

Spotlight:

Public Forum 2017

The 2017 Public Forum in September debated the realities of trade by going beyond the rhetoric to look in detail at the opportunities trade offers and the challenges it brings, particularly for developing countries.

The Forum provided a platform for frank discussions among policy-makers, civil society representatives, business people and researchers to consider how to maximize the benefits of trade and ensure the trading system is as inclusive as it can be.

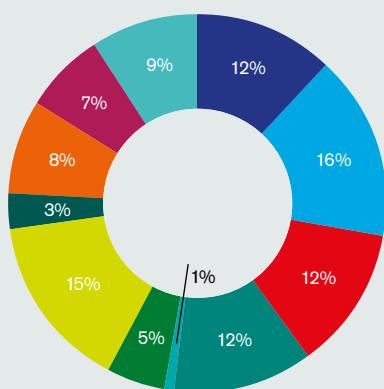
Under the theme “Trade: Behind the Headlines”, the WTO’s premier outreach event held 105 sessions – the most ever – including two high-level plenary sessions. The sessions related to three sub-themes – trade and jobs, inclusive trade and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 1,221 participants (excluding WTO delegates and staff) from 112 countries (both members and non-members) were drawn from civil society, business, government and research institutions. Businesses accounted for the largest proportion of participants (16 per cent) ahead of non-governmental organizations (15 per cent) and government officials (12 per cent) (see Figure 1). The majority of participants came from Europe, followed by Asia.

Keynote speakers at the opening plenary made heartfelt pleas for a more inclusive global trading system. “Even if you argue – as I would – that trade is essential for growth, development and jobs, you have to accept that we drastically underestimated people’s dissatisfaction with the status quo,” said WTO Director-General Roberto Azevêdo, who led the debate.

The high-level panel included Christine Lagarde, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, New York Times columnist and Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman, Argentine minister Susana Malcorra, Bruce Stokes, Director at the Pew Research Center, Dr Naushad Forbes, Co-Chairman of Forbes Marshall, and Strive Masiyiwa, founder of the Econet Group.

The second high-level panel saw the launch of the WTO’s flagship World Trade Report (see page 182), which examines how technology and trade affect labour markets. High-level economists discussed its themes of

Figure 1: Public Forum participation in 2017



- Academics
- Business representatives
- Government officials
- International organizations
- Journalists
- Lawyers
- Non-governmental organizations
- Parlementarians
- Students (high school)
- Students (university)
- Others





The SDGs and trade's role in achieving them featured prominently in many sessions.

how continued economic progress hinges on societies remaining open to trade and technological advances while also being able to adjust, adapt and promote greater inclusiveness.

The SDGs and trade's role in achieving them featured prominently in many sessions. Participants looked at the part played by agriculture and how turning the SDGs into reality can create new business opportunities. Another important topic was how sustainable development can be achieved through the adoption of clean technologies.

Sessions debated how to create a more open and inclusive trading system for all, with better and fairer opportunities for women. Ensuring that SMEs are able to adapt to the new ways of doing business, including e-commerce, was also a key topic.

The Forum featured three "Meet the Author" sessions organized by the WTO bookshop and library, in which the authors discussed their books.

Several stands were set up, showcasing products and work being carried out by small businesses, international organizations and institutions to help countries and individuals share in the benefits of trade. Among the exhibitors was SPINNA Circle, which supports the growth of women entrepreneurs and artisans in the fashion and textiles industry by linking them in networks, or "circles", providing training, mentoring and business opportunities.

Relations with non-governmental organizations

- Over 350 representatives from 170 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended the 11th Ministerial Conference.
- NGOs formed the second-largest group of participants at the Public Forum.

Background on relations with NGOs

The WTO maintains regular dialogue with civil society organizations through outreach activities, such as regular briefings, to enhance cooperation and increase awareness of WTO activities and the multilateral trading system. It provides a platform for NGOs to discuss current trade issues and provides them with access to many WTO events.

Over 350 representatives of 170 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attended the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in December, where the WTO provided a fully equipped NGO centre for their exclusive use. NGOs organized side events and received daily briefings from the WTO Secretariat on the status of the discussions. In Geneva, NGOs received briefings throughout the year on meetings of the General Council and the Trade Negotiations Committee and on other WTO activities.

Public Forum

The 2017 Public Forum (see page 166) attracted over 1,200 participants from over 100 countries. NGOs formed the second-largest group after business, accounting for 15 per cent of participants. NGOs organized sessions on a variety of topics, including how trade can help achieve gender equality and how trade can fairly contribute to economic growth and decent work for marginalized communities.

Open hearings

In 2017, NGOs were able to attend five dispute hearings relating to three panels. Since 2005, certain panel meetings, Appellate Body hearings and arbitration proceedings have been open to the public. The three panels were: "United States – Supercalendered Paper", covering countervailing duties on Canadian paper; a compliance dispute brought by the European Union against the United States over subsidies for large aircraft – "European Communities and Certain Member States – Large Civil Aircraft (Article 21.5 – US)"; and "US – Tax Incentives" for the manufacturing of large civil aircraft, in a case brought by the European Union.

CUTS International organized a Public Forum session on how trade can contribute to economic growth and decent work for marginalized communities.



Contact with parliamentarians

- The 2017 Parliamentary Conference on the WTO took place ahead of the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires.
- The conference urged WTO members to strive to strengthen the multilateral trading system, with the WTO as its cornerstone.

Background on contact with parliamentarians

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.

The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO met at the National Congress of Argentina in Buenos Aires in December 2017.

The Parliamentary Conference on the WTO, meeting on 9-10 December at the National Congress of Argentina in Buenos Aires, just before the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC11), urged WTO members to make every effort to strengthen the multilateral trading system, with the WTO as its cornerstone.

Members of Parliament (MPs) welcomed the entry into force of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (see page 94) and the amendment to the Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Agreement (see page 100) and urged governments that have not yet ratified these two instruments to do so as speedily as possible.

Addressing the conference, attended by hundreds of MPs from around the world, Director-General Roberto Azevêdo said: "You play a fundamental role here. We rely on you, through platforms like this, to pass on the cares and concerns of your communities. And we rely on you to help inform them about the work of the WTO."

The Steering Committee of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on WTO matters met in March in Brussels and in Geneva during the WTO Public Forum (see page 166). The IPU is the international organization of parliaments. Senior WTO staff, the Chair of the General Council (see page 62) and Geneva-based ambassadors briefed legislators on important issues facing the multilateral trading system. Deputy Director-General (DDG) David Shark and DDG Karl Brauner addressed the Committee.

A parliamentary session was held during the Public Forum (see page 166) on "Making trade fair: the contribution of parliaments". Speakers included members of the European Parliament and members of national assemblies from Pakistan and Cameroon.

Regional workshops and meetings

In 2017, the WTO organized four regional workshops for parliamentarians: in Vienna (co-organized with the Joint Vienna Institute) for MPs from Central European, Central Asian and the Caucasus countries; in Rabat, Morocco (organized jointly with the Assemblée Parlementaire de la Méditerranée) for MPs from the Mediterranean area; in Madagascar (with the Organization Internationale de la Francophonie) for African MPs; and in Singapore (with the TEMASEK Foundation) for MPs from Asia. The four events drew 107 MPs.



Cooperation with other intergovernmental organizations

- The WTO worked closely with other international organizations to promote the Sustainable Development Agenda and other global goals.
- DG Azevêdo attended the G20 summit and took part in events organized by the UN, the World Bank, the IMF and OECD.
- The WTO worked with UNCTAD and ITC to assist developing countries in maximizing the benefits of trade.

Background on cooperation with other international organizations

The WTO works closely with other intergovernmental 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.

G20 leaders underlined the crucial role of the rules-based international trading system.

G20

In July, Director-General Roberto Azevêdo attended the summit of the G20 group of leading developed and developing countries in Hamburg, Germany. In a statement released ahead of the summit, DG Azevêdo, the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Christine Lagarde, and World Bank President Jim Yong Kim stressed that the economic well-being of billions of people depends on trade and that deeper trade integration coupled with supportive domestic policies can help boost incomes and accelerate global growth.

G20 leaders underlined the crucial role of the rules-based international trading system. They also vowed to keep markets open and to continue to fight protectionism, including all unfair trade practices, recognizing the role of legitimate trade defence instruments in this regard.

With the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the WTO continued to publish six-monthly reports on trade and investment measures in G20 countries. The November report showed the

introduction of fewer trade-restrictive measures compared with the previous review period.

The WTO contributed a range of inputs to trade discussions, notably in the G20 sherpa track and in the G20 Trade and Investment Working Group, which seeks to better coordinate efforts to reinforce trade and investment. Together with the OECD and the World Bank, the WTO organized a conference in Paris bringing together G20 policy-makers and researchers to review current knowledge on the distribution of the gains from trade. Jointly with the IMF and the World Bank, the WTO provided a background document, "Making Trade an Engine of Growth for All" (see page 121).

OECD

DG Azevêdo addressed the OECD Ministerial Council on 8 June, telling the meeting that the WTO's success over the past few years in delivering agreements needs to be maintained so that trade can do even more to create jobs and support growth and development.

The OECD and the WTO cooperate in a wide range of areas, including in the Trade in Value-Added (TiVA) database, launched in 2013. They also cooperate



DG Azevêdo is greeted by Germany's Chancellor, Angela Merkel, at the G20 leaders' summit in Hamburg, Germany, in July 2017.



to improve the measurement of digital trade. In 2017, the WTO ran for the first time a course on global value chains supported by the OECD (see page 185).

The OECD and WTO are also cooperating in the development of a set of trade facilitation indicators (TFIs). This interactive web tool covers 152 countries. The TFIs identify areas for action and assess the potential impact of trade facilitation reforms so that governments can prioritize action and mobilize technical assistance.

United Nations

DG Azevêdo attended the spring meeting of the United Nations Chief Executives Board (CEB) – a high-level body composed of the executive heads of UN agencies, funds and programmes as well as the executive heads of the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO. The CEB aims to enhance international cooperation on global issues.

The WTO is part of the UN Secretary General-led High-Level Task Force, which brings together 23 UN agencies and international organizations to improve coordination in global food security responses. The task force offers high-level policy coordination and political leadership, with the aim of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to food and nutrition security and to sustainable agriculture and food systems.

The WTO also works closely with departments of the UN Secretariat, especially on the follow-up and implementation of the trade-related targets in the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. In 2017, the WTO made several contributions to this work, among them an issue brief for the 2017 High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which included policy recommendations on ways to accelerate progress in poverty eradication from a trade perspective.

During the Aid for Trade Global Review (see page 154) the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the WTO unveiled a joint publication on trade and food standards (see page 181).

The WTO's collaboration with the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and the Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLS) has continued to strengthen. The WTO regularly contributes to the UN Secretary General's reports on the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action for the Least Developed Countries as well as the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries.

The WTO works closely with UNCTAD and the International Trade Centre ITC. During the WTO 11th Ministerial Conference (MC11) in Buenos Aires, they launched an innovative web-based tool to help businesses, in particular smaller firms, benefit from trade.





The ILO and the WTO launched a joint study on “Investing in Skills for Inclusive Trade.”

The WTO and UNCTAD continue to cooperate in providing training and technical assistance to developing countries and least developed countries (LDCs), building on the declaration signed by DG Azevêdo and UNCTAD Secretary-General Mukhisa Kituyi in October 2015 to strengthen collaboration between the two organizations. The WTO also cooperates with UNCTAD within the framework of the UN inter-agency “cluster” on trade and productive capacity, which aims to coordinate trade and development operations throughout the UN system.

UNCTAD, the ITC and the WTO jointly produce quarterly and annual statistics on international trade in services. They also combined in statistical capacity-building activities, including training courses and e-learning courses.

ITC

The WTO and UNCTAD jointly sponsor the ITC, a trade promotion body for developing countries. The WTO also collaborates with the ITC and UNCTAD in the annual publication of the World Tariff Profiles (see page 184).

The WTO works closely with the ITC to help developing countries implement and benefit from WTO agreements. They are working together in the Business for Development initiative, which aims to help the private sector in developing countries define national priorities for WTO negotiations and

make governments mindful of business concerns. During MC11, the two organizations launched the joint WTO-ITC cotton portal (see page 48).

The ITC's Joint Advisory Group (JAG) meets annually to make recommendations on the ITC's work programme. The 51st session of the JAG was held in July at the WTO.

Other intergovernmental organizations

In 2017, the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the WTO launched a joint study – *Investing in Skills for Inclusive Trade* – which suggested that enhancing the skills of a country's workforce lifts the export performance of its enterprises and better prepares them to meet foreign competition (see page 183).

The WTO Secretariat attends sessions of the ILO Governing Body and the International Labour Conference as an observer and participates in meetings of the Governing Body's Working Party on the Social Dimension of Globalization. The ILO and the WTO are undertaking research on the role that skills-development policies can play in making trade an engine of inclusive growth.

Speaking at the Social Forum of the UN Human Rights Council on 2 October, DG Azevêdo highlighted how the WTO's trade rules and its close cooperation with the World Health Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization have been essential in improving access to medicines for developing countries (see page 101).

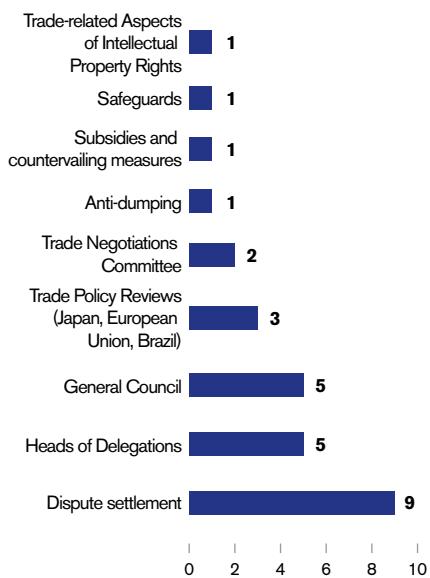
The WTO was actively involved in preparing for the G20 Agriculture Ministers meeting and the Rapid Response Forum of the G20 Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), which took place in Berlin, in January and February 2017, respectively. In November, the meeting of the AMIS Global Market Information Group was hosted by the WTO. The WTO undertook to continue helping AMIS in ensuring increased transparency in international commodity markets and improving policy coordination as part of the collective effort to address global food security.



Contact with the media

- **Nearly 320 journalists attended the 11th Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, including six from least-developed countries invited by the WTO.**
- **Overall, 45 press events took place during the year at WTO headquarters and the nearby United Nations headquarters in Geneva.**

Figure 2: Meetings/subjects covered by WTO press briefings in 2017



The 11th Ministerial Conference (MC11) in Buenos Aires was the focus of media activities in 2017. Nearly 320 journalists attended the four-day meeting in December, including six journalists from least developed countries (LDCs) invited by the WTO. Director-General Roberto Azevêdo and MC11 Chair Susana Malcorra briefed reporters at both the beginning and the end of the conference (see page 32). In all, journalists were invited to 57 press events in Buenos Aires, including 19 press conferences.

In Geneva, journalists attended a number of WTO events, including seminars, book launches, the Public Forum (the organization's flagship outreach event), the Aid for Trade Global Review and the Symposium on the 20th Anniversary of the Information Technology Agreement (see page 91). Press briefings (see Figure 2) and press conferences were held on a range of WTO issues, including the WTO's annual trade forecast. In total, 46 press events took place at WTO headquarters and the nearby UN headquarters in Geneva.

The WTO received 226 requests for registration to the media newsroom of the WTO website, where journalists can access press releases and publications under embargo. The number of journalists registered stood at 1,917 at the end of 2017.

Outreach

As MC11 was the first WTO Ministerial Conference in South America, the WTO invited 15 journalists from 13 Latin American countries to Geneva in September for a seminar jointly organized with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The programme included the new challenges of international trade and preparations for MC11. The journalists met the WTO ambassadors from Argentina, Colombia and Panama as well as DG Azevêdo.

A workshop for Latin American journalists was organized in Buenos Aires ahead of MC11. Nearly 30 journalists from 16 countries attended. Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs Jorge Faurie and the Minister of Production, Francisco Cabrera, along with MC11 Chair Malcorra, addressed the group.

WTO press officers also participated in regional outreach programmes for parliamentarians in Austria and Kuwait in 2017 (see page 169).



Contact with the business community

- Two focus groups of business leaders, established under the WTO's Trade Dialogues initiative, issued recommendations on business priorities for the WTO.
- A Business Forum, held for the first time at a WTO Ministerial Conference, ended with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) presenting recommendations on the future direction of world trade agenda.
- The WTO and ICC launched the "Small Business Champions" initiative.
- The Global Trade Helpdesk was launched to help businesses, in particular smaller firms, benefit from trade.

Background on contact with the business community

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.

The Trade Dialogues initiative aims to highlight how the WTO can address the challenges facing business.



Trade Dialogues

Two focus groups of business leaders, established at the first Trade Dialogues meeting with the business community in 2016, made their final recommendations on a range of trade-related issues, such as services, investment, market access, e-commerce and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The Trade Dialogues initiative aims to highlight the challenges and opportunities businesses, both large and small, from developed and developing economies, face in conducting trade and how the WTO can best address their needs.

The reports followed 11 months of extensive online discussions. In July 2017, the group leaders – John Danilovich, Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), and Dr Stormy Mildner, B20 sherpa and Head of Foreign Trade Policy at the Federation of German Industries – presented the recommendations to the coordinators of various groups of WTO members.

The first set of recommendations encourages WTO members to look into ways of creating a global ecosystem that better enables small businesses to access international markets and

sell products online more easily. The recommendations also highlight the need for enhanced connectivity and capacity building in e-commerce. The second set calls for the revitalization of WTO trade negotiations and the rapid and effective implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (see page 94). The two discussion group leaders continued to engage with WTO members in Geneva on the basis of these reports.

MC11 Business Forum

A Business Forum took place on 12 December in Buenos Aires, organized by the Ministry of Production of Argentina, together with the ICC, the World Economic Forum and the B20. It was the first time a business forum had been held on the sidelines of a WTO Ministerial Conference. The Forum concluded with the ICC presenting recommendations on the future direction of the world trade agenda, which were delivered to Director-General Azevêdo and the Chair of the Conference, Argentine Minister Susanna Malcorra.

The recommendations focused on three main elements: strengthening the role of the WTO in response to global challenges; establishing a new work programme for the WTO covering





At the end of the Business Forum in Buenos Aires, the ICC presented recommendations on the future direction of world trade.

priority issues for business; and providing support to WTO members in their discussions at the 11th Ministerial Conference (MC11) and beyond.

Public Forum

The WTO's 2017 Public Forum (see page 166) drew 180 business representatives to its debates and meetings on the theme of "Trade: behind the headlines". The business community organized 22 sessions during the three-day event, covering topics such as sustainability, inclusive trade, e-commerce, protectionism, technology and the future trade agenda.

Small Business Champions

ICC and the WTO launched the Small Business Champions initiative in August 2017. The initiative provides a platform for companies and private sector organizations to propose innovative, practical ideas to encourage micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to do business across borders (see page 176).

Global Trade Helpdesk

During MC11, the International Trade Centre, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the WTO launched an innovative tool to help businesses, in particular smaller firms, benefit from trade. Accessible through a new online hub – HelpMeTrade.org – the Global Trade Helpdesk will serve as a one-stop shop for businesses and policymakers seeking to access trade data and to find practical information on target markets.

The Helpdesk provides data on tariffs and taxes, relevant health and safety standards and compliance procedures, details about export and import procedures, such as pre-shipment formalities, and current trade patterns and trade agreements. "For a small business, easy access to the right information can make the world of difference," DG Azevêdo said at the launch.

E-commerce initiative

In Buenos Aires, the WTO, the World Economic Forum and the Electronic World Trade Platform (eWTP) announced a joint initiative to drive public-private dialogue on e-commerce. "Enabling E-commerce" aims to bring together leading voices from governments, businesses and other stakeholders for a high-level conversation on e-commerce policies and practices that can benefit small businesses. It will also encourage research and knowledge sharing on the practical challenges faced by MSMEs and serve as a bridge between global e-commerce practice and policy.

Other contact with businesses

Throughout the year, WTO officials met with members of the business community visiting Geneva and held meetings with business representatives during visits overseas. The issues most frequently discussed included the state of play in the WTO's trade negotiations ahead of MC11.



Contact with the business community
www.wto.org/business