

A message from the Director-General

Roberto Azevêdo

Robust statistics underpin every aspect of the World Trade Organization's work. By providing detailed information on tariff structures, non-tariff measures, trade flows and economic growth our statisticians help to improve transparency in trade policy and provide the analytical insights needed by policymakers. This publication is a very important part of this effort. I want to thank everyone who has been involved in producing this comprehensive report.

This year the WTO marks its 20th anniversary and, as in other areas, our statistical work has changed and developed since 1995. As the global economy has evolved, the coverage of WTO statistics has been considerably broadened in a number of areas. One such area is the services sector.

Trade in services is identified with the General Agreement on Trade in Services. The approach of official statisticians for compiling statistics in services trade reflects these origins, going beyond simple cross-border transactions to measure 'mode 3' commerce as well (this is when services are provided by a service supplier from one country in the territory of another country). Accordingly, information on foreign affiliates is now available in this publication, and we would like to expand this work further in the future. Coverage has also been gradually broadened to include information on trade in services by origin and destination. Efforts are now under way to further develop trade in services statistics by mode of supply, as this would be helpful to support trade negotiations.

Our work has also broadened to cover new concepts. Working with the OECD, we have introduced analysis of global value chains as part of official trade statistics. As a result, we are now able to complement existing analysis based on gross trade flows with analysis of trade in value added. This has revealed the huge importance of trade in intermediate inputs (both goods and services) in improving a country's competitiveness.

The interest in trade in value-added goes beyond trade specialists, as it reflects structural changes in the global economy and influences both the calculation of national accounts and the measure of socio-economic development. It has provided new insights into the relationship between trade growth and factors such as jobs and investment. National data providers have an important role to play here in improving input data. A growing number of countries and regions are working to do so and in March 2015 this work received the support of the United



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Nations Statistical Commission. I think this underlines the potential impact that this new dimension of globalization has on national and regional development.

The WTO has also been active in fostering statistical capacity building, in cooperation with other regional and international institutions. This is vital because of course the quality of our statistical work depends largely on accurate and comprehensive official data submitted by members. The WTO is now acting as the technical assistance focal point of the inter-agency task force on international trade statistics (comprising the UN, Eurostat, IMF, OECD, UNCTAD, UNWTO and the WTO) with the aim of improving the availability of trade in services statistics.

Of course, compiling statistics is only part of the job. To provide transparency and increase understanding of trade trends, we must also make our statistics available and accessible to a wider audience. We have therefore been investing in new IT technologies and revamping our databases to make them more user-friendly for inter-disciplinary analysis. In addition, we are working on new research projects to develop composite trade indicators and properly quantify e-commerce. Looking ahead, we will be able to see further improvements in the WTO's statistical work through streamlined publications, enhanced online accessibility and expanded coverage of data. In this way, I am confident that our statistical work will continue to go from strength to strength – and that it will continue to support all elements of the WTO's objectives, just as it has for the last 20 years.

Robul Azim

