



JOINT STATEMENT

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The heads of ITC, UNCTAD and the WTO have announced the rollout of an improved and expanded Global Trade Helpdesk. The platform now contains more trade information designed to empower firms of all sizes, particularly micro, small and medium size enterprises (MSMEs), to take advantage of market opportunities and adapt to new post-COVID commercial realities.

The COVID-19 global health emergency has led to an unprecedented global economic slowdown – one that is having a particularly severe impact on smaller firms.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) estimates that world merchandise trade could fall by 12% to 32% in 2020. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) projects that global foreign direct investment inflows will decline by up to 40% in 2020, reaching their lowest level in two decades. Estimates for this year's decline in global GDP growth start at 3%. According to the International Trade Centre's (ITC's) COVID Business Survey, 1 in 4 MSMEs reports being at risk of shutting down permanently within the next three months. Taken together, these threats to global trade, investment, growth, and employment risk derailing progress towards the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

As policymakers work to lay the groundwork for a strong and sustainable recovery from the crisis, the success or failure of MSMEs – which employ the majority of the labour force – will play a key role in determining whether or not this recovery is socially inclusive. Ready access to trade and market information is a challenge for smaller firms at the best of times, since they have fewer resources to devote to analysing complex information dispersed across multiple sources. As businesses struggle with uncertainty, falling demand, and supply chain disruptions, getting the information they need to reach new customers and markets will be paramount.

Since 2017, ITC, UNCTAD and the WTO have joined forces on the Global Trade Helpdesk initiative, together with the African Development Bank (AfDB), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), World Bank Group (WBG), World Customs Organization (WCO) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). This initiative has created a user-friendly digital platform (www.globaltradehelpdesk.org) that empowers MSMEs by providing a one-stop shop where businesses can find up-to-date trade statistics, export potential estimations, tariffs, regulatory requirements, as well as information about voluntary standards, and contact information for key public and private partners.

The platform has now been revamped to better respond to firms' needs, following broad-based testing with support from ICC National Chambers and members of the WTO Informal Working Group on MSMEs. The latest version expands data coverage, and offers a more intuitive user experience through improved design and new functionalities. Users can now compare updated export potential estimations across different prospective target markets. To simplify market research for businesses, the Global Trade Helpdesk now includes COVID-19 resources from across international agencies, including information about temporary restrictions enacted in response to the crisis. The platform also provides improved coverage of trade statistics, import, export and transit trade procedures, a new business directory, resources to help protect intellectual property rights, as well as online resources from various agencies to build their trade and market analysis skills. The platform is now accessible in Russian in addition to Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

As the leaders of organisations concerned with global trade and inclusive growth, we commit to continue working closely together to ensure that firms have access to the timely and relevant trade and market information they need to make effective decisions in a rapidly changing global market.