

FOREWORD

Technology has always propelled trade. From the invention of the steam engine and steamship in the 1700s, the popularization of the standard shipping container in the 1950s, and the rise of the internet in the 1990s, technology has over the centuries profoundly changed the way we trade. Today, emerging technologies and digitalization are changing trade at a speed much faster than before – leading to both opportunities and challenges.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that digital trade and commerce has become a staple for survival for small and medium-sized enterprises all over the world, while the application of autonomous technologies – from robotics to artificial intelligence – have contributed to the operation of ports and warehouses with minimal staffing during lockdowns. According to a World Economic Forum business survey, the adoption of TradeTech – the set of technologies that enables global trade to become more efficient, inclusive and sustainable – has helped to ease supply chain bottlenecks across different industries.

As TradeTech adoption is moving fast and is largely driven by the private sector, there is an urgent need for trade policymaking to keep pace. For trade to work for all, TradeTech adoption must happen in the most efficient and inclusive manner across the globe and for all members of society. The benefits

of TradeTech on efficiency and sustainability are highly promising. However, uneven deployment due to regulatory fragmentation could result in unintended consequences of unequal growth, threats to cybersecurity and a growing trend in technonationalism.

Leveraging technologies for trade requires more than technological innovation. The major challenge might actually be international policy coordination and coherence. The right ecosystem needs to be in place to drive global adoption and scalability. Trade agreements can play a key role in this regard. Recent trade agreements and plurilateral initiatives have started to explore the interplay between technology and trade. Yet, further input and analysis are needed on issues such as electronic transferable records, automated contracts, digital tokens, the interoperability of data models, and the digital identity of legal and physical persons and of physical and digital goods.

This joint World Economic Forum and WTO publication aims to shed light in this area, providing public, private and civil society's inputs on the building blocks for TradeTech policy adoption: the 5 Gs of TradeTech. This publication builds on the "Trade for Tomorrow" call to action put forward by both organizations last year, to bring trade to a new speed for all.



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