

About WTO

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World Trade Organization (WTO)

Description:

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is the only global international organization dealing with the rules of trade between nations. At its heart are the WTO agreements, negotiated and signed by the bulk of the world's trading nations and ratified in their parliaments.

Stakeholder(s):

WTO Members :

The WTO is run by its member governments. All major decisions are made by the membership as a whole, either by ministers (who usually meet at least once every two years) or by their ambassadors or delegates (who meet regularly in Geneva).

WTO Secretariat :

While the WTO is driven by its member states, it could not function without its Secretariat to coordinate the activities. The Secretariat employs over 600 staff, and its experts — lawyers, economists, statisticians and communications experts — assist WTO members on a daily basis to ensure, among other things, that negotiations progress smoothly, and that the rules of international trade are correctly applied and enforced.

Roberto Azevêdo :

WTO Director-General — Roberto Azevêdo is the sixth Director-General of the WTO. He became Director-General on 1 September 2013, serving a four-year term. At a meeting of the

General Council in February 2017, WTO members agreed by consensus to appoint Roberto Azevêdo as Director-General for a second four-year term, which started on 1 September 2017. DG Azevêdo made a detailed presentation to the February General Council outlining the successes that the membership achieved since 2013 and his vision for the next four years

Nations

Parliaments

Producers :
of goods and services

Exporters

Importers

Vision

Open trade for the benefit of all

Mission

To help producers of goods and services, exporters, and importers conduct their business.

Values

Principles: What we stand for -- The WTO agreements are lengthy and complex because they are legal texts covering a wide range of activities. But a number of simple, fundamental principles run throughout all of these documents. These principles are the foundation of the multilateral trading system.

Non-Discrimination: Non-discrimination -- A country should not discriminate between its trading partners and it should not discriminate between its own and foreign products, services or nationals.

Openness: More open -- Lowering trade barriers is one of the most obvious ways of encouraging trade; these barriers include customs duties (or tariffs) and measures such as import bans or quotas that restrict quantities selectively.

Predictability: Predictable and transparent -- Foreign companies, investors and governments should be confident that trade barriers should not be raised arbitrarily. With stability and predictability, investment is encouraged, jobs are created and consumers can fully enjoy the benefits of competition — choice and lower prices.

Transparency

Competition: More competitive -- Discouraging ‘unfair’ practices, such as export subsidies and dumping products at below cost to gain market share; the issues are complex, and the 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.

Fairness

Transition: More beneficial for less developed countries -- Giving them more time to adjust, greater flexibility and special privileges; over three-quarters of WTO members are developing countries and countries in transition to market economies. The WTO agreements give them transition periods to adjust to the more unfamiliar and, perhaps, difficult WTO provisions.

Environmentalism: Protect the environment -- The WTO’s agreements permit members to take measures to protect not only the environment but also public health, animal health and plant health. However, these measures must be applied in the same way to both national and foreign businesses. In other words, members must not use environmental protection measures as a means of disguising protectionist policies.

1. Trade Negotiations

The WTO agreements cover goods, services and intellectual property... These agreements are not static; they are renegotiated from time to time and new agreements can be added to the package. Many are now being negotiated under the Doha Development Agenda, launched by WTO trade ministers in Doha, Qatar, in November 2001.

1.1. Principles & Exceptions

Spell out the principles of liberalization and the permitted exceptions.

They spell out the principles of liberalization, and the permitted exceptions.

1.2. Commitments

Document individual countries' commitments.

They include individual countries' commitments to lower customs tariffs and other trade barriers, and to open and keep open services markets.

1.3. Procedures

Set procedures for settling disputes.

They set procedures for settling disputes.

2. Implementation & Monitoring

Make trade policies transparent.

WTO agreements require governments to make their trade policies transparent by notifying the WTO about laws in force and measures adopted.

2.1. Compliance

Ensure that requirements are being followed and agreements are being properly implemented.

Various WTO councils and committees seek to ensure that these requirements are being followed and that WTO agreements are being properly implemented.

2.2. Reporting

Scrutinize the trade policies and practices of WTO members.

All WTO members must undergo periodic scrutiny of their trade policies and practices, each review containing reports by the country concerned and the WTO Secretariat.

3. Dispute Settlement

Resolve trade quarrels.

The WTO's procedure for resolving trade quarrels under the Dispute Settlement Understanding is vital for enforcing the rules and therefore for ensuring that trade flows smoothly. Countries bring disputes to the WTO if they think their rights under the agreements are being infringed. Judgements by specially appointed independent experts are based on interpretations of the agreements and individual countries' commitments.

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4. Trade Capacity

Build trade capacity.

WTO agreements contain special provision for developing countries, including longer time periods to implement agreements and commitments, measures to increase their trading opportunities, and support to help them build their trade capacity, to handle disputes and to implement technical standards.

4.1. Technical Cooperation

Organize technical cooperation missions.

The WTO organizes hundreds of technical cooperation missions to developing countries annually.

Stakeholder(s):

Developing Countries

4.2. Courses

Hold courses for government officials.

It also holds numerous courses each year in Geneva for government officials.

Stakeholder(s):

Government Officials

4.3. Aid for Trade

Help developing countries develop the skills and infrastructure needed to expand their trade.

Aid for Trade aims to help developing countries develop the skills and infrastructure needed to expand their trade.

5. Outreach

Enhance cooperation and increase awareness of WTO activities

Stakeholder(s)

Non-Governmental Organizations

The Media

Parliamentarians

The General Public

International Organizations

The WTO maintains regular dialogue with non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians, other international organizations, the media and the general public on various aspects of the WTO and the ongoing Doha negotiations, with the aim of enhancing cooperation and increasing awareness of WTO activities.

Administrative Information

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