generate. The thematic session built on three Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) projects in West Africa, Central America and East Africa.

The Secretariat organized a workshop on transparency, which brought together SPS

Spraying of pesticides in a strawberry plantation in Brazlândia, Brazil.

**Figure 4: SPS notifications and percentage of notifications submitted by developing economies, 2005-24**



notification authorities and enquiry points to discuss their transparency-related work and online transparency tools. The STDF hosted a reception to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the SPS Agreement and the 20th anniversary of the STDF.

**Specific trade concerns**

The Committee considered 23 new specific trade concerns raised by WTO members and 57 previously raised concerns (compared to 17 and 50, respectively, in 2023). New issues related to animal diseases, melamine contamination, maximum limits or approval for certain residues in food products and delays or burdensome requirements in relation to SPS certificates and approvals.

Previously raised concerns discussed again in 2024 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; registration requirements for exporting

establishments; and measures taken in response to the release of water treated through a filtration process from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station.

About 60 per cent of all concerns raised in the SPS Committee in 1995-2024 have been reported as resolved or partially resolved.

**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 2024, members notified 2,147 planned, new or changed SPS regulations, compared to 1,994 the year before. Of these, 1,931 were regular notifications and 216 were emergency notifications.

Developing economies (including LDCs) submitted a record high of 1,608 notifications, accounting for almost 75 per cent of all notifications (see Figure 4). The number of notifications from LDCs also reached a record 466, up from 318 the previous year, accounting for almost 20 per cent of all notifications.

### Capacity-building

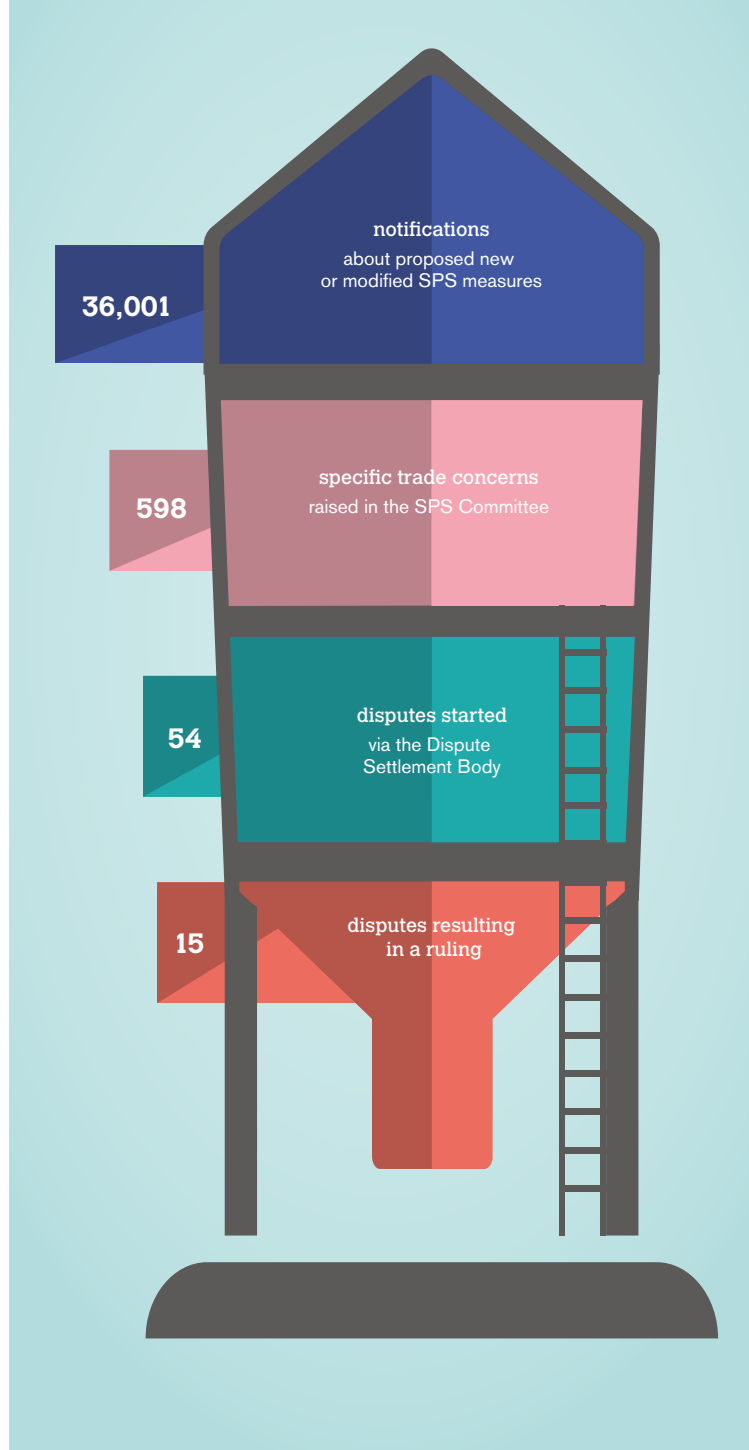
The WTO Secretariat undertook over 20 SPS technical assistance activities. It organized a second edition of its SPS Transparency Champions Course, attended by 25 government officials, to enhance implementation of the SPS transparency framework and use of digital tools. The Secretariat also held a follow-up session of its 2023 SPS Advanced Course to take stock of improvements in action plans developed by participants to address SPS challenges in their countries. Other activities included an SPS workshop for French-speaking Africa and several national seminars.



**About 60 per cent of all concerns raised in the SPS Committee in 1995-2024 have been reported as resolved or partially resolved.**

### Box 1: SPS measures

Few concerns end in disputes: 1995-2024



## Technical barriers to trade

- **At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), ministers adopted a declaration on strengthening regulatory cooperation to reduce technical barriers to trade (TBT), stressing the importance of a multilateral framework.**
- **The Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) finalized new voluntary guidelines for conformity assessment procedures to support regulators in the choice and design of appropriate and proportionate procedures to verify compliance with standards and regulations put in place by WTO members.**
- **In a sign of increasing transparency, members submitted 4,334 notifications on TBT measures, which surpassed last year's record high.**

### Background

The TBT Agreement seeks to ensure that regulations, standards, testing and certification processes prepared and adopted by WTO members do not create unnecessary or discriminatory barriers to trade. The TBT Committee meets to discuss specific trade concerns, to hold thematic sessions on relevant topics, to help members implement the Agreement and to adopt guidelines and recommendations to improve its work.

**A**t MC13, ministers adopted a declaration on strengthening regulatory cooperation to reduce technical barriers to trade (TBT). 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 addressing existing and emerging challenges in areas such as environment (climate change), health (future pandemics) and the digital economy.

In November 2024, the TBT Committee agreed on a three-year work programme, following its latest triennial review of the Committee's work and of the TBT Agreement. Responding to the priorities identified in the MC13 declaration, members began to act on many specific recommendations, including the organization of thematic sessions and further improvements to transparency procedures and digital tools.

### Guidelines for conformity assessment procedures

In March 2024, the Committee finalized new guidelines for conformity assessment procedures. These practical, non-prescriptive and voluntary guidelines can support regulators in the choice and design of appropriate and proportionate procedures to verify compliance with standards and regulations put in place by members. This will provide confidence to consumers that their products meet safety or quality specifications.

### Triennial review

The Committee adopted in November the 10th Triennial Review of the work of the Committee and the implementation of the TBT Agreement. The WTO Secretariat received over 45 submissions from members containing feedback and suggestions for improvements in the running of the Committee.

Based on the suggestions and Committee discussions, the review produced recommendations on good regulatory practice, regulatory cooperation, conformity assessment procedures, standards, transparency, technical assistance, special and differential treatment (S&D) and on the operation of the Committee.

### Transparency

Following intensive preparatory work in the Committee's Transparency Working Group, the Committee finalized a Good Practice Guide on Commenting on a Member's Notification. It also produced guidelines and an online template for the submission of statements of implementation – a one-time



notification with an overview of a member's actions, agencies and publications necessary for implementing the TBT Agreement.

Furthermore, work is nearing completion to streamline and modernize the TBT Agreement's various notification formats. These outcomes contribute to improving regulatory transparency, dialogue and cooperation among public and private stakeholders.

### Specific trade concerns

A total of 190 specific trade concerns on drafted or adopted TBT measures were discussed by the Committee. The number of new concerns – 33 – was little changed from 2023's 34. The number of previously raised concerns, however, decreased considerably – from 172 to 157. Members noted that progress was made toward the resolution of ten concerns.

New concerns covered issues such as environment (e.g. deforestation, energy efficiency, greenhouse gas emissions and electric vehicles), conformity assessment procedures (e.g. of pharmaceutical products, plastics products and cheese), and packaging and labelling requirements of various products (e.g. packaged foods, alcoholic beverages, washing machines and telecommunications products).

New concerns discussed by the SPS Committee included labelling requirements of various products.



**Members submitted 4,334 notifications on TBT measures in 2024, surpassing last year's record, and increasing transparency of such measures.**

**Notifications**

Members submitted 4,334 notifications on TBT measures, which surpassed last year's record high of 4,098, in a sign of increasing transparency. The number of notifying members rose slightly from 90 in 2023 to 91 in 2024. Uganda submitted the most notifications, followed by the United States, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Egypt, Burundi, Brazil, China and Israel.

For the first time, all notifications were submitted online using ePing, which allows exporters, government officials and other stakeholders to track upcoming changes to regulatory requirements. ePing also provides a forum for users to pose questions or submit feedback on draft measures circulated via the platform. In 2024, there were over 380,000 visits to the ePing website.

**TBT@30**

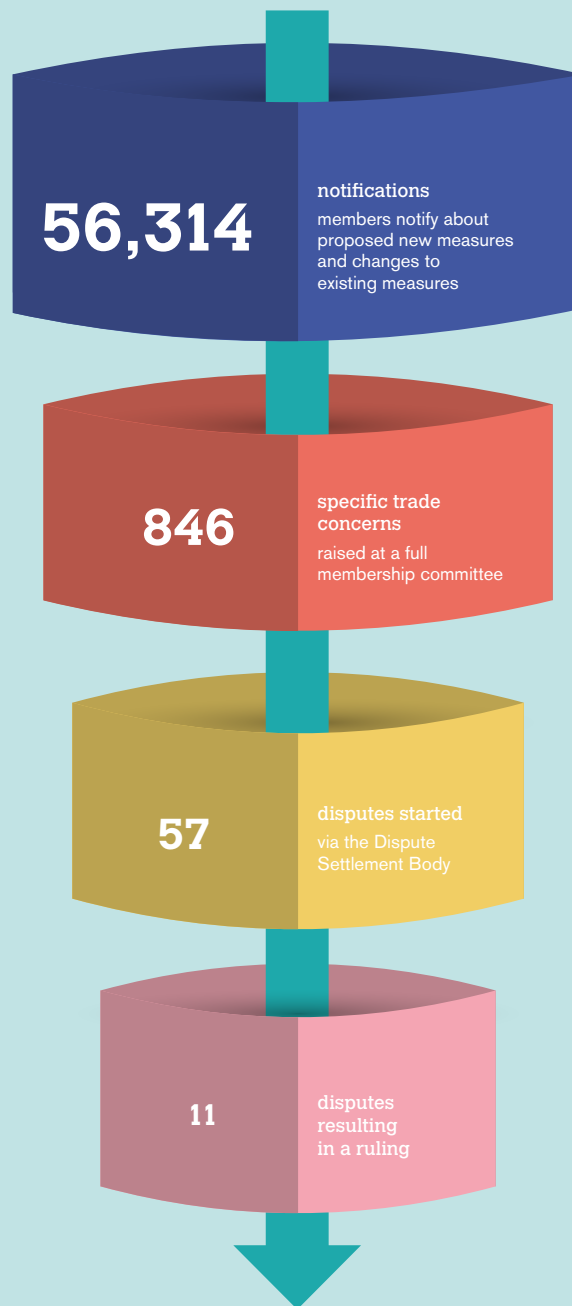
In November, the Committee marked the 30th anniversary of the TBT Agreement by bringing together representatives of international standard-setting organizations, TBT delegates and the private sector. Addressing the event, DG Okonjo-Iweala said: "It is you, this Committee, that keeps the Agreement dynamic. The work you do is fundamental to keep trade flowing, in good times and bad."

**Capacity-building**

The WTO Secretariat delivered 23 national and regional TBT technical assistance activities. In addition, TBT training was delivered as part of regional and advance trade policy courses organized by the Secretariat.

**Box 2: Technical requirements affecting trade in all products**

Few concerns end in disputes: 1995-2024\*



\*until 30 November 2024.

## Subsidies and countervailing measures

- The chairs of the Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) Committee reiterated serious concerns over members' persistently low compliance with subsidy notification obligations, underscoring the critical importance of transparency to the proper functioning of the SCM Agreement.
- Initiations of countervailing duty investigations increased more than threefold to 35 in the first half of 2024, from ten in the same period of 2023.

### 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.

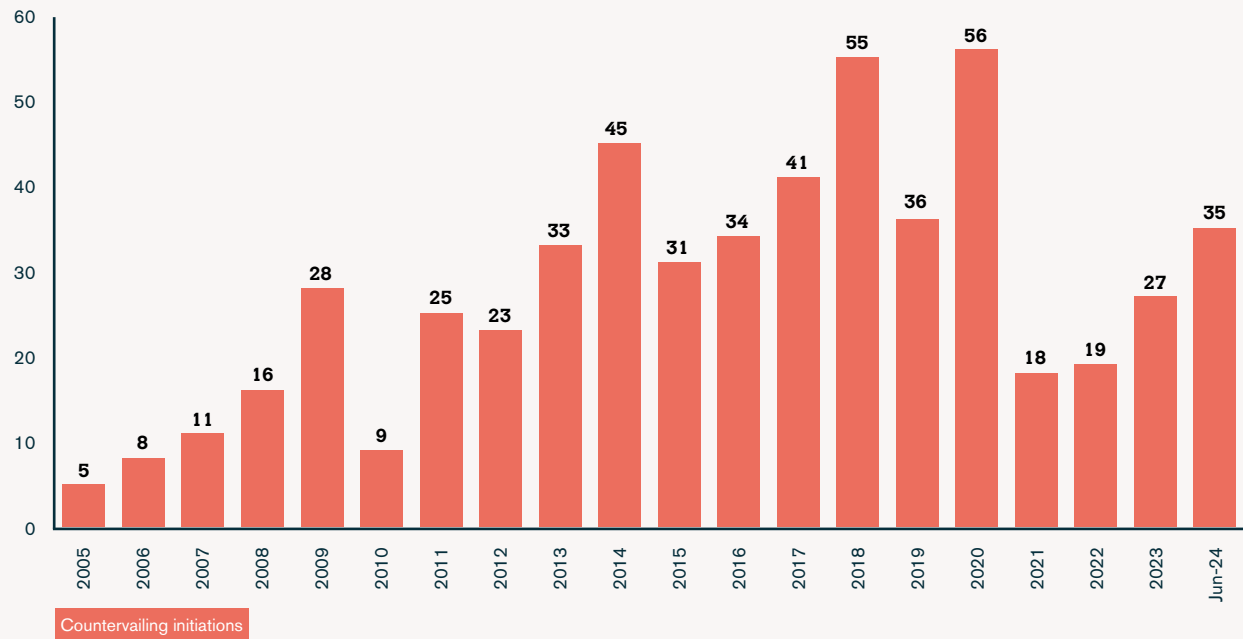
The Committee continued to discuss ways to improve the timeliness and completeness of notifications and other information flows on trade measures. The chairs – James Lester of New Zealand at the Committee's first regular meeting of the year and Wolfram Spelten of Germany at the second – drew attention to members' chronic low compliance with the transparency obligation to notify subsidies. They urged non-compliant members to act promptly, stressing that transparency benefits all members.



As of 14 January 2025, 84 members had not submitted their 2023 notifications, due by 30 June 2023. Similarly, 82 members had not submitted their 2021 notifications.

Members commended the WTO Secretariat's ongoing technical assistance project to enhance the capacity of developing economy members and least developed countries (LDCs) to comply with notification requirements. Out of 23 developing and LDC participants in the project, 11 submitted their 2023 notifications. A second round of the project was launched in December 2024 aiming to improve timely submissions during the new notification cycle in 2025.

The chairs recalled the 31 December 2015 deadline for the extended transition period given to 19 developing economy members to eliminate export subsidies. Beneficiaries should have made their final transparency notifications by 30 June 2016 but only 15 have done so.

**Figure 5:** Initiations of new countervailing duty investigations, 1 January 2005 to end-June 2024

Note: Figure 5 covers initiations up to the end of June 2024 as notified by members. Data for the second half of 2024 are not yet available.

LDCs and nine developing economy members listed in Annex VII(b) of the SCM Agreement continue to be exempt from the export subsidy prohibition. The Committee reviewed updated gross national income (GNI) calculations for these members. Some members asked the Secretariat to provide the same GNI calculations for all. These calculations were circulated in July 2024.

The Committee also reviewed notifications of countervailing actions taken (see Figure 5). Initiations of countervailing duty investigations jumped to 35 in the first half of 2024, compared with ten in the same period of 2023. As of 30 June 2024, there were 296 notified measures in force, up from 292 at the same period in 2023.

The Committee continued to discuss proposed guidelines for submission of questions and answers under Articles 25.8 and 25.9 on subsidies, submitted by Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United

States. It also received an update on a joint proposal by Canada, the Republic of Korea, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, the United Kingdom and the United States to form an informal technical discussion group on issues under the SCM Agreement.

China raised concerns over US subsidy policies, and the Republic of Korea inquired about France's electric vehicle subsidy programme. Australia, Canada, the European Union, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States jointly highlighted issues related to subsidies and capacity while the United States questioned Kazakhstan's proposed preferences for domestically produced agricultural machinery.

The WTO Secretariat announced the launch of a new Secretariat activities transparency portal, which became operational in December 2024.

## Anti-dumping practices

- **WTO members reported initiating 169 new investigations from January to June 2024 (see Figure 6), a notable increase from the 77 investigations initiated during the same period in 2023.**
- **Investigations involving steel products continued to be the subject of extensive debate in the Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices.**

### 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.

**I**ndia reported initiating the most new anti-dumping investigations in the first six months of 2024, with 43 investigations, more than double the 16 it started in the same 2023 period. It was followed by the United States, with 35 new investigations, slightly higher than the previous 31.

Other top initiating members in the first six months of 2024 were: Türkiye (17); Brazil (14); Canada, China and the European Union (seven); Pakistan and Ukraine (five); Australia, Colombia and the United Kingdom (four); Georgia and the Republic of Korea (three). Mexico, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Viet Nam reported two initiations during this period, while Argentina, Israel, Japan Peru and the

Eurasian Economic Union member states – Armenia, Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic and the Russian Federation – reported one each.

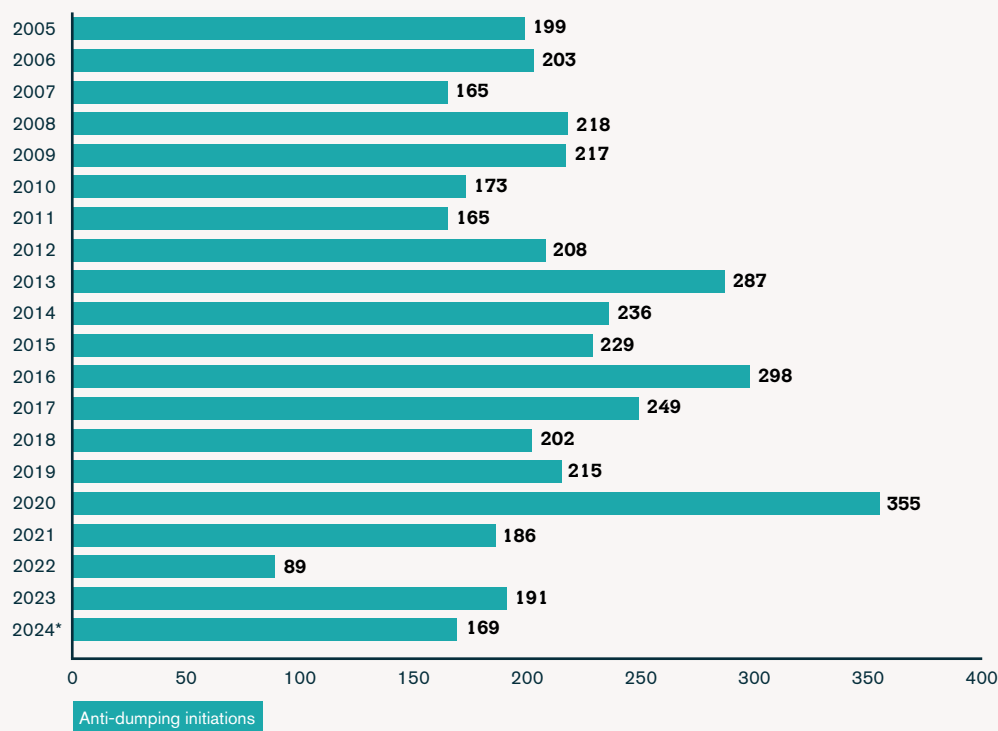
Besides India and the United States, Türkiye, Brazil, Canada, China, the European Union, Pakistan, Ukraine, Australia, Colombia, the United Kingdom, Georgia, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Viet Nam, Israel and Japan also initiated more investigations in the first six months of 2024 than in the first half of 2023. Argentina and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) states initiated fewer, while the Republic of Korea, Mexico and Peru initiated the same number in both periods.

The following members that initiated anti-dumping investigations in the first six months of 2023 did not initiate any investigations in the first half of 2024: Indonesia, the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) member states (Kingdom of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates), Chinese Taipei and Malaysia.

Investigations involving steel products generated extensive debate in the Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices.



**Figure 6:** Initiations of new anti-dumping investigations, 1 January 2005 to end-June 2024



Note: Figure 6 covers initiations up to the end of June 2024, as notified by members. Data for the second half of 2024 are not yet available.

As of 30 June 2024, a total of 1,954 notified anti-dumping measures (definitive duties and undertakings) were in force, down from 2,001 in the same 2023 period.

At its two regular meetings in 2024, the Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices reviewed 41 members' semi-annual reports covering the July-December 2023 period and 45 members' semi-annual reports covering the first half of 2024. Investigations involving steel products, which accounted for 22 per cent of all new investigations in the first six months of 2024, continued to be the subject of extensive debate in the Committee.

Members and the chairs of the Committee emphasized the importance of prompt notifications for transparency purposes. The Committee Chair, Aysegül Sahinoğlu Yerdeş (Türkiye), and the interim Chair, Wolfram Spelten (Germany), noted at the

April and October meetings, respectively, that some members had failed to submit semi-annual reports during the reviewed periods and urged them to comply with this notification requirement.

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 trade remedies data portal is also available, providing improved access to databases on anti-dumping and countervailing actions.

In 2024, the Working Group on Implementation met twice, in April and in October 2024, and the Informal Group on Anti-circumvention met once in October 2024.

## Safeguards

- In 2024, WTO members launched 16 safeguard investigations, up from 12 in 2023, and applied nine measures, compared with six the year before.
- Measures on certain steel products applied by the European Union and the United Kingdom continued to draw the most discussion in the Committee on Safeguards.

### 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 2024, WTO members initiated 16 new safeguard investigations and applied nine safeguard measures, compared with 12 and six, respectively, in 2023 (see Figure 7). Türkiye (three), Indonesia (two), Madagascar (two), China (one), the European Union (one), India (one), Jordan (one), Morocco (one), the Philippines (one), South Africa (one), United States (one) and Zimbabwe (one) initiated the investigations. Madagascar (three), Türkiye (two), Ghana (one), India (one), Indonesia (one) and the United States (one) applied measures during the year.

The total number of safeguard measures in force as of end-October was 40, unchanged on 2023.

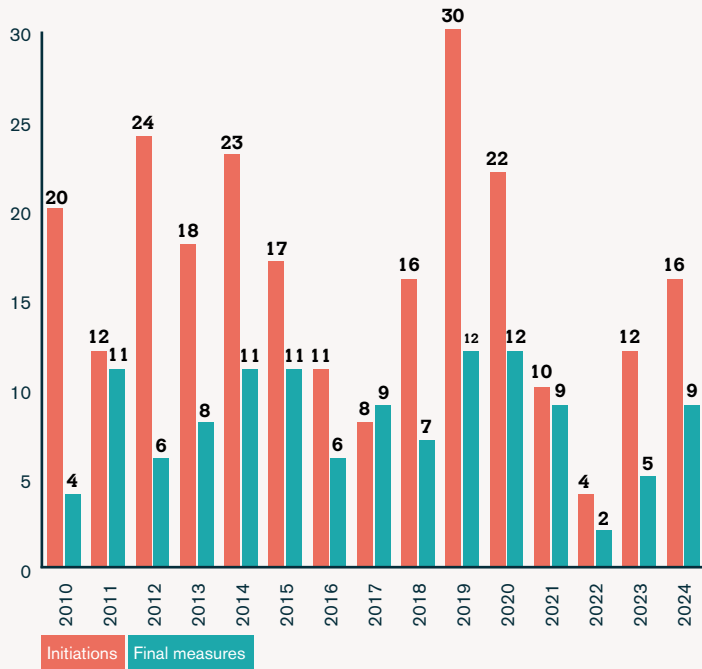
In total, the Safeguards Committee reviewed notifications relating to 52 specific safeguard investigations by WTO members at its regular meetings in April and October.

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

Measures on steel products attracted the most discussion in the Committee on Safeguards.

**Figure 7:** Initiations of new safeguard investigations and application of new final measures, 2010 to 2024 (for all WTO members)



Note: The number of measures in force/applied indicated in Figure 7 may differ from the figures provided in previous WTO annual reports due to updated information provided by members.

measure on certain steel products, applied since February 2019, and the United Kingdom's safeguard measure on certain steel products, applied since the United Kingdom left the European Union in February 2020.

At the October meeting, the Committee discussed Indonesia's request to review whether Türkiye's proposal to suspend equivalent concessions or other obligations against imports from Indonesia in response to Indonesia's safeguard measure on carpets and other textile floor coverings is "substantially equivalent", as required by the Safeguards Agreement.

At both meetings, the Committee received reports on progress for the creation of an online portal for safeguard notifications, originally proposed by the WTO Secretariat and subsequently discussed and endorsed by the Committee.

## Information Technology Agreement

- Information Technology Agreement (ITA) members highlighted the need to expand participation in the Agreement and to emphasize the value of the ITA to the global economy.
- China submitted a proposal on enhancing the functioning and relevance of the ITA Committee, suggesting regular symposiums or workshops where industry representatives and stakeholders could share the latest developments.
- The WTO Secretariat organized a second Geneva-based workshop on the ITA and the ITA Expansion Agreement, building on the success of the first one in 2023.

### 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).

In April 2024, the Chair of the ITA Committee, Don Spedding (Australia), reported on his consultations on advancing discussions on the Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) Work Programme and participants' ideas on future work. The WTO

Secretariat provided an overview of work undertaken to date in the Committee on non-tariff barriers.

The Chair reported that several members highlighted the need to focus on expanding ITA participation and on stepping up advocacy on the value of the ITA to the global economy. Members also saw the need to address classification divergences and to improve transparency in the Agreement's implementation.

Regarding 22 "Attachment B" products of the 1996 Ministerial Declaration for which there is no agreed tariff classification, the Committee encouraged members that have not yet provided comments to do so in order to arrive at a common classification for these products.

The Chair said that participants want updates on relevant work in other WTO bodies. As a result, the Secretariat outlined ongoing discussions on conformity assessment procedures relating to ITA products in the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) (see page 86). WTO members increasingly notify digital-related regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures on a variety of products. They

have also used the TBT Committee to raise concerns related to the regulation of products, such as drones, autonomous vehicles and artificial intelligence.

China submitted a proposal on enhancing the functioning and relevance of the Committee, suggesting regular symposiums or workshops where industry representatives and stakeholders could share the latest developments. Japan presented a study on the impact of the ITA and the future of information and communications technology (ICT) trade. Trade concerns over ITA implementation in Indonesia and Egypt were raised.

The Secretariat organized a Geneva-based workshop on the ITA and the ITA Expansion Agreement, building on the success of a first workshop in 2023. The workshop was attended by government officials from 26 developing economies. Other activities organized by the Secretariat included a regional trade policy course for the Asia-Pacific region and an introductory course for least developed countries (LDCs). ITA participants encouraged the Secretariat to continue with such activities to improve non-participants' understanding of the ITA.



**83**

A total of 83 WTO members participate in the ITA, representing 97 per cent of world trade in IT products.



A computer production line in Hsin Chu, Chinese Taipei.

## Customs valuation

- The Committee on Customs Valuation received 32 notifications in 2024, its highest yearly number.
- The WTO Secretariat organized a first customs valuation workshop to assist developing and least-developed members with notifications. It resulted in 33 draft notifications, of which 17 were finalized and circulated.
- The Committee reviewed the customs legislation and valuation practices of 26 members and concluded six 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 2024, the Committee received first-time notifications of their customs legislation from Congo, Maldives, Mauritania, Papua New Guinea and Seychelles. It also received notifications of their checklist of issues relating to their legislation from Cabo Verde, Gabon, Georgia, Maldives, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Senegal and Seychelles.

Gabon, Moldova, Mongolia, Nigeria, Senegal, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Ukraine notified the Committee of updates to their customs legislation.

First-time notifications were also received from Bahrain, Cabo Verde, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Maldives and Myanmar on their treatment of interest charges.

Cabo Verde, the Dominican Republic, Honduras, Maldives, and Seychelles provided notifications for the first time on the valuation of software on certain carrier media.

Customs officers checking export and import cargo in Surabaya, Indonesia.

In May, the WTO Secretariat organized a first customs valuation workshop to assist developing and least-developed members with notifications. The workshop focused on members with pending notifications and resulted in 33 draft notifications, of which 17 were finalized and circulated.

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. It reviewed the legislation of 26 members based on notifications provided and concluded six of these reviews.

The total number of members to have notified their customs legislation stands at 117, and 88 have notified the checklist of issues related to their legislation (counting EU member states as one).

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

## Rules of origin

- **The Chair of the Committee on Rules of Origin reported on his consultations on the idea of a questionnaire, or template, to update and standardize members' notifications on non-preferential rules of origin.**
- **The Committee considered several presentations by the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) Group on best practices in the design and administration of preferential rules of origin.**
- **The WTO Secretariat updated members on digital tools to facilitate the participation of delegations in the work of the Committee.**

### 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.

### Non-preferential rules of origin

In a presentation on notifications of non-preferential rules of origin, the WTO Secretariat said the number of members applying non-preferential rules of origin had risen from 15 in 1995 to 57 in 2024. However, information gaps persisted, it added.

Members have been considering ways to improve transparency on non-preferential rules of origin since 2019. The Chair of the Committee, Guna Seelan Balakrishnan (Malaysia), reported on his consultations on the possibility of adopting a questionnaire,

or template, to refresh and standardize members' notifications of their practices related to non-preferential rules of origin.

Despite widespread support for the proposal, some reservations persisted. As a result, the Chair encouraged members to use the questionnaire on a voluntary basis.

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

### Preferential rules of origin

The Committee continued to analyse preferential rules of origin used in non-reciprocal trade preferences for LDCs under a workplan proposed by the LDC Group.

The Committee considered what the Group sees as best practices in the design and administration of rules of origin. These include the method used for ad valorem calculations, whereby the degree of manufacturing or processing carried out in a country is calculated by the value it adds to the product or products. The Committee also considered proof of origin and flexibilities for low-value shipments and tariff classification criteria used in drafting "substantial transformation" rules.

Several preference-granting members said their rules of origin already fully complied with ministerial decisions on making it easier for LDCs to qualify for preferential treatment. Some also noted the need for a minimum level of "substantial transformation" for preferences to meet LDCs' development objectives.

Members also considered the use of non-reciprocal trade preferences in the European Union, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

### Other areas of work

The Secretariat updated members on digital tools facilitating their participation in the work of the Committee. These include the e-Delegate tool allowing them to register for receiving documents, the e-Agenda tool and the rules of origin gateway page on the WTO website.

## Import licensing

- The new import licensing notification portal and database, launched in October 2023, completed its first full year of operation. The portal streamlines notifications through online submissions.
- The Committee on Import Licensing received or reviewed 95 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.
- The Committee conducted the 15th biennial review of the Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures.



### 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 2024, the Committee worked on transitioning to the newly established import licensing notification portal, which streamlines notifications through online submissions. It also facilitates the collection and automatic dissemination of information through the import licensing website. In its first full year of operation, about a quarter of WTO members submitting notifications did so using the portal.

At the end of the year, the Committee conducted the 15th biennial review of the Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures. Increasing notification compliance and improving the quality of notifications remain big challenges. The rate of compliance with the obligation to respond to the annual questionnaire on import licensing procedures has slightly increased over the past few years. However, it remains quite low, with an average of about 40 notifications per year.

In 2024, the Committee received 54 notifications from 18 members on new import licensing procedures or changes in these procedures. The Committee also reviewed 41 notifications from 34 members containing responses to the annual questionnaire on import licensing procedures.

As of the end of 2024, 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

Circuit board production in Uttar Pradesh, India.



and Japan 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 questioned Angola's import licensing requirements and Egypt's import licensing on certain agricultural and processed products. Chinese Taipei and Thailand questioned India's import licensing regime for pneumatic tyres.

The United Kingdom questioned Indonesia's importer registration requests for agricultural, food and drink products and Mongolia's new import licensing requirements for alcoholic beverages. Japan questioned Indonesia's commodity balancing mechanism for issuing import licences, its import licensing regime for certain textiles products, compulsory registration by importers of steel products and its import restriction on air conditioners.

In September, the WTO Secretariat conducted a workshop on import licensing and notifications, which was attended by 30 government officials from developing economies. The Secretariat organized 25 group and bilateral training sessions on the use of the import licensing notification portal.

## Balance-of-payments restrictions

- **The Chair of the Committee on Balance-of-Payments Restrictions, Clara Delgado Jesús (Cabo Verde), reminded WTO members that any measure directly or indirectly taken to restrict imports due to BOP reasons must be notified to the Committee.**

### 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.

**N**o measures taken for balance-of-payments (BOP) purposes were notified to the Committee in 2024.

At a December meeting to approve the Committee's annual report, the Chair – Clara Delgado Jesús (Cabo Verde) – reminded WTO members that any measure directly or indirectly taken to restrict imports due to BOP reasons must be notified to the Committee prior to or directly after its announcement and must be the subject of consultations.

Ambassador Delgado Jesús called members' attention to the 13th Ministerial Conference Declaration, in which members acknowledged the challenges that the WTO is facing and the need to address them, particularly with regard to transparency and to ensuring its proper functioning.



Winnowing wheat seeds in North Kazakhstan Province.

## 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 on a permanent basis two measures aimed at improving its functioning.**

**T**he Committee on TRIMs discussed investment measures which, according to the WTO members raising the issues, 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 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.

The Committee also 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

### 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.

obligations in China's recommended standard for office devices and in the revision of the Chinese Government Procurement Law, as well as Kazakhstan's alleged preferences for domestic agricultural machinery. Pakistan's Automobile Industry Development Policy was raised for the first time.

Regarding WTO reform, the practices of drafting minutes in verbatim style and of circulating a chair's factual summary after each meeting were made permanent. In addition, the Committee decided to start using the eAgenda tool on a trial basis for the preparation of meetings.

## State trading enterprises

- In 2024, the Working Party on State Trading Enterprises (STEs) reviewed 46 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.

**T**he Working Party on STEs reviewed 46 new and full notifications from 36 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. While more notifications were received in 2024 than in 2023, compliance with notification obligations remained poor.

For the most recent notification period, covering 2022 and 2023, only 39 new and full notifications were received by end-December from the 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.

## Trade in civil aircraft

- The Committee on Trade in Civil Aircraft continued the transposition exercise of the product coverage annex to reflect the latest amendments to the Harmonized System (HS) for classifying traded goods.

### 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.

**T**he Committee continued the transposition exercise of the product coverage annex of the Agreement, initiated in 2021. The purpose of the transposition exercise 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 78). The last transposition was done in 2015.

The product coverage annex of the Agreement, which covers civil aircraft and 265 aircraft-related products, is currently presented in terms of HS 2007. Since November 2021, the Committee has been regularly holding technical consultations and negotiations on how to update it.

## Trade facilitation

- **Three WTO members – Comoros, Timor-Leste and Venezuela – ratified the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), bringing the total number of ratifications to 160 members, representing 96 per cent of the membership.**
- **The Committee on Trade Facilitation held dedicated sessions on digitalization, transit issues for landlocked developing countries and technical assistance and capacity building.**
- **The Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility (TFAF) implemented three project preparation grants and approved a fourth.**

### 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.

### Ratification of the TFA

The number of ratifications of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) rose to 160, or 96 per cent of the WTO membership. The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela deposited its instrument of ratification for the TFA, and Comoros and Timor-Leste ratified the Agreement as part of their accession to the WTO.

### Implementation of the TFA

Implementation of the Agreement also advanced. A total of 45 members were

scheduled to implement 198 TFA measures in 2024, nearly three-quarters of which require technical assistance and capacity building (Category C measures). In addition, seven members (Cambodia, Egypt, Eswatini, Kenya, Maldives, Myanmar and Sri Lanka) notified the accelerated implementation of a total of 48 TFA provisions.

End-2023 marked the final deadline for developing and least developed country (LDC) members to notify definitive dates for implementing all commitments. Most members have now provided comprehensive roadmaps for implementation, increasing transparency on the overall implementation of the Agreement.

### Dedicated sessions

The Committee held dedicated sessions throughout the year on utilizing digital tools to optimize the movement of goods across borders in line with its decision to focus on this topic in 2024.

Themes included utilizing data and technology to simplify trade, promoting the implementation of the TFA through digital technologies, digitalization of border procedures, and “single windows” (the use of a single platform to collect and process import, export or transit information). The Committee decided to continue sharing experiences on digitalization in 2025 and to dedicate sessions to the use of authorized economic operators.

Two other dedicated sessions were held. In July, the Committee looked at transit issues of landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) (see page 129). Members highlighted the need to coordinate border management mechanisms and to undertake capacity-building initiatives. In October, the Committee held a session on technical assistance and capacity-building support for implementation of the Agreement. It featured presentations and panel discussions with donors, beneficiaries and international organizations.

### Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility

The Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility (TFAF) carried out three in-country missions in Cameroon, Congo and Guyana to strengthen





their national trade facilitation committees (NTFCs), or an equivalent body, and to assist them in identifying technical assistance needs and potential partners. The TFAF also funded short-term advisory services to assist St Lucia and Grenada on the TFA “single window”.

The TFAF hosted a panel on humanitarian relief with 50 participants and organized jointly with the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) (see page 136) the 4th regional meeting of NTFCs of the Asociación Latinoamericana de Integración (ALADI) to discuss digitalization and interoperability. At the request of LDC members, the TFAF organized a one-day retreat for delegations on technical assistance mobilization.

The Facility implemented three project preparation grants – for Togo, Angola and Madagascar – and approved one for Kenya to be implemented in 2025. These preparation grants fund diagnostic studies and project preparation with the aim of clarifying the technical assistance needs for category C measures. It also received five applications for project implementation grants.

Lorries entering Sabah Ports, Malaysia.

## Trade in services

- WTO members discussed ways to advance work in the Council for Trade in Services, taking their lead from the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) which underlined the importance of services to the global economy.
- On the waiver for least-developed countries (LDCs), which permits more favourable treatment for services exporters from LDCs, the LDC Group proposed an online questionnaire to help identify the challenges exporters may face.
- The Council received 13 notifications, down from 22 in 2023, of new or revised measures that significantly affect trade in services.

### 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.

**W**TO members discussed ways to reinvigorate work on services trade in meetings of the Council for Trade in Services, taking their lead from MC13 where ministers underlined the importance of services to global economic output. In addition to work on services trade,



ministers mandated the Council to continue work on supporting resilience and disaster preparedness, the WTO response to pandemics, WTO reform, the LDC services waiver and the e-commerce work programme.

### **Work on trade in services**

Members proposed several services trade-related topics the Council should address. These included good regulatory practices, digitalization, development and the “green” transition. It was suggested that the Council hold thematic sessions, with the participation of relevant experts.

On the WTO pandemic response, the Council held an experience-sharing session on the impact of COVID-19 on trade in information and communications technology (ICT) and digitally delivered services. Data show that while services trade fell significantly during the pandemic, digitally delivered services registered the fastest growth of all international trade segments.

In December, members heard a presentation on a joint WTO-World Bank report on “Trade in Services for Development” (see page 145), highlighting the significant growth and

development opportunities services trade offers for developing economies.

### **LDC services waiver**

Members continued examining the operation of the LDC waiver, introduced in 2011, which permits the granting of more favourable treatment for services and suppliers from LDCs. The LDC Group proposed an online questionnaire to help analyse how LDC suppliers are interacting with consumers and enterprises, with the aim of identifying the challenges they may face.

### **Other ministerial mandates**

On WTO reform, members welcomed the improvements implemented regarding the functioning of the Council.

Members continued to share information on domestic developments related to e-commerce under the Work Programme.

### **Other issues**

Japan and the United States reiterated concerns about cybersecurity measures of China and Viet Nam, while China expressed concerns about various US measures and

Indian measures on certain mobile applications. China shared concerns about Australia's 5G cellular network measures until July 2024.

The Council received 13 notifications, down from 22 in 2023, of new or revised measures that significantly affect trade in services where the notifying members have commitments. Nine other notifications dealt with economic integration agreements covering services trade and one notification was received on recognition measures in services sectors.

### Specific commitments

In 2024, the Committee on Specific Commitments focused its discussions on environmental services. At the July meeting, members considered a communication from New Zealand and the United States on the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) model schedule of commitments on environmental and environmentally related services. At the December meeting, it centred on how to proceed with an experience and information sharing session regarding the link between trade in services and the environment, as proposed by Canada.

### Trade in financial services

Following a proposal by India, co-sponsored by the Philippines and South Africa, the Committee on Trade in Financial Services organized a thematic seminar on the cost of remittance services, a crucial source of financing for developing economies.

Members continued discussing possible follow-up to a thematic seminar on “financial services: trade, inclusion and accessibility”, held in 2023, as well as the one on remittance services. A recurring theme was that of financial technology, including how to leverage the potential of digital technology for development and financial inclusion.

The Committee considered two related proposals by China and the Philippines to examine, including through thematic discussions, issues related to the facilitation of electronic payments and the interoperability of electronic payment systems.

## Trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS)

- **Tunisia and Armenia deposited their instruments of acceptance for the protocol amending the TRIPS Agreement. The amendment makes it easier for WTO members to access affordable medicines.**
- **With the accessions of Comoros and Timor-Leste to the WTO in 2024, the number of members that have accepted the protocol rose to 141.**
- **Members marked the 30th anniversary of the TRIPS Agreement with a high-level dialogue on challenges for IP policy at a time of dramatic technological change, opened by the heads of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the WTO.**

### 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 intellectual property rights protection, administration, and enforcement. 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.

### Amended TRIPS Agreement

Tunisia and Armenia deposited their respective instruments of acceptance for the protocol amending the TRIPS Agreement.

As Comoros and Timor-Leste acceded to the WTO in August 2024, and so are automatically covered, the total of members that have accepted and are covered by the amendment rose to 141.

The TRIPS Agreement was the first multilateral WTO agreement to be amended to create an additional legal avenue for developing and least-developed members with no manufacturing capacity to procure affordable medicines from external sources under a compulsory licence. The remaining 25 members benefit from the 2003 decision that established the mechanism. In December 2023, the General Council decided to extend the period for members' acceptance until 31 December 2025.

### Technical assistance

The linkages between TRIPS, trade, and public health continued to be the focus of technical assistance activities organized by the WTO Secretariat in close collaboration with the World Health Organization (WHO) and WIPO. The three organizations held a webinar highlighting the importance of understanding the interplay between IP rights and competition law and policy.

They also hosted a symposium on boosting manufacturing capacity to combat non-communicable diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases, cancer, chronic respiratory diseases and diabetes. The event in December underscored the importance of strengthening and diversifying production through initiatives that promote innovation and enhance access to health technologies.

In September, the WTO Secretariat hosted its annual workshop on trade and public health, focusing on pandemic preparedness.

### TRIPS and COVID-19

Members followed up on instructions from ministers at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) for delegations to analyse lessons learned and challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. They heard a submission by the United Kingdom on intellectual property and technology



transfer and a joint proposal from Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt and India. Discussions focused on pandemic preparedness and the role of the WTO in addressing IP challenges.

### TRIPS at 30

In April 2024, members celebrated the 30th anniversary of the TRIPS Agreement with a high-level dialogue, opened by the Director-General of WIPO, Daren Tang, and DG Okonjo-Iweala.

Representatives from governments, international organizations, the private sector, academia and civil society discussed the future challenges for IP policy at a time of dramatic technological change. The DG said the anniversary was an opportunity to engage in a forward-looking dialogue on how the WTO can best respond to current and future intellectual property needs and the interests of its members.

## Transparency and trade monitoring

In April 2024, the WTO Secretariat issued the third Annual Report on Notifications and Other Information Flows, highlighting notification trends and statistics regarding the TRIPS Agreement.

During 2024, 24 members notified the TRIPS Council of new or updated IP legislation. Belize responded to the checklist notifying the essential elements of its system for enforcement of IP rights while the European Union notified contact points for cooperation on eliminating trade in IP-infringing goods.

The Council was briefed on TRIPS-related measures covered in the WTO's trade monitoring reports and on IP policy matters raised during members' Trade Policy Reviews. Topics included the latest information on members' domestic copyright, trademarks, geographical indications (see page 59), patent regimes, IP enforcement, and international cooperation on IP.

## Technology transfer

In March 2024, the Council concluded its 21st 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 focusing on domestic implementation of technology transfer provisions, where government officials shared their experience.

## TRIPS non-violation and situation complaints

The TRIPS Council continued discussing the 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 MC13 that the current moratorium on such complaints be further extended until MC14, set for March 2026.



## Plant and animal inventions, biodiversity and traditional knowledge

Members continued discussions without substantive progress 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.

The Council discussed the adoption in May of the WIPO Treaty on Intellectual Property, Genetic Resources, and Associated Traditional Knowledge. This treaty incorporates, for the first time, provisions specifically for indigenous peoples and local communities. Key elements include a mandatory disclosure requirement for patent applicants whose inventions are based on genetic resources and associated traditional knowledge.

## Electronic commerce

The Council reviewed a submission by South Africa calling for e-commerce-related IP issues to be included again as a standing item on the Council's agenda.

## 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 support of start-ups operating in a cross-border environment.

Members celebrated the 30th anniversary of the TRIPS Agreement in April 2024 with a high-level dialogue at the WTO.

## Trade and environment

- **The Committee on Trade and Environment intensified its work on enhancing dialogue among WTO members on the relationship between trade and environmental measures.**
- **In October, the WTO organized the fifth Trade and Environment Week, with 15 sessions organized by 27 delegations. Topics included sustainable agriculture, renewable energy and trade-related climate measures.**

### 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.

### Key themes

In 2024, through various meetings, thematic sessions and its Trade and Environment Week, the Committee on Trade and Environment – chaired by Ambassador Erwin Bollinger (Switzerland) – intensified its work on enhancing dialogue among members on the relationship between trade and environmental measures.

In April 2024, the Committee held a thematic session on “Trade contributions to energy transition efforts concerning climate adaptation and mitigation”, following up on a first session in 2023. In June, the Committee agreed to focus upcoming sessions on trade-related climate measures, technology transfer and sustainable agriculture.

A session in October on trade-related climate measures aimed to map the landscape of these measures and to facilitate dialogue on how the WTO can limit the costs from different approaches.

During the year, the Committee's discussions focused mainly on climate change and trade. It also addressed sustainability, inclusive development and biodiversity. The EU continued briefing members on various aspects of the European Green Deal.

The Committee discussed several new submissions on trade and climate change. Proposals from Japan, China and the United States each addressed the topic of interoperability and consistency.

Japan's proposal focused on how WTO work could lead to specific guidance on methodologies for measuring embedded emissions – emissions generated during the production or transportation of goods. China set out suggestions for advancing work in the WTO towards transparency and consistency of measures. The United States proposed ideas for deepening discussions on coherence of trade-related climate measures.

The United Kingdom updated the Committee on the Forest Agriculture and Commodities Trade Dialogue, which brings together several key exporters and importers to discuss making agricultural trade more sustainable and protecting forests and other ecosystems.

New Zealand provided updates on the finalization of an Agreement on Climate Change, Trade and Sustainability, launched with Costa Rica, Fiji, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. The Agreement includes removal of tariffs on environmental goods, market access and certainty for service suppliers, disciplines to eliminate harmful fossil fuel subsidies and voluntary eco-labelling programmes.

The Chair of the Committee and the WTO Secretariat regularly informed members of trade-related activities at COP29. The WTO Secretariat outlined its collaboration with the COP29 Azerbaijan Presidency on shaping the Climate Finance, Investment and Trade Day and on reports and projects to be presented at COP29. The Secretariat also provided a briefing on a paper it prepared on climate mitigation policies – “A Global Framework for Climate Mitigation Policies: A Technical Contribution to the Discussion on

## Carbon Pricing and Equivalent Policies in Open Economies”.

On sustainable and inclusive development, the Committee discussed several new submissions. An African Group proposal called for recognizing domestic industrial policy space, including to address climate change and promote sustainable development. The African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) proposal highlighted enhanced cooperation, including harmonization and mutual recognition of technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures. It also addressed environmental technologies and services, blue economy measures and recovery from climate disasters.

A ministerial declaration, endorsed at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) by 18 WTO members and the African Group, called on members to refrain from unilateral trade-related environmental measures that create unnecessary obstacles to trade or arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination between economies and to enhance transparency of such measures.

On biodiversity, the Committee heard updates from the United Kingdom on its Forest Risk Commodities Regulation aimed at tackling illegal deforestation in the UK’s supply chains. The Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity provided an update on preparations for the 2024 United Nations Biodiversity Conference.

Discussions continued on previously submitted proposals, including from India and South Africa on transfer of environmentally sound technologies (ESTs) and on concerns around unilateral environmental measures. The proposals call for discussions in the Committee on topics such as special and differential treatment and the creation of a Trade and Environment Fund to support transfer of ESTs.

Briefings took place at every Committee meeting on members’ trade and environment initiatives – the Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade, the Trade and Environmental



Sustainability Structured Discussions and the Fossil Fuel Subsidies Reform (see page 64).

Wind turbines in Wellington, New Zealand.

### **Technical assistance activities**

“Action on Climate and Trade”, launched by the World Bank, the World Economic Forum and the WTO Secretariat, provided capacity-building assistance to Indonesia and Rwanda to support their use of trade to meet climate change mitigation and adaptation goals.

The WTO Advanced Course on Trade and the Environment provided participants with practical tools to better understand the role of trade in supporting sustainable development.

### **Trade and Environment Week**

In October 2024, the WTO organized the fifth Trade and Environment Week, with 15 sessions organized by 27 members, over 100 speakers and more than 370 in-person participants. Topics included sustainable agriculture, critical minerals, plastics pollution, renewable energy, climate adaptation and trade-related climate measures.

## Trade and transfer of technology

- **The Working Group on Trade and Transfer of Technology admitted the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) as an observer in a move to foster coherence with international organizations.**
- **The Group sought ways to reinvigorate discussions on technology transfer to developing economies and continued examining members' communications on technology transfer.**

### Background

The Working Group on Trade and Technology Transfer was established at the Doha Ministerial Conference in 2001 to examine the relationship between trade and technology transfer and to recommend steps within the mandate of the WTO for increasing technology flows to developing economies.

**T**he Working Group granted WIPO observer status, strengthening collaboration on intellectual property and technology transfer issues and answering a call by the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi for the Working Group to continue working with other relevant international organizations.

Chairs from the Committee on Agriculture (see page 79), Trade Facilitation (see page 102) and the facilitator of the Work Programme on E-Commerce (see page 74) briefed the Working Group on aspects of their work that could be of relevance to the Working Group. These sessions provided insights into technology transfer-related issues being debated elsewhere and enhanced coherence across WTO activities. To identify synergies and avoid duplication, a key concern of members, the Group asked the WTO Secretariat to map technology transfer activities in relevant WTO bodies.

The Group continued to examine various communications on technology transfer put forward by members and to brainstorm on how to inject new energy into finding ways to increase flows of technology to developing economies. A submission from India emphasized the role of trade in addressing climate change through the transfer of environmentally sound technologies. The African Group highlighted the role of technology transfer in resilience-building, with a focus on agriculture, climate adaptation and digitalization.

Following his election as Working Group Chair in May, Ambassador Raimondas Alisauskas of Lithuania said: "Ministers have recognized in the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration the role of this Working Group and encouraged the continuation of our work. There is a need for us to reassess the current status of our work and to structure it going forward to deliver substantively."

Assembly of smartwatches in Uttar Pradesh, India.



# Impact of AI on international trade

Artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to unlock unprecedented opportunities in international trade but it is also a source of significant risks and challenges. The WTO has a critical role in facilitating AI-related trade, ensuring trustworthy AI and addressing emerging trade tensions.



**US\$ 621 billion**

Increased use of AI is spurring demand for goods related to information and communications technology. The global market for AI chips was valued at US\$ 61.5 billion in 2023 and is projected to reach **US\$ 621 billion** by 2032.

**14**

Under an optimistic scenario of universal AI adoption and high productivity growth up until 2040, global real trade growth could increase by almost **14 percentage points**, based on WTO simulations.



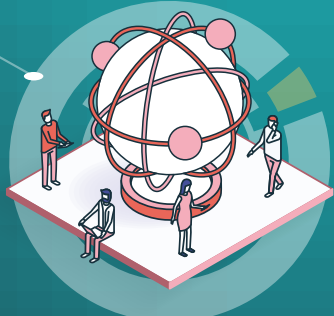
**75**

To promote the development of AI and to mitigate its potential risks, governments are increasingly putting in place AI strategies to enhance their AI capabilities. The number of economies having implemented AI strategies increased from three in 2017 to **75** in 2023.



**18.1**

Low-income economies could experience trade growth of **18.1 percentage points** under the scenarios of universal AI adoption and high productivity growth, a much higher rate than high-income economies.



**5%**

AI depends on data flows. According to the OECD and the WTO, if all economies fully restricted their data flows, this could result in a **5 per cent** reduction in global GDP.

Source: WTO report "Trading with intelligence: How AI shapes and is shaped by international trade".

## Regional trade agreements

- In 2024, WTO members submitted notifications concerning 17 regional trade agreements (RTAs) currently in force, mostly involving the Asia Pacific region.

### Notifications

In 2024, WTO members submitted notifications of 17 RTAs currently in force. RTAs are reciprocal preferential trade agreements between two or more partners. Most of the notifications involve the Asia Pacific region and Europe. Twelve of the RTAs are between developing partners, four involve developing and developed partners and one is between developed partners.

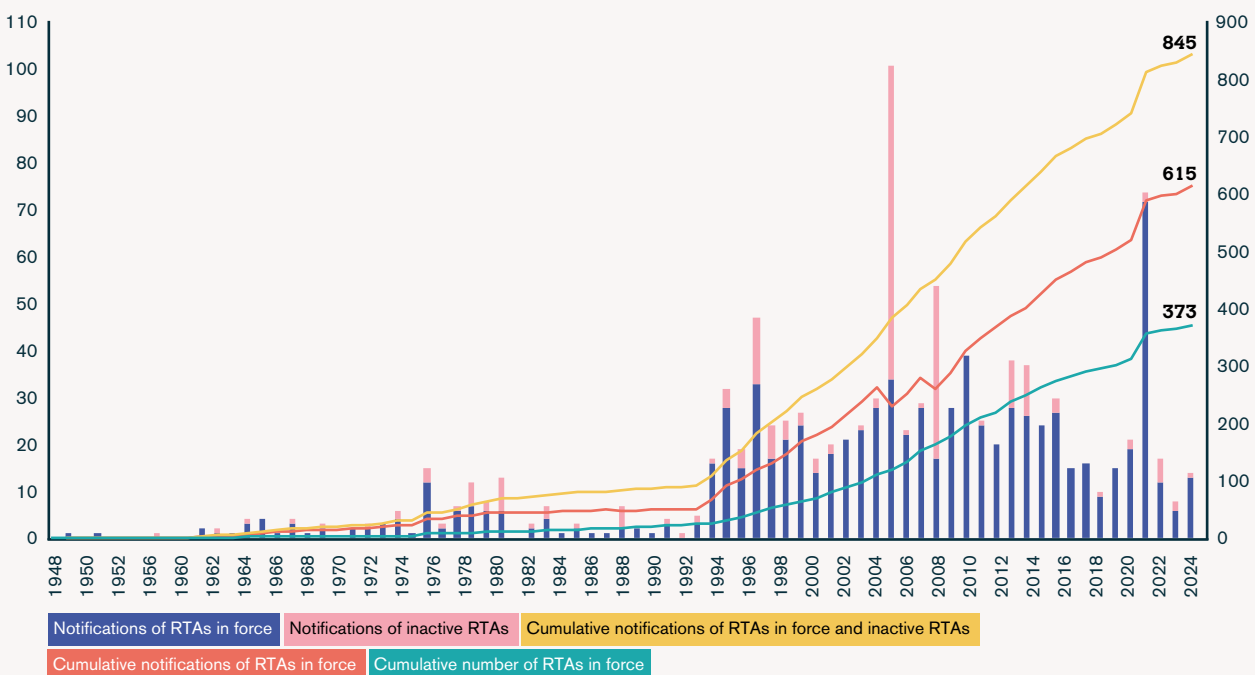
A total of 373 notified RTAs were in force on 31 December 2024. Goods and services aspects of RTAs as well as accessions to existing RTAs are notified separately, so overall notifications stood at 615 (see Figure 8).

### 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's terms of reference also provide for considering the systemic implications of RTAs and regional initiatives for the multilateral trading system.

In addition, 56 RTAs were in force but not notified as of November 2024. The WTO Secretariat regularly issues a list of these RTAs.

**Figure 8:** RTAs notified to the GATT/WTO (1948-2024) by year of entry into force



Note: Notifications of 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 the year of entry into force and notifications of inactive RTAs by the year they became inactive.

**Table 3: RTAs considered in 2024**

RTA and WTO body	Coverage
<b>Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (CRTA)</b>	
ASEAN – Japan	Services
ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA)	Goods
Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) – Entry into force for Brunei Darussalam, Chile and Malaysia	Goods and services
European Union – Pacific States (Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Samoa and the Solomon Islands)	Goods
India – United Arab Emirates*	Services
Indonesia – Republic of Korea	Goods and services
Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER Plus)	Goods and services
Republic of Korea – Cambodia	Goods
Türkiye – Montenegro	Services
United Kingdom – Australia	Goods and services
United Kingdom – Colombia, Ecuador and Peru	Goods and services
United Kingdom – Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway	Goods and services
United Kingdom – New Zealand	Goods and services
United Kingdom – Ukraine	Goods and services
United Kingdom – Viet Nam	Goods and services
<b>Committee on Trade and Development (CTD)</b>	
India – United Arab Emirates*	Goods
Mexico – Cuba	Goods

\* This agreement was considered in both the CRTA and the CTD.

### Monitoring RTAs

Since December 2006, all notified RTAs are subject to the WTO's transparency mechanism for RTAs. Depending on the provision under which the RTA was notified, its consideration takes place in either the Committee on Regional Trade Agreements (CRTA) or the Committee on Trade and Development (CTD) (see page 124). The WTO Secretariat prepares a factual presentation on each RTA.

In 2024, the CRTA considered 15 RTAs and the CTD two (see Table 3). By the end of 2024, over 260 RTAs currently

in force (including accessions to existing RTAs) had been considered under the transparency mechanism.

Two early announcements of the signature of RTAs as well as one implementation report were presented to the CRTA in 2024. While early announcements are voluntary, end-of-implementation reports are mandatory. Records show, however, that more than 200 such reports are pending.

The transparency mechanism continues to operate on a provisional basis.

## Improvements to the functioning of the CRTA

In 2024, members agreed and implemented procedures to streamline management of CRTA meetings. The Committee also agreed to reduce the number and duration of meetings for a trial period of two years and to include executive summaries in factual presentations.

These changes build on improvements implemented in 2023, in particular an interactive dashboard on the CRTA's work programme, a CRTA work calendar, an annual information session on the CRTA's work and a tentative timeline for considering RTAs at an early stage of the process.

Information on RTAs may be found in the WTO RTA Database.

Container port in Lazaro Cardenas, Mexico.



## Trade Policy Reviews

- In 2024, the Trade Policy Review Body reviewed the trade policies of 14 WTO members, four of which were least developed countries (LDCs).
- Kazakhstan was reviewed for the first time.

### 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 14 members in 2024: Angola, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, China, Iceland, Kazakhstan, Jamaica, Malawi, Maldives, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Paraguay and Solomon Islands. It was Kazakhstan's first review since joining the WTO in 2015. By the end of 2024, the TPRB had conducted 594 reviews since 1989, covering 161 of 166 members.

Members continued to actively participate in review meetings. In 2024, an average of 34 members (ranging from 19 to 72) took the floor at each TPRB meeting. Members raised between 110 and 1,500 written questions to the 14 members reviewed. Members under review provided answers to most written questions before their TPRB meetings.

The contribution of trade and trade policy to fostering members' economic growth and increasing living standards was discussed

during the review meetings. Many members were praised for lowering trade barriers, including by unilaterally reducing tariff protection, introducing and upgrading customs automation systems and national single windows (a single point for handling import/export-related data and documents), implementing authorized economic operator programmes between customs authorities and economic operators and eliminating licensing requirements for imports and exports.

Concerns were expressed about some members' relatively higher tariff protection for agricultural products, and some applied tariffs apparently exceeding their bound rates – rates contained in a member's WTO tariff schedule. The use of non-tariff measures such as non-automatic import licensing, temporary import and export prohibitions and restrictions, and certain aspects of technical barriers to trade (TBT) and sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures (see pages 86 and 82) were a common theme across several TPRs.

Many members also commented on the potentially trade-distorting effects of subsidy schemes, including for exports. The few members with critical minerals strategies were encouraged to maintain a balance between safeguarding national and economic security and promoting investment through a fair, transparent and predictable business environment for companies from all WTO members.

The TPRB also provided an important forum for dialogue on inclusive and sustainable trade. In-depth discussions were held on approaches to ensuring that trade benefits reach traditionally under-represented groups, including women and small businesses. Members' efforts were commended in improving environmental sustainability by, among other things, adopting sustainable forestry and agricultural policies and promoting the use of renewable energy.

Another theme frequently discussed in review meetings was the key role of the multilateral trading system in enhancing members' resilience to external shocks and climate-related disruptions.



During Kazakhstan's first review, several members highlighted the benefits that Kazakhstan has derived from WTO membership. Since its WTO accession in 2015, Kazakhstan has seen its trade volume double, reflecting its increasingly open trade regime. At Morocco's TPRB meeting, members recalled Morocco's historic role in hosting the signing of the Marrakesh Agreement, which established the WTO 30 years ago.

Many members reviewed in 2024 were praised for their active participation in WTO discussions on plastics pollution, fossil fuel subsidy reform, trade and environmental sustainability, e-commerce, investment facilitation for development, small businesses and domestic regulation of trade in services. Members repeatedly highlighted the importance of complying with WTO notification obligations to enhance the transparency and predictability of the rules-based trading system. Several members' efforts to improve their notification records in the run-up to their TPRB meetings were praised.

The TPRB Chair's concluding remarks summarizing each review are available on the WTO website.

During 2024, members were invited to provide feedback on a new information and technology (IT) platform intended to facilitate the TPR question-and-answer process. The platform is in the final stages of development.

### **Programme for 2025**

Sixteen members are scheduled for review in 2025: Australia, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Colombia, Guatemala, Madagascar, Nepal, Norway, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Tunisia, Ukraine, United Kingdom (first review), Vanuatu and Zambia.

Maintenance work on a railway track in Mozambique.

## Trade monitoring reports

- **The latest WTO trade monitoring report shows that members introduced 169 new trade-restrictive and 291 trade-facilitating measures on goods between mid-October 2023 and mid-October 2024.**
- **The trade covered by new restrictions increased significantly compared to the previous report.**
- **The stockpile of import restrictions implemented since 2009 has continued to grow.**

**T**he latest WTO trade monitoring report shows that during the review period (mid-October 2023 to mid-October 2024) the trade covered by new restrictions increased significantly compared to the previous period. Although WTO members have continued to introduce wide-ranging measures that liberalize trade, the report also shows that industrial policies and certain other programmes could potentially widen existing trade tensions.

Presenting the report to the Trade Policy Review Body (TPRB) in December 2024, DG Okonjo-Iweala stressed that trade has shown resilience to all the shocks of recent years, to members' benefit, but she added that "the resilience we have seen ... looks fragile amid geopolitical tensions and the unilateral measures described in this report".

Although members continued to introduce liberalizing measures, the report showed that during the 12 months, the value of trade covered by the 169 new restrictions was US\$ 888 billion. The DG noted that this was half a trillion dollars more than the US\$ 337 billion covered by restrictions introduced in the preceding period. Trade coverage of trade-facilitating measures also increased sharply to an estimated US\$ 1,440 billion, from US\$ 977 billion previously.

The DG also expressed concern at the rising stockpile of restrictive measures. "There is little meaningful roll-back of existing trade restrictions. That means the stockpile of trade

### 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 Trade Policy Review Body.

restrictions continues to grow," she said. The stockpile of import restrictions implemented since 2009 has grown steadily. For 2024, the trade covered by import restrictions in force was estimated at US\$ 2,942 billion, representing 11.8 per cent of world imports, up from US\$ 2,480 billion, or 9.9 per cent, in the last report.

The introduction of new export restrictions has increased since 2020, first in the context of the pandemic and then because of the war in Ukraine and the food security crisis. The latest review period saw a deceleration in the introduction of new export restrictions – 53 new measures compared to an annual average of more than 110 between 2021 and 2023.

But trade coverage of the new export restrictions was estimated at US\$ 276.7 billion, representing 1.1 per cent of the value of world merchandise exports, up from US\$ 159.1 billion, or 0.7 per cent, in the last report. The accumulated stockpile of export restrictions since 2009 affects 3.2 per cent of world exports, worth about US\$ 786 billion.

"An important silver lining here is that our tracking of export restrictions on food, feed and

fertilizers put in place since late February 2022 shows that these have decreased significantly, today covering an estimated trade value of US\$ 11.8 billion, down from US\$ 29.6 billion a year ago," the DG told the TPRB.

The average number of trade remedy initiations by members, such as anti-dumping, countervailing and safeguard actions, was 28.2 per month during the review period, up from 16.7 in the previous period. This marks the end of a slowdown in the number of initiations of trade remedy investigations observed since 2021.

Trade remedy actions, especially anti-dumping measures (see page 91), continue to be a central trade policy tool for members, accounting for 49.5 per cent of trade measures on goods.

Members introduced 134 new measures affecting trade in services, slightly more than the 123 reported in the last report. A third of these measures could be considered restrictive. More than half were policies affecting mode 3 (commercial presence) and mode 4 (movement of natural persons) (see page 103).

The review period saw an increase in new general and economic support measures by

members, echoing findings by the OECD and the IMF of a rise in industrial policies by governments to support strategic industries and sectors. It is difficult to evaluate the impact of these support measures on international trade and competition. Most of these measures mentioned the environment, energy and agriculture.

Overall, the implementation of new COVID-19 trade-related measures slowed significantly. Most of the 461 COVID-19 trade-related measures on goods introduced by WTO members and observers since the outbreak of the pandemic were trade-facilitating (256 or 55.5 per cent). Members continued to phase out pandemic-related measures, especially restrictions. As of mid-October 2024, 15 export restrictions and 10 import restrictions were in place.

### Status of the reports

The WTO Secretariat prepared two reports on global trade policy developments in 2024, including one on trade measures implemented by G20 economies. The reports have no legal effect on members' rights and obligations and do not seek to pronounce on whether a trade measure is protectionist or question members' right to take certain trade measures.



**US\$ 888 billion**

The value of trade covered by the 169 new restrictions introduced in 2024 was US\$ 888 billion.



Container port in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

## Trade, debt and finance

- The Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance started to examine specific concerns raised by least developed countries (LDCs) and net food-importing developing countries on financing of food imports, notably in periods of food emergency.
- Speaking at a roundtable with heads of multilateral development banks, DG Okonjo-Iweala highlighted the critical role of supply chain finance in integrating small businesses from developing economies into global trade.

### 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.

At the request of the Committee on Agriculture (see page 79), the Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance started to examine specific concerns raised by LDCs and net food-importing developing countries on financing of food imports, notably in periods of food emergency. The Working Group also received a submission by Pakistan calling for intensified efforts to explore the link between trade policies and debt management, given "the burgeoning public debt crisis faced by developing countries, including LDCs".

Speaking at a roundtable with heads of multilateral development banks on the



sidelines of World Bank Group and IMF annual meetings in Washington D.C., DG Okonjo-Iweala highlighted the critical role of supply chain finance in integrating small businesses from developing economies into global trade. She commended the WTO's and International Finance Corporation's (IFC) progress in promoting supply chain finance.

DG Okonjo-Iweala participated in a roundtable on trade finance with heads of multilateral development banks in Washington, D.C. in October 2024.

She noted that multilateral development banks have increased trade and supply finance support from US\$ 30 billion annually before the COVID-19 pandemic to nearly US\$ 50 billion, helping ensure the supply of essential food, medicine and other critical imports.

The DG also pointed out that global supply chain finance, one of the fastest-growing segments of trade finance, is now valued at around US\$ 2.3 trillion. But small businesses in developing economies have not fully benefited from this expansion due to challenges such as weak legal frameworks, inadequate technological infrastructure, and high costs, she said.

WTO research showed that a 10 per cent increase in the use of international factoring – the main type of supply-chain finance used by small businesses to secure immediate cash against unpaid invoices – can boost countries' trade by a full percentage point.

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank), the Asian Development Bank, the Islamic Development Bank and IDB Invest pledged in a statement after the roundtable to create a joint group to leverage resources for supporting small businesses in supply chains and advance practical work in the area of technology infrastructure, analytics, training and financing.

## Agreement on Government Procurement

- **The Committee on Government Procurement marked the 10th anniversary of the Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) 2012, which was adopted in 2014.**
- **Albania and Costa Rica submitted market access offers in their accession negotiations. Timor-Leste became a Committee observer.**

### Background

The GPA 2012 aims to open up 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 regarding 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 the GPA 2012 and there are 36 observers to the Committee on Government Procurement.

### Celebrating 10 years of the GPA 2012

The Committee marked the 10th anniversary of the entry into force in 2014 of the GPA 2012 with an event opened by DG Okonjo-Iweala.

She highlighted how the GPA 2012 is as much about good governance in procurement systems as it is about market access. "It fosters greater transparency and accountability," the DG said, noting also how the 2012 revision of the Agreement is

an inspiration for the WTO as a whole that should be borne in mind in other WTO work aimed at keeping the WTO fit for purpose.

### Accessions to the Agreement and new observers

Albania and Costa Rica submitted market access offers in 2024, key documents in accession negotiations.

Timor-Leste, a new WTO member since 2024, became an observer to the Committee. It emphasized that the GPA 2012 could be transformative for developing economies and least developed countries by strengthening governance frameworks, promoting private sector development and protecting against reduced competition.

### Other work

The Committee adopted a compilation of best practices for promoting and facilitating the participation of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in government procurement. The Committee Chair, Martin Zbinden (Switzerland), said: "This outcome on SMEs is significant. It reflects the efforts ... over the past ten years in ... the Committee's work programme on SMEs."

The work programme on sustainable procurement developed two catalogues covering green government procurement-related measures implemented domestically by GPA parties and provisions included by some of them in free trade agreements (FTAs) or similar instruments.

The Committee also reached an agreement making it easier for parties to update information on the media used for the publication by GPA parties of their laws and regulations on government procurement, procurement statistics, procurement notices and award information relevant to suppliers.

In addition, the WTO Secretariat upgraded its online platform (e-GPA Gateway) for accessing specific GPA parties' market access obligations under the GPA 2012 and other related information.



49

A total of 49 WTO members are parties to the GPA 2012.

# Dispute settlement

## Dispute settlement activities in 2024

- WTO members filed ten requests for consultations concerning allegedly WTO-inconsistent measures in 2024, compared with six the previous year.
- Five panel reports were circulated, including one indicating that a mutually agreed solution had been reached. Three panel reports were adopted by the Dispute Settlement Body while one report was appealed to the Appellate Body. The latter is currently unable to hear appeals due to all seven positions in the Body remaining vacant and the ongoing lack of consensus among WTO members on launching a selection process.
- At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), members adopted a decision instructing their officials to accelerate dispute settlement reform discussions, with a view to having a fully and well-functioning dispute settlement system accessible to all members by 2024 (see page 51).

### Requests for consultations

In 2024, WTO members filed ten requests for consultations concerning allegedly WTO-inconsistent measures (see Table 4), the first stage in the dispute settlement process, compared with six in 2023. In addition, one request was made under Article 21.5 of the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU), which concerns proceedings where a panel determines whether a party has complied with previous recommendations and rulings.

By the end of 2024, a total of 631 disputes had been initiated under the DSU since the entry into force of the WTO agreements in 1995 (see Figure 9).

### 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.

### Dispute settlement proceedings

If the parties to a dispute are unable to resolve their differences through consultations, the complainant can request that the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) establish a dispute settlement panel.

In 2024, the DSB established four original panels. It also referred one compliance dispute to the original panel in accordance with Article 21.5 of the DSU (see Table 5). Additionally, in one dispute, “US – Ripe Olives from Spain” (DS577), the matter was referred to arbitration under Article 22.6 of the DSU, which concerns the suspension of concessions and other obligations.

To provide for review of panel reports in the absence of a functioning Appellate Body, parties in several disputes have resorted to an alternative mechanism based on arbitration proceedings under Article 25 of the DSU to address appeals. In most of these disputes, the parties have agreed to use the

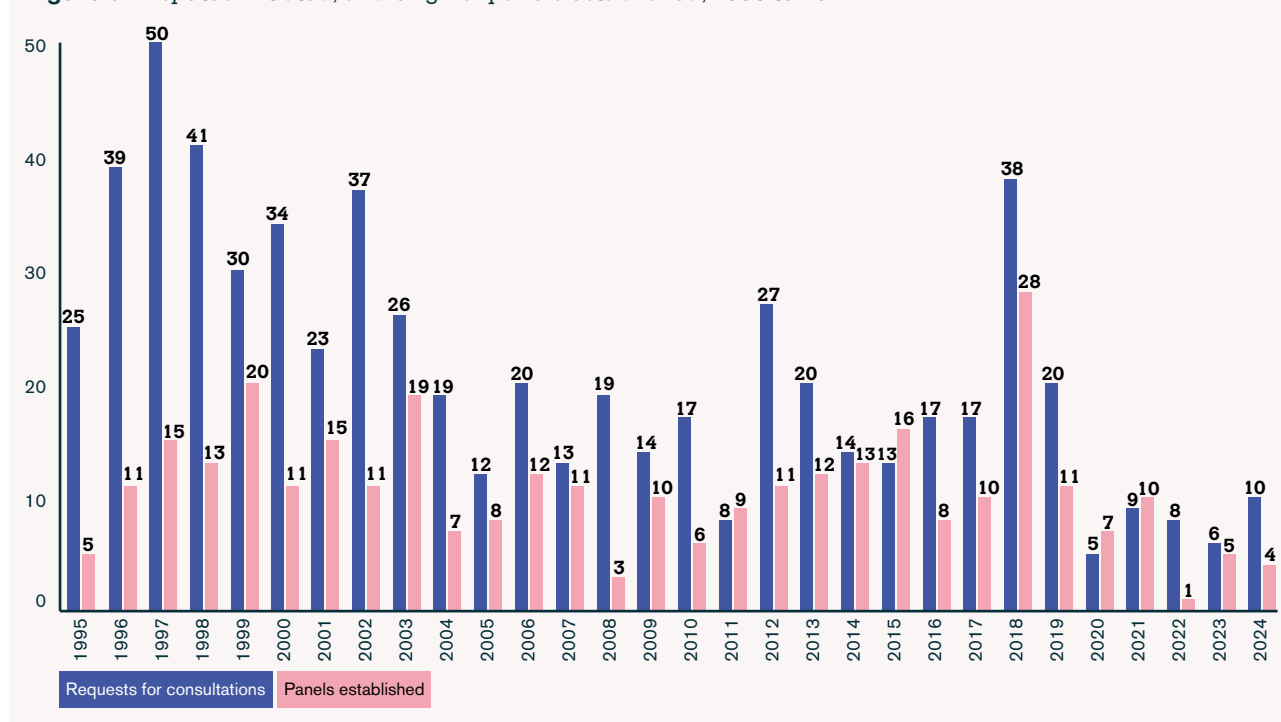


**631**

By the end of 2024, a total of 631 disputes had been initiated since the WTO was established in 1995.

**Table 4:** Disputes initiated in 2024 (requests for consultations)

Dispute settlement number	Title	Date of request	Status on 31 December 2024
DS631	China – Provisional AD Duties on Brandy (EU)	25/11/2024	In consultations
DS630	EU – Definitive CVDs on BEVs (China)	04/11/2024	In consultations
DS629	Türkiye – EVs (China)	08/10/2024	In consultations
DS628	China – CVD Investigation on Dairy Products (EU)	23/09/2024	In consultations
DS627	Canada – Certain Products (China)	06/09/2024	In consultations
DS626	EU – Provisional CVDs on BEVs (China)	09/08/2024	In consultations
DS625	Chinese Taipei – Offshore Wind Installations (EU)	26/07/2024	In consultations
DS624	EU – Citrus Fruit II (South Africa)	15/04/2024	Panel established (26/07/2024)
DS623	US – IRA (China)	26/03/2024	Panel composed (19/12/2024)
DS622	EU – AD on Fatty Acid (Indonesia)	07/02/2024	Panel established (18/12/2024)
DS591	Colombia – Frozen Fries (Article 21.5 – EU)	31/05/2024	Panel composed (27/11/2024)

**Figure 9:** Disputes initiated, and original panels established, 1995 to 2024

**Table 5: Panels established in 2024**

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date of establishment (and composition)
DS624	EU – Citrus Fruit II (South Africa)	26/07/2024
DS623	US – IRA (China)	23/09/2024 (composed 19/12/2024)
DS622	EU – AD on Fatty Acid (Indonesia)	18/12/2024
DS613	EU – Citrus Fruit (South Africa)	26/07/2024
DS591 (Article 21.5 proceeding)	Colombia – Frozen Fries (Article 21.5 – EU)	Referred to original panel 25/11/2024 (composed 27/11/2024)

so-called multi party interim appeal arbitration arrangement (MPIA). In 2024, no proceedings under Article 25 of the DSU were initiated.

As of end-December 2024, 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; Mexico; Montenegro; New Zealand; Nicaragua; Norway; Pakistan; Peru; the Philippines; Singapore; Switzerland; Ukraine; and Uruguay.

### Panel reports

Five panel reports were circulated in 2024 (see Table 6), including one compliance panel report. One of these reports indicated that the parties had reached a mutually agreed solution. The DSB adopted three panel reports (see Table 7) in the year.

### Suspension/termination of dispute settlement proceedings

During 2024, the panels in two disputes notified the DSB that they had agreed to requests to suspend their work (see Table 8). In two other disputes, the authority for the 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 three disputes, the parties notified the DSB that they had reached a mutually agreed solution on the matter.

**Table 6: Panel reports circulated in 2024**

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date of circulation
DS603	Australia – AD/CVD on Certain Products (China)	26/03/2024
DS602	China – AD/CVD on Wine (Australia)	19/04/2024
DS600	EU and Certain Member States – Palm Oil (Malaysia)	05/03/2024
DS599	Panama – Import Measures (Costa Rica)	05/12/2024
DS577	US – Ripe Olives from Spain (Article 21.5 – EU)	20/02/2024

**Table 7: Panel reports adopted in 2024**

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date adopted
DS603	Australia – AD/CVD on Certain Products (China)	26/04/2024
DS600	EU and Certain Member States – Palm Oil (Malaysia)	26/04/2024
DS577	US – Ripe Olives from Spain (Article 21.5 – EU)	19/04/2024

### Appeals

In 2024, one report was appealed to the Appellate Body (see Table 9). This brings to 31 the number of disputes in which appeals were pending as of 31 December 2024.

**Table 8:** Suspension/termination of dispute settlement proceedings in 2024

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date
<b>Suspension of panel proceedings</b>		
DS610	China – Goods (EU)	25/01/2024
DS593	EU – Palm Oil (Indonesia)	05/03/2024
		06/05/2024
		08/07/2024
		03/09/2024
		08/11/2024
<b>Lapse of panel's authority</b>		
DS554	US – Steel and Aluminium Products (Russia)	23/06/2024
DS521	EU – Cold-Rolled Steel (Russia)	13/07/2024
<b>Mutually agreed solution</b>		
DS602	China – AD/CVD on Wine (Australia)	29/03/2024
DS507	Thailand – Subsidies Concerning Sugar (Brazil)	06/03/2024
DS430	India – Agricultural Products (United States)	15/03/2024

**Table 9:** Panel reports appealed in 2024

Dispute settlement number	Short title	Date of notice of appeal
DS561	Turkey – Additional Duties (US)	26/01/2024

Given the ongoing absence of consensus among WTO members on launching a selection process, all seven positions in the Appellate Body remained vacant in 2024, so the Appellate Body was unable to hear appeals.

### John H. Jackson Moot Court Competition

In 2024, 73 universities participated in the regional rounds of the John H. Jackson Moot Court Competition on WTO Law, held between March and May 2024. The top 24 teams qualified for the final round. The participation of African teams was supported by the UN Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) as well as international and individual donors.

The WTO co-hosted the final oral round, which took place in Geneva in June. Teams

from the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (Ukraine), the eventual winner, and Strathmore University (Kenya) advanced to the Grand Final.

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) and the World Trade Institute (Switzerland).

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.

# Supporting development and building trade capacity

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## Trade and development

- A WTO Secretariat report on the participation of developing economies in the global trading system showed their combined merchandise exports rose from US\$ 7.7 trillion in 2020 to US\$ 11.3 trillion in 2022.
- WTO members attended a retreat in January 2025 to look at ways of responding to the challenges that developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs) face when engaging in trade.

The Committee on Trade and Development (CTD) Chair, Ambassador Ram Prasad Subedi of Nepal, held informal discussions on streamlining the CTD's agenda and fostering more focused discussions in the context of the WTO's "reform by doing". Several measures were put in place to improve the functioning of the Committee, including use of an interactive e-Agenda and simplifying

access to meeting documents and the submission of statements.

Consultations continued on some long-standing agenda items, including trade and development work in relation to decisions taken at the 8th Ministerial Conference in 2011.

The CTD considered a WTO Secretariat report on the participation of developing economies in the global trading system. The report showcased a substantial increase in the value of developing economies' merchandise exports, which rose from US\$ 7.7 trillion in 2020 to US\$ 11.3 trillion in 2022. The share of developing economies in global exports increased from 45 per cent in 2020 to 47 per cent in 2022.

Developing economies' commercial services exports rose from US\$ 1.5 trillion in 2020 to US\$ 2.3 trillion in 2022, accounting for 33 per cent of global commercial services exports, up from 29 per cent. Nevertheless, many developing

### Background

The Committee on Trade and Development is a 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.



Solar panels at a renewable power station in Gbamu, Nigeria.

economies are facing challenges in bolstering their participation.

Discussions continued on submissions from the African Group on rebalancing trade rules to address policy space for industrial development and other challenges, such as climate change, concentration of production and digital industrialization. The Committee also considered a submission from the African Group to advance Committee work on structural transformation and industrial development in developing economies.

The Committee further considered a submission from India assessing progress in the development dimension of WTO work. Another submission from India concerned the relationship between trade and the transfer of environmentally sound technologies to developing economies to address climate change. The Committee also considered a submission from the United States on how developing economies are using modern technologies to accelerate the production of local, traditional crops to facilitate exports, improve food security and promote economic growth.

Two dedicated sessions on the monitoring mechanism on special and differential treatment (S&D) were held. The mechanism was designed to analyse and review the implementation of S&D provisions, based on written submissions by members. However, no submissions have yet been made.

The Committee held three dedicated sessions on regional trade agreements (RTAs) (see page 112) and another three on preferential trade arrangements (PTAs). One dedicated session was held on small economies (see page 128).

### Technical cooperation and training

The WTO technical assistance annual report for 2023 was presented to the Committee. It showed 79 per cent of targets had been fully or partially met, the best result in five years. Participation in technical assistance activities increased in all regions, with LDC participation, including in e-learning, increasing significantly.

With regard to the Global Trust Fund (GTF), which finances training assistance activities, the report showed that contributions from members continued to decline, with voluntary contributions recorded in 2023 representing their lowest in 25 years.

### Retreat

WTO members attended in January 2025 a retreat entitled “Trade as a Tool for Development and the Way Forward” to look at ways of responding to the challenges that developing economies and LDCs face when engaging in trade.

The retreat offered heads of delegation an opportunity to engage in a forward-thinking dialogue on this issue, with the aim of reaching a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities at hand, identifying actionable ideas for addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities within the WTO, and proposing concrete actions to be taken after the retreat, leading towards MC14.

In her opening remarks, DG Okonjo-Iweala said: “The development dimension remains central to furthering the Organization’s purpose of raising living standards, creating jobs and advancing sustainable development.”

## Least-developed countries

- The 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) agreed to a three-year transition period for WTO members “graduating” from least developed country (LDC) status to continue to benefit from LDC-specific technical assistance and to adapt to WTO rules.
- A WTO Secretariat report showed that LDCs’ share in world trade of goods and commercial services has nearly doubled since the launch of the WTO, from 0.59 per cent in 1995 to 1.17 per cent in 2023.
- WTO members marked the 100th session of the Sub-Committee on LDCs on 11 November. The session looked into the challenges and opportunities of global efforts to support greater integration of LDCs into global trade.

### 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 2024, there are 45 LDCs, of which 37 are WTO members and five are in the process of accession.

### LDC graduation

At MC13, WTO members agreed to a three-year transition period for LDC graduates to continue to benefit from LDC-specific WTO technical assistance. Graduation refers to when a country meets certain United Nations development criteria and is no longer defined as an LDC. After graduation, WTO members will also have three years to adjust to certain WTO rules applying to non-LDCs.



Processing of vanilla pods in Antalaha, Madagascar.

In meetings on other elements of LDC proposals on graduation, WTO members examined provisions on intellectual property, subsidies, market access and trade facilitation. “Members remain committed to support the graduating LDCs. There is also willingness to continue consideration of specific challenges that graduating LDCs may face,” said Ambassador Ib Petersen of Denmark, Chair of the Sub-Committee on LDCs.

### LDC trade trends

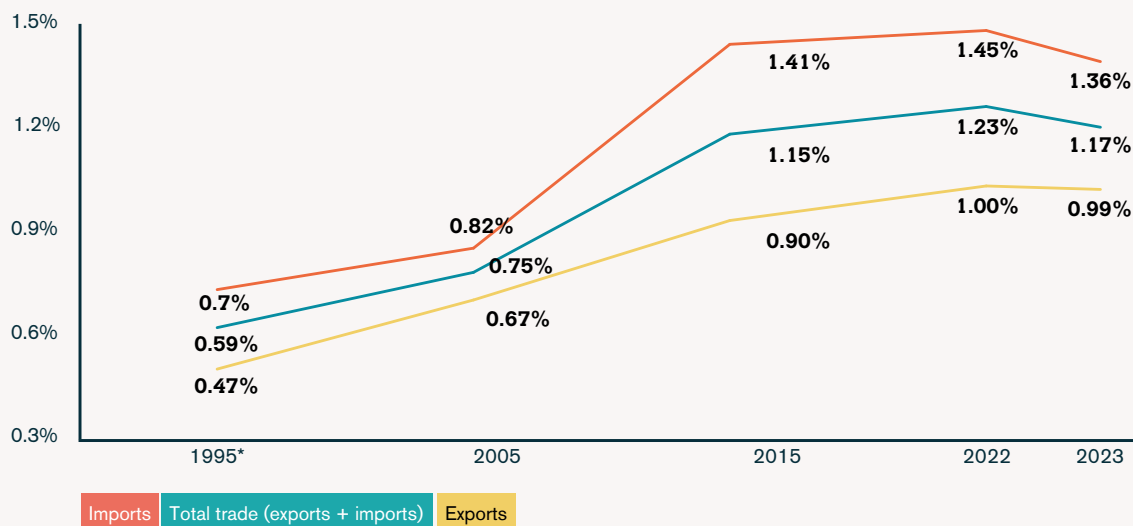
LDCs’ share in world trade of goods and commercial services has nearly doubled since the launch of the WTO, from 0.59 per cent in 1995 to 1.17 per cent in 2023, according to a WTO Secretariat note issued in October (see Figure 10). LDCs’ merchandise (goods) exports increased almost elevenfold from US\$ 24 billion in 1995 to US\$ 258 billion in 2023. Primary products continue to account for over half of LDC goods exports.

Services exports grew nearly ninefold over the same period, from US\$ 5 billion to US\$ 43.5 billion. Tourism has been the key export earning sector.

In July 2024, the Sub-Committee brought together trade experts, international

**Figure 10:** LDCs' shares in total world trade of goods and commercial services, 1995 to 2023

(Percentage shares; BOP/BPM6)



\*Methodology of IMF Balance of Payments Manual, Fifth Edition (BPM5).

Source: WTO-UNCTAD-ITC estimates.

organizations and other stakeholders to talk about ways of boosting LDCs' trade capacity in services. The discussion highlighted that while much of LDCs' services exports derive from travel, areas such as transport, information and communication technology (ICT), finance and business services remain essential for future productivity. The main challenges facing LDCs' services providers include issues related to skills development, the regulatory environment and limited technological capacity.

To mark the 100th session of the Sub-Committee in November 2024, WTO members took stock of the steps taken over the past 30 years to support LDCs' integration into global trade. The session also offered an opportunity for LDCs to share their trade priorities. "Our vision for the next decade focuses on strengthening the implementation of the special and differential treatment (S&D) provisions, bolstering export diversification, enhancing capacity to digital trade, addressing climate-related challenges and graduating from LDC status," said Trade and Tourism Minister Warsama Dirieh Mohamed of Djibouti, Coordinator of the LDC Group.

### South-South Dialogue

The seventh South-South Dialogue on LDCs and Development under China's LDCs and Accessions Programme took place in Geneva in October. The General Council Chair, WTO group coordinators, ambassadors from LDCs' key trading partners and close to 70 delegates joined the event. Participants explored the opportunities for LDCs offered by global value chains, digital trade and the green transition. "Development is at the heart of everything we do at the WTO, so it has been heartening to see the WTO making progress on trade and development issues," said DG Okonjo-Iweala.



**Development is at the heart of everything we do at the WTO, so it has been heartening to see the WTO making progress on trade and development issues.**

DG Okonjo-Iweala

## Small economies

- **As mandated by the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), the Committee on Trade and Development began to develop future areas of work on small economies, including the challenges and opportunities presented by e-commerce.**
- **The Committee held an informal thematic session on the role of small economies in green supply chains.**

### 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.

**T**he Committee on Trade and Development began in 2024 to apply an MC13 decision on future areas of work on small economies. These areas include the challenges and opportunities for small economies in using e-commerce and digital ecosystems to

drive competitiveness. Other areas include 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.

Work should also include exploring with other relevant WTO bodies how to integrate trade-related climate change adaptation and mitigation policies into the trade policies of small economies, the MC13 decision states.

At the one dedicated session on small economies in 2024, Guatemala, on behalf of the group of small economies, proposed outlines for WTO Secretariat reports on the three areas mandated at MC13. The Committee agreed to start with e-commerce and digital ecosystems.

At an informal thematic session on “Green Supply Chains for Development: The Case of Small Economies”, members discussed presentations from the WTO, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the International Trade Centre and UN Trade and Development on topics such as the impact of climate change on small, vulnerable economies (SVEs), trade in tropical fruits and the importance of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) for green supply chains.

Tea manufacturing in Ramboda, Sri Lanka.



## Landlocked developing countries

- The Committee on Trade and Development held its first focused session on landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) in November in response to instructions from the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) to assess trade-related challenges to the fuller integration of LLDCs into the multilateral trading system.
- LLDC governments, regional organizations and donor governments attended an informal session on “Strengthening Trade Infrastructure in LLDCs” that highlighted the importance of both physical and digital infrastructure development.

### Background

The WTO supports landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) in overcoming the challenges they face in integrating into the multilateral trading system, particularly by addressing high trade costs. Trade trends for LLDCs reveal that since the establishment of the WTO, they have experienced notable growth in both merchandise and commercial services trade. The Committee on Trade and Development holds focused sessions on LLDCs, as mandated by the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference.

The Committee on Trade and Development (CTD) held its first focused session on LLDCs in November 2024 in response to a ministerial declaration on LLDCs at MC13. Ministers instructed the Committee to hold such sessions to assess trade-related challenges identified for the fuller integration of LLDCs into the multilateral trading system.

Members welcomed the session as an important first step in drawing attention to the special challenges and needs of the LLDCs in the WTO. They saw the initiative



as contributing to a global dialogue on LLDC issues.

Trucks queuing to cross the Argentina-Paraguay border.

The United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS) presented the UN's Programme of Action for LLDCs (2024–34), intended to guide international support for the 32 LLDCs over the coming decade in key priority areas. These areas include the effective implementation of the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) (see page 102) in all LLDCs.

An informal session on “Strengthening Trade Infrastructure in LLDCs” was also held, with participation from LLDC governments, regional organizations and donor governments. LLDC members highlighted the importance of both physical infrastructure – railways, roads and energy – and digital infrastructure development for their effective participation in international trade. Additionally, regional organizations and donor governments elaborated on existing support programmes for LLDCs.

## Aid for Trade

- Following a decline during COVID-19, Aid for Trade disbursements climbed to a record high of more than US\$ 50 billion in 2022. Since the start of the Aid for Trade initiative in 2006, US\$ 648 billion has been invested to help developing economies, including least developed countries, to participate more fully in global trade.
- A study by the WTO, “Aid for Trade in a Changing Global Context”, outlined the need for more assistance to promote trade policy and regulations, given their relevance for the work of the WTO. Currently, 98 per cent of Aid for Trade goes to infrastructure and productive sectors.

Around 60 per cent of Aid for Trade is provided by bilateral donors. The other 40 per cent is provided by multilateral donors. Seventy per cent of Aid for Trade goes to Africa and Asia. By income level, lower middle-income countries are the main recipients, accounting for 38 per cent. Least developed countries (LDCs) are the second-largest recipient at 28 per cent.

Over half of Aid for Trade goes to trade-related infrastructure – for example, transport and storage (27 per cent) and energy generation and supply (23 per cent). A little under 45 per cent is allocated to productive sectors. Within these sectors, agriculture, forestry and fisheries (18 per cent) and banking/financial services (12 per cent) receive the largest shares. Aid for Trade for trade policy and



**US\$ 50 billion**

Disbursements of Aid for Trade reached a high of more than US\$ 50 billion in 2022.

### Background

Aid for Trade helps developing economies, and particularly least-developed countries (LDCs), to 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 LDCs. Aid for Trade is part of Official Development Assistance.

### Aid for Trade flows

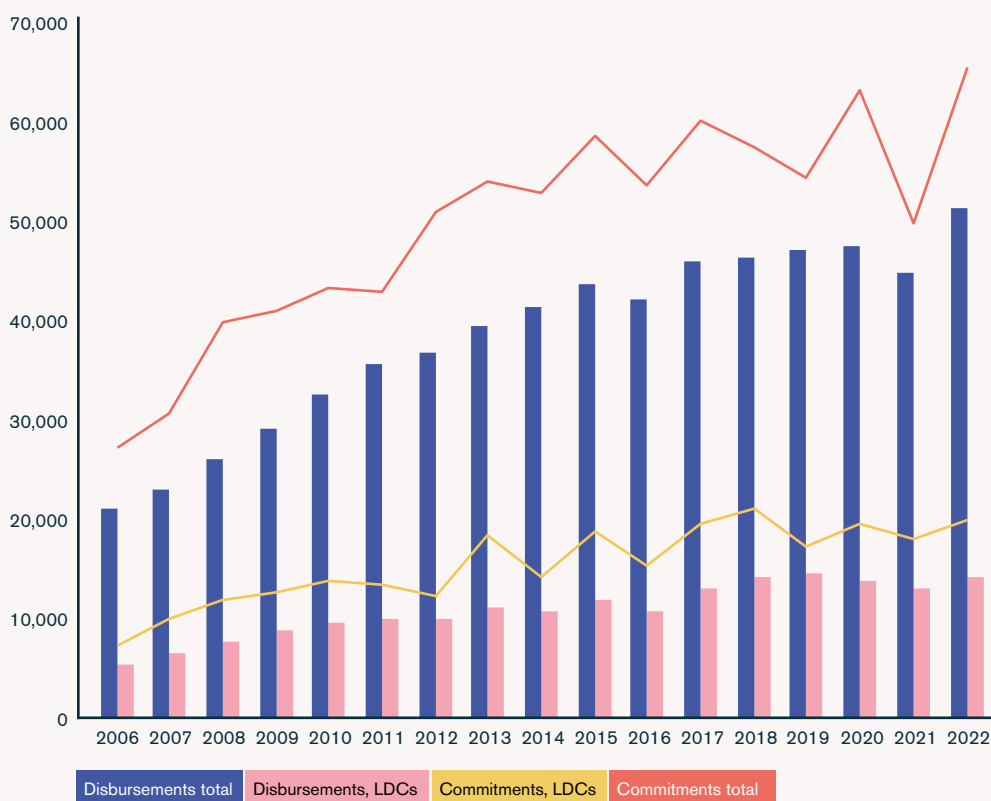
Since the start of the Aid for Trade initiative in 2006, over US\$ 648 billion has been invested to strengthen infrastructure, bolster productive sectors and build strong trade institutions in developing economies (see Figure 11). Aid for Trade disbursements bounced back to reach a record high of more than US\$ 50 billion in 2022, the latest year for which figures are available, from their decline during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Tomato farmers in Mataquesuintla, Guatemala, prepare their produce for export.



**Figure 11:** Aid for Trade flows, 2006–22, US\$ million, constant prices



Source: OECD Creditor Reporting System.

regulation accounts for only 2 per cent of the total.

**Evolution of Aid for Trade**

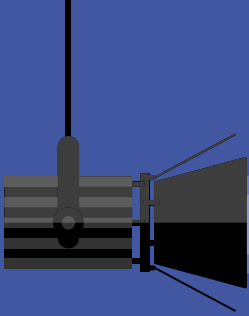
The Aid for Trade initiative has evolved significantly over the past 18 years. WTO members discussed ways to strengthen the initiative at an informal session of the Committee on Trade and Development in November. They examined the findings of a study by the WTO, “Aid for Trade in a Changing Global Context”, which outlined the need for assistance to promote trade policy and regulations, given their relevance for the work of the WTO.

Some of the key points highlighted include the need for greater ownership of the process by beneficiaries and donors. It was also noted that Aid for Trade discussions should focus

on best practices and lessons learned, with a view to examining the effectiveness and impact of Aid for Trade interventions.

“WTO members had an enriching discussion on the evolving context of Aid for Trade and how it could better contribute to addressing the evolving needs of developing countries. I hope it provided valuable insights as members prepare for the Aid for Trade discussions going forward,” said the Chair, Ambassador Ram Prasad Subedi (Nepal).

At the Ninth Global Review of Aid for Trade in June 2024 (see page 132), over 1,000 participants discussed food security, digital connectivity and trade mainstreaming. The three-day event was told that while Aid for Trade support remains relevant, more efforts are required to help developing economies better integrate into global trade.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# Aid for Trade Global Review

Every two years, the WTO welcomes trade and development practitioners from across the world to assess the impact of Aid for Trade and to reflect on the way forward. The Ninth Global Review took place in June 2024 in Geneva under the theme “Mainstreaming Trade into Development Strategies”.

DG Okonjo-Iweala at the opening session of the Aid for Trade Global Review.



Over 1,000 participants from 120 economies examined across 60 sessions the role of Aid for Trade in bolstering food security, strengthening digital connectivity and mainstreaming trade. Taking part were ministers, high-ranking government officials, heads of international organizations, policymakers and representatives from academia, the private sector and civil society.

“Amidst the challenges we face, trade continues to be resilient and still offers up opportunities that developing countries can and should seize. Aid for Trade remains a vital instrument to help them do just that,” said DG Okonjo-Iweala.

The event displayed the strength of WTO strategic partnerships in Aid for Trade, including with the World Bank and the International Trade Centre (ITC). Six reports were launched, including an OECD/WTO joint report, “Aid for Trade at a Glance”, a biennial publication providing comprehensive analysis of trends and developments in aid. “Globalization, open markets, free trade and investment flows, and the expansion of global trade have very significantly contributed to increased incomes and living standards all around the world,” said OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann.



Discussions highlighted the importance of addressing both traditional areas of Aid for Trade assistance, including trade facilitation, and emerging priorities such as digitalization and the green transition, with particular emphasis on the needs of least developed countries (LDCs). Participants recognized that concerted efforts were required to help LDCs use trade for generating jobs and adding value to their exports of goods and services. “We must work together to bring LDC trade development to new heights, to promote inclusive trade and to create a prosperous future for all,” said Trade and Tourism Minister Warsama Dirieh Mohamed of Djibouti, Coordinator of the LDC Group.

Participants acknowledged the importance of strengthening resilience and sustainability of agriculture and food supply chains. Various crop diversification initiatives were also highlighted. In addition, the

discussions stressed the need for advancing negotiations on agriculture (see page 49) and fisheries subsidies (see page 52). This could help to level the playing field for farmers and fishers in developing economies, participants said. “The current state of talks reminds me of Ernest Hemingway’s novel “For Whom the Bell Tolls?”. Is the bell tolling for others? Or is it tolling for us? I think it is tolling for us. And we need to advance with the agriculture negotiations,” said Cameroon’s Trade Minister, Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana.

The discussions also highlighted the role of international standards in bolstering firms’ competitiveness in global markets. The role of international cooperation in supporting the adoption of digital tools and standards was recognized.

The Global Review saw broad agreement on the transformative

power of digital trade for economic development. The need to bolster infrastructure, regulatory cooperation and skills development featured prominently in the sessions. Participants also acknowledged the importance of partnerships in Aid for Trade, including the WTO-World Bank cooperation on “Digital Trade for Africa” and WTO-ITC cooperation on the “Women Exporters in the Digital Economy Fund” (see page 141).

“The Aid for Trade initiative remains vital for ensuring that the benefits of trade are widely shared,” Deputy DG Zhang said in closing the three-day event.

Above: A session co-organized by the WTO and World Bank on implementing the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies.

## Enhanced Integrated Framework

- **The Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) concluded the second phase of its programme in support of least developed countries (LDCs) in 2024, eight years after its launch, furthering its aim to create a trade environment conducive to inclusive and sustainable growth, to boost LDC exports and to increase their access to markets.**
- **EIF Phase Two was supported by 24 donor countries, which contributed US\$ 143.56 million to the EIF Trust Fund. A total of 175 projects in 49 LDCs and recently “graduated” countries were implemented.**
- **With discussions on a future multilateral Aid for Trade support mechanism for LDCs taking place in 2025, six donors have committed funds to an EIF Interim Facility.**

### 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, 26 donors and eight partner agencies works closely with governments, development organizations, civil society and academia. Together, they leverage expertise and resources to tackle the world's most pressing trade-for-development issues. The WTO houses the Executive Secretariat of the EIF.

### End of EIF phase two

The second phase of the EIF programme in support of LDCs ended in 2024. The programme's twin goals were to create a trade environment conducive for inclusive

and sustainable growth and to increase exports and access to international markets for LDCs. The first phase was launched in 2016.

EIF Phase Two was supported by 24 donor countries, which contributed US\$ 143.56 million to the EIF Trust Fund. These funds helped to leverage an additional US\$ 52 million from LDC governments, development partners and private sector actors. A total of 175 projects in 49 LDCs and recently graduated countries (see page 126) were implemented.

The programme registered some notable results. Ninety per cent of its targets were met or exceeded. More than 225,000 individual beneficiaries (64 per cent of them women) received value chain development training. More than 30,000 micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) benefited from EIF projects.

In Phase Two, 48 LDCs integrated trade into their national development plans, of which 37 were supported through the EIF. The programme facilitated US\$ 1 billion in exports by LDCs to 304 international markets. An external evaluation found that 25 per cent of trade reforms in the LDCs during Phase Two were linked to EIF support. The evaluation also found that EIF Aid for Trade was statistically linked to an increase of around 20 per cent in total exports in the LDCs.

### Interim support for LDCs

With the end of EIF Phase Two, and discussions ongoing in early 2025 around a future multilateral Aid for Trade support mechanism for LDCs, some donors have contributed funding to an EIF Interim Facility. The principal objective of the Facility is to maintain and build on the results of the EIF programmes until any future support mechanism is operational. The Facility, which will run until September 2025, operates under the same governance arrangements as EIF Phase Two but with a substantially leaner structure.

As of December 2024, Finland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Sweden, the United Arab Emirates



**US\$ 143.56 million**

A total of US\$ 143.56 million was contributed by 24 donor countries to EIF Phase 2, which ended in 2024.



and the United Kingdom had committed US\$ 10.5 million to the Facility, enabling the financing of 42 projects in 41 LDCs. This has helped to mobilize an additional US\$ 7.26 million in co-funding, exceeding the initial target of US\$ 5 million.

### **Supporting LDCs in mobilizing Aid for Trade resources**

One of the primary objectives of the EIF has been to enable LDCs to mobilize additional Aid for Trade resources through EIF national implementation units (NIUs) to support trade development priorities.

For example, Rwanda secured US\$ 26 million to implement a component of a World Bank-funded project that aims to provide improved connectivity along regional logistics

corridors and to support local and regional economic activities.

In Bhutan, the EIF provided catalytic support to the Food Corporation of Bhutan to establish a potato auction platform and a potato grading facility, enabling farmers to trade their potatoes on more advantageous terms and to receive prompt payment.

In Cambodia, following the successful implementation of an EU project, the EIF national implementation unit (NIU) mobilised an additional US\$ 10.5 million from the EU and Germany for the second phase of the project. The next phase aims at strengthening trade policy, the digital economy, trade facilitation and small business trade competitiveness. It is being coordinated by the NIU at Cambodia's Ministry of Commerce.

The EIF is among the partners working with the Rwandan Government to facilitate trade across borders for small businesses and women entrepreneurs.



## Standards and Trade Development Facility

- The Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) marked its 20th anniversary with a publication showcasing its evolution and results.
- The STDF Working Group allocated US\$ 5.1 million for seven new projects and six project preparation grants (PPGs) to help developing economies and least developed countries (LDCs) meet international standards for food safety and animal and plant health needed to access markets.
- An external evaluation of the 2020-24 strategy highlighted that “the STDF has delivered significant and tangible results”. Work began on a new multi-year strategy.

### Boosting safe trade

With over 200 successful projects and project preparation grants implemented in more than 90 countries across Africa, Asia and the Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean, the STDF has contributed significantly to meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Since its launch in 2004, it has

### 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](http://www.standardsfacility.org).

The STDF, working with the FAO and the Spices Board of the Indian Ministry of Commerce, has helped over 1,700 farmers to adopt better agricultural and hygiene practices.



**“The STDF has delivered significant and tangible results”, according to an external evaluation of the 2020-24 strategy.**

helped communities and economies gain safer access to markets. A new publication – “20 years of safe trade for sustainable development” – commemorated the partnership’s 20th anniversary, showcasing the STDF’s evolution and results.

In 2024, gender analyses covering more than 10 countries were carried out under STDF projects to promote greater inclusiveness. An external evaluation was published of how environment, biodiversity and climate change have been mainstreamed into the STDF’s work on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) (see page 82) capacity building and safe trade facilitation. It found that “since the STDF’s early work on climate change risks there is a clear trend of growing awareness of the interconnections between SPS issues, safe trade, climate change and environment.”

An external evaluation of the partnership’s 2020-24 strategy – “Safe and inclusive trade horizons for developing countries” – highlighted the STDF’s success in increasing SPS capacity in developing economies, noting that economies and sectors benefiting from STDF support have seen stronger export growth in plants, animals and foods than their comparators.

### Project results in 2024

From strengthening phytosanitary systems in West Africa to enhancing food safety in Asia, the STDF’s projects are delivering solutions that facilitate safe trade and protect health. In 2024, the STDF successfully completed eight projects and seven project preparation grants (PPGs) across Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

With the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the Indian Ministry of Commerce’s Spices Board, the STDF helped over 1,700 farmers to adopt better agricultural and hygiene practices. This reduced pesticide residues, improved compliance with Codex standards and created opportunities for women farmers and other vulnerable groups to sell their products to new markets. Farmer organizations signed 25 agreements with exporters and trading companies, increasing prices and market stability for their members.

In the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, six countries developed harmonized guidelines for biopesticides. Sixteen SADC member states endorsed the guidelines at the technical level, paving the way for them to be rolled out to promote more sustainable agriculture following approval by the SADC Council of Ministers.

In Central America and Africa, two pilot projects enabled national authorities and the private sector to learn about how voluntary third-party assurance (vTPA) programmes can support more risk-based food safety controls.

The STDF Working Group allocated US\$ 5.1 million for seven new projects and six PPGs, enabling more stakeholders globally to benefit from STDF support. They include a regional project to pilot e-Veterinary certification in Latin America, drawing on the successful STDF ePhyto model of electronic SPS certification. The Working Group also approved a project to promote expanded use of the ePing transparency platform, which facilitates the tracking of SPS measures, in five target countries – Kenya, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and Uganda.

### Knowledge shared

The STDF shared knowledge at over 60 events worldwide on good practice topics, including public-private partnerships, e-certification, the use of evidence-based approaches and mainstreaming environment and gender for more inclusive and sustainable trade. These events reached more than 5,700 representatives from governments, industry, international and regional organizations and the private sector.

### Moving forward

Building on the findings of the external programme evaluation, STDF partners, donors and developing economy experts initiated work in 2024 to develop a new strategy for 2025-30, emphasizing innovation and scaling as well as gender and environment mainstreaming. Enhanced collaboration with the private sector and regional institutions will be pivotal in driving the strategy.



**US\$ 5.1 million**

The STDF Working Group allocated US\$ 5.1 million in 2024 to developing economies.

## Technical cooperation and training

- Approximately 7,000 participants benefited from trainer-led technical assistance, while 10,687 completed e-Learning courses, a 14 per cent rise.
- Africa remained the region with the highest participation, accounting for 42 per cent of total participants in 2024.

### Background

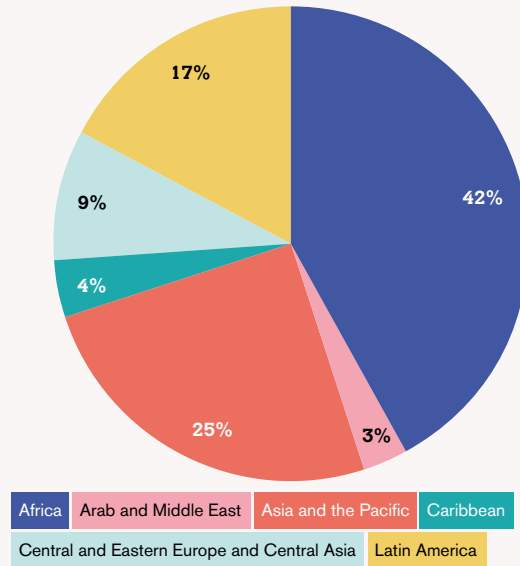
The Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation coordinates the WTO's technical assistance programmes. Its activities include e-Learning, global and regional training courses, academic programmes, and workshops at local level. The technical assistance programmes help WTO members better understand their rights and obligations in the multilateral trading system and enhance their ability to negotiate effectively. This strengthens their capacity to benefit from participation in the system.

### Overview of technical assistance activities

The WTO Secretariat blended face-to-face and online components in delivering technical assistance in 2024. The volume of trainer-led activities remained steady at 154, while the number of courses on the e-Learning platform increased from 160 to 176. Overall, WTO technical assistance activities rose 8.6 per cent, continuing an upward trend.

The largest share of activities (31 per cent) were "global" activities, open to all WTO TA beneficiary members and observers. The remaining 69 per cent were delivered at the national or regional level, reflecting the Secretariat's commitment to a demand-driven approach.

Figure 12: Overall participation by region



The 2024-25 Technical Assistance and Training Plan adopts a "results-based management" approach. Programme guidelines and benchmarks help to maintain a high standard of content, consistent teaching methods and regular evaluation of activities.

Twenty-seven government officials from developing economies took part in an introductory Trade Policy Course in Geneva in April 2024.



### Participation in technical assistance activities

Nearly 7,000 participants attended trainer-led technical assistance activities and close to 10,700 completed e-Learning courses, with 73 per cent of participants doing multiple courses.

At 42 per cent, up from 32 per cent in 2023, Africa once again had the highest percentage of total participation, followed by Asia and the Pacific (25 per cent) and Latin America (17 per cent) (see Figure 12). Participation from least developed countries (LDCs) in e-Learning increased by 26 per cent from 2023's 38 per cent. Women represented 46 per cent of participants across all WTO technical assistance activities, similar to the previous year.

Approximately 49 per cent of WTO technical assistance activities (including e-Learning courses) were delivered in English, 25 per cent in Spanish and 21 per cent in French. The remaining 5 per cent consisted of trainer-led activities with interpretation into all the WTO languages.

### Long-term placement and internship programmes

As in previous years, government officials completing WTO long-term placement programmes were mostly from LDCs and other low-income countries in Africa and the Asia-Pacific region, with participation also meeting programme objectives on gender.

Eighteen participants (eight women and ten men) completed the French and Irish Mission Programme (FIMiP), which offers a ten-month placement to a capital-based official at the selected member's mission in Geneva. Fourteen participants (six women and eight men) completed the Netherlands Talent Programme, which also runs for ten months.

Three officials (one woman and two men) participated in the Group Coordinator Support Programme, under which a capital-based official of a WTO developing or LDC member coordinating a regional

## French Irish Mission Programme



**Myrlande Ignounga MOUNGUENGUI**  
Gabon

“The ten months we spent at the WTO were an opportunity to strengthen our knowledge of international trade rules, to acquire practical skills in trade negotiations and to better understand the complex issues faced by developing economies and least developed countries in global trade.”

## Netherlands Talent Programme (NTP)



**Saira Tariq**  
Pakistan

“The placement under the NTP provided me with the opportunity to specialize in trade in services, addressing gaps in my knowledge and skills in this area. I feel more committed, motivated and confident in my ability to contribute to my country's development.”

## Group Coordinators Support Programme



**Alassane Doumbia**  
Mali

“In addition to allowing me to be at the heart of the coordination of the Cotton 4, the programme provided me with invaluable experience regarding the cotton discussions at the WTO. The knowledge this programme has equipped me with will be immensely valuable for helping my country integrate more fully into global trade.”

## Regional Trade Policy Course



**Maha Saier Turki Alanazi**  
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

“This course will directly benefit my role by enabling me to analyse and interpret international trade agreements with greater precision, support effective policy formulation and advocate for our trade interests more robustly.”

## Advanced Trade Policy Course



**Olena Chumakova**  
Chief Specialist, Ministry of Economy,  
Ukraine

“In 2025, the trade policy of Ukraine was reviewed in the WTO for the second time. The course allowed me to be better-prepared for further engagement in the TPR-related work, due to its comprehensive nature and practical exercises.”

## E-learning



**Kelvin Mwea**  
Trade Advisory Services, Export  
Promotion and Branding Agency, Kenya

“This platform is awesome. It allows you to enrol for the course of your choice, gives objectives of the course, provides course reading materials in both pdf and interactive formats which are easy to read while offering revision questions and take aways. Lastly, it provides a test to help you remember what you have learnt.”

grouping of developing and/or LDC members can be placed at their Geneva mission for up to 12 months.

Five interns (one woman and four men) were engaged in the Accession Internship Programme. Financed by China, the programme covers a six-month placement at the Accessions Division, or elsewhere, for young professionals from LDCs and developing members and observers to increase their understanding of the WTO.

Twenty young professionals (ten women and ten men) were recruited for the Young Professionals Programme. 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 in the WTO Secretariat (see page 179).

### Financing technical assistance

Most of the technical assistance programme is funded by unearmarked contributions to the Global Trust Fund provided voluntarily by WTO members. These unearmarked contributions have gradually declined, with a more significant drop in 2024. Such funds are crucial as they allow the Secretariat to adapt to the needs and requests of beneficiaries. In 2024, new contributions to the Global Trust Fund totalled CHF 3 million, slightly less than in 2023.

Other funding sources include the WTO regular budget for Geneva-based courses and local technical assistance activities – CHF 4.5 million for 2024 – and other voluntary contributions earmarked for specific programmes, such as the French and Irish Mission Programme (CHF 1.1 million), the Netherlands Talent Programme (CHF 0.9 million), the WTO Chairs Programme (CHF 0.9 million) and the China LDCs & Accessions Programme (CHF 0.4 million).

## Trade and women's empowerment

- The Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund was launched at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) to help women entrepreneurs expand their businesses through international trade and digitalization.
- The WTO's Trade and Gender Policy Questionnaire provided WTO members with a tool to assess and report on the integration of gender considerations into trade policies.

### Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund

The Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund was launched by the WTO and the International Trade Centre at MC13. The initiative aims to empower women entrepreneurs by supporting the expansion of their businesses through international trade and digitalization. The Fund will provide grants and technical assistance to tackle barriers, foster inclusivity and enhance economic empowerment through digital trade.

The Fund's activities will be implemented through projects in specific countries in cooperation with business support organizations selected through a competitive call for proposals.

The WTO and ITC aim to raise US\$ 50 million for the Fund, with an initial target of US\$ 25 million, from public and private sector partners.

### Strengthening capacity for gender-responsive trade policymaking

In 2024, the WTO organized two in-person training weeks on gender-responsive trade policymaking. Capacity-building efforts resulted in the training of 70 government officials, bringing the total number of those trained in gender-responsive trade policymaking to over 600 since 2018.

The in-person training enhanced participants' understanding of gender-responsive trade



policies. Francisco Javier Vicencio Macaya, of Chile's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said: "The course provides vital elements that will help us to deepen and innovate the implementation of Chile's Foreign Policy, which includes the introduction of gender provisions in trade agreements."

### Gender-responsive policymaking

The WTO has made its trade and gender policy questionnaire available on its website, offering members a flexible tool that can be used for a variety of policy objectives, including strategy development and reporting under the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (see page 114).

Adapted from the WTO Secretariat's Trade Policy Review report structure and based on research on gender-responsive trade policies conducted by the WTO Trade and Gender Office, the questionnaire enables economies to gather data and gain insights into how gender equality is reflected in national trade and development objectives. It also helps to collect evidence on trade and gender issues, making it an essential resource in policy development.

The Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund was launched by the WTO and the International Trade Centre at MC13.

# 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 COP29 Climate Summit in Baku, where the WTO co-hosted a Trade and Investment House, providing a space for debate on links between trade, investment and climate change concerns.
- During G20, World Bank and IMF meetings, the DG highlighted the potential of the WTO and the multilateral trading system to help solve the world's technological, environmental, social and geopolitical challenges.
- The WTO and the World Bank launched a project to promote the use of digital trade to create more economic opportunities, growth and jobs and reduce poverty in African countries.

### UN climate summit

DG Okonjo-Iweala led a WTO Secretariat delegation to the COP29 Climate Conference in Baku in November, where a Trade and Investment House was provided by the host, creating space for debate and engagement on the links between trade, investment and climate matters. The House was hosted by Azerbaijan's Ministry of Economic Affairs, the WTO, the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the International Trade Centre (ITC) and UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

On 14 November, a Climate Finance, Investment and Trade (FIT) Day was organized. Dedicated discussions were held on how trade and investment can be used to amplify climate finance flows and support developing economies on a "just transition" to low-carbon and environmentally sustainable economies.

Various joint reports or projects were presented with partners. These included the Asian Development Bank on a critical minerals database, the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) on renewable hydrogen, and the World Meteorological Organization on supporting the renewable energy transition through trade.

## G20

In November, the 31st WTO Trade Monitoring Report on trade measures taken by G20 economies showed a surge in trade-restrictive actions. Although G20 economies also continued to introduce wide-ranging trade-facilitating measures, the report points to increasing evidence of inward-looking and unilateral trade policies.

“The report indicates a trade-restrictive trend, which should be a cause for concern,” said DG Okonjo-Iweala, a message she returned to at the G20 Leaders’ Summit in Rio de Janeiro in November.

## World Bank and IMF

The DG attended the annual meeting of the World Bank Group and the IMF in Washington D.C. in October. At a roundtable with the heads of multilateral development banks, she pointed to the crucial role of supply chain finance for small businesses in developing economies and highlighted the WTO’s and the International Finance Corporation’s (IFC) role in supporting this.

She also delivered the 2024 Per Jacobsson lecture, where she highlighted the role of the multilateral trading system, embodied by the WTO, and its potential to help meet the technological, environmental, social and geopolitical challenges of current times.

In February, on the eve of the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), the WTO and the World Bank launched a project to promote the use of digital trade to create more economic opportunities, growth and jobs and to reduce poverty in African countries. Both organizations have carried out pilot needs assessments in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Nigeria,



Rwanda and Togo to determine possible policy action on digital trade for each country.

A joint WTO-World Bank programme to assist developing economies in unlocking the benefits of services trade for their exports was launched during the WTO Public Forum in September (see page 150).

## Agriculture, food and fisheries

In June 2024, the WTO and the African Export-Import Bank (Afreximbank) signed a memorandum of understanding to further collaboration on issues such as food and agriculture trade, trade finance and fisheries subsidies.

During the World Food Forum in Rome in October, the DG reiterated the important role trade plays in dealing with farming and food security challenges. She recalled the importance of the strengthened cooperation between the WTO and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and called for national domestic policies that reduce distortions and improve competition.

## Health, climate and trade

In December, the World Health Organization (WHO), World Intellectual Property

DDG Jean-Marie Paugam moderating a session in the Trade and Investment House at COP29.

Organization (WIPO) and the WTO held their 11th Joint Technical Symposium, titled “Strengthening manufacturing capacities to respond to the non-communicable diseases burden”. The event focused on the global health burden caused by non-communicable diseases (NCDs) and the role the three organizations can play in strengthening and diversifying production.

The WTO, WIPO and WHO organized several other joint activities. In June, WIPO and the WTO offered a two-week executive programme to senior intellectual property (IP) officials from developing economies.

Five international organizations released in October a landmark report outlining pathways for coordinated approaches on climate action, carbon pricing, and the cross-border effects of climate change mitigation policies with a view to achieving global climate goals. The report was presented by the Joint Task Force on Climate Action, Carbon Pricing, and Policy Spillovers, convened by the WTO and joined by the IMF, the OECD, UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the World Bank.

### 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.

### UNCTAD, ITC and other international organizations

UNCTAD, the ITC and the WTO jointly produced the annual “World Tariff Profiles” (see page 158) and quarterly and annual statistics on trade in services. They also joined in statistical capacity building, including training and e-learning courses.

In September, the WTO hosted a meeting of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Business and Trade Statistics. Deputy DG Ellard opened the meeting, highlighting the collaboration between the two institutions in advancing capacity building.

During MC13, the WTO and ITC launched the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund to help women entrepreneurs and businesses seize opportunities in international trade and the digital economy (see page 141).

In January 2025, the WTO and the World Customs Organization (WCO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to enhance cooperation and collaboration on customs-related matters. “Both organizations have a shared interest in effective implementation by its members of customs-related rules in areas such as commodity classification, trade facilitation and the prevention of illicit trade,” DG Okonjo-Iweala said.

### FIFA

At the start of MC13, DG Okonjo-Iweala and FIFA President Gianni Infantino unveiled the “Partenariat pour le Coton”, a brand aimed at supporting African countries’ participation in cotton value chains (see page 50).

Cotton Made in Africa and the International Labour Organization are some of the partners in this project. Consultations with the beneficiary countries – Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Cote d’Ivoire – have been initiated to identify needs in their respective cotton industries.

DG Okonjo-Iweala and Afreximbank President Benedict Okey Oramah sign an MoU in June 2024 to strengthen collaboration.



## WTO cooperation with the World Bank and IMF



The WTO and the World Bank launched the Trade in Services for Development Initiative at the 2024 Public Forum.

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 cooperation and regular consultation. Recent areas of cooperation include:

**Work on subsidies:** The three organizations, together with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), organized a webinar to discuss their research on subsidies and held two technical webinars on risk monitoring. The WTO and the IMF also organized a roundtable on the policy determinants of comparative advantage in Washington D.C. during the annual meetings of the IMF and the World Bank.

**Trade in services for development:** At the 2024 WTO Public Forum (see page 150), the WTO and the World Bank launched a work plan for assisting developing economies in services trade, including through improved analytics and data. In 2023,

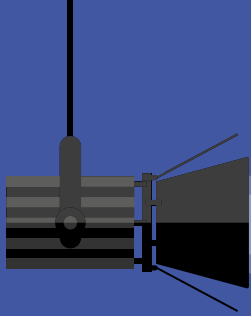
a WTO-World Bank joint report showcased the role of services trade in fostering economic growth and development. It pointed to the challenges facing developing economies and identified ways to overcome them, including through increased Aid for Trade.

**Joint task force on climate action, carbon pricing and policy spillovers (IMF, OECD, UNCTAD, World Bank, WTO):** The multi-agency task force published its first report, discussing the cross-border spillover effects of climate policies such as carbon pricing. The report also highlighted the role of international coordination in managing these effects and scaling up climate action.

**Trade finance gaps in developing economies:** DG Okonjo-Iweala and the Managing Director of the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation, Makhtar Diop, met with heads of multilateral development banks to advance work on trade and supply chain finance (see page 118).

A third joint report on trade finance in Central America and Mexico was launched in early 2025. The WTO-IFC reports include bank and firm-level surveys and analysis on how much more trade could be generated if trade finance were more widely available.

**Digital trade for Africa:** The WTO is working 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 project is at the pilot stage, with 10 African countries having expressed interest in participating. Joint WTO-World Bank missions to six of these countries increased understanding of their needs and pinpointed areas for possible future technical support.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# Presidential Lecture Series

European Council President Charles Michel and Santiago Peña Palacios, President of Paraguay, delivered presidential lectures at the WTO in November 2024 and January 2025, respectively. The WTO Presidential Lecture series provides a platform for distinguished speakers from around the world to address aspects of multilateral cooperation and global governance.



## President of the European Council

In her introduction, DG Okonjo-Iweala highlighted President Charles Michel's dedication to multilateralism, peace and sustainable development, noting the timeliness of his insights amid an evolving global landscape.

President Michel called on the international community to rebuild trust, boost trade and transform multilateral institutions to make the world more peaceful and prosperous. Trust is the foundation of effective international collaboration, trade is a driver of shared prosperity, and transformation is a necessary step in adapting multilateral institutions like the WTO to the demands of the 21st century.

President Michel emphasized trade's role in fostering peace and stability, citing the European Union as a compelling example of economic integration promoting mutual understanding and cooperation.

He also addressed the intersection of trade and sustainability, advocating for environmentally conscious policies that align with the needs of both developed and developing nations. His remarks highlighted the importance of inclusivity in global trade systems, calling for reforms



that ensure equitable access and opportunities for all countries.

Highlighting the need to build mutually beneficial partnerships, President Michel said: “We need to listen, cooperate and forge common decisions based on smart compromise. And we have to develop our collective intelligence for solving collective problems.”

### **President of Paraguay**

In January 2025, the WTO welcomed the President of Paraguay, Santiago Peña Palacios, who spoke on “Sustaining Multilateralism in Uncertain Times: The Role of Middle Powers”. In introducing President Peña, DG Okonjo-Iweala observed that, as a landlocked developing country, Paraguay faces challenges familiar to many WTO members. The DG praised Paraguay’s active and constructive engagement at the WTO, particularly in the agriculture negotiations.

President Peña indicated that “amid the current global challenges faced

by the multilateral trading system, middle powers like Paraguay have a unique responsibility to act as bridge builders and to foster dialogue and consensus”, with the objective of contributing to a more stable and cooperative international order.

He emphasized the importance of ensuring that environmental measures enhance international trade while securing justice, fairness and equality – the most fundamental principles of international commerce. “Cooperation, coordination and collaboration are the only weapons that can kill instability, uncertainty and conflict,” he said, stressing that “multilateralism remains the most effective path to sustainable development”.

President Peña said Paraguay sees free commerce as “a bedrock of civilized peoples”. Paraguay is the second most-open economy in Latin America due to the absence of significant restrictions on trade, a simple tax system and a markedly business-oriented stance, he said. Integration into global markets

through the clear, fair and enforceable multilateral trading system is crucial in promoting peace, development and prosperity, he added.

“I believe in the WTO; I believe in the WTO’s great achievements of the past; I believe in the WTO’s present fight for equality in commerce; and – more importantly – I believe in the WTO’s future, which I am certain will be a great one,” President Peña said in conclusion.

Dr Okonjo-Iweala and both distinguished speakers emphasized the WTO’s enduring mission to serve as a platform for constructive dialogue, fostering trust and driving meaningful reforms for people and planet. The lecture series draws a large audience of ambassadors, Swiss authorities, heads of intergovernmental organizations, WTO Secretariat staff and academia.

## Contact with the business community

- The International Chamber of Commerce and the WTO jointly organized the 2024 Business Forum at the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), bringing together officials and business leaders to discuss key trade issues.
- Business organizations led 29 sessions at the WTO Public Forum, sharply more than the previous year, tackling crucial topics such as fostering inclusive trade through digitalization.

### 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.

### Business Forum at MC13

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), which represents the global business community, jointly organized with the WTO the 2024 Business Forum at MC13, bringing together officials and business leaders to discuss key issues facing the WTO.

DG Okonjo-Iweala told the Forum that the support and engagement of the business community with the work of the WTO is particularly important.

Following the Forum, the ICC presented the DG with its global business priorities, which were developed following consultations with businesses and private-sector associations. They included five key priorities, among them agreeing on a holistic vision for WTO reform and allowing digital trade to thrive.



### Business at the Public Forum

Business organizations led 29 sessions at the WTO Public Forum (see page 150), in September, sharply up from 17 in 2023, addressing critical topics such as fostering inclusive trade through digitalization, the WTO's role in mitigating the digital divide, the intersection of trade, sustainability and AI, and the future of trade in a re-globalized world.

During a session with steel industry leaders, the DG highlighted the growing opportunities within the sector as it adjusts to low-emission value chains. "The ability of a country to provide low-emissions inputs to a value chain is becoming a competitive advantage, and we see that clearly in the steel sector," she said.

The DG also met with shipping company chief executives to exchange views on the latest trends in global trade and maritime shipping and the challenges facing the industry, including geopolitical tensions. "You are a trade barometer. Getting real-time information on what is happening in the shipping industry is an indication of what is happening in trade," the DG said.

### Other contact with business

Throughout the year, the DG and other WTO representatives met with members of the business community in Geneva or internationally. Discussions focused on trade negotiations, trade tensions and the continued impasse over the Appellate Body.

The DG hosted a fourth meeting of her Business Advisory Group in September. Discussions centred on the increasingly complex and uncertain geopolitical landscape. The Group was established in 2023 to enable business representatives to share their perspectives with her.

DG Okonjo-Iweala addressing the Business Forum at MC13.

## Relations with non-governmental organizations

- Over 200 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were accredited to the WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi.
- NGOs organized over 25 sessions at the WTO's Public Forum in September.
- The DG's Civil Society Advisory Group welcomed a new member.

### 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.

Over 200 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from around the world were accredited to MC13.

During MC13, DG Okonjo-Iweala convened a meeting with her Civil Society Advisory Group to exchange views on the state of the negotiations. "Civil society input is indispensable. Today's dialogue has provided us with significant insights as we continue working towards building a WTO that is fit for the 21st century," she said after the meeting.

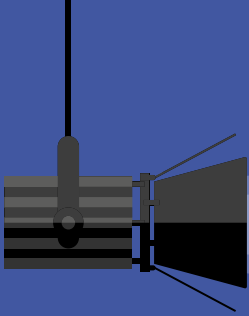
In 2024, the Advisory Group welcomed the Secretary-General of the World Farmers Organisation, Andrea Porro, as its ninth member.

During the year, NGOs attended four briefings organized by the WTO Secretariat on major WTO meetings. These sessions, which provided updates on key aspects of the WTO's work, were attended by over 60 representatives from 30 NGOs.

NGOs also played an active role in the WTO's 2024 Public Forum (see page 150), which focused on how trade policies can contribute to building more inclusive economies. NGOs organized over 25 sessions at the Forum, addressing critical topics such as the "green" transformation to low-carbon economies.

A Public Forum session organized by the Pew Charitable Trusts, Friends of Ocean Action and the World Economic Forum on fisheries subsidies and the WTO's environmental agenda.





IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# Public Forum 2024

This year's Public Forum, held from 10 to 13 September, gathered together close to 3,000 participants, a record number, to explore how to make trade more inclusive and to ensure its benefits reach more people. Part of the WTO's 30th anniversary celebrations, the Forum welcomed participants from around the world and from all walks of life for a week of active discussions in Geneva.



Professor Jason Furman of Harvard University gives the opening lecture at the Public Forum.

Under the theme “Re-globalization: Better Trade for a Better World”, the event comprised 139 sessions, providing an opportunity for civil society, the business community, WTO members and other stakeholders to exchange views on the latest issues facing world trade. Highlights included an opening lecture delivered by Harvard Economics Professor Jason Furman, a session organized by the Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) on the role of trade in a geopoliticized world, a high-level panel on youth and the launch of the 2024 World Trade Report (see page 164).

## Globalization

Launching the Forum, Professor Furman, a former adviser to US President Barack Obama, spoke in defence of globalization, arguing that over the past 25 years it has significantly improved human welfare. He said more than one billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty while indicators such as life expectancy, maternal mortality and literacy have also seen remarkable gains.

However, Professor Furman stressed the need to build a more inclusive and resilient global trade system that meets the needs of everyone. “The question



A group of young entrepreneurs and activists provided the youth perspective on the future of trade in a session at the end of the Public Forum.

is not whether we can afford to keep globalizing, but whether we can afford not to," he said, urging policymakers to embrace trade while addressing its shortcomings through reforms.

DG Okonjo-Iweala said Professor Furman's insights align with recent WTO reports emphasizing how globalization has delivered positive outcomes but it has not benefited everyone equally. "There is absolutely no doubt that trade is facing challenging times and we look forward to hearing how trade can continue to pull the global economy along, continue to make a difference in people's lives, continue to be a source of solutions for today's global challenges," she said.

### Re-globalization

The Peterson Institute session – titled "Re-globalization: Trade in a Geopoliticized World," – argued that trade remains a source of opportunities, jobs and development. By decentralizing supply chains and involving more regions and countries

in global trade, re-globalization promises to extend the benefits of trade to a broader population. The panel explored strategies to leverage trade as a driver of future growth.

### Youth perspective

The Public Forum concluded with a focus on youth and the opportunities to make trade more inclusive by placing the views of the next generation at the forefront. The high-level event brought together young entrepreneurs and activists from around the world to hear their views on how to shape a more sustainable and inclusive global economy.

Lili Vessereau from Harvard University said the WTO and other multilateral institutions often become scapegoats for broader issues that are also governments' responsibility. Rising geopolitical tensions require the involvement of "new actors, including developing countries", she said. These actors can help build supply chains that "ensure we foster green growth through inclusivity, not solely

through economics, but also through geopolitical alliances".

DG Okonjo-Iweala encouraged young people everywhere to continue advocating for sustainable development and for pushing companies to operate more responsibly.

### Background

The Public Forum is the WTO's largest outreach event, providing a unique platform for interested stakeholders from around the world to discuss the latest developments in global trade and to propose ways of enhancing the multilateral trading system. The event attracts over 2,000 representatives each year from civil society, academia, business, government, international organizations and the media.

## Contact with parliamentarians

- The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, a joint annual event of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the European Parliament, met in Abu Dhabi on the eve of the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13).
- DG Okonjo-Iweala told the Conference that parliamentary support is vital for WTO negotiators gathered for MC13.
- At a virtual meeting of parliamentarians in October, Deputy DG Ellard provided an update on the WTO's activities since MC13, highlighting current negotiating priorities.



### 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. Parliamentarians from around the world visit the WTO on a regular basis.

The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, a joint annual event of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the European Parliament, met in Abu Dhabi on 25 February on the eve of MC13. Addressing delegates, DG Okonjo-Iweala said that parliamentary support is vital for WTO negotiators gathered for the WTO Ministerial Conference. Approximately 300 MPs attended the event.

She thanked parliamentarians and the IPU for their support for the ratification of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (see page 52) adopted in June 2022 with the

aim of ending the worst forms of fisheries subsidies. She said further backing can help to secure the remaining ratifications needed for the Agreement to enter into force.

The WTO looked forward to “deepening relations with parliaments and MPs ... to help strengthen the multilateral trading system and ensure that the WTO keeps delivering for the people all of us are here to serve,” she added.

The aim of the Parliamentary Conference is to strengthen democracy at the international level by bringing a parliamentary dimension to multilateral cooperation on trade issues. Its Steering Committee, consisting of around 30 parliamentarians, meets twice a year in Geneva. The DG regularly briefs the Committee on the status of trade negotiations.

In October, Deputy DG Ellard addressed a virtual meeting of parliamentarians on the outcomes of MC13 and the Parliamentary Conference. She provided an update on WTO activities since MC13, highlighting negotiating priorities.

DDG Ellard also briefed legislators on dispute settlement reform (see page 51) and e-commerce (see page 60). She reiterated the crucial role of parliamentary engagement in WTO issues, saying it is essential for ensuring that the WTO's work is effective, tangible and meaningful.

DG Okonjo-Iweala participated in the Parliamentary Conference on the WTO in Abu Dhabi on the eve of MC13.

## Trade for Peace Programme

- Ministers of the g7+ WTO Group met on the margins of the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi to expand its membership to all 20 members of the g7+ WTO group of conflict-affected countries.
- In February 2025, the WTO hosted the fourth edition of the Trade for Peace Week under the theme of “Expanding horizons, integrating the private sector and advancing the trade for peace programme”.

### Background

The Trade for Peace Programme aims to assist countries' transition from fragility and conflict to stability and economic well-being. The Trade for Peace (T4P) Programme has been implemented through its four pillars: (1) political engagement and partnerships; (2) public dialogue and outreach; (3) research; and (4) training and capacity building.

Ministers of the g7+ WTO Group (formerly known as the g7+WTO Accessions Group) met on the margins of MC13 in Abu Dhabi to expand its membership to all 20 members of the g7+ group of conflict-affected countries. The Group applauded the WTO accessions of two g7+ members – Comoros and Timor-Leste (see page 40) – and reiterated a call for the establishment of a dedicated WTO work programme on trade for peace.

In February 2025, the WTO hosted the fourth edition of the Trade for Peace Week under the theme of “Expanding horizons, integrating the private sector and advancing the trade for peace programme”. DG Okonjo-Iweala opened a high-level session exploring the pivotal role of the private sector in fostering economic development that



directly supports peacebuilding efforts in fragile and conflict-affected regions.

The session saw the official launch of the WTO's Trade for Peace programme's (T4P) private sector initiative, formally recognizing the role of businesses in advancing peace through trade.

A first T4P book – “Pathways to Sustainable Trade and Peace” – was launched during the T4P Week. It examines the trade-peace nexus across topics including gender, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), macroeconomic stability and development.

The T4P Week also unveiled the Trade for Peace Research and Knowledge Database, dedicated to collecting research and other resources on the linkages between trade and peace, serving as a tool to support evidence-based policy development.

The Programme organized a session at the Public Forum (see page 150) on Somalia. It also engaged in research on trade and economic development in Somalia, which is progressing in its WTO accession (see page 40), in collaboration with the Graduate Institute of Geneva.

As part of the WTO's Trade for Peace: Future Leaders youth initiative, the Secretariat hosted a virtual event in October entitled “Youth Driving Change: Integrating Research and Experience for the Trade and Peace Link in Fragile Contexts”, bringing together 45 young people from across the globe.

Launch of “Pathways to Sustainable Trade and Peace” at the WTO in February 2025.



## Contact with the media

- **The WTO's 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi drew keen press interest and was the main media event in 2024.**
- **More than 500 journalists and media support staff were accredited for MC13, including 13 invited journalists from least-developed countries (LDCs).**

**M**C13 saw a large number of journalists from around the world gather in Abu Dhabi to report on the five and a half days of ministerial discussions. The WTO press team organized 16 press conferences, briefings and events both prior to and during MC13 to keep media informed and engaged. These included opening and closing press conferences with DG Okonjo-Iweala and the MC13 Chair, Thani bin Ahmed Al Zeyoudi, Minister of State for Foreign Trade of the United Arab Emirates.

Invited LDC journalists produced more than 70 news stories covering the discussions and the various events.

The press team organized two media outreach events in 2024. More than 20 journalists from developing economies and LDCs were invited to Geneva in September for the launch of the WTO's World Trade

Report and the four-day Public Forum. They met with the DG and her four Deputy DGs, producing more than 60 print articles and TV news items.

Fourteen journalists from the Latin American media attended a seminar organized jointly by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the WTO in October in Geneva. The seminar addressed the Organization's main areas of work and the principal challenges faced by the multilateral trading system.

The WTO organized 37 WTO press briefings and other press events in Geneva in 2024. The press team also helped produce more than 500 news items for the WTO website. The launch of the annual trade forecast in April and the revised trade forecast in October again attracted strong media interest and press coverage.

The press team supported the WTO Secretariat's active role in highlighting the trade and environment nexus at the COP29 climate summit in Baku.

The WTO media team approved over 200 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 2,076 at the end of 2024.

An LDC journalist asks a question at one of the press conferences organized daily during MC13.

## Contact with the public

- The WTO website attracted a record of over 4.4 million monthly visits in 2024, exceeding the previous high of 3.5 million in 2023.
- WTO-produced original video content reached an all-time high, with an 18.5 per cent increase compared with the previous year. A total of 128 videos were published across the WTO website and social media platforms.
- To mark the 30th anniversary of the Marrakesh Agreement, which launched the WTO, the WTO produced “Tracing the Spirit of Marrakesh”, a video series showcasing success stories in trade.
- The WTO issued over 40 publications (in English, French and Spanish) in 2024 on key trade topics, ranging from the role of AI in world trade to international trade in renewable energy.

### WTO website

The WTO website attracted a record of over 4.4 million monthly visits in 2024, exceeding the previous high of 3.5 million in 2023. The United States accounted for the most visits, with 20 per cent, followed by China (8.7 per cent) and Russia (5.8 per cent). Total page views rose to 134.8 million, from 89.8 million in 2023. Traffic to the website was exceptionally high around the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13). Over 530 news items were published in 2024.

Some of the most downloaded files were the WTO’s flagship publications, the “World Trade Statistical Review 2023” (157,350 downloads), the “World Trade Report 2023” (115,650 downloads), the “Global Trade Outlook and Statistics (April 2024)” (68,800 downloads) and the “Annual Report 2024” (48,000 downloads).

WTO videos posted on the website were viewed over 264,000 times in 2024. The most popular video, with over 12,700 views, was “Public Forum Trade 2030: Opening debate” (see page 150). The “Let’s Talk

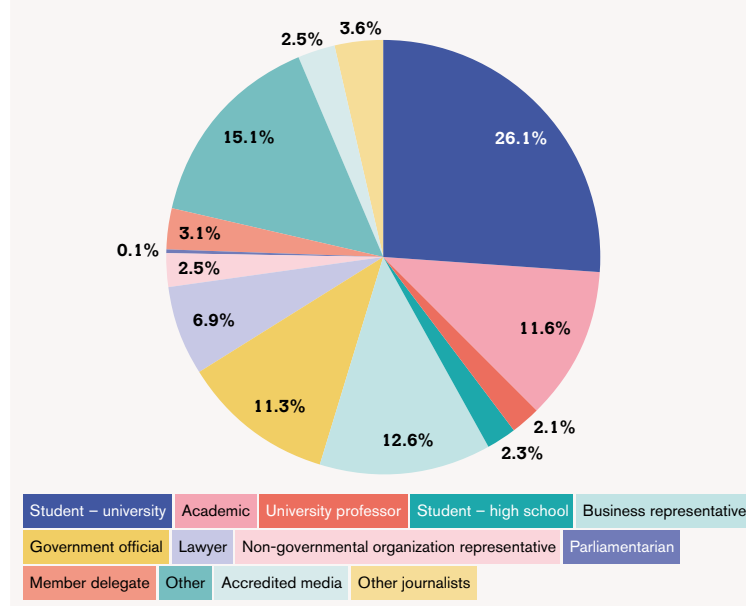
WTO” video was viewed over 12,100 times and the “WTO explained” video was viewed over 11,700 times. The “Let’s Talk Trade” series aims at explaining trade topics in everyday language.

The 15 blog posts were viewed 320,000 times. The most popular were “Trade, sustainability and climate: What is at stake 30 years after WTO’s creation?” by Deputy DG Jean-Marie Paugam, which was viewed 115,396 times, and “High demand for energy-related critical minerals creates supply chain pressures” by WTO staffers Monia Snoussi-Mimouni and Sandra Avérrous, viewed over 60,025 times.

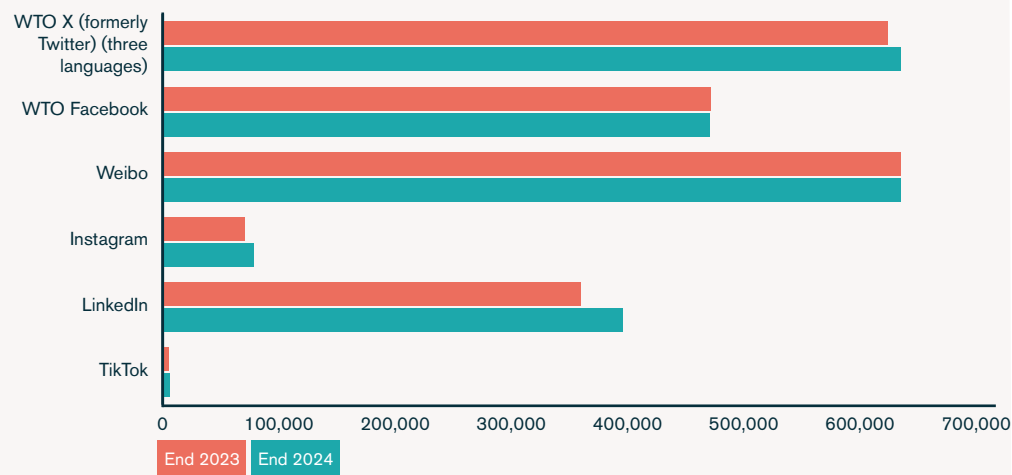
In 2024, the Global Services Trade Data Hub (see page 167) was launched to allow users to customize services trade data according to their needs via dynamic charts. These pages were visited almost 124,000 times.

Some 82,300 people have registered to receive email alerts for WTO news items (see Figure 13). The largest number is from India (10.4 per cent), followed by the United States, Mexico, Peru, Colombia and the United Kingdom.

**Figure 13:** Users registered for email alerts by occupation, as of end-2024



**Figure 14:** Percentage growth in the number of followers of the WTO on social media platforms



**2.2 million**

The number of followers on the WTO's social media channels reached 2.2 million in 2024.

**Social media**

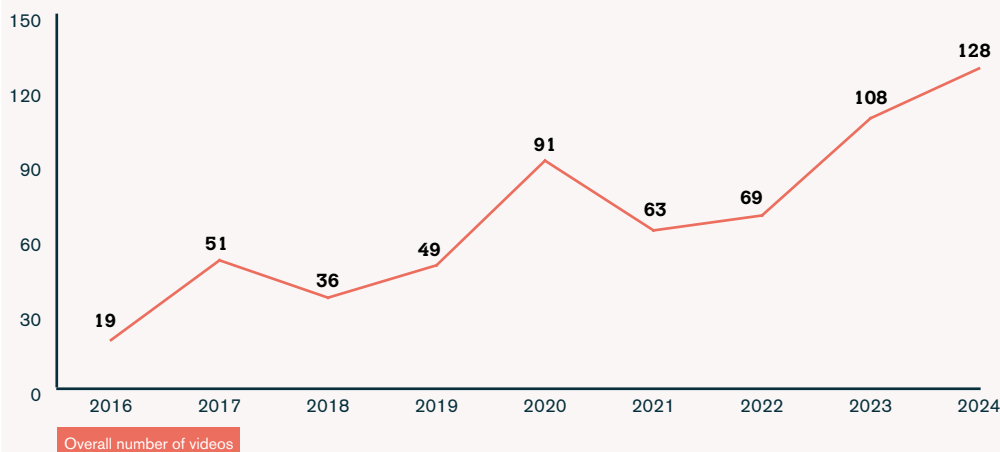
The number of followers across X, LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram, Weibo and TikTok saw a steady increase, reaching 2.2 million (see Figure 14). The most significant audience growth occurred during MC13.

During the year, 6,143 posts were published, generating over 21 million views and 700,000 engagements – an increase of 3.3 per cent and 10.6 per cent, respectively.

WTO videos on social media garnered over 2 million views, a 30.4 per cent increase. The most popular video was the launch of the WTO Young Trade Leaders Programme (see page 161), which attracted 60,000 views and over 10,000 engagements. The series “Tracing the Spirit of Marrakesh” (see below) had 47,000 views. In addition, the “Marrakesh Coffee” talk series, inspired by the 1994 Agreement that launched the WTO, was viewed 78,000 times.

Posts on the DG's reappointment generated the highest levels of views and engagement.

**Figure 15:** Videos published on WTO website



### Audio-visual products

In 2024, WTO-produced original video content reached an all-time high, with an 18.5 per cent increase compared with the previous year. A total of 128 videos were published across the WTO website and social media platforms, marking the third consecutive year of growth in video production (see Figure 15).

Among the most viewed videos were the launch of the Young Trade Leaders Programme (see above), the 30th anniversary of the Marrakesh Agreement, and the “WTO explained” video featuring senior management (see above).

To mark the 30th anniversary of the Marrakesh Agreement, the video team launched the series “Tracing the Spirit of Marrakesh”, showcasing success stories in trade. The first seven videos feature inspiring stories from Morocco, where the Agreement was signed.

A total of 19 videos related to MC13 were produced, capturing key moments and outcomes.

In addition, 28 new videos were added to the “Fish TV” series, highlighting members’ acceptances of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and contributions to the Fisheries Fund (see page 52).

### Student group presentations

The number of groups visiting WTO headquarters at Centre William Rappard rose significantly. In total, 207 presentations were delivered in person and two were held virtually, involving a total of around 6,150 people, compared with 2023’s 174 presentations and 5,550 people.

The presentations mostly covered the mandate 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 – 163. There were 18 in French, nine in Chinese, seven in Spanish, three each in Arabic and German, two in Greek and one each in Italian, Korean, Portuguese and Ukrainian.

## WTO publications

The WTO issued over 40 publications (in English, French and Spanish) in 2024 on topics ranging from trade and artificial intelligence (AI) to international trade in renewable energy.

### Flagship publications



#### Annual Report 2024

ISBN 978-92-870-7613-7 | CHF 60



#### World Trade Report 2024: Trade and inclusiveness: How to make trade work for all

ISBN 978-92-870-7672-4 | CHF 60



#### Global Trade Outlook and Statistics

Digital only | Free

### Other annual publications



#### World Tariff Profiles 2024

ISBN 978-92-870-7652-6 | CHF 60



#### Dispute Settlement Reports

CHF 200

## New publications



**Trading with intelligence: How AI shapes and is shaped by international trade**

ISBN 978-92-870-7661-8 | CHF 50



**Supporting the Renewable Electricity Transition through Trade: Unlocking re-globalization opportunities via interconnection**

978-92-870-7307-5 | CHF 30



**Trade Policy Experiences Contributing to Climate Action**

Digital only | Free



**Enabling Global Trade in Renewable Hydrogen and Derivative Commodities**

ISBN 978-92-870-7371-6 | CHF 30



**Working Together for Better Climate Action: Carbon pricing, policy spillovers, and global climate goals**

ISBN 978-92-870-7181-1 | CHF 30



**WTO's Contribution to Attaining UN Sustainable Development Goals: 2024 update to the High-Level Political Forum**

Digital only | Free



**Leveraging Global Partnerships to Implement the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies for a Sustainable and Food-secure Future**

Digital only | Free



**Aid for Trade in Action: Supporting the transition to clean energy**

ISBN 978-92-870-3894-4 | CHF 40



**Aid for Trade at a Glance**

978-92-870-7646-5 | CHF 60



**Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement: 10 key results from 2023**

Digital only | Free



**Illicit Trade in Food and Food Fraud**

ISBN 978-92-870-7548-2 | CHF 40



**WTO Ministerial Conferences: Key Outcomes – second edition**

ISBN 978-1-00-944470-5 | CHF 40



**WTO in Brief**

Digital only | Free



## Young Trade Leaders Programme

- The WTO launched the Young Trade Leaders Programme in 2024 to bring young people closer to the work of the WTO.
- The eight young leaders selected for the year-long programme, chosen from 2,000 candidates, took part in multiple activities, including co-organizing a session at the Public Forum.

### Providing a platform for youth

The Young Trade Leaders Programme was established in 2024 to bring young people closer to the work of the WTO. By creating a network of young leaders, it aims at promoting a better understanding of the WTO's role in supporting international trade.

During the year-long programme, beginning in August, participants are organizing events promoting the importance of world trade, attending training courses on trade organized by the WTO, benefiting from WTO Secretariat mentoring, and receiving support for trade-related activities in their home countries.

Eight candidates were selected from some 2,000 applications for the 2024 programme. The successful candidates are from Argentina, Australia, Canada, China, France, the Kyrgyz Republic, Malawi and Nigeria.

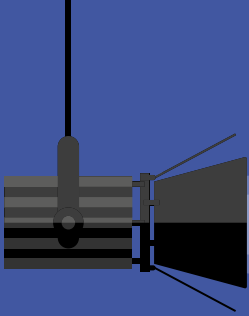
### Activities in 2024

To kick off the programme, the eight young leaders were invited to Geneva to participate in the 2024 Public Forum in September. Activities included:

- meeting DG Okonjo-Iweala and the Deputy DGs to discuss the issues facing world trade
- attending a full-day workshop on world trade led by senior WTO staff
- co-organizing a session at the Forum on inclusivity (see page 150)
- meeting delegates from their home countries.

Since the Public Forum, the young leaders have played an active role in raising awareness in their home countries of the role of trade in raising living standards. The activities they have organized include conferences, webinars, debates and training sessions.

Eight young people were selected for the inaugural Young Trade Leaders Programme in 2024.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

# WTO Open Day 2024

The WTO opened its doors to the public on Sunday 9 June 2024, welcoming around 4,000 visitors and expressing its gratitude to its host city Geneva for many years of support. The Open Day, organized as part of the WTO's 30th anniversary celebrations, provided an opportunity for visitors to explore the WTO's historic headquarters, learn about its work in facilitating global trade and participate in various activities.



## Opening ceremony

DG Okonjo-Iweala along with the Chair of the General Council, Ambassador Petter Ølberg, and representatives from the Swiss Government and local authorities welcomed visitors at the opening ceremony, which was also addressed by Nigeria's Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment, Doris Uzoka-Anite.

The DG thanked the city of Geneva for its longstanding support, emphasizing the city's role in promoting peace and multilateralism. For over a century, Geneva has stood for peace, human decency and cooperation, she said. "These are things the world needs more than ever. The WTO will continue to do its part for people and the planet." The DG reminded the audience that trade is an important

means of raising living standards, creating jobs and promoting sustainable development.

Ambassador Ølberg highlighted some of the WTO's achievements, including the Trade Facilitation Agreement (see page 102) and efforts to address harmful fisheries subsidies (see page 52). "If the WTO did not exist, we would have to invent it," he remarked.

DG Okonjo-Iweala visits the food stalls organized by WTO members at the Open Day (left).

More than 40 guided tours of the WTO building took place during WTO Open Day 2024 (right).



Nathalie Fontanet, President of the State Council for the Canton of Geneva, spoke about current global challenges, affirming Geneva's role as a hub for multilateralism. Minister Uzoka-Anite emphasized the importance of trade in driving global economic growth and called for continued reform towards a fairer, more inclusive global trading system.

#### Guided tours and exhibitions

Visitors had the opportunity to enjoy more than 40 guided tours of the WTO headquarters, led by WTO staff. These tours and various other activities provided insights into the organization's history, its role in global trade and the origins of the works of art it hosts.

A photo exhibition showcased the evolution of the WTO building since its construction in 1926, highlighting historic moments such as the signing of the Marrakesh Agreement in 1994, which established the WTO. The WTO's team of interpreters invited visitors to learn more about their work by inviting them to try out the WTO's interpretation booths. Visitors also engaged in question-and-answer sessions with WTO Secretariat staff and tested their knowledge of the WTO through interactive quizzes.

#### Lakeside activities

On the WTO's lakeside terrace, visitors enjoyed the opportunity to discover food and drink stalls

set up by 18 WTO members, each offering a taste of their domestic cuisines. In addition, several WTO members staged an international market, selling crafts, textiles and goods from around the world.

For younger visitors, activities included storytelling, face-painting and a bouncy castle, making the day an all-round family experience.

## Economic research activities

- **The WTO's flagship World Trade Report 2024 explores the complex interlinkages between trade and inclusiveness across and within economies.**
- **"We need strong and renewed political support for multilateral cooperation to make trade work for all," DG Okonjo-Iweala said in her foreword to the report.**
- **A first WTO report on artificial intelligence (AI), "Trading with Intelligence", explores how AI is transforming international trade and discusses the role of the WTO in promoting AI and mitigating its risks.**

### World Trade Report 2024

The WTO's flagship publication, the World Trade Report 2024, explores the complex interlinkages between trade and inclusiveness across and within economies. The report – "Trade and inclusiveness: how to make trade work for all" – shows that openness to international trade can drive economic growth, but many low- and middle-income economies struggle to participate in or leverage trade for diversification.

In addition, while trade creates numerous jobs, including higher-paying ones, and provides access to a wide range of affordable goods and services, some individuals face challenges in adapting to new economic conditions following trade openness or fail to benefit from cheaper imported products.

However, trade protectionism neither protects the overall economy nor promotes inclusiveness within economies. To ensure future trade benefits are more inclusive, trade policies and complementary measures (such as enhanced access to education, improved transport infrastructure and labour market policies that reduce frictions) must align more effectively and cohesively.

"There is no substitute for complementary policies: to make trade work for more people,

the wider economy needs to work for everyone. And we need strong and renewed political support for multilateral cooperation to make trade work for all," DG Okonjo-Iweala said in her foreword to the report.

Introducing the report at the WTO's Public Forum (see page 150) in September, WTO Chief Economist Ralph Ossa said that enhancing inclusiveness "requires a comprehensive strategy – one that integrates open trade with complementary domestic policies and fosters greater international cooperation".

### Trading with intelligence: How AI shapes and is shaped by international trade

The WTO's first report on artificial intelligence (AI), "Trading with Intelligence: How AI shapes and is shaped by international trade", explores how AI is transforming international trade and discusses the role of the WTO in promoting AI and mitigating its risks. It was launched in November at a dedicated conference.

The report discusses how AI may shape the future of international trade and reviews some key trade policy considerations, in particular the urgent need to address the growing AI divide, data governance and intellectual property issues, and how to ensure trustworthy AI.

The report also provides an overview of domestic, regional and international government initiatives to promote and regulate AI and highlights the resulting risk of regulatory fragmentation. Finally, the report discusses the critical role of the WTO in promoting AI and mitigating its risks.



**By working together to leverage AI responsibly, we can drive sustainable economic growth, foster innovation and ensure that the benefits of this technology are shared by all.**

DG Okonjo-Iweala

“Because of the remarkable pace at which AI is evolving, we need to look beyond today and anticipate what lies on the horizon,” DG Okonjo-Iweala said in her foreword. “By working together to leverage AI responsibly, we can drive sustainable economic growth, foster innovation and ensure that the benefits of this technology are shared by all,” she wrote.

### Fragmentation and re-globalization

In a background paper for the Emerging Markets Forum, a not-for-profit initiative, the Economic Research and Statistics Division updated its recent work on fragmentation and re-globalization.

The paper found that while some changes in trade flows consistent with geographic

re-globalization – extending trade integration to more economies, people and issues – are observable, these are mostly spurious and driven by factors such as surging energy prices. Instead, the trends point to fragmentation and the re-orientation of trade along geopolitical lines. This trend could broadly benefit emerging markets and developing economies, if it favoured diversification of supply chains, but so far it benefits only a small set of them.

The paper argues that the continuous presence of policy and structural barriers as well as rising policy uncertainty and an unfavourable macroeconomic environment, including high national debt and interest rates, slows down geographic re-globalization. As these obstacles have eased, re-globalization may pick up.

## Key facts from the 2024 World Trade Report



Economic growth has improved living conditions for many people around the world, but not all individuals and economies have benefited equally from the changes brought about by more open trade.



WTO members that implemented reforms and made deeper commitments grew on average 1.5 percentage points faster during their accession process than they would have otherwise.



Membership of WTO/GATT has increased trade between members by an average of 140 per cent.



Between 1995 and 2023, per capita income tripled in low- and middle-income economies, which narrowed the gap with high-income economies. Approximately one-third of this convergence is due to lower trade costs.



More than 310 regional trade agreements (RTAs) include explicit provisions related to dimensions of inclusiveness (e.g. human, workers and indigenous peoples' rights, gender and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises).



Carlos Goes of the University of California, San Diego, receives the WTO Essay Award from WTO economist Victor Stolzenburg in Athens.

## WTO Essay Award for Young Economists

The winner of the 2024 WTO Essay Award for Young Economists was Carlos Goes of the University of California San Diego for his paper “Trade, Growth, and Product Innovation”. He was presented with his prize of CHF 5,000 at the annual meeting of the European Trade Study Group in Athens (Greece) on 12 September 2024.

Carlos Goes’s paper examines the mechanisms through which trade integration can lead to product innovation.

The paper makes significant contributions to trade economics. Traditional trade theory suggests increased economic integration leads economies to produce a narrower

range of goods. But empirical evidence shows that European Union member countries started producing more product varieties, investing more in research and development (R&D) and trading more than candidate countries that did not join.

The paper highlights the substantial gains from trade, suggesting that previous literature may have underestimated these gains. The paper estimates that dynamic gains from trade account for 65-90 per cent of the total welfare gains from the 2004 EU enlargement.

Carlos Goes is a Brazilian national. He is a Ph.D. candidate in Economics from the University of California San Diego.

### 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 released new online interactive tools including the **Global Services Trade Data Hub, World Trade Statistics and a dashboard on global value chains (GVCs)**, further improving data accessibility.
- The WTO Secretariat updated the **Trade in Services by Mode of Supply (TiSMoS) dataset, extending coverage through 2022.**
- The WTO Tariff and Trade platform, an improved version of the **Tariff Analysis Online database, was launched following collaboration with the IT and Market Access divisions.**

### Background

The Economic Research and Statistics Division supports WTO members and the WTO Secretariat with data on economic and trade policy issues. It also provides technical advisory services on market access negotiations and the maintenance of members' schedules of commitments. The division is the principal supplier of WTO trade statistics and information on tariffs and non-tariff measures. It is the focal point for coordinating inter-organizational statistical activities.

### Statistical developments

The WTO launched the new Global Services Trade Data Hub, offering tailored access to WTO services trade statistics. The Hub provides customizable charts and data download features to address diverse user needs. It showcases four datasets: digitally delivered services, trade in services by mode of supply, trade in commercial services, and the WTO-OECD Balanced Trade in Services dataset, the only source of comprehensive bilateral data on trade in services.

The Secretariat updated the Trade in Services by Mode of Supply (TiSMoS) dataset. New estimates for 2005-2022 for over 200 economies and 55 sectors provide insights into how services supply has evolved, reflecting the impact of digitalization and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The WTO released the World Trade Statistics interactive tool, which contains data up to end-2023, revealing key trends in merchandise and services trade and supporting trade analysis through dynamic charts and downloadable tables.

The WTO published new global value chain (GVC) sectoral profiles. The first two profiles focused on the food and beverage sector, and the textiles and clothing sector. These profiles were complemented by the new GVC dashboard, which presents charts on GVC trade in a dynamic way.

World Tariff Profiles 2024, a joint publication of the WTO, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), provides comprehensive information on the tariffs and non-tariff measures imposed by over 170 countries and customs territories. The 2024 edition highlighted tariffs on critical minerals vital to the electric vehicle value chain.

Six data blogs were launched on the WTO website in cooperation with other divisions of the WTO, covering issues such as trade in intermediate goods, critical minerals and a review of 30 years of trade growth. In addition, statisticians worked on a research paper showing that over 80 per cent of global merchandise trade is subject to the WTO's most-favoured nation (MFN) trading principle, under which WTO members do not discriminate between their trading partners.

WTO statisticians collaborated with the IT and the Market Access divisions to enhance access to tariff and trade data, creating a new WTO Tariff and Trade Data platform (<https://ttd.wto.org/>), an improved version of the Tariff Analysis Online database. It provides official tariff and import data for more than 170 economies, including annual data from 1996 onwards for many of them.



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“World Tariff Profiles” provides comprehensive information on the tariffs and non-tariff measures of over 170 countries and customs territories.



DDG Xiangchen Zhang opens the WTO Chairs Programme Annual Conference in June 2024.

## Cooperation with academic institutions

- The WTO expanded the WTO Chairs Programme (WCP) to include five new academic institutions from the Dominican Republic, Nigeria, Qatar, Togo and Vanuatu to increase the participation of under-represented regions.
- The WCP Annual Conference in June 2024 explored the role of trade in reducing inequality and the importance of international collaboration within the WCP network of academic institutions.

### Background

The WTO Chairs Programme (WCP), launched in 2010, promotes research, training, and outreach relating to international trade by academics that responds to the needs of policymakers in developing economies and least developed countries. WCP Chair-holders are selected through a competitive process. The main objectives of the programme are to create a network fostering research on trade issues, provide training to students and stakeholders, and provide policy advice to governmental and other stakeholders through outreach. The WCP is funded by the WTO's Global Trust Fund, with contributions from Austria, France and the Republic of Korea.

### Global and regional academic networks

The WTO expanded the WTO Chairs Programme (WCP) to include five new academic institutions from under-represented regions. The five additions – from the Dominican Republic, Nigeria, Qatar, Togo and Vanuatu – take the programme's network to 39 chairs. The objective of the expansion is to improve diversity and inclusivity and foster research on trade issues in developing and least-developed WTO members and observers.

In June 2024, the WTO Chairs Programme (WCP) network met in Geneva at the WCP Annual Conference to explore the role of trade in reducing inequality and the importance of international collaboration within the network of academic institutions. Thematic sessions included reform of the WTO dispute settlement system (see page 51) and evolving trade priorities for LDCs.

The network is “helping governments and other stakeholders ensure that trade benefits all sections of society, including women, young people and indigenous populations – and that it benefits the planet,” DG Okonjo-Iweala told the conference.

A gathering of the Asian and African chairs was hosted by the WCP Chair in India. DDG Zhang emphasized that in relation to global challenges, “universities and academic institutions such as the WCP Chairs have a critical role to play”.

WCP chairs in Asia focused on trade and climate change, food security and



implementing training and information workshops for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). In Latin America and the Caribbean, trade and gender was a key area for the network. WCP chairs in Mexico and Brazil facilitated discussions of the ThinkTwenty (T20) task force, an “idea bank” for the G20. In Jordan and Oman, the chairs carried out research on fisheries subsidies (see page 52).

The WCP chairs in Africa, known as the African Trade Group, collaborated on events in Cameroon, Lesotho, Mauritius and Rwanda that focused on WTO reform, sustainability and climate change, trade and development and trade and investment. The African Trade Group has also been closely involved in the implementation of the 2018 African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement.

The DG met the WCP chairs in Chile, China, Costa Rica, Peru and Uzbekistan, interacting with students, trade experts and women business leaders who work with the network. WCP chairs have also synergized their work with the WTO’s other technical assistance activities.

### Activities of the Chairs Programme

“Model WTOs”, simulations of WTO negotiations, were organized by chairs in Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uzbekistan.

Additionally, in Ecuador, as well as in Indonesia, Nepal and Peru, WCP teams engaged with businesses, negotiators and academics through podcasts on trade policy and other issues. Reaching beyond the network, chairs from Costa Rica, India and Tanzania also carried out activities in Bhutan, Ethiopia, Somalia, Malawi and Panama.

WCP chairs produced over 900 pieces of research, delivered over 330 WTO-related courses and engaged in over 420 exchanges with policymakers and relevant stakeholders.

### Academic support programmes

In 2024, five students from Cambodia, China, India, Singapore and Sri Lanka participated in the WTO’s PhD support programme. This programme enhances academic expertise in developing economies on WTO-related matters, improves the quality of research undertaken and establishes links between PhD students, Secretariat staff and Geneva delegations.

The WTO co-hosted the final round of the 22nd edition of the John H. Jackson Moot Court Competition on WTO Law, which took place in June 2024 (see page 123). It also supported the 2024 edition of the Model WTO, organized by St. Gallen University.

Over 60 students participated in the 2024 edition of Model WTO at the WTO’s headquarters.

## 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 India**

Indian Institute of Foreign Trade

**26 Lesotho**

National University of Lesotho

**27 Nepal**

Kathmandu University School of Management

**28 Pakistan**

Lahore School of Economics

**29 Peru**

Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú

**30 Rwanda**

University of Rwanda

**31 Chinese Taipei**

National Taiwan University

**32 Tanzania**

Trade Policy Training Centre in Africa

**33 Uzbekistan**

The University of World Economy and Diplomacy of Uzbekistan

**34 Viet Nam**

Foreign Trade University



The Phase IV institutions will be added to the official list of chairs once the signing of the relevant memoranda of understanding has been completed.



WTO OMC



A meeting of the General Council in May 2024.



# 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.

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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. In November 2024, she was reappointed as Director-General for a second four-year term, set to begin on 1 September 2025.

### 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.



### Membership

The WTO has 166 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.



### WTO Secretariat

The WTO has approximately 610 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 86 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.

# WTO Secretariat

- In 2024, the Secretariat Strategy 2030 was launched to provide direction and focus to guide the WTO Secretariat through 2030 and to support WTO members with integrity, impartiality, independence and expertise.
- The Strategy, Planning and Transformation Division was created to drive implementation of Strategy 2030 and ongoing transformation efforts, to help align planning, budgeting and resourcing with the Strategy and to oversee the Secretariat’s knowledge management activities.
- As of 31 December, the WTO employed 610 staff members on fixed-term and regular contracts, up from 604 the year before. Of the professional staff, 51 per cent were women, up from 49 per cent in 2023.

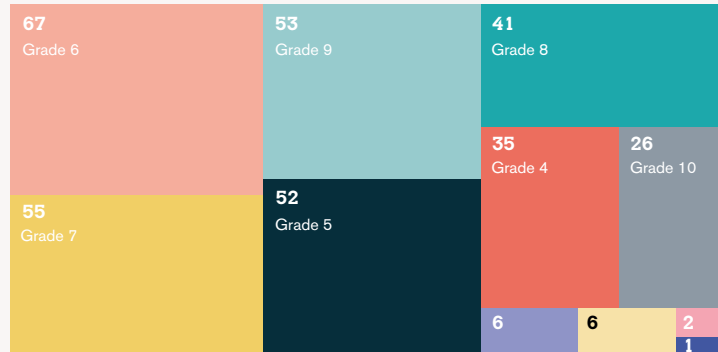
## Background

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.

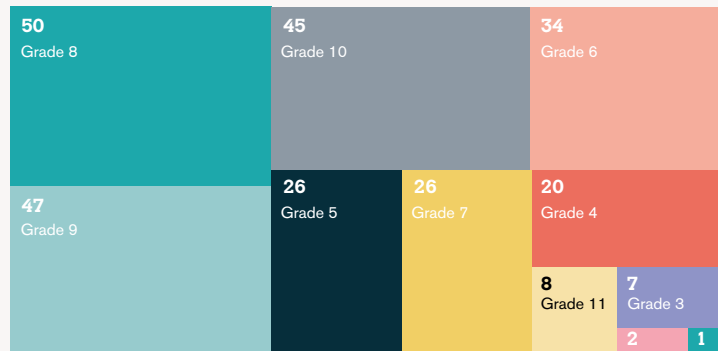
The Strategy, Planning, and Transformation Division (see below) was created to drive implementation of Strategy 2030, which will provide direction and focus to guide the Secretariat through 2030. It will also oversee ongoing transformation efforts, help align planning, budgeting and resourcing with the Strategy and oversee the Secretariat’s knowledge management activities.

DG Okonjo-Iweala launched a transformation programme in 2022 to strengthen the Secretariat and prepare for the future. Programme oversight is provided by the

**Figure 1:** WTO staff on regular budget by grade and gender, as of 31 December 2024



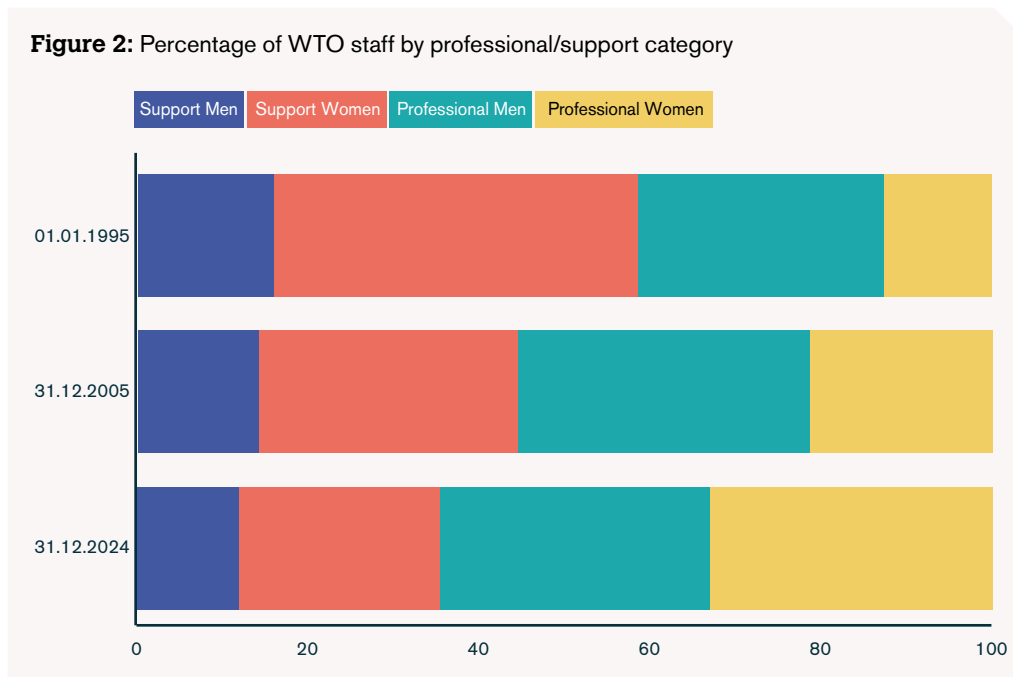
### 344 Women



### 266 Men



**Figure 2:** Percentage of WTO staff by professional/support category



86

WTO Secretariat staff come from 86 different WTO members.

Transformation Steering Committee, chaired by the DG and composed of the Chief of Staff and the four Deputy DGs.

The WTO's recruitment activity in 2024 resulted in 35 fixed-term appointments. As of 31 December, the WTO employed 610 staff members on fixed-term and regular contracts funded from the regular budget, up from 604 in 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 344 to 266 (see Figure 1). Of the professional staff, 51 per cent are female and 49 per cent male (see Figure 2), compared to 49 and 51 per cent, respectively, in 2023. Men outnumber women at director levels (see Figure 1).

WTO Secretariat staff come from 86 different WTO members, showing the geographical diversity of WTO staff (see Figure 4).

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 47 external vacancies

issued in 2024, there were on average 333 applicants for every vacancy.

Twenty young professionals joined the Young Professionals Programme in January 2024 (see page 140). The group included professionals from Armenia, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chile, Chinese Taipei, Ghana, Guyana, Kenya, Malawi, Montenegro, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Oman, Pakistan, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Viet Nam and Zambia. 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, went live with additional modules covering performance management, rewards and recognition, and learning and development. WISE underscores a commitment to modernize human resources (HR) operations for increased effectiveness, transparency and adaptability.

**Figure 3:** WTO Secretariat organizational chart, as of May 2025



<sup>1</sup> Antony Taubman was Director until August 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Xiaolin Chai was Director until February 2025.

<sup>3</sup> The Strategy, Planning and Transformation Division was created in November 2024.

**Figure 4:** WTO staff on regular budget by member and gender as of 31 December 2024

Country	Female	Male	Grand Total	Country	Female	Male	Grand Total
<b>Africa</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>47</b>	Estonia	1	–	1
Benin	–	2	2	Finland	2	2	4
Burundi	–	1	1	France	89	63	152
Cameroon	1	1	2	Germany	9	15	24
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	2	1	3	Greece	3	1	4
Côte d'Ivoire	–	1	1	Hungary	1	2	3
Egypt	3	1	4	Ireland	13	–	13
The Gambia	1	–	1	Italy	16	12	28
Ghana	1	–	1	Lithuania	–	1	1
Guinea	–	1	1	Netherlands	–	4	4
Kenya	4	–	4	Poland	–	2	2
Malawi	1	1	2	Portugal	–	5	5
Mauritius	–	3	3	Romania	4	–	4
Morocco	–	2	2	Russian Federation	5	1	6
Mozambique	1	–	1	Spain	37	10	47
Nigeria	1	1	2	Sweden	2	2	4
Rwanda	–	1	1	Switzerland	11	12	23
Senegal	1	1	2	Ukraine	3	–	3
South Africa	–	1	1	United Kingdom	27	14	41
Tanzania	2	–	2	<b>Latin America</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>65</b>
Tunisia	2	2	4	Argentina	5	3	8
Uganda	2	1	3	Bolivia	–	1	1
Zambia	1	–	1	Brazil	7	6	13
Zimbabwe	2	1	3	Chile	2	1	3
<b>Asia</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>67</b>	Colombia	3	5	8
Armenia	1	–	1	Costa Rica	1	1	2
Bangladesh	–	1	1	Cuba	–	1	1
China	6	6	12	Dominica	1	–	1
India	4	10	14	Dominican Republic	1	–	1
Japan	3	4	7	Ecuador	2	1	3
Jordan	1	–	1	El Salvador	2	–	2
Korea, Republic of	6	–	6	Guatemala	2	–	2
Malaysia	–	2	2	Honduras	2	–	2
Nepal	1	1	2	Jamaica	1	–	1
Pakistan	–	3	3	Paraguay	1	–	1
Philippines	5	7	12	Peru	3	4	7
Sri Lanka	1	–	1	Saint Lucia	–	1	1
Tajikistan	–	1	1	Trinidad and Tobago	3	1	4
Türkiye	1	3	4	Uruguay	–	1	1
<b>Europe</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>385</b>	Venezuela	–	3	3
Austria	1	1	2	<b>North America</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>41</b>
Belgium	2	2	4	Canada	7	8	15
Bulgaria	2	4	6	Mexico	1	3	4
Croatia	1	–	1	United States of America	14	8	22
Czech Republic	1	–	1	<b>Oceania</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Denmark	1	1	2	Australia	1	4	5
				<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>610</b>



Diversity is key to an international organization like the WTO, whose Secretariat should represent the diversity of its membership and the people it serves. In 2024, renewed focus was placed on access, inclusion and representation, including as part of ongoing work on a new recruitment policy. WTO Secretariat staff come from 86 different WTO members, showing the geographical diversity of WTO staff (see page 177).

The WTO is committed to an inclusive environment where all individuals feel safe, valued, and treated with dignity, respect and fairness. No abuse of authority, discrimination, harassment, and sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, or retaliation in any form are tolerated.

**Learning and development programme**

In 2024, the HRD 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.

The Secretariat launched a new competency framework, which includes six behavioural competencies as well as four leadership and management competencies, which staff leaders and managers are expected to demonstrate.

The framework provides clear expectations regarding workplace behaviours in the Secretariat and is systematically being embedded in HR functions, including recruitment, performance management and staff development. It helped guide implementation of a revised promotions policy that came into force. This was applied for the first time in 2024.

A skills identification exercise was undertaken via a series of focus groups involving stakeholders at all levels of the

DG Okonjo-Iweala launches the WTO Secretariat Strategy 2030 in September 2024.

Secretariat, with the aim of defining current and future skillsets needed in the Secretariat and developing an inventory of technical skills.

A new Advanced Coaching Programme for Managers was launched aimed at improving managers' ability to enhance staff performance.

### **Transformation work, launch of Secretariat Strategy 2030**

The WTO Secretariat launched the Secretariat Strategy 2030 in September 2024, the first time a strategy has been developed for the Secretariat. The strategy provides direction and focus to guide the Secretariat through 2030, with the aim of building a better world through global cooperation and rules-based international trade and supporting the WTO membership with integrity, impartiality, independence and expertise, in line with WTO agreements.

"I see it as a roadmap for success, a path that can help us navigate through complexity, uncertainty and change and towards a future that looks increasingly green, digital, inclusive and services-oriented," DG Okonjo-Iweala said in a foreword.

To support implementation of Strategy 2030, the Secretariat established a new Strategy, Planning and Transformation Division. The division will drive implementation of the strategy and ongoing transformation efforts, help align planning, budgeting and resourcing with the strategy and oversee the Secretariat's knowledge management efforts.

Phase 1 of the transformation programme launched by the DG in 2022 focused on modernizing certain human resources policies and practices, improving ways of working and internal processes and leveraging technology. Internal reforms and improvements have been introduced in areas such as procurement, promotions, staff recognition and risk management. Building on this progress, a new promotions policy was introduced and applied for the first time in 2024. Efforts are ongoing to modernize recruitment and increase staff mobility.

## **New recruit**

### **Shraddha Gautam**



**Economic Affairs Officer – Development Division**

**Nationality:**  
Nepalese  
**Joining date:**  
1 July 2024

My first experience at the WTO was as a participant in the Young Professionals Programme in 2023. Over the course of that year, I genuinely fell in love with the organization's culture, as I found myself surrounded both by colleagues who were passionate about solving global challenges in trade and by mentors who were willing to guide and support young professionals.

Prior to joining the WTO, I worked at UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) and the World Bank on a number of macroeconomic analysis projects, which included reviews of government expenditures and policy issues related to LDC graduation. I also contributed to ESCAP's flagship economic survey report for the Asia-Pacific region.

In my current role, I assist the Committee on Trade and Development, including in the current ongoing negotiations to secure more favourable terms for developing WTO members. I find it very rewarding to support member governments directly on a day-to-day basis.



Significant progress continues to be made in digital transformation.

Phase 2 of the transformation programme began in March 2023, aiming to articulate a vision and strategy for the Secretariat. Work included extensive stakeholder engagement. Inputs, ideas and feedback were sought from staff at all levels, senior management, WTO members, external experts and the DG’s business (see page 148) and civil society (see page 149) advisory groups.

These efforts culminated in the launch of Strategy 2030 during the Public Forum (see page 150). It spells out five strategic goals – excellent service, knowledge hub, global platform, engaged partner and forward-looking organization (see above). There are three “enablers” – people, technology and measurement – to support achievement of these goals.

WTO members receive regular updates on progress on transformation and the Secretariat Strategy 2030, primarily through the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration.

**Digitalization initiatives**

The WTO Secretariat worked on building its capacity to use generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) after publishing internal guidelines to improve understanding of the technology. AI technology is already used to speed up translation and to produce minutes of meeting. It is also used to write code but it is only at a pilot stage for other domains of work.

Under the leadership of an AI advisory group, the Secretariat is testing how GenAI can help mine contents of WTO trade reports, generate search results based on harmonized system (HS) (see page 78) codes related to members’ notifications, search the internet to identify published trade measures or improve search of trade concerns within the ePing platform (see page 88).

The Secretariat released an internal ChatGPT-like application to offer all staff the ability to use the latest large language model (LLM) in a safe environment without sending any confidential information into the public cloud.

Delegates can use e.delegates to register interest in specific committees and indicate the services they wish to receive from the Secretariat. Fifteen WTO committees use eAgenda to support information exchanges between members ahead of meetings. The Secretariat also created a new platform to support booking of meeting rooms online.

Members can now test an online notification tool for safeguards and a new digital “questions & answers” support for trade policy review meetings.

The Secretariat collaborated with its UN counterparts to share knowledge about cybersecurity threats and block attackers and continued upgrading its defences and enhancing staff vigilance.

### Knowledge management

In 2024, knowledge management efforts focused on capturing the experience of departing staff to preserve institutional knowledge and launching new materials to cultivate a knowledge management culture across the Secretariat. Nineteen departing staff shared their insights, which were documented and made accessible to all staff via the intranet.

The goal of knowledge management in the Secretariat is to capture, preserve and enable the sharing and effective use of knowledge across the WTO. Developing and deploying knowledge-management tools, technologies and practices helps staff develop and grow and facilitates coordination and informed decision-making.

In March 2024, the section launched a Knowledge Retention, Transfer and Handover Guide and Toolkit, setting out 18 practical knowledge-sharing tools. “This initiative goes beyond mere documentation; it catalyses progress,” remarked Deputy DG Zhang at the launch. “By systematically identifying, documenting and transferring critical knowledge, we position ourselves to adapt swiftly, maintain excellence, enhance productivity and guarantee the good services we promised to deliver to members,” he said.

## New recruit

**Stella  
Nasirumbi**



**Legal Officer,  
Office of the  
Legal Counsel**

**Nationality:**  
Kenyan  
**Joining date:**  
6 May 2024

Before joining the WTO, I worked in the Office of Legal Affairs at the International Organization for Migration (IOM). My role entailed advising on institutional law issues, including operational matters affecting IOM’s status, privileges and immunities, including those of its staff.

At the WTO, in addition to institutional law, I support OLC’s work on administrative law, procurement matters, etc. Our engagement with almost everyone in the Organization makes my work varied and interesting!

In Kenya, the WTO is well known. I grew up seeing the WTO on the news a lot. However, my interest in working at the WTO came from a different angle – the law of international organizations. As a public international lawyer, I am thrilled at the prospect of delving into the workings of this unique international organization. As a bonus, I get to expand my knowledge of international trade law, which, while not my area of specialization, is one that is very important in today’s world.

A new digital tool is also being developed to serve as a central platform for accessing and sharing knowledge, providing best practices, guidelines and tools to support strategic knowledge management and collaboration.

Throughout the year, 19 knowledge-sharing events were organized, often in partnership with other WTO divisions. These included “Entre nous” sessions, providing a stage for informal knowledge sharing and dialogue among Secretariat staff on critical global and organizational issues. A session at the Aid for Trade Global Review (see page 132) looked at inclusive digital trade, and the Secretariat organized two “knowledge cafés”, short, interactive, small-group sessions on specific themes which focus on knowledge sharing, relationship building, decision making, innovation and collaboration.

### Language, documentation and information management services

In 2024, the division responsible for language and documentation services processed around 43 million words for translation and over 12,000 documents for publication in Docs Online, which provides access to official documentation of the WTO. The main areas of work were dispute settlement, Trade Policy Reviews, notifications regarding technical barriers to trade and sanitary and phytosanitary measures, and output relating to economic research and WTO publications.

In line with members’ request to accelerate the turnaround of minutes of various WTO bodies, 2024 saw a strong increase in demand for automatic transcription of proceedings, with over 450 requests for “raw machine” transcription of audio files. About half of these were also edited by staff. The division leveraged cutting-edge AI, language technologies and human expertise in its work.

All sections of the division contributed to a successful MC13, including work undertaken on visual communications and running the Information and Documentation Desk in Abu Dhabi, which was used by hundreds of participants. In addition, a new in-house document management system helped to streamline workflows, leading to quicker



online publication of members’ statements than in previous conferences.

A “Meet the Author” session at the 2024 Public Forum.

The WTO Library continued to expand both digital and onsite services to build on its role as a venue for both written resources and knowledge-based events. It recorded the “Meet the Author” sessions at the Public Forum 2024, filmed in collaboration with the Geneva Graduate Institute, and Trade and Environment Week (see page 108). The Library is working on a single simplified interface for those wishing to access library resources and many other open and WTO data sources.

In alignment with the Secretariat Strategy 2030, the Registry, Records and Archives Management Section (RAMS) initiated an AI-driven project to improve access to historical documents and address knowledge gaps. This initiative allowed access to more than 4,500 historical documents related to GATT negotiating groups and managed reference requests from members, academia and Secretariat staff. By fully embracing technology, RAMS kept in step with the WTO’s 2024 digital transformation agenda and promoted best practices.

### Office of Internal Oversight

The Office of Internal Oversight conducted a number of assessments in 2024 to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness and collaborated in promoting and maintaining a culture of integrity and respect at the WTO.

It 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 184).

The Office also launched a policy to strengthen organizational resilience against fraud and corruption. It delivered training and inductions of new staff, encouraging the importance of maintaining robust internal controls and of speaking up, including through the WTO's independent confidential reporting line, the Integrity Line.

### **Ethics, risk and compliance**

An Ethics, Risk and Compliance Officer was appointed in 2024 to head a new Ethics, Risk and Compliance Office. The Office is to provide oversight and guidance across the WTO on ethics, risk management and compliance undertakings, and to foster a culture of due regard for these competencies and disciplines in all operations and activities.

The Office is a separate operational section inside the WTO Secretariat and is independent from other divisions in the conduct of its duties, in particular around ethical issues, standard setting and advice. During the year, it worked with all Secretariat staff to promote standards of conduct and ethical behaviour. The Office carried out focused sessions during an inaugural Ethics Awareness Week, which has been created as an annual event to remind staff of the importance of maintaining standards of conduct and behaviour and ethical values.

"Ethics might sound like some kind of abstract concept, but in the context of organizations like our own, it's anything but. It's the foundation upon which trust is built," DG Okonjo-Iweala said in an opening address.

During the year, staff engaged with the Office to seek clarity and advice on ethics, risk management and compliance. Interaction with staff was largely done on an individual basis, with the highest level of confidentiality. All activities and interactions by the Office are aimed at assisting staff in observing and performing their functions to the highest standards of integrity required by the WTO Oath of Office and as international civil servants.

## **New recruit**

**João Nunes**



**Fisheries  
Subsidies Officer  
– Rules Division**

**Nationality:**  
Portuguese  
**Joining date:**  
5 August 2024

Prior to joining the WTO, I worked for several years on fisheries issues in the European Commission, where I contributed to the negotiation of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, the first with environmental sustainability at its core. My responsibilities also included trade policy regarding fisheries and aquaculture products, notably negotiating and implementing free trade agreements.

I have also worked on topics related to the EU regional policy, but the call of the ocean was stronger, and I could not miss the opportunity to join the great colleagues in the WTO fisheries subsidies team.

Despite working in a landlocked country like Switzerland, we are part of a broader mission to contribute to the sustainability of our oceans worldwide. My main mission is supporting members in implementing the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and in the negotiation of additional provisions.

# Budget, finance and administration

- **The General Council approved measures supporting a long-term WTO pension reform process to address an actuarial imbalance.**
- **The General Council approved the revision of the WTO Financial Rules.**

## Background

The Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration monitors the WTO's budgetary and financial matters. It reviews the WTO budget, the financial statements presented by the Director-General and matters related to audit and extra-budgetary funds. It makes recommendations about these matters to the General Council.

Upon the recommendation of the Committee on Budget, Finance, and Administration, the General Council approved measures for long-term pension reform to address an actuarial imbalance, following a proposal put forward by the WTO pension plan management board.

Following the recommendation of the Committee, the General Council also approved the revision of the WTO Financial Rules, which takes place every five years.

The Committee endorsed transfers between budgetary sections during 2023 as well as the 2023 WTO audited financial statements, which were subsequently approved by the General Council.

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 took note of the 2024–25 mid-term budget update. It considered and took note of quarterly financial reports and 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 2023 as well as the 2023 WTO pension plan audited financial statements and the external auditors' reports for the WTO's and the WTO pension plan's financial statements.

The Committee received various reports on human resources, including the 2024 WTO salary survey and dependency allowances, the annual report on diversity, the annual report on grading structure and the learning and development programme for 2023.

It 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, an update on the replacement of Documents Online, and an interim report on ethics, risk and compliance in the WTO Secretariat.

The Office of Internal Oversight (OIO – see page 182) presented to the Committee its report on internal audit activities for 2023–24. It also reported on progress in implementing recommendations of the OIO and the internal control framework which sets out the principles, policies and procedures aimed at helping the WTO achieve its strategic and operational objectives.





Regular updates on the WTO Secretariat's transformation work (see page 179) were provided at each Committee meeting by Deputy DG Ellard.

#### WTO budget 2025

The WTO derives its income from annual contributions from its 166 members (see Table 3) and miscellaneous income.

The WTO's budget for 2025 is CHF 204,928,900 (see Table 2).

**Table 2: Consolidated budget for 2025 (in CHF thousand)**

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, translators, interpreters, panellists and interns)	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
<b>Total</b>	<b>204,929</b>

**Table 3: WTO members' contributions to the consolidated budget 2025 (in CHF)**

Member	2025 Contribution CHF	2025 Contribution %	Member	2025 Contribution CHF	2025 Contribution %
Afghanistan	34,527	0.017%	Ecuador	217,317	0.107%
Albania	48,744	0.024%	Egypt	546,339	0.269%
Angola	231,534	0.114%	El Salvador	85,302	0.042%
Antigua and Barbuda	30,465	0.015%	Estonia	205,131	0.101%
Argentina	625,548	0.308%	Eswatini	30,465	0.015%
Armenia	50,775	0.025%	European Union <sup>1</sup>	0	0.000%
Australia	2,658,579	1.309%	Fiji	30,465	0.015%
Austria	1,998,504	0.984%	Finland	889,578	0.438%
Bahrain, Kingdom of	241,689	0.119%	France	7,333,941	3.611%
Bangladesh	467,130	0.230%	Gabon	42,651	0.021%
Barbados	30,465	0.015%	The Gambia	30,465	0.015%
Belgium	3,781,722	1.862%	Georgia	81,240	0.040%
Belize	30,465	0.015%	Germany	14,314,488	7.048%
Benin	34,527	0.017%	Ghana	190,914	0.094%
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	87,333	0.043%	Greece	704,757	0.347%
Botswana	60,930	0.030%	Grenada	30,465	0.015%
Brazil	2,311,278	1.138%	Guatemala	154,356	0.076%
Brunei Darussalam	67,023	0.033%	Guinea	48,744	0.024%
Bulgaria	375,735	0.185%	Guinea-Bissau	30,465	0.015%
Burkina Faso	42,651	0.021%	Guyana	38,589	0.019%
Burundi	30,465	0.015%	Haiti	30,465	0.015%
Cabo Verde	30,465	0.015%	Honduras	83,271	0.041%
Cambodia	192,945	0.095%	Hong Kong, China	5,343,561	2.631%
Cameroon	62,961	0.031%	Hungary	1,102,833	0.543%
Canada	4,785,036	2.356%	Iceland	83,271	0.041%
Central African Republic	30,465	0.015%	India	5,045,004	2.484%
Chad	30,465	0.015%	Indonesia	1,766,970	0.870%
Chile	718,974	0.354%	Ireland	4,177,767	2.057%
China	23,011,230	11.330%	Israel	987,066	0.486%
Colombia	483,378	0.238%	Italy	5,073,438	2.498%
Comoros	30,465	0.015%	Jamaica	50,775	0.025%
Congo	44,682	0.022%	Japan	7,240,515	3.565%
Costa Rica	178,728	0.088%	Jordan	152,325	0.075%
Côte d'Ivoire	117,798	0.058%	Kazakhstan	479,316	0.236%
Croatia	268,092	0.132%	Kenya	125,922	0.062%
Cuba	87,333	0.043%	Korea, Republic of	5,483,700	2.700%
Cyprus	178,728	0.088%	Kuwait, the State of	523,998	0.258%
Czech Republic	1,504,971	0.741%	Kyrgyz Republic	36,558	0.018%
Democratic Republic of the Congo	129,984	0.064%	Lao People's Democratic Republic	56,868	0.028%
Denmark	1,667,451	0.821%	Latvia	188,883	0.093%
Djibouti	36,558	0.018%	Lesotho	30,465	0.015%
Dominica	30,465	0.015%	Liberia	30,465	0.015%
Dominican Republic	184,821	0.091%	Liechtenstein	67,023	0.033%

Member	2025 Contribution CHF	2025 Contribution %	Member	2025 Contribution CHF	2025 Contribution %
Lithuania	371,673	0.183%	Samoa	30,465	0.015%
Luxembourg	1,137,360	0.560%	Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of	1,988,349	0.979%
Macao, China	201,069	0.099%	Senegal	58,899	0.029%
Madagascar	32,496	0.016%	Seychelles	30,465	0.015%
Malawi	30,465	0.015%	Sierra Leone	30,465	0.015%
Malaysia	1,913,202	0.942%	Singapore	5,323,251	2.621%
Maldives	30,465	0.015%	Slovak Republic	816,462	0.402%
Mali	44,682	0.022%	Slovenia	367,611	0.181%
Malta	176,697	0.087%	Solomon Islands	30,465	0.015%
Mauritania	30,465	0.015%	South Africa	875,361	0.431%
Mauritius	44,682	0.022%	Spain	3,795,939	1.869%
Mexico	4,206,201	2.071%	Sri Lanka	154,356	0.076%
Moldova, Republic of	44,682	0.022%	Suriname	30,465	0.015%
Mongolia	71,085	0.035%	Sweden	2,083,806	1.026%
Montenegro	30,465	0.015%	Switzerland	3,885,303	1.913%
Morocco	408,231	0.201%	Chinese Taipei	2,983,539	1.469%
Mozambique	71,085	0.035%	Tajikistan	30,465	0.015%
Myanmar	127,953	0.063%	Tanzania	85,302	0.042%
Namibia	42,651	0.021%	Thailand	2,341,743	1.153%
Nepal	67,023	0.033%	Timor-Leste	30,465	0.015%
Netherlands	6,032,070	2.970%	Togo	30,465	0.015%
New Zealand	456,975	0.225%	Tonga	30,465	0.015%
Nicaragua	54,837	0.027%	Trinidad and Tobago	79,209	0.039%
Niger	30,465	0.015%	Tunisia	127,953	0.063%
Nigeria	542,277	0.267%	Türkiye	2,150,829	1.059%
North Macedonia	75,147	0.037%	Uganda	62,961	0.031%
Norway	1,322,181	0.651%	Ukraine	550,401	0.271%
Oman	339,177	0.167%	United Arab Emirates	2,772,315	1.365%
Pakistan	387,921	0.191%	United Kingdom	7,352,220	3.620%
Panama	215,286	0.106%	United States of America	23,092,470	11.370%
Papua New Guinea	64,992	0.032%	Uruguay	129,984	0.064%
Paraguay	111,705	0.055%	Vanuatu	30,465	0.015%
Peru	448,851	0.221%	Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	215,286	0.106%
Philippines	865,206	0.426%	Viet Nam	2,416,890	1.190%
Poland	2,735,757	1.347%	Yemen	36,558	0.018%
Portugal	848,958	0.418%	Zambia	73,116	0.036%
Qatar	672,261	0.331%	Zimbabwe	44,682	0.022%
Romania	909,888	0.448%	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>203,100,000</b>	<b>100%</b>
Russian Federation	3,399,894	1.674%			
Rwanda	30,465	0.015%			
Saint Kitts and Nevis	30,465	0.015%			
Saint Lucia	30,465	0.015%			
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	30,465	0.015%			

<sup>1</sup> The European Union is not subject to contributions. However, its 27 members are assessed individually. The total share of members of the European Union represents 31.04% of the total assessed contributions for 2025.

# How the WTO is structured

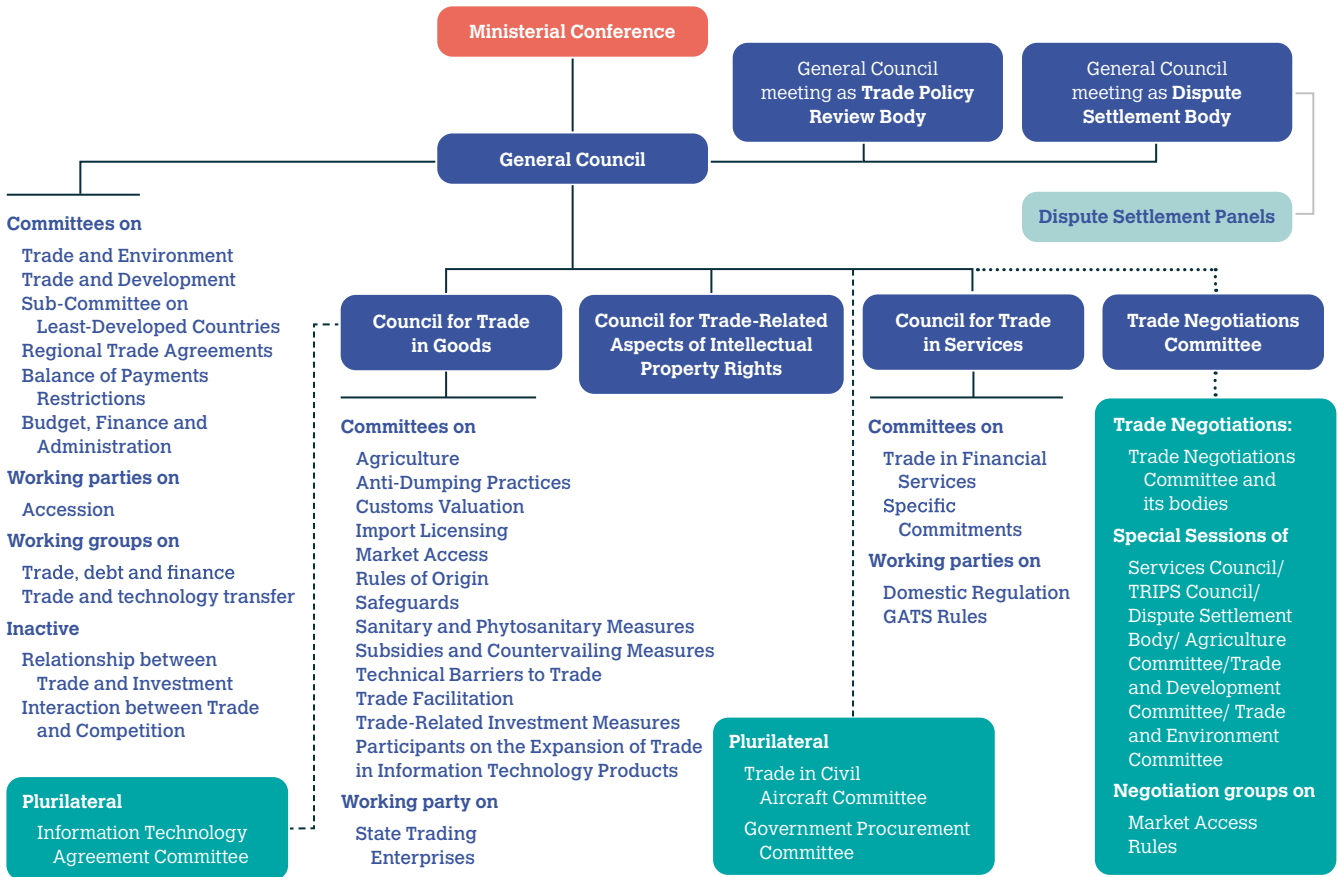
The WTO's top-level decision-making body is the Ministerial Conference, which usually meets every two years.

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 2024)

Chairpersons of the General Council and bodies reporting to it		Chairpersons of subsidiary bodies of the Council for Trade in Goods	
General Council	Ambassador Petter Ølberg (Norway)	Committee on Agriculture	Ms Anna Leung (Hong Kong, China)
Dispute Settlement Body	Ambassador Saqer Abdullah Almoqbel (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia)	Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices	Mr Mohamed Zouhair Taous (Tunisia)
Trade Policy Review Body	Ambassador Adamu Mohammed Abdulhamid (Nigeria)	Committee on Customs Valuation	Mr Sergio Prieto López (Spain)
Council for Trade in Goods	Ambassador Clare Kelly (New Zealand)	Committee on Import Licensing	Ms Tyesha Turner (Jamaica)
Council for Trade in Services	Ambassador Syahril Syazli Ghazali (Malaysia)	Committee on Market Access	Ms Nicola Waterfield (Canada) (Interim Chair)
Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights	Ambassador Sofia Boza Martinez (Chile)	Committee on Rules of Origin	Mr Guna Seelan Balakrishnan (Malaysia)
Committee on Trade and Development	Ambassador Ram Prasad Subedi (Nepal)	Committee on Safeguards	Mr Jun Morikawa (Japan)
Committee on Trade and Environment	Ambassador Erwin Bollinger (Switzerland)	Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures	Ms Cecilia Risolo (Argentina)
Sub-Committee on Least-Developed Countries	Ambassador Ib Petersen (Denmark)	Committee on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures	Dr Wolfram Spelten (Germany)
Committee on Balance-of-Payments Restrictions	Ambassador Ms. Clara Manuela da Luz Delgado Jesus (Cabo Verde)	Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade	Ms Daniela Garcia (Ecuador)
Committee on Regional Trade Agreements	Ambassador Salomon Eheth (Cameroon)	Committee on Trade Facilitation	Ms Chanikarn Dispadung (Thailand)
Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration	Ambassador José R. Sánchez-Fung (Dominican Republic)	Committee on Trade-Related Investment Measures	Dr Ahmed Diab (Egypt)
Working Group on Trade and Transfer of Technology	Ambassador Raimondas Ališauskas (Lithuania)	Working Party on State Trading Enterprises	Ms Jooyoung Lee (Republic of Korea)
Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance	Ambassador Caroline Bwanali-Mussa (Malawi)	Committee of Participants on the Expansion of Trade in Information Technology Products	Mr Ta-Lin (Peter) Shih (Chinese Taipei)
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 Fernando Camilo Velarde Gonzalez (Mexico)
Special Session of the Council for Trade in Services	Ambassador Zhanar Aitzhanova (Kazakhstan)	Working Party on Domestic Regulation	Mr Gabriel Bautista (Philippines)
Special Session of the Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights,	Ambassador Alfredo Suescum (Panama)	Committee on Specific Commitments	Ms Maruša Baus (Slovenia)
Special Session of the Dispute Settlement Body	Ambassador Kokou Yackoley Johnson (Togo)	Working Party on GATS Rules	Ms Clare McNamara (Ireland)
Special Session of the Committee on Agriculture	Ambassador Alparslan Acarsoy (Türkiye)	Chairpersons of Committees of Plurilateral Agreements	
Sub-Committee on Cotton	Ambassador Alparslan Acarsoy (Türkiye)	Committee on Trade in Civil Aircraft	Mr Jean-Marie Meraldi (Switzerland)
Special Session of the Committee on Trade and Environment	Ambassador Eunice M. Tembo Luambia (Zambia)	Committee on Government Procurement	Mr Martin Zbinden (Switzerland)
Special Session of the Committee on Trade and Development	Ambassador Kadra Ahmed Hassan (Djibouti)		

# WTO Senior Management

As of end-May 2025



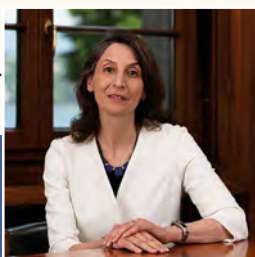
**Director-General**  
**Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**



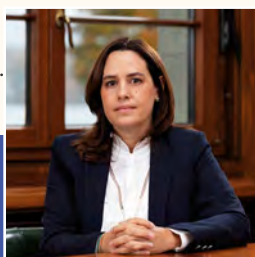
**Chief of staff**  
**Dr Bright Okogu**

**Areas of responsibility**

- Council and Trade Negotiations Committee Division
- Information and External Relations Division
- Enhanced Integrated Framework Secretariat
- Strategy, Planning and Transformation Division



**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**

- Finance and Corporate Services Division
- Legal Affairs Division
- Market Access Division
- Rules Division

- Economic Research and Statistics Division
- Intellectual Property, Government Procurement and Competition Division
- Languages, Documentation and Information Management Division
- Trade in Services and Investment Division

- Agriculture and Commodities Division
- Trade and Environment Division
- Trade Policy Reviews Division
- Human Resources Division

- Accessions Division
- Development Division
- Information Technology Solutions Division
- Institute for Training and Technical Corporation

**Membership of the WTO 166 members (as of 31 December 2024)**

Member*	Year of accession	Member*	Year of accession	Member*	Year of accession
Afghanistan	2016	Ecuador	1996	Lithuania	2001
Albania	2000	Egypt	1995	Luxembourg	1995
Angola	1996	El Salvador	1995	Macao, China	1995
Antigua and Barbuda	1995	Estonia	1999	Madagascar	1995
Argentina	1995	Eswatini	1995	Malawi	1995
Armenia	2003	European Union	1995	Malaysia	1995
Australia	1995	Fiji	1996	Maldives	1995
Austria	1995	Finland	1995	Mali	1995
Bahrain, Kingdom of	1995	France	1995	Malta	1995
Bangladesh	1995	Gabon	1995	Mauritania	1995
Barbados	1995	The Gambia	1996	Mauritius	1995
Belgium	1995	Georgia	2000	Mexico	1995
Belize	1995	Germany	1995	Moldova, Republic of	2001
Benin	1996	Ghana	1995	Mongolia	1997
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	1995	Greece	1995	Montenegro	2012
Botswana	1995	Grenada	1996	Morocco	1995
Brazil	1995	Guatemala	1995	Mozambique	1995
Brunei Darussalam	1995	Guinea	1995	Myanmar	1995
Bulgaria	1996	Guinea-Bissau	1995	Namibia	1995
Burkina Faso	1995	Guyana	1995	Nepal	2004
Burundi	1995	Haiti	1996	Netherlands	1995
Cambodia	2004	Honduras	1995	New Zealand	1995
Cameroon	1995	Hong Kong, China	1995	Nicaragua	1995
Canada	1995	Hungary	1995	Niger	1996
Cabo Verde	2008	Iceland	1995	Nigeria	1995
Central African Republic	1995	India	1995	Norway	1995
Chad	1996	Indonesia	1995	North Macedonia, Republic of	2003
Chile	1995	Ireland	1995	Oman	2000
China	2001	Israel	1995	Pakistan	1995
Colombia	1995	Italy	1995	Panama	1997
Comoros	2024	Jamaica	1995	Papua New Guinea	1996
Congo	1997	Japan	1995	Paraguay	1995
Costa Rica	1995	Jordan	2000	Peru	1995
Côte d'Ivoire	1995	Kazakhstan	2015	Philippines	1995
Croatia	2000	Kenya	1995	Poland	1995
Cuba	1995	Korea, Republic of	1995	Portugal	1995
Cyprus	1995	Kuwait, the State of	1995	Qatar	1996
Czech Republic	1995	Kyrgyz Republic	1998	Romania	1995
Democratic Republic of the Congo	1997	Latvia	1999	Russian Federation	2012
Denmark	1995	Lao People's Democratic Republic	2013	Rwanda	1996
Djibouti	1995	Lesotho	1995	Saint Kitts and Nevis	1996
Dominica	1995	Liberia	2016	Saint Lucia	1995
Dominican Republic	1995	Liechtenstein	1995	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	1995

## CHAPTER 4

Member*	Year of accession	Member*	Year of accession	Observers** (as of 31 December 2024)
Samoa	2012	Tunisia	1995	Algeria
Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of	2005	Türkiye	1995	Andorra
Senegal	1995	Uganda	1995	Azerbaijan
Seychelles	2015	Ukraine	2008	Bahamas
Sierra Leone	1995	United Arab Emirates	1996	Belarus
Singapore	1995	United Kingdom	1995	Bhutan
Slovak Republic	1995	United States	1995	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Slovenia	1995	Uruguay	1995	Curaçao
Solomon Islands	1996	Vanuatu	2012	Equatorial Guinea
South Africa	1995	Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	1995	Ethiopia
Spain	1995	Viet Nam	2007	Holy See
Sri Lanka	1995	Yemen	2014	Iran
Suriname	1995	Zambia	1995	Iraq
Sweden	1995	Zimbabwe	1995	Lebanese Republic
Switzerland	1995			Libya
Chinese Taipei	2002			São Tomé and Príncipe
Tajikistan	2013			Serbia
Tanzania	1995			Somalia
Thailand	1995			South Sudan
Timor-Leste	2024			Sudan
Togo	1995			Syrian Arab Republic
Tonga	2007			Turkmenistan
Trinidad and Tobago	1995			Uzbekistan

\* 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

<b>ADP</b>	anti-dumping practices	<b>MC14</b>	14th WTO Ministerial Conference
<b>CTD</b>	Committee on Trade and Development	<b>MEAs</b>	multilateral environmental agreements
<b>DSB</b>	Dispute Settlement Body	<b>MFN</b>	most-favoured nation
<b>DSU</b>	Dispute Settlement Understanding	<b>MSMEs</b>	micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>EIF</b>	Enhanced Integrated Framework	<b>NAMA</b>	non-agricultural market access
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization	<b>NGO</b>	non-governmental organization
<b>FDI</b>	foreign direct investment	<b>NTMs</b>	non-tariff measures
<b>GATS</b>	General Agreement on Trade in Services	<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>GATT</b>	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade	<b>PTAs</b>	preferential trade arrangements
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product	<b>RTAs</b>	regional trade agreements
<b>GIs</b>	geographical indications	<b>SCM</b>	subsidies and countervailing measures
<b>GPA</b>	Government Procurement Agreement	<b>SG</b>	Agreement on Safeguards
<b>HS</b>	Harmonized System	<b>SPS</b>	sanitary and phytosanitary measures
<b>ICC</b>	International Chamber of Commerce	<b>STDF</b>	Standards and Trade Development Facility
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization	<b>SVE</b>	small, vulnerable economy
<b>IPU</b>	Inter-Parliamentary Union	<b>TBT</b>	technical barriers to trade
<b>ISO</b>	International Organization for Standardization	<b>TNC</b>	Trade Negotiations Committee
<b>ITA</b>	Information Technology Agreement	<b>TPR</b>	Trade Policy Review
<b>ITC</b>	International Trade Centre	<b>TPRM</b>	Trade Policy Review Mechanism
<b>ITTC</b>	Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation	<b>TRIMs</b>	trade-related investment measures
<b>ITU</b>	International Telecommunication Union	<b>TRIPS</b>	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
<b>IUU</b>	illegal, unreported and unregulated [fishing]	<b>WIPO</b>	World Intellectual Property Organization
<b>LDCs</b>	least-developed countries		
<b>MC13</b>	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 2024 and early 2025. 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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