



Seasonal agricultural workers.

Chapter 2

**Twenty years of increasing
integration of developing
economies into global trade**

Evolution of trade in developing economies

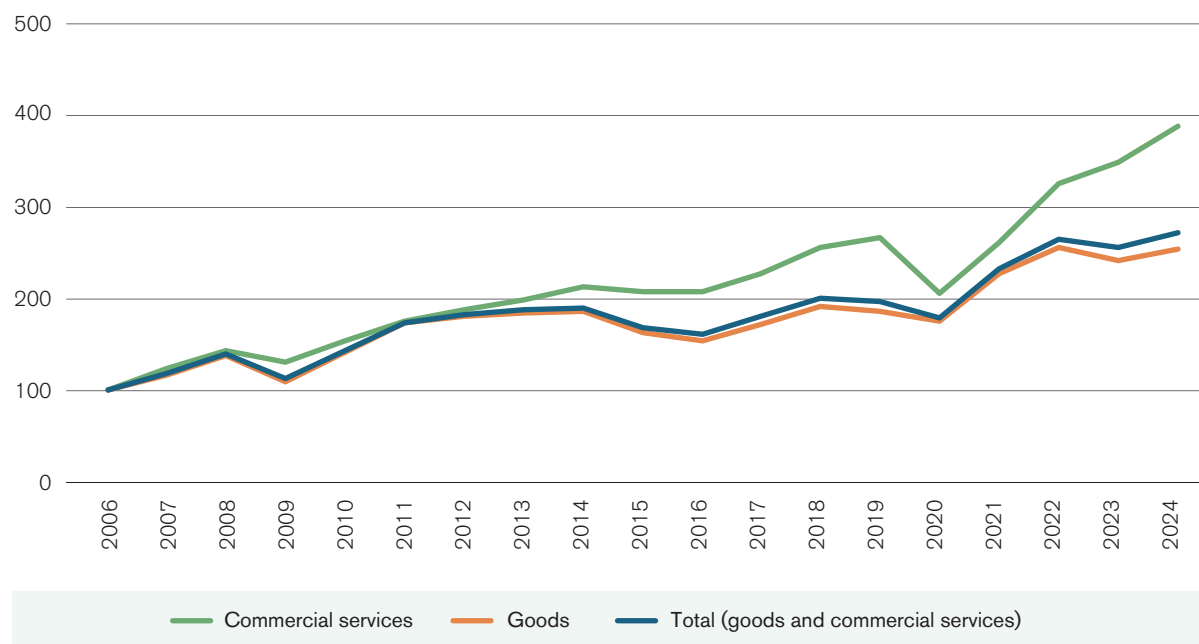
Over the past two decades, growth in trade and in gross domestic product (GDP) have followed a similar trajectory. This long-term trend suggests a positive correlation between trade and economic growth, with expanding trade contributing to rising living standards across many developing economies (see [Box 2.1](#)). Between 2006 and 2024, exports of goods and services from

developing economies increased at an average annual rate of 5.7 per cent, exceeding total world exports (+4.5 per cent) (see [Figure 2.1](#)). Commercial services exports from developing economies grew much faster than merchandise exports (7.8 per cent vs 5.3 per cent), outpacing the global average (6.2 per cent and 4.0 per cent, respectively) (see [Table 2.1](#)).

Figure 2.1:

Evolution of exports of goods and commercial services from developing economies, 2006–2024

Index 2006 = 100



Source: WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

Table 2.1:**Trends in exports of goods and commercial services from developing economies, 2006–2024**

US\$ million and percentages; balance of payments/BPM6

	Value (US\$ million)		Annual percentage change (%)					
	2006	2024	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2006-2024
Exports								
Total goods and commercial services	5,377,519	14,662,064	-8.6	29.1	14.1	-3.4	6.5	5.7
Goods	4,641,337	11,804,964	-5	29	12	-6	5	5.3
Commercial services	736,182	2,857,100	-23.1	27.2	24.5	7.4	11.1	7.8
Imports								
Total goods and commercial services	4,982,098	13,946,355	-11	29	14	-3	5	5.9
Goods	4,120,280	11,065,016	-8	31	12	-6	5	5.6
Commercial services	861,818	2,881,339	-22	19	20	11	8	6.9

Source: WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

Note: BPM6 = Balance of payments and International Investment Position Manual, 6th edition.

Box 2.1:**Trade and growth: 20 years of progress**

The early 2000s were characterized by trade growth exceeding GDP growth, reflecting rapid globalization and deepening global value chains (see [Figure 2.2](#)). This pattern was interrupted by two major shocks: the global financial crisis in 2009 and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, when trade contracted more sharply than GDP. Trade sharply rebounded in 2010 following the financial stabilization. Thereafter, trade growth moderated for nearly a decade. The rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic, in 2021, was largely fuelled by pent-up demand and fiscal stimulus. In 2025, the annual trade growth rate reached 5 per cent higher than the GDP growth of 3 per cent.

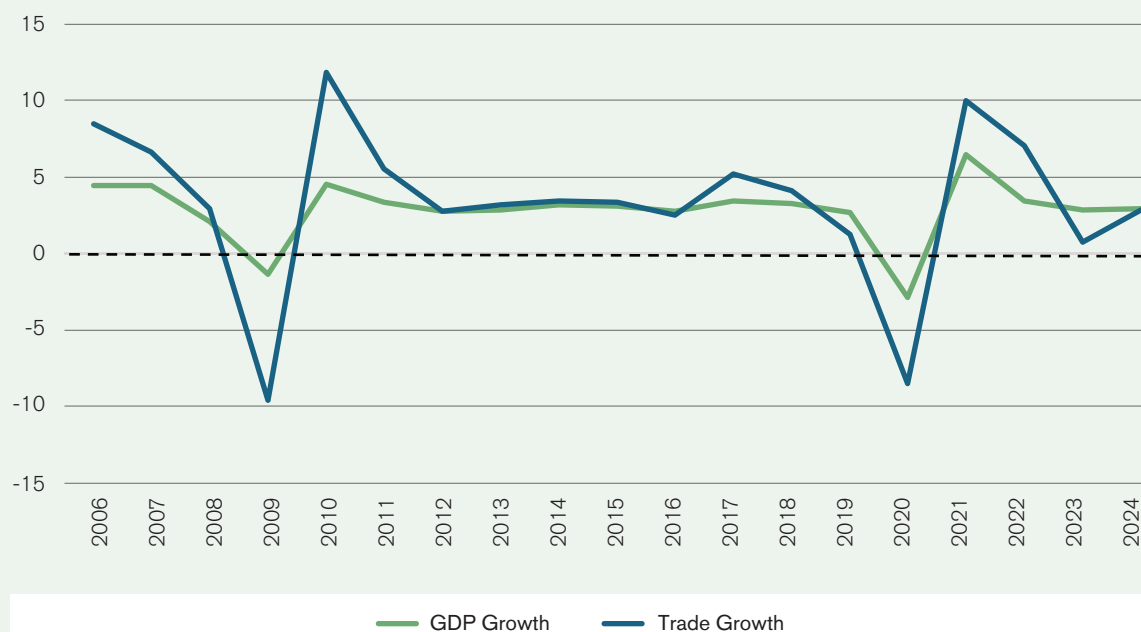
Despite sharp fluctuations experienced by many developing economies, trade remains a central component of global economic activity. In 2024, world trade, measured as exports plus imports of goods and services, represented around 57 per cent of global GDP, according to World Bank data. This highlights the importance of trade integration as part of the global growth process: trade can

enable countries to access larger markets, specialize, achieve economies of scale and benefit from the diffusion of technology and knowledge. Through these channels, trade can support productivity, employment and income growth.

The above broad trends mask an uneven trade growth experienced by many developing economies, including least-developed countries (LDCs). For these economies, the ability to turn trade opportunities into inclusive growth depends on productive capacity, reliable infrastructure, access to finance, skills and institutions. This is where Aid for Trade remains central: by helping countries address supply-side constraints, boost trade capacity and build resilience, it can strengthen the link between trade, growth and poverty reduction. It should be noted that over the last 20 years the world has witnessed a substantial reduction in extreme poverty, with the global poverty headcount ratio falling from 28.3 per cent in 2005 to 10.4 per cent in 2024 (World Bank, 2025).

Source: Arnaud Mabillard and Roberta Allport, WTO Secretariat.

Figure 2.2:
World trade and GDP growth, 2006–2024



Source: World Development Indicators (2026).

Note: Trade growth refers to exports of goods and services, annual per cent growth.

Trends in merchandise trade

Global merchandise trade has expanded substantially over the past two decades, providing new opportunities for developing economies and LDCs to play a bigger role in world trade. The extent to which economies have been able to translate this expansion into sustained market participation and export diversification varies markedly across income groups.

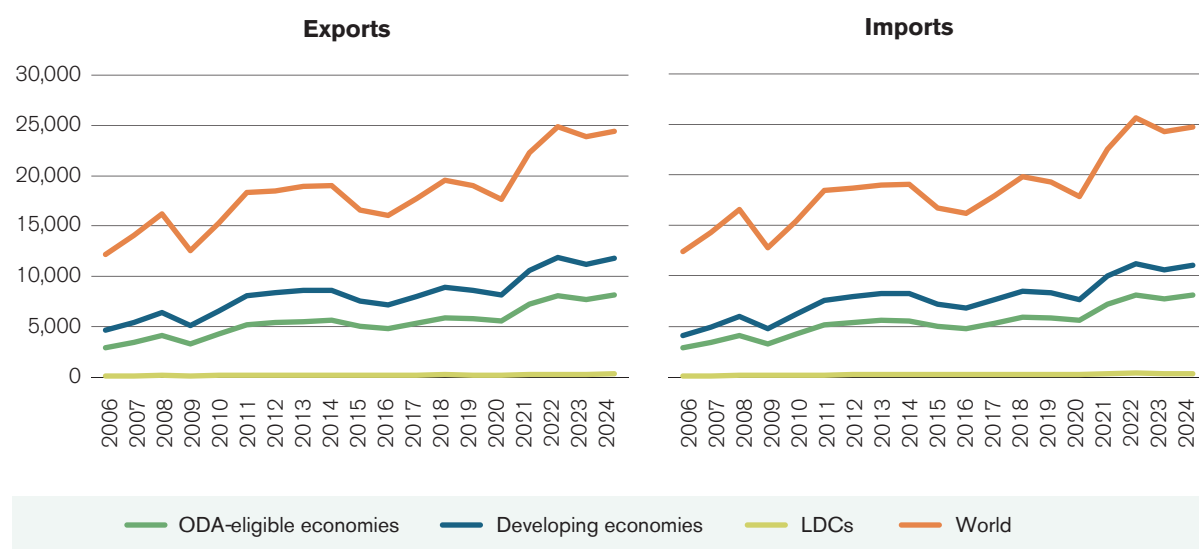
Exports of merchandise goods from developing economies¹ more than doubled between 2006 and 2024, rising from US\$ 4.6 trillion to US\$ 11.8 trillion, and growing at an average annual rate of around 5.3 per cent, above the global average of approximately 4 per cent (see [Figure 2.3](#)). Over the same period, world merchandise exports increased from US\$ 12.1 trillion to US\$ 24.6 trillion, with pronounced contractions

during the global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic. Within developing economies, merchandise exports from developing economies eligible for official development assistance (ODA) grew on average 5.9 per cent per year, from US\$ 2.9 trillion in 2006 to US\$ 8.1 trillion in 2024.²

Merchandise imports followed a similar long-term upward trajectory. Imports by developing economies more than doubled between 2006 and 2024, rising from US\$ 4.1 trillion to around US\$ 11.1 trillion, broadly in line with export growth and reflecting deeper integration into global markets. Merchandise imports of ODA-eligible developing economies expanded from US\$ 2.7 trillion in 2006 to US\$ 7.7 trillion in 2024.

Figure 2.3:
Exports and imports of merchandise trade in developing economies, 2006–2024

US\$ billion



Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

LDCs also recorded strong long-term growth, with merchandise exports nearly tripling over the period, from US\$ 95 billion to US\$ 277 billion, though from a low base and with continued vulnerability to external crises. Imports by LDCs also expanded steadily, from just under US\$ 100 billion in 2006 to around US\$ 344 billion in 2024, highlighting rising demand for consumer, capital and intermediate goods, albeit alongside continued exposure to external crises and trade imbalances.

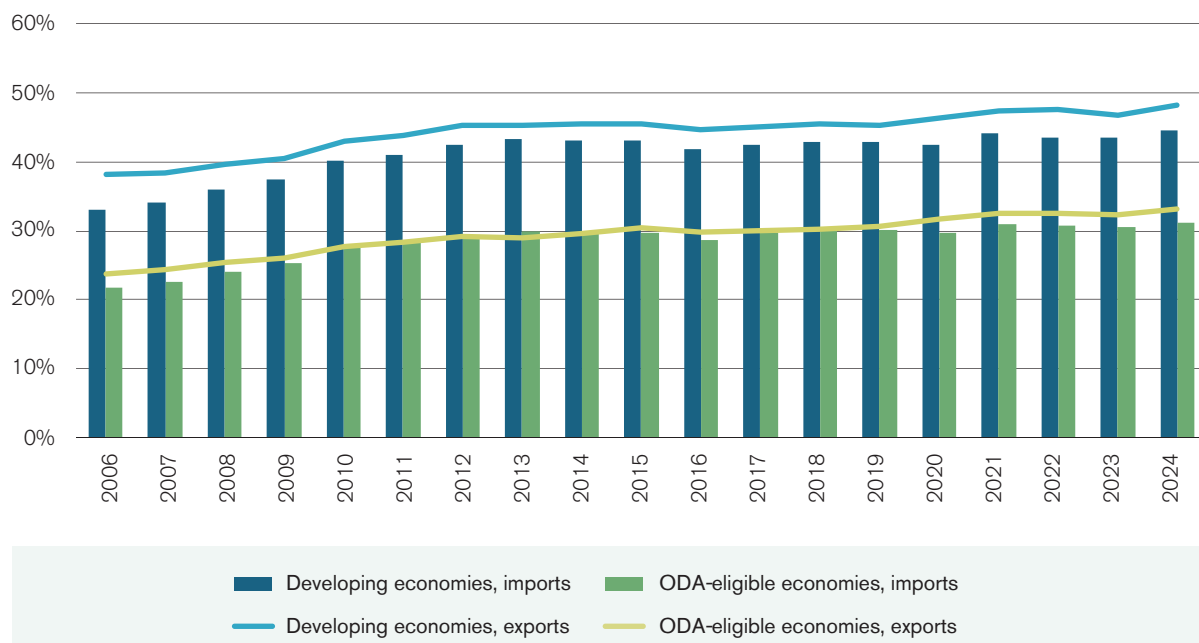
As indicated above, developing economies have steadily increased their share of world merchandise trade over the past two decades, with exports rising from around 38 per cent in 2006 to just over 48 per cent in 2024, and imports following a similar upward trajectory from 33.2 per cent in 2006 to 44.6 per cent

in 2024 (see [Figure 2.4](#)). ODA-eligible economies increased their share of world merchandise exports from 23.7 per cent in 2006 to 33.2 per cent, with imports rising from 21.7 per cent in 2006 to 31.1 per cent in 2024.

Within this broader expansion, the participation of LDCs in world trade has increased only marginally. LDC exports rose from around 0.8 per cent of global merchandise exports in 2006 to approximately one per cent in 2024, while imports increased from around 0.8 per cent to 1.4 per cent over the same period (see [Figure 2.5](#)). This highlights that, although LDCs have benefited from the overall growth in developing-economy trade, their relative integration into global markets remains limited, with gains occurring gradually and from a very low base.

Figure 2.4:

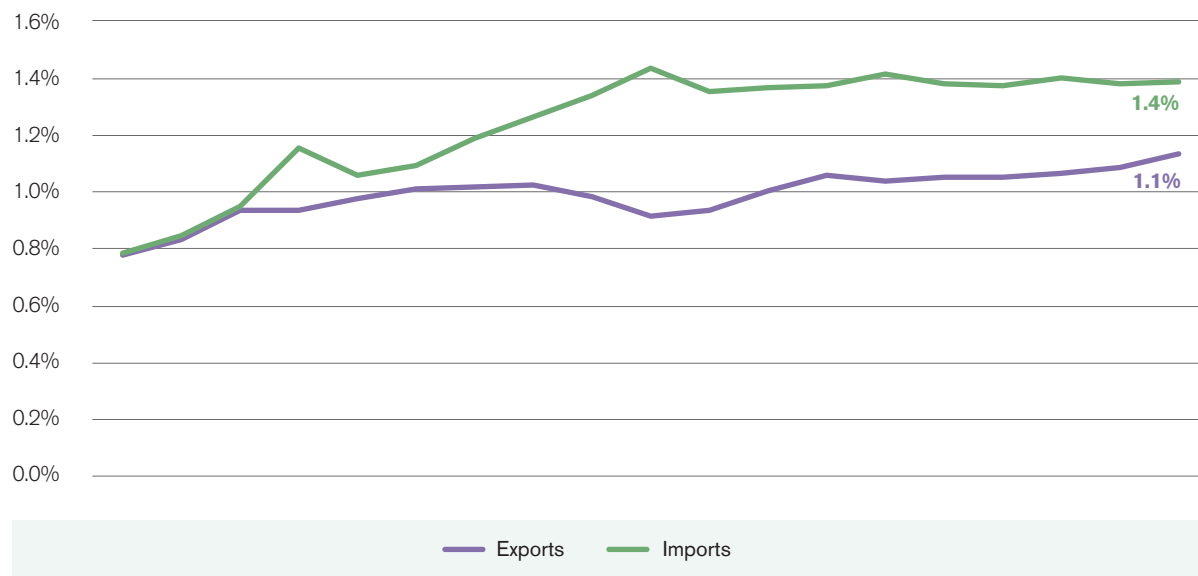
Share of exports and imports of developing economies in global merchandise trade, 2006–2024
Percentage share



Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

Figure 2.5:
Share of LDCs' exports and imports in global merchandise trade, 2006–2024

Percentage share



Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

Between 2006 and 2024, merchandise exports from developing economies became more strongly oriented towards manufactured goods (see [Figure 2.6](#)). In 2006, these goods already dominated developing-economy exports, accounting for around 64 per cent of total merchandise exports, with fuels and mining products at 29 per cent, and agricultural products at 7 per cent. By 2024, the share of manufactured goods increased further to around 70 per cent, while fuels and mining products declined to roughly 20 per cent and agricultural products rose modestly to around 10 per cent.

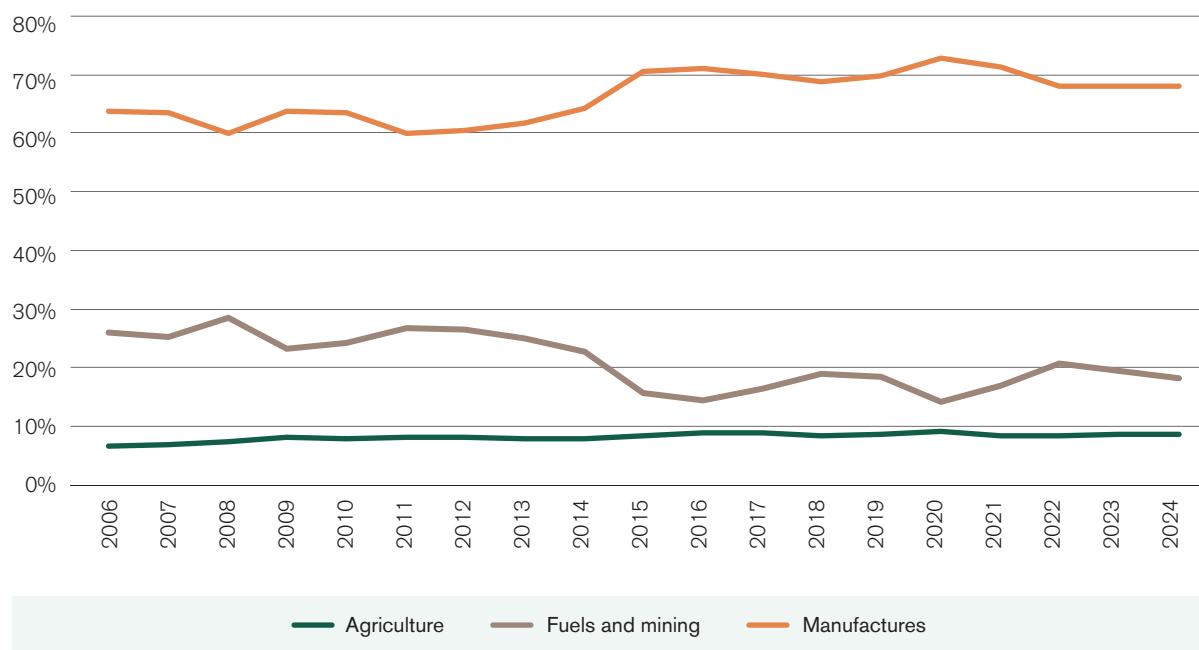
Since global trade is evolving rapidly, including through technological activities, many manufacturing activities are becoming capital-intensive, and many developing

economies are yet to see significant growth in manufacturing exports (Rodrik, 2024).

Between 2006 and 2024, merchandise exports from LDCs saw a gradual rise of manufactured goods in the overall share of LDC exports, and a shift away from fuels and mining products (see [Figure 2.7](#)). In 2006, exports were heavily concentrated in fuels and mining products, which accounted for roughly two-thirds of total merchandise exports, while manufactured goods represented around one-quarter and agricultural products a much smaller share. By 2024, the export structure appears more balanced: the share of fuels and mining products had declined markedly, while manufactured goods had expanded substantially and agricultural products had increased their relative importance.

Figure 2.6:
Structure of merchandise exports from developing economies, 2006–2024

Percentage share



Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

Note: The sectoral structure of merchandise exports is compiled using country-level product data. A small number of exporters are excluded where product-level disaggregation is unavailable or incomplete. These exclusions account for a negligible share of total developing-economy merchandise exports and do not affect the qualitative patterns shown.

Export-weighted sectoral shares reinforce this trend.³ When sectoral exports are aggregated across economies and weighted by total merchandise exports, fuels and mining products fall from 47 per cent in 2006 to 41 per cent in 2024; meanwhile manufactured goods rise from 45 per cent to 46 per cent and agricultural products increase from 8 per cent to 13 per cent, indicating a gradual but important broadening of LDC exports. Overall, the evidence suggests modest progress towards a more diversified export base, alongside the continued prominence of commodity-based exports in several LDCs.

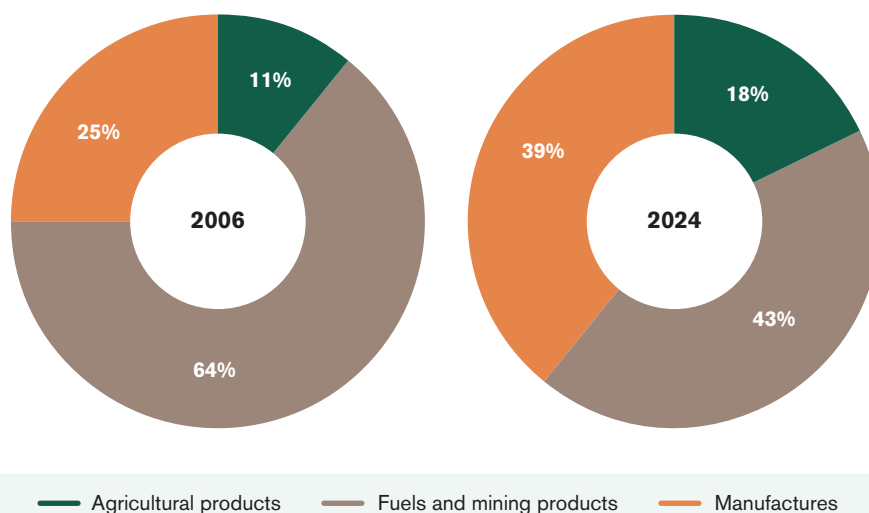
On a more granular level, merchandise exports from LDCs are highly concentrated in a small number of

large exporters, with different economies dominating different sectors. Fuels and mining exports are led by a handful of resource-rich economies, most notably Angola in the mid-2000s and, by 2024, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Zambia, reflecting the growing importance of mineral exports within the fuels and mining sector.

Manufactured exports are even more concentrated among a few LDCs. The dominant share in LDC manufacturing exports is held by Bangladesh, followed by Cambodia and Myanmar. Most of these manufacturing exports continue to be driven by textiles and clothing products. This also reinforces the difficulty faced by LDCs in making a breakthrough in other manufacturing sectors.

Figure 2.7:
Structure of merchandise exports from LDCs, 2006 and 2024

Percentage share



Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

Notes: This figure covers economies classified as LDCs during the period of analysis, including those that have subsequently graduated from LDC status. The cohort-based approach is used to assess changes in export structure over time and does not reflect the current LDC category.

In 2006, sectoral disaggregation is missing for several LDCs, predominantly small exporters. Two larger exporters (the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar) report total merchandise exports but lack sectoral detail in the early years, reflecting reporting constraints rather than trade structure. As a result, early-period sectoral shares should be interpreted with caution, particularly for fuels and mining products.

Agricultural exports are comparatively less concentrated, with several African LDCs including Ethiopia, Malawi, Mali, Tanzania and Uganda making meaningful contributions. This concentration means that aggregate LDC export patterns are strongly influenced by the performance of a small number of large exporters.

Across regions, the evolution of merchandise exports between 2006 and 2024 shows markedly different trajectories (see [Figure 2.8](#)). Developing Asia recorded the strongest and most sustained expansion, with exports rising from about US\$ 2.5 trillion in 2006 to US\$ 7.3 trillion in 2024. The Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean saw a

modest increase, with exports rising from about US\$ 660 billion to around US\$ 1.46 trillion in 2024 and from US\$ 694 billion to 1.46 trillion, respectively. Exports from Africa and Developing Europe remained at lower levels, with exports rising from US\$ 359 billion to US\$ 627 billion and from US\$ 139 billion to US\$ 359 billion, respectively. All regions experienced a decline in exports during the global financial crisis of 2008-09 and the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a strong recovery.

Regional import patterns between 2006 and 2024 broadly mirror developments on the export side, with important differences in scale and volatility. Developing Asia accounted for the

largest share of developing-economy imports, rising from around US\$ 2.3 trillion in 2006 to nearly US\$ 6.6 trillion in 2024, reflecting a strong demand for intermediate and capital goods.

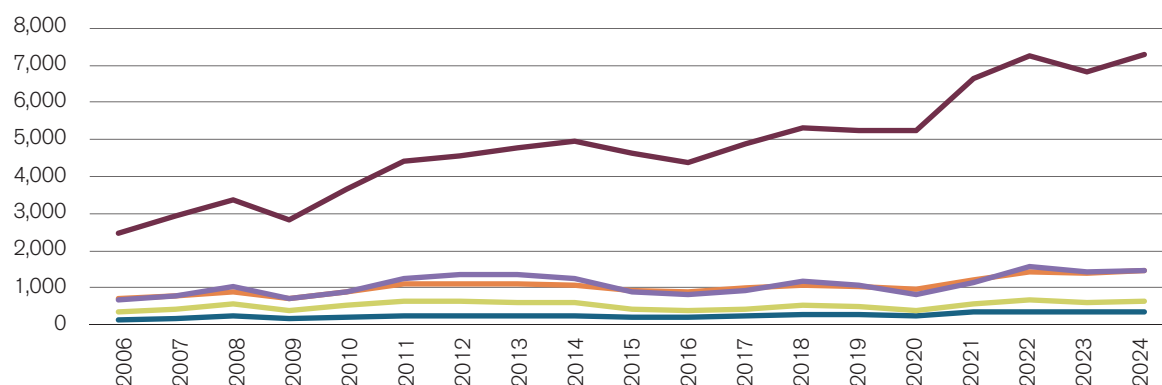
Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East were the second- and third-largest importers, recording imports of around US\$ 1.5 trillion and US\$ 1.2 trillion in 2024,

up from US\$ 631 billion and US\$ 374 billion respectively in 2006. Africa's imports increased from US\$ 302 billion to US\$ 727 billion while Developing Europe saw imports rise from US\$ 216 billion to US\$ 508 billion. While all regions recorded a strong post-pandemic rebound, import growth was particularly notable in the Middle East, reflecting strong domestic demand and investment activity.

Figure 2.8:
Regional trends in merchandise trade exports and imports, 2006–2024

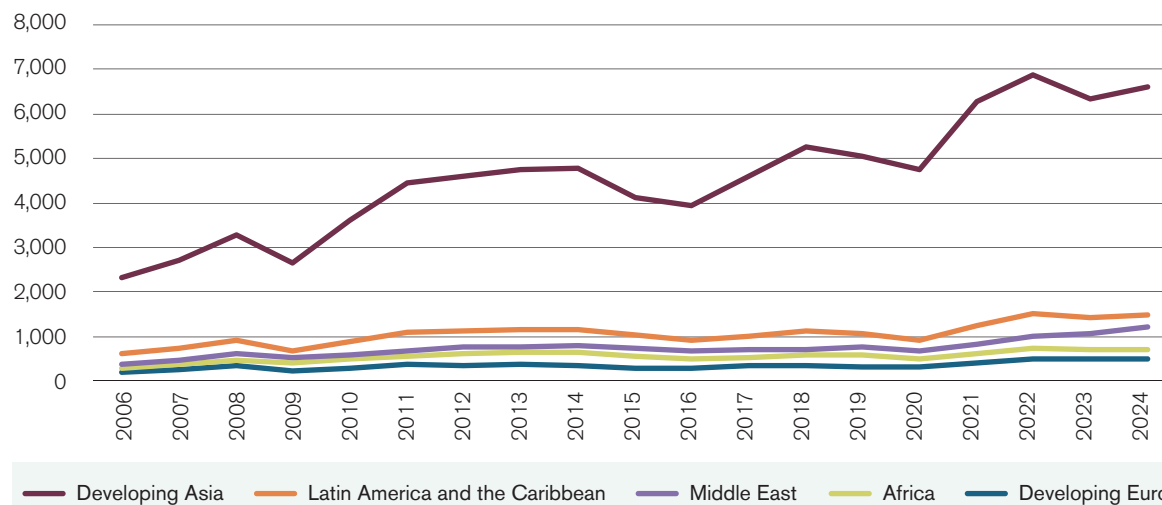
Evolution of merchandise exports by region, 2006–2024

US\$ billion



Evolution of merchandise imports by region, 2006–2024

US\$ billion



Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

Between 2006 and 2024, merchandise exports from developing economies became markedly more concentrated among the largest exporters, with China strengthening its dominant position – its share of world exports rising from 8.0 per cent to 14.6 per cent and its share of

developing-economy exports from about one-fifth to nearly one-third.⁴ Among ODA-eligible economies, while several leading exporters (such as China, Mexico and Brazil) remained among the top exporters, India and Viet Nam increased their prominence.⁵

Trade trends in small economies

Small, vulnerable economies (SVEs)⁶ have maintained a relatively stable share of global trade over the past two decades.

Their contribution to world exports have remained between 0.7 and 0.8 per cent and their import share has hovered around 1.0 to 1.1 per cent from 2006 to 2024.

While the share of developing economies as a whole in global trade has increased steadily over the same period, the position of SVEs has remained relatively unchanged. This contrast underscores the structural constraints affecting SVEs' participation in global markets.

The sectoral composition of merchandise exports remains concentrated in three main categories – manufactured goods, fuels and mining products, and agricultural goods – though their relative importance has shifted over time (see [Figure 2.9](#)).

In 2006, manufactured goods accounted for the largest share of exports (approximately 45 per cent), followed by fuels and mining products (around 34 per cent) and agricultural products (21 per cent). By 2024, this structure had become more balanced between the top two sectors,

with fuels and mining products rising to roughly 37 per cent of total exports, slightly overtaking manufactured goods (around 33 per cent), while agricultural products maintained a relatively stable share at around 30 per cent.

The increasing prominence of fuels and mining products is evident despite periods of volatility, particularly around global commodity cycles. In contrast, the declining share of manufactured goods suggests limited structural transformation towards higher value-added production.

Overall, the data point to a gradual reorientation towards resource-based exports, with implications for export concentration and exposure to commodity price fluctuations.

Services trade for SVEs has generally trended upward over the past two decades: exports rose from around US\$ 38 billion in 2005 to nearly US\$ 105 billion in 2024, while imports increased from US\$ 23 billion to around US\$ 76 billion over the same period; these figures indicate steady long-term growth with the exception of a sharp dip in 2020 at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a strong post-pandemic rebound.

Furthermore, services as a share of total trade for SVEs has generally trended upward over time, with services exports rising from around one-third of total exports in the mid-2000s to roughly 35 per cent in 2024. When examining the growth of digitally delivered services, SVE service exports increased from US\$ 5.98 billion in 2005 (0.58 per cent of the global share) to US\$ 19.7 billion in 2025 (0.37 per cent of the world total), indicating approximately 229 per cent growth in this period, paired, however, with a declining global share.

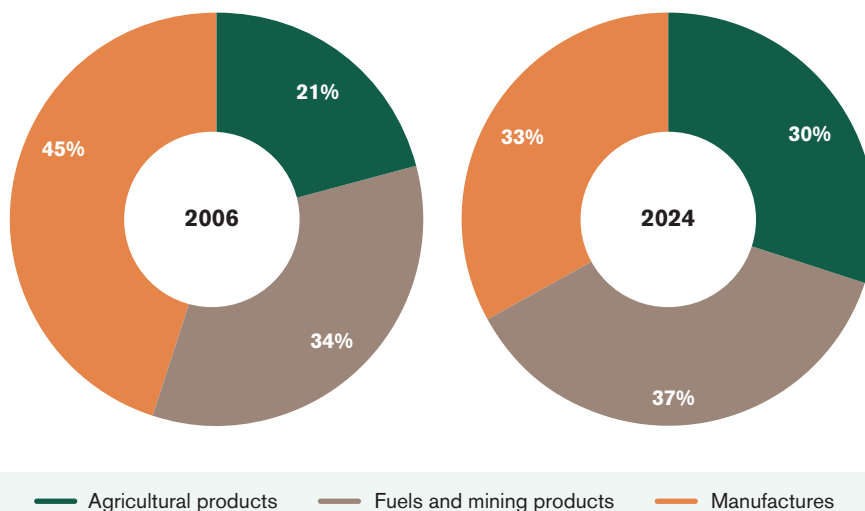
The composition of these exports has also shifted over time. In 2005, exports were relatively evenly distributed across other

business, personal, cultural and recreation services, and telecommunications services (23-30 per cent); by 2025 they were dominated by other business services (44.4 per cent) and financial services (21.3 per cent), alongside a notable rise in computer services. This evolution reflects a structural move towards more knowledge-intensive and commercially oriented activities.

Services imports have increased more gradually, rising from around 17-18 per cent of total imports in the mid-2000s to just over 21 per cent in 2024, indicating a steady but modest deepening integration into global services trade.

Figure 2.9:
Structure of merchandise exports from small, vulnerable economies (SVEs),
2006 and 2024

Percentage share



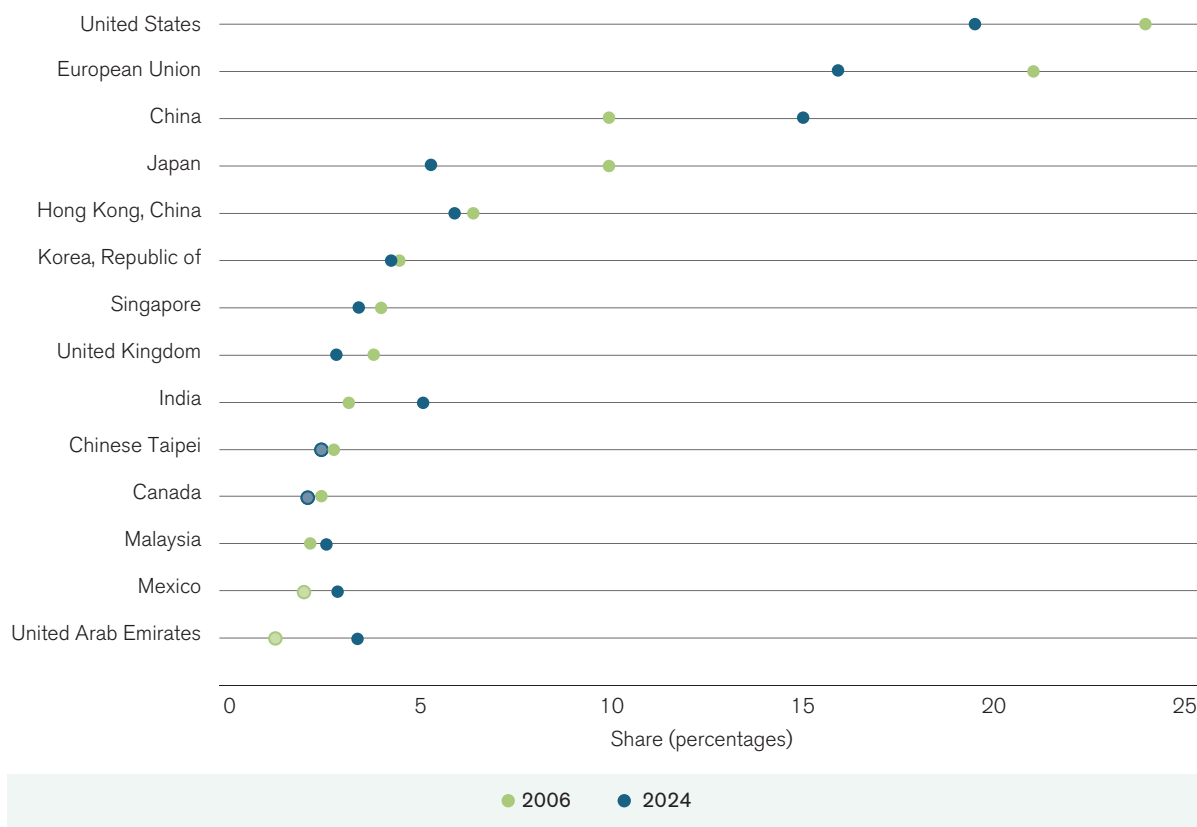
Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

Export markets

Over the past two decades, developing-economy exports have shifted towards other developing markets, underscoring the deepening of South-South trade (see [Figure 2.10](#)). The share of developing economy exports absorbed by other developing economies rose from around 52.5 per cent in 2006 to nearly 60.8 per cent in 2024, while the share going to developed economies declined correspondingly (see [Figure 2.11](#)).

In 2024, a quarter of LDC exports went to China, followed by the European Union (17 per cent), the United Arab Emirates (12 per cent), the United States (9 per cent) and India (7 per cent). In 2006, the top three destinations of merchandise exports from LDCs were the United States, the European Union and China. In 2024, five key markets accounted for 70 per cent of total LDC exports. China has become the top destination for LDC exports since 2019.⁷

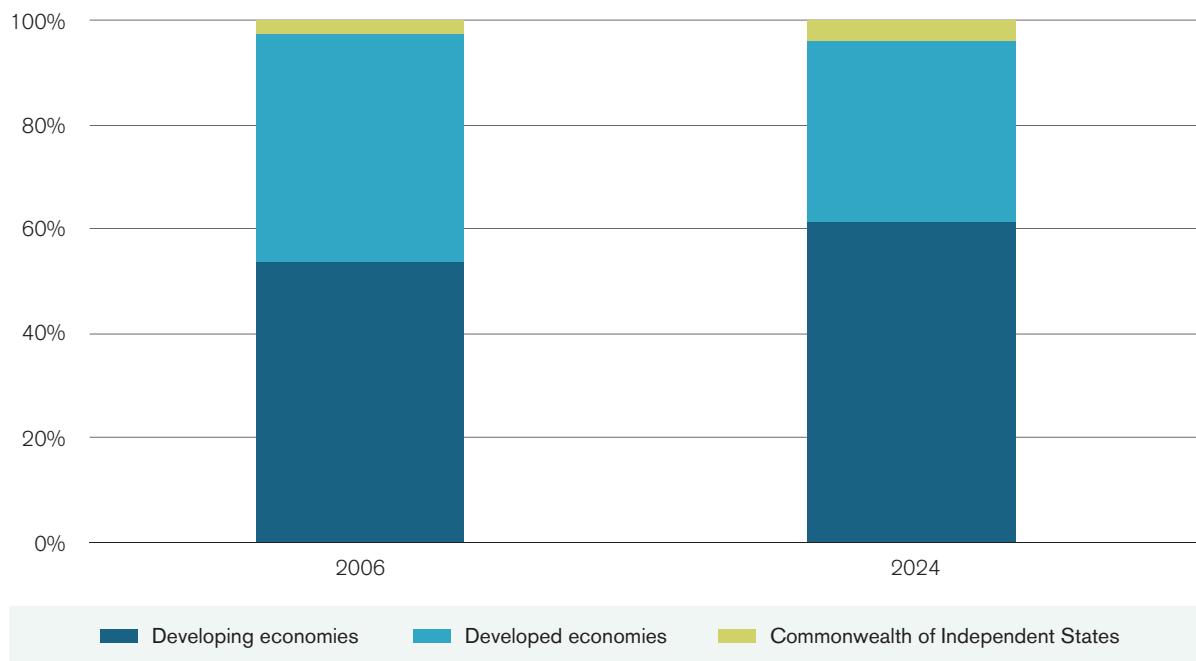
Figure 2.10:
Top markets for developing-economy merchandise exports, 2006 and 2024



Source: WTO Analytical Database.

Note: The figure includes economies appearing in either the 2006 or 2024 top 12 destination lists. Chinese Taipei and Canada ranked outside the top 12 in 2024 (14th and 16th, respectively). The United Arab Emirates and Mexico were not in the top 12 in 2006.

Figure 2.11:
Share of developing-economy exports by destination group, 2006 and 2024



Source: WTO Analytical Database.

While developing economies have increased their share of world trade, and ODA-eligible economies have also registered positive growth, their exports remain concentrated among a few economies, and most developing economies export a narrow range of products. The 2025 note by the WTO Secretariat, “Participation of developing economies in the

global trading system”, confirms the need for greater efforts towards diversification.⁸

LDC exports exhibit limited economic diversification. Within the LDC Group, Cambodia has made the most progress (see Box 2.2). While some degree of diversification has taken place, structural changes in the export profiles of LDCs have not come about.

Box 2.2:
Cambodia: Improving workforce skills, transforming textiles sector

As Cambodia prepares for graduation from LDC status, it is focusing on economic diversification.

After decades of reforms, Cambodia has met all three United Nations criteria for graduation from LDC status – income per capita, human assets and economic resilience – twice, in 2021 and in 2024. This achievement earned Cambodia a recommendation for graduation

at the UN Committee for Development Policy's 2024 Triennial Review. "The government is now seeking a five-year preparatory period, aiming for a smooth and sustainable transition by 2029," said WTO Ambassador Prasith Suon of Cambodia.

Cambodia's growth has been powered by exports – especially garments, travel goods, bicycles, and agricultural products such as rice and cashew nuts – but this success has also created vulnerabilities. "Our economy remains highly concentrated," Ambassador Suon notes. "Heavy reliance on agriculture and labour-intensive manufacturing exposes us to external shocks."

"Graduation will bring new pressures", said Ambassador Suon. Preferential market access that helped Cambodian exports compete globally will be gradually phased out. "After graduation, Cambodian exports of garments, travel goods and bicycles will face higher tariffs, stricter rules of origin and greater market competition," he added.

That is why Cambodia is actively negotiating new free trade agreements and exploring alternative preferential trading schemes to expand market access, said Ambassador Suon. At the same time, Cambodia is investing in its most valuable long-term asset: its people. "Through technical and vocational education and training, the aim is to empower 1.5 million young people in Cambodia to acquire new skills across 10 priority sectors, ranging from hairdressing to graphic design," he added.

Since 2022, Cambodia has been working to reshape its travel goods and apparel sectors into environmentally sustainable, resilient industries with higher value added – a shift designed to boost competitiveness while supporting climate and sustainability goals, noted Ambassador Suon.

"As the country approaches graduation, it continues to rely on support from its development partners during the transition, including in making the most of trade preferences, expanding its export base, reaching new markets and upskilling its people to boost productivity," he concluded.

Source: LDC success stories on WTO website, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/cssta4t-cambodia0_e.htm

Trends in commercial services trade

Exports of commercial services from developing economies quadrupled between 2006 and 2024, rising from US\$ 736.2 billion to US\$ 2.86 trillion and growing at an average annual rate of 7.8 per cent, outpacing the global average of 6.2 per cent (see [Figure 2.12](#)). Over the same period, imports

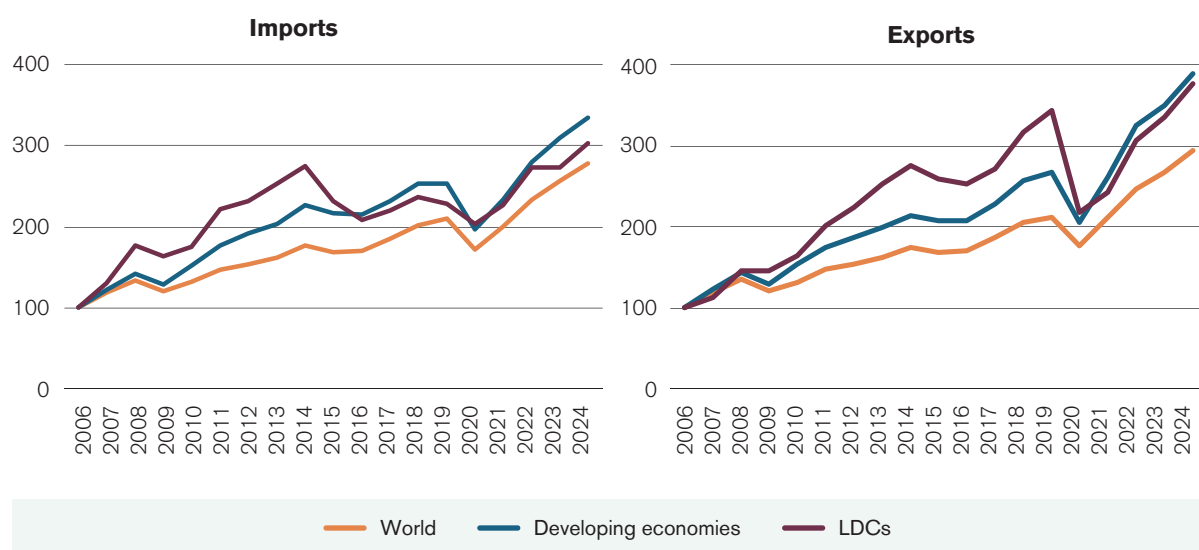
grew at an average annual rate of 6.9 per cent, reaching US\$ 2.88 trillion in 2024. Developing economies significantly increased their share of world services exports, rising from 25 per cent to 33 per cent, and their share of imports from 30 per cent to 36 per cent (see [Figure 2.13](#)).

Between 2006 and 2024, commercial services exports from developing economies became more concentrated. By 2024, the five largest exporters accounted for 53 per cent of total exports, up from 45 per cent in 2006. China remained the leading exporter, increasing its share from 12 per cent to 16 per cent, while Singapore rose to second place with a sharp rise from 8 per cent to 15 per cent. India ranked third in 2024, expanding its share from 9 per cent to 14 per cent.

The composition of commercial services exports from developing economies has shifted (see [Figure 2.14](#)). Between 2006 and 2024, exports of “other commercial services” – which covers a wide variety of services, ranging from financial to professional services – increased sixfold, reaching US\$ 1.4 trillion. Over the same period, the travel sector’s share fell from 34 per cent to 25 per cent of services export revenue, while transport declined from 26 per cent to 22 per cent, reflecting a gradual diversification away from traditional services.

Figure 2.12:
Exports and imports of commercial services from developing economies, 2006–2024

Index 2006 = 100



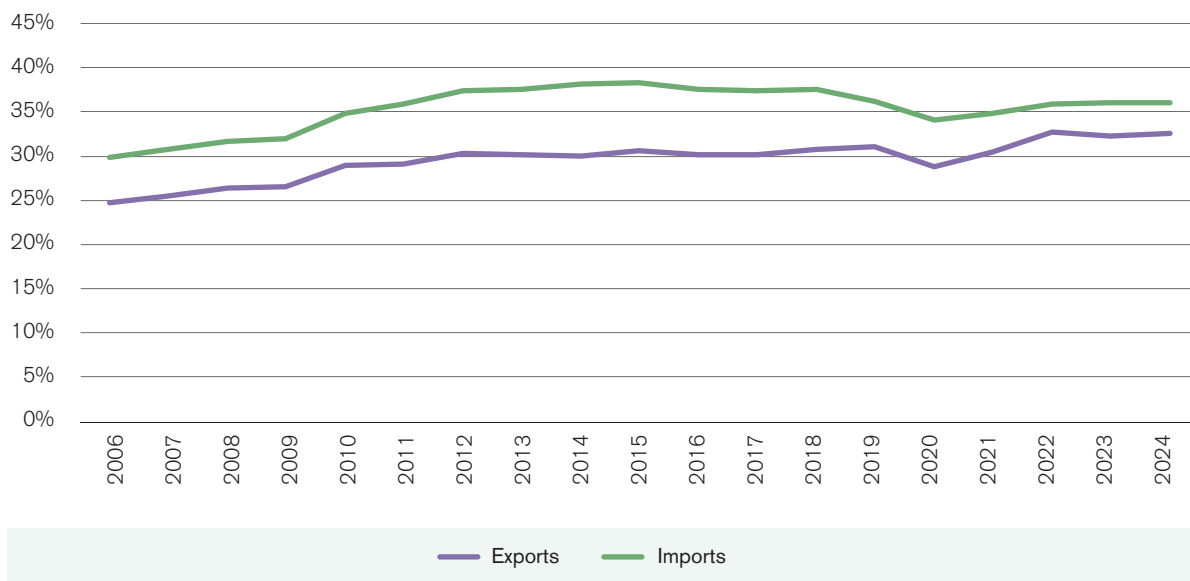
Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

The top 10 export markets accounted for 55.5 per cent of developing economies’ exports of commercial services in 2024, compared to 56.0 per cent in 2006. In 2006, the United States (16.6 per cent), Japan (6.4 per cent) and Hong Kong, China (6.2 per cent) were the top three

destinations for commercial services exports from developing economies. In 2024, the United States remained the top destination (15.4 per cent), followed by China (8.9 per cent) and Hong Kong, China (5.3 per cent).

Figure 2.13:
Share of developing economies in global commercial services trade for exports and imports, 2006–2024

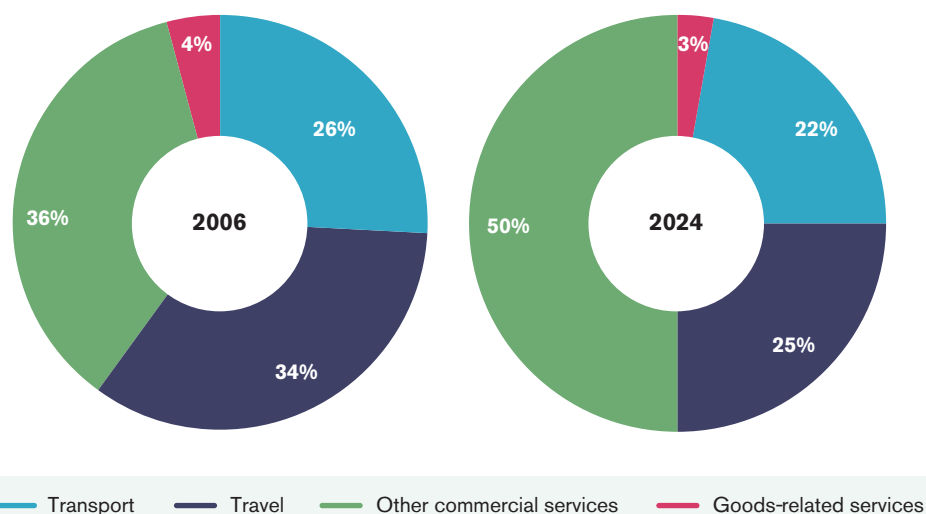
Percentage share



Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

Figure 2.14:
Structure of commercial services exports from developing economies, 2006 and 2024

Percentage share



Source: WTO-UNCTAD estimates in the WTO Global Services Trade Data Hub.

Exports of commercial services from LDCs increased almost fivefold between 2006 and 2024, rising from US\$ 9.5 billion to US\$ 47 billion and growing at an average annual rate of 7.7 per cent.

Although starting from a low base, LDCs increased their share of global services exports from 0.42 per cent to 0.54 per cent (see [Figure 2.15](#)). Over the same period, imports grew more moderately at 6.4 per cent per year, reaching US\$ 90 billion in 2024, with the share of global services imports into LDCs edging up from 1.03 per cent to 1.13 per cent.

LDC exports of commercial services became more concentrated between 2006 and 2024, with the top five exporters accounting for 57 per cent of total exports in 2024, up from 48 per cent in 2006.

Ethiopia emerged as the top exporter, increasing its share from 7 per cent to 17 per cent, while Tanzania remained second, expanding its share from 12 per cent to 15 per cent. Bangladesh rose to third place with an 11 per cent share in 2024, followed by Cambodia (10 per cent) and Uganda (4 per cent).

Figure 2.15:
Least-developed countries' (LDCs') share in global commercial services trade for exports and imports, 2006–2024

Percentage share



Source: WTO Secretariat calculations based on WTO-UNCTAD estimates.

The structure of LDCs' commercial services exports shifted markedly between 2006 and 2024. The share of travel declined from 45 per cent to 41 per cent, while other commercial services fell more sharply from 34 per cent to 20 per cent (see [Figure 2.16](#)).

In contrast, transport services expanded strongly, with their share of total services exports nearly doubling from 18 per cent to 35 per cent.

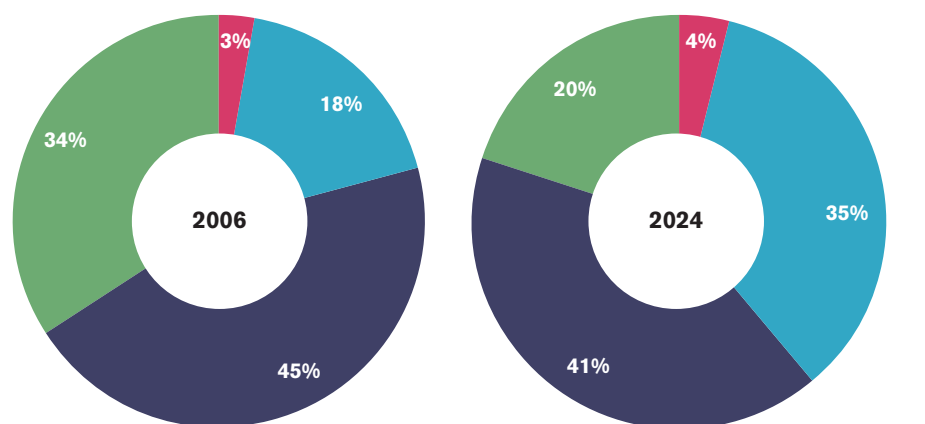
LDC exports of commercial services remain concentrated in a few markets. In 2024, 38.5 per cent went to five export

markets, compared to 35.3 per cent in 2006. In 2024, Greece was the top export market (10.4 per cent), followed by the United States (8.0 per cent) and China (7.7 per cent).

With a view to supporting greater integration of developing economies, including LDCs, into global services trade, the WTO and the World Bank – with funding from the United Kingdom – launched the Trade in Services for Development initiative in 2024, providing developing economies with tools such as the Competitiveness Diagnostic Checklist to identify services trade opportunities.

Figure 2.16:
Structure of commercial services exports from least-developed countries (LDCs),
2006 and 2024

Percentage share



— Transport — Travel — Other commercial services — Goods-related services

Source: WTO-UNCTAD estimates in the WTO Global Services Trade Data Hub.

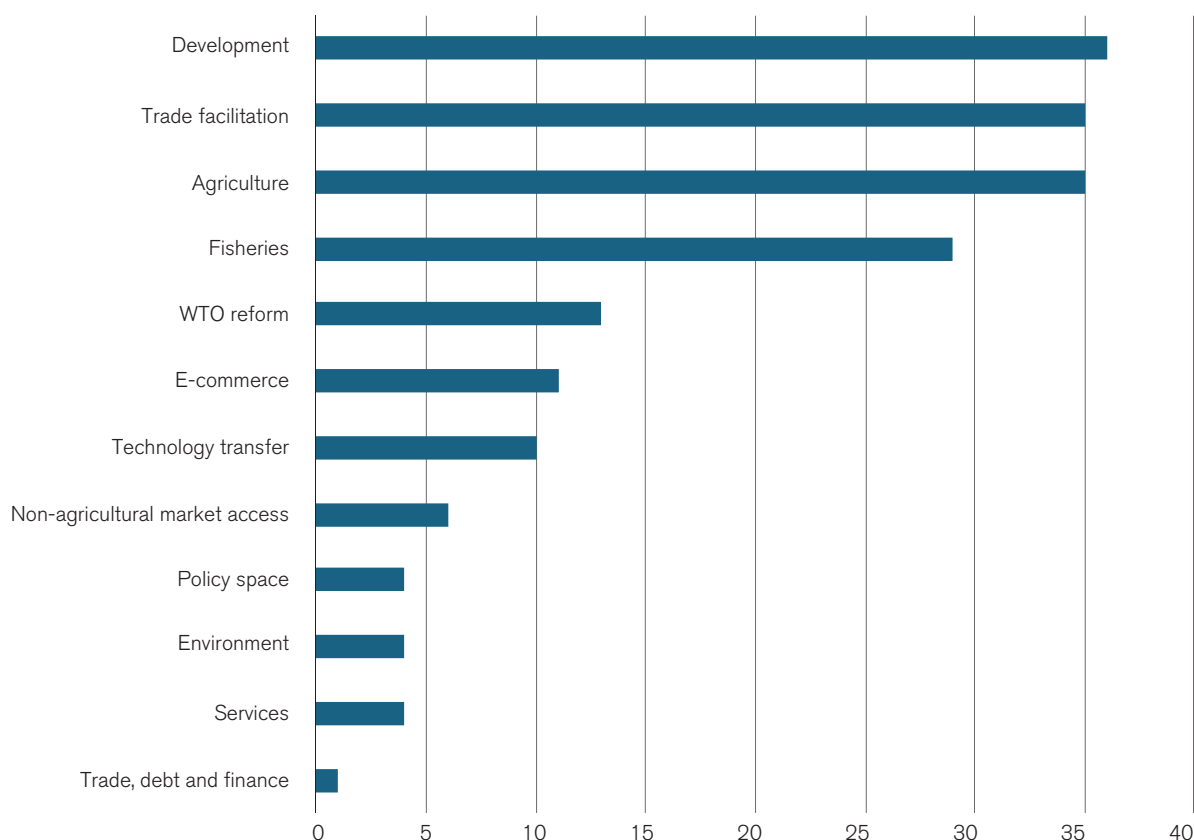
Participation of developing economies in multilateral trade negotiations

Over the past 20 years, developing economies have participated increasingly in negotiations at the WTO. The African Group, the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group and the LDC Group tabled over 200 proposals between 2006 and 2025. Development was the top area of

interest for developing members, including LDCs, followed by trade facilitation, agriculture, fisheries and WTO reform (see [Figure 2.17](#)). LDC-specific priorities included preferential rules of origin, the LDC services waiver and LDC graduation (see [Figure 2.18](#)).

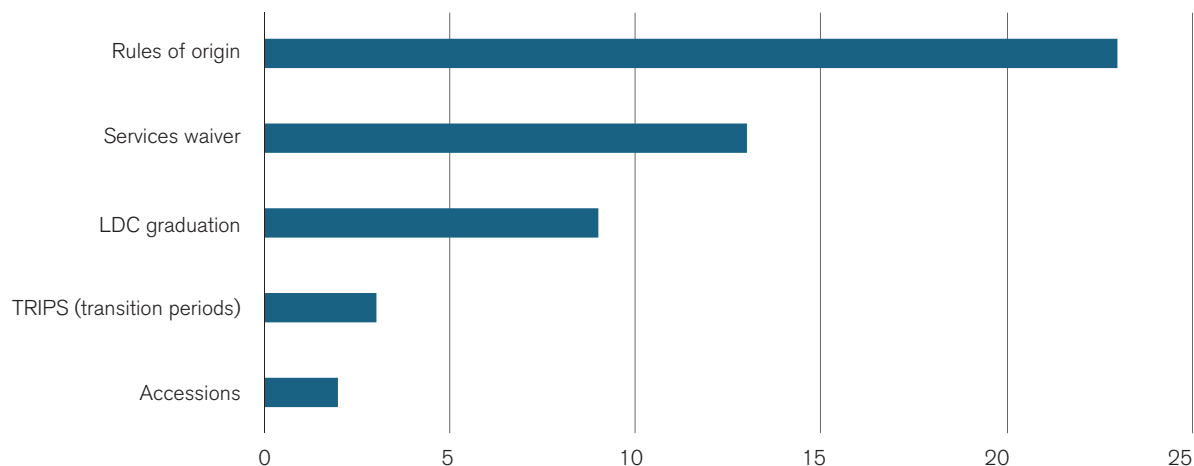
Figure 2.17:

Proposals submitted by the ACP, African and LDC groups by topic, between 2006 and 2025



Source: WTO documents online (2025).

Figure 2.18:
LDC-specific proposals by topic, between 2006 and 2025



Source: WTO documents online (2025).

The active participation of developing economies in WTO negotiations and the articulation of their priorities in trade negotiations have contributed to WTO rule-making. Over the years, WTO rules have evolved to support greater integration of developing economies, including LDCs, into world

trade. Greater emphasis has been put on the need to provide support to developing economies to implement WTO rules. This has also been reiterated in various discussions in the WTO. The Aid for Trade work in the WTO could also benefit from the ongoing reform discussions (see [Box 2.3](#)).

Box 2.3: WTO reforms and perspectives on development

The ongoing reform discussions provide an opportunity for the international community to reimagine the Aid for Trade Initiative which was launched 20 years ago.

In fact, reforming the WTO and revitalizing development work have become synonymous over the past decade. Ever since G7 and G20 leaders started reflecting on WTO reform back in 2017,⁹ members have reiterated that development should remain at the core of the WTO's work.

At the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14), in March 2026, ministers deliberated on WTO reform, covering decision-making, past mandates, development, a level playing field and broader foundational questions.¹⁰ In most of these areas developing economies put forward proposals articulating their views on WTO reform. The importance of ensuring the centrality of the development dimension was underscored at MC14.

For some time, members have been exploring new frontiers for developing economies to effectively benefit from the rules-based multilateral trading system. Members expressed a wide spectrum of perspectives. On one hand, special and differential treatment (S&DT) is still seen as a treaty-embedded right, while on the other there has been a call for S&DT to be needs-based and targeted to particular circumstances of individual developing economies. Members are also examining the effectiveness of the existing S&DT provisions and how these provisions can be better utilized. It should be noted that the approaches to S&DT have also evolved over the past decade in the context of multilateral and plurilateral agreements. Both the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), which entered into force in 2017, and the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement (IFD Agreement), which is yet to enter into force, link the implementation to each member's capacity.

Despite the progress of developing economies' participation in global trade, many remain on the margins and face formidable constraints in building trade capacity. The Aid for Trade Initiative, which primarily aimed at strengthening trade-related infrastructure, has increasingly faced resource limitations in view of several setbacks in the global economy stemming from COVID-19 and geopolitical developments. Moreover, new technologies, including rapid advances in artificial intelligence, continue to change business models for export firms, helping them stay competitive and to tap in to emerging trade opportunities. At the same time, it also creates challenges as some firms, especially in developing economies, may not have the know-how or infrastructure to keep up with new developments. These are some of the underlying forces the international community must consider in shaping the future direction of the Aid for Trade Initiative.

The post-MC14 reform discussions in the WTO can provide a space to deliberate on trade support for developing economies which is fit for purpose, including LDCs. The classic approach of relying predominantly on traditional ODA would need to be supplemented by innovative approaches, to provide more resources to respond to growing needs.

Development is also an important cross-cutting theme when members are discussing ongoing contemporary issues, including digital trade, climate change, technology transfer and the ability of developing economies to move up the global value chain. These are the areas where developing economies need more knowledge and capacity building to take informed decisions in the evolving discussions. Aid for Trade discussions in the WTO offer developing economies a valuable platform on which to build expertise and identify opportunities for trade cooperation in different formats.

Trade remains an important instrument for boosting economic growth. The viability of the multilateral trading system will be key to maintaining the growth momentum and to ensure predictability for businesses. All the reform issues, including the need for increased transparency, require support for developing economies, including LDCs. Aid for Trade can do more to help governments implement WTO rules and thereby ensure that everyone can benefit from a modern multilateral trading system.

Source: Text contributed by the WTO Secretariat.

Trade facilitation

The WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA), adopted in 2013 and which entered into force in 2017, marked a new era in how S&DT is put into practice. It allowed developing members, including LDCs, to set transition periods for implementing each provision in line with their capacity, and to identify the technical assistance and capacity-building support they would need. As a result, many developing members have been able to advance implementation at a pace that reflects their capacity.

To date, 97 per cent of developing members, including LDCs, have notified their TFA commitments across three categories: implementation upon entry into force of the Agreement; implementation after a transition period (Category B); and implementation after a transition period with technical assistance

(Category C). The Agreement also includes built-in flexibilities to address implementation challenges faced by developing members and LDCs. These include an early warning mechanism – whereby they can request a time extension if they face difficulties in meeting the dates for implementing provisions – and the possibility to shift commitments from Category B to Category C. In addition, the WTO Committee on Trade Facilitation provides a forum for members to share implementation experiences, including support provided for TFA implementation.

Furthermore, the TFA Facility was created to help developing and LDC members obtain implementation-related assistance from development partners, such as multilateral organizations (see [Box 2.4](#)).

Box 2.4:

Progress in implementing the Trade Facilitation Agreement

Trade facilitation is a high priority for Aid for Trade to support developing economies in transitioning to a competitive trade environment and to assist developing and LDC members have better market access and attract investment.

The implementation of the TFA is a catalyst for trade facilitation reforms. The Agreement contains provisions for expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. It also sets out measures for effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues.

The TFA is a new type of agreement to help developing economies embrace trade disciplines. For the first time, an agreement acknowledges that developing and LDC members must build capacity in order to implement the provisions of the Agreement. Consequently, these members can select measures for which they require assistance and capacity building, as well as request additional time. Ninety-one members have submitted more than 1,000 requests for technical assistance and capacity building (TACB) across the entire TFA. Various development partners fund TFA-related projects in many members.

The requests and provision of TACB focus on the digitalization of border procedures, including risk management frameworks. Demand for assistance related to the use of technology and adaptation to e-commerce is growing. The results achieved via TFA-related assistance include a reduction in customs clearance time, a reduction of physical inspections by customs or other border agencies, a reduction in processing time for administrative formalities and process optimization.

In Egypt, reforms of the integrated risk management framework for customs and other agencies, supported by the World Bank, have reduced physical inspection at ports by 27 per cent. Support to improve cross-border coordination and risk-based operations have reduced waiting times at the border crossing between South Africa and Eswatini from over three hours to just 20 minutes.

A project supported by the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation in Colombia reduced inspection rates for imports of food, beverages, medicines and medical devices by 30 per cent. The introduction of an electronic phytosanitary certification in Togo, supported by the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation, reduced issuing times from 3.5 hours to 30 minutes. The Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries in Tanzania adopted a digital system for the issuance of permits, which led to a reduction in the permit issuance time from 14 days to one hour.

The alignment of practices with TFA provisions requires time, extensive administrative reforms and private-public dialogue. Trained officials also need to keep pace with changes in the trade environment. In addition, trade facilitation is closely linked to other areas, including logistics and transport connectivity, digital connectivity and infrastructure more generally. This makes for a complex, multi-year reform environment requiring domestic resources, cross-government coordination, strategic guidance and the mobilization of adequate TACB from development partners.

Source: Birgit Viohl, WTO Secretariat.

Fisheries subsidies

The WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies, which was adopted in 2022 and entered into force in 2025, prohibits government support to illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. It has also adopted specific criteria to provide flexibility for a certain group of members in their notifications on fisheries subsidies.

For example, LDC members and developing members with an annual share of global volume of marine capture production not exceeding

0.8 per cent are only required to provide certain information (such as the status of fish stocks, conservation and management measures, fleet capacity, name and ID number of the subsidized vessels and catch data) every four years, to the extent possible, instead of every two years as for other members.

The Fisheries Funding Mechanism has also been established. The role of this Mechanism is to help developing members, including LDCs, implement

the provisions of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. As of July 2026, 43 project grants across a broad range of developing economies, including LDCs, totalling US\$ 5 million have been approved.

At MC14, members reiterated their commitment to continue negotiations on

further disciplines on fisheries subsidies, with a view to making a recommendation to the 15th Ministerial Conference.¹¹ Members also recognized that appropriate and effective S&DT for developing economies, including LDCs, should be an integral part of these negotiations.

Agriculture

Surveys on Aid for Trade needs have consistently underlined the importance of strengthening the agricultural sector's contribution to developing economies' export earnings. In parallel, WTO negotiations have also sought to address the needs of developing economies, including LDCs, in this sector.

The 2015 Nairobi Ministerial Decision on Export Competition marked an important step in addressing the trade priorities of developing economies, including LDCs, delivering on a key target of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal on Zero Hunger.¹² The decision phased out export subsidies for agriculture, thus contributing to levelling the playing field for farmers around the world, particularly those in the more vulnerable developing economies which were unable to compete with wealthier economies that artificially boosted their exports through subsidies.

The Nairobi Decision also provided specific flexibilities for LDCs and net food-importing developing countries (NFIDCs). These flexibilities include an extended timeline – until 2030 – to phase out export subsidies used to reduce marketing and freight costs, as well as longer repayment periods, of 36 to

54 months for export finance programmes for the acquisition of basic foodstuffs, compared to 18 months for other members.

The Nairobi Decision also includes provisions to ensure that international food aid does not hamper local market conditions in recipient economies and to promote procurement from local or regional sources, while ensuring that these disciplines do not unintentionally impede the delivery of food aid to deal with emergency situations. LDCs and NFIDCs also have the possibility to permit the monetization of international food aid to address short- and long-term food deficits, as well as situations of chronic hunger and malnutrition.

In 2022, members took further significant steps at the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in Geneva to support global food security, notably in developing economies, including LDCs, reflected in the adoption of a ministerial declaration on the emergency response to food insecurity. This declaration reaffirmed the vital role of trade to improve global food security, committing members to take concrete steps to facilitate trade and improve resilience of markets for food and agricultural products and agricultural inputs, and stressing the need to minimize

trade distortions when applying emergency measures. It also acknowledged the specific challenges faced by LDCs and NFIDCs and initiated a work programme considering their needs to increase their resilience in responding to acute food instability. Members also agreed not to impose export prohibitions or restrictions on foodstuffs purchased for non-commercial humanitarian purposes by the World Food Programme.¹³

Cotton has been another important priority in the agriculture negotiations for cotton-producing developing economies, including LDCs, following the initiative launched by a group of cotton-producing African LDCs, known as the Cotton-4.¹⁴ Developed members and developing members, in a position to do so, agreed in the 2015 Nairobi Ministerial Decision on Cotton to provide duty-free market access for cotton and related products originating from LDCs, to the extent provided in their respective preferential trade agreements.

The WTO Director-General's Consultative Framework Mechanism on Cotton provides a platform for discussion among members on the development assistance aspects of cotton. In addition, the "Cotton Partnership" – Partenariat pour le Coton – was established at the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) to help Cotton-4 plus members mobilize US\$ 5 billion in investment over a 10-year period, with estimated revenues of US\$ 7 billion per year targeting export and regional markets.

The specific challenges faced by developing economies, particularly LDCs, are also being considered in the ongoing negotiations on other areas of trade in agriculture. These relate to various aspects of agricultural trade, covering issues ranging from market access and special safeguard measures for developing economies to export restrictions, domestic support, and public stockholding for food security purposes.

Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures and technical barriers to trade (TBT)

The 2024 declaration on SPS and TBT, adopted at the 13th Ministerial Conference, marked an important step in supporting the integration of developing economies into global trade.¹⁵ This declaration called for improved technical assistance for developing economies, including LDCs, to assist them in engaging in a timely manner in matters concerning standards or technical regulations, thereby contributing to their implementation of the SPS and TBT agreements.

At MC14, members agreed that the Committee on Trade and Development in Special Session

has fulfilled its commitment to undertake the work on SPS and TBT, as instructed by ministers at MC13. It was also noted that the WTO committees on SPS and TBT may continue discussions on improving implementation of the provisions of the SPS and TBT agreements, including those related to S&DT, based on proposals from members.¹⁶

In addition, the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) has been helping developing economies comply with evolving SPS requirements.

Bolstering food safety and unlocking market access opportunities

The STDF is a global partnership which helps developing economies, including LDCs, meet international food safety, animal and plant health standards, enabling them to protect health while improving their access to regional and global markets.

At the heart of the STDF's work is the fact that when economies can meet international standards, they unlock market access, protect people and ecosystems, and create better jobs and livelihoods.

The STDF has provided over 277 grants worldwide, helping governments, farmers and businesses comply with SPS requirements and participate more fully in trade. Africa has received the largest share of support, followed by Asia, the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and multi-regional initiatives. By the end of 2025, STDF grant funding exceeded US\$ 85.2 million, with an additional US\$ 43.4 million leveraged from public and private partners. LDCs have received some 60 per cent of total funding.

The STDF combines science, innovation, capacity building and regional collaboration to facilitate safe trade while protecting public health. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, STDF-funded work on cadmium contamination in cocoa generated scientific evidence that informed Codex decisions on maximum permitted levels and a global code of practice, reducing uncertainty for exporters and facilitating market access.

An initiative with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat, implemented by the United Nations Industrial Development

Organization, is piloting digital audit and verification approaches in the fisheries sector, aimed at reducing costs and delays, while promoting more harmonized regional practices for food safety oversight.

Scalable projects in Africa, Asia and Latin America have demonstrated that integrating the use of biopesticides at the end of the growing season following the application of conventional plant protection products can significantly reduce trade risks while maintaining productivity and market access. In Southern Africa, this approach facilitated biopesticide registration and an adoption to mitigate pesticide residues. It supported the adoption of harmonized regional guidelines across all 16 Southern African Development Community member states and strengthened capacity for more than 500 farmers, scientists and regulators, illustrating how evidence-based practices and regulatory cooperation can facilitate safer agricultural trade, and benefit the planet.

Innovation has been particularly visible at border crossings. The International Plant Protection Convention ePhyto Solution, piloted with STDF support, has transformed how plant health certificates are issued and exchanged globally, cutting delays, tackling fraud, lowering trade costs and reducing CO2 emissions. Today, 148 economies are registered and 98 are actively exchanging electronic phytosanitary certificates (ePhytos). Building on this success, the STDF has supported work on electronic veterinary certification, extending benefits to the animal health trade.

The STDF's global platform and knowledge workstream brings together global expertise from diverse public and private stakeholders to share good practices, evidence and lessons from SPS capacity development. It includes founding partners, donors, developing economy experts, international and regional organizations, the private sector and civil society, supported by the STDF Secretariat and guided strategically by the STDF Policy Committee. This platform works by supporting dialogue, learning and innovation to influence policy and practice worldwide, while translating insights from project work into practical tools, guidance and practitioner exchanges that help developing economies facilitate safe, inclusive trade.

An example of this knowledge work is how evidence-based decision-making has been strengthened through the STDF's innovative Prioritizing SPS Investments for Market Access (P-IMA) framework, which helps governments prioritize SPS investments when resources are limited. In economies such as Bangladesh, Belize and Malawi, P-IMA has been used to show how SPS investments impact policy objectives, including trade growth, poverty reduction, and health and environmental benefits. This has led to more transparent choices, stronger public-private buy-in and better alignment with national development plans, in several cases unlocking substantial follow-on financing.

Engagement with the private sector is a cornerstone of the STDF's approach. As a leading actor in agri-food production and trade, private sector stakeholders have been involved as key partners in over 45 STDF projects, providing knowledge, expertise and resources, while micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, farmers, producers and traders benefit from the majority of the STDF's grants. Across horticulture,

cocoa production, fisheries and livestock value chains, public-private partnerships have improved developing economies' compliance with standards, upgraded infrastructure and strengthened the capacity of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Industry advisory groups linked to digital certification initiatives have helped ensure that solutions respond to commercial realities while maintaining public oversight.

Inclusivity and sustainability are increasingly central issues for the STDF. Projects have supported women producers and workers across agri-food value chains, from shrimp farming in Bangladesh to horticulture in Senegal. Gender analysis of participation in trade is now a core design element, leading to better targeted capacity building and fairer access to market opportunities. Environmental protection and climate resilience have also gained prominence, with work on invasive species, biodiversity and climate-related risks highlighting the role of strong SPS systems in protecting ecosystems while facilitating trade.

The STDF Strategy 2025–2030 builds on two decades of STDF experience. It aims to strengthen the STDF's focus on monitoring, evaluation and learning, scale up what works, accelerate uptake of proven tools and digital solutions, and deepen engagement with the private sector. Innovation, inclusivity and sustainability underpin the current strategy, ensuring safe trade continues to act as a catalyst for growth, resilience and sustainable development.

The STDF was created in 2004 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Health Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), the World Bank and the WTO to strengthen

developing economy capacity for safe trade. It is hosted by the WTO. The Trust Fund is currently supported by 11 donors, including Australia,

Canada, the European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United States.

Market access and policy flexibilities for LDCs

WTO members have taken several steps to bolster the integration of LDCs into global trade. Since 2006, WTO members have adopted eight ministerial decisions and 12 decisions taken in the General Council and other WTO bodies in response to the trade and development priorities of LDCs (see [Annex 2.2](#)).

Currently, most developed members and several developing members provide full or almost full duty-free market access to LDCs. For example, Australia, China, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland offer them 100 per cent duty-free market access. Chile, the European Union and the United Kingdom offer over 99 per cent duty-free market access to LDCs. In addition, Hong Kong, China; Macao, China; and Singapore grant duty-free market access on all or almost all of their tariff lines on the most-favoured-nation basis.

Furthermore, members established two sets of guidelines, in 2013 and 2015, with a view to making preferential rules of origin simple and transparent.¹⁷ Rules of origin are the criteria used to determine where a product is made; they are used in the implementation of many trade measures, including trade preferences.

Most of the preference-granting members notified preferential rules of origin using the WTO template adopted in 2017, while the Committee on Rules of Origin (CRO) has been tracking LDCs' use of preferences. In 2022, the CRO adopted a decision on preferential rules of origin and the implementation

of the 2015 guidelines, aimed at identifying and agreeing upon best practices by all members on preferential rules of origin and analysing preference utilization.¹⁸ The WTO LDC Group has been benefiting from targeted support in this area. For example, United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has been providing capacity building so that LDCs can benefit more fully from the implementation of the two guidelines. This has also helped LDCs to engage in committee discussions in an effective manner.¹⁹

Steps have also been taken to expand opportunities for LDC services suppliers. In 2011 WTO members adopted the LDC services waiver,²⁰ which allows members to grant preferential treatment to services suppliers from LDCs. Members agreed to promote the operationalization of the waiver in 2013,²¹ and in 2015 they extended the waiver up to 2030.²²

So far, 51 WTO members (counting the European Union Member States individually) have notified measures under the LDC services waiver. The top sectors range from business services (92 per cent) and transport (84 per cent) to tourism and travel (80 per cent). Some of the measures include visa waivers for businesspersons, e-visa applications, authorized destination status for tourism purposes and designation of specific contact points. LDCs continue to receive support to explore preferences for LDCs and LDC service suppliers.²³

LDCs' active engagement in the WTO has also helped them to secure longer time frames to

implement WTO rules. LDCs are exempt from implementing the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, except core non-discrimination provisions, until 1 July 2034 or until they graduate from the LDC category, whichever comes first. Also, they are not required to protect patents and undisclosed information for pharmaceutical products until 1 January 2033, or until they leave the LDC category, whichever comes first.

Many of the LDCs who have benefited from trade opportunities offered by the multilateral trading system have demonstrated improvements in socio-economic indicators and embarked on the path to graduation from the LDC category. Securing a smooth and sustainable transition after graduation has become an important priority for the LDC Group in the WTO. In the past three years, WTO members have taken two important steps.

First, WTO members have encouraged preference-granting members to provide a smooth and sustainable transition period before withdrawing duty-free market access. Several preference-granting members, including China, the European Union, Japan, Kazakhstan, the Russian Federation, Türkiye and the United Kingdom, have already done so. Others are considering such measures. Second, at the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) in 2024, WTO members offered economies graduating from LDC status a three-year transition period to fully implement WTO rules and to continue accessing the WTO's technical assistance.

The work of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), the only multilateral Aid for Trade partnership for LDCs' trade development, has been helping LDCs strengthen trade institutions and bolster productive sectors with high export potential.

Twenty years of bolstering trade institutions in LDCs

Housed at the WTO, the Enhanced Integrated Framework draws together 44 LDCs, 26 development partners, and eight international organizations.

Since 2008, the EIF has disbursed over US\$ 340 million to support LDCs' trade ministries, deliver evidence-based trade diagnostics and strengthen productive sectors. Support for trade policy and regulations is at the heart of the EIF's work, accounting for around 40 per cent of the EIF portfolio.

At country level, the EIF has established National Implementation Units in 45 LDC trade ministries, placing LDCs in the driver's seat to coordinate Aid for Trade and manage project delivery. The EIF

has supported 55 Diagnostic Trade Integration Studies (DTIS) across 45 LDCs, with 85 per cent of LDCs using DTIS findings to set trade priorities in national development plans. Today, 45 LDCs have mainstreamed trade into their development strategies. Furthermore, an independent evaluation attributes around 25 per cent of all trade reforms in LDCs to EIF support.

Following the completion of the first two phases of the initiative, a task force for the future of the EIF was set up. Its report recommended a third phase of the EIF aimed at raising US\$ 200 million for LDC trade development by 2031.²⁴ The launch of EIF Phase 3 took place on the eve of MC14. The new phase introduces a strengthened results framework, a revamped resource mobilization strategy and

greater flexibility for LDCs in accessing support, with initial pledges totalling US\$ 37.9 million. In July 2026, WTO members welcomed the launch of the

EIF Phase 3 and confirmed that the implementation of EIF will not involve any cost to the regular budget of the WTO.²⁵

WTO accessions

Since 2006, 17 members have joined the WTO. They include Viet Nam (2007), Tonga (2007), Ukraine (2008), Cabo Verde (2008), Montenegro (2012), Samoa (2012), the Russian Federation (2012), Vanuatu (2012), Lao PDR (2013), Tajikistan (2013), Yemen (2014), Seychelles (2015), Kazakhstan (2015), Liberia (2016), Afghanistan (2016), Comoros (2024), and Timor-Leste (2024) (see [Box 2.5](#)).

To facilitate the accession of LDCs, WTO members adopted two sets of LDC accession guidelines, in 2002 and 2012.²⁶ These guidelines set benchmarks for market access negotiations in goods and services, alongside provisions on S&DT, transition periods for implementing WTO agreements and technical assistance.

Box 2.5:

Timor-Leste: Targeting regional and global markets

After joining the WTO, Timor-Leste has focused on strengthening competitiveness and discovering new markets

Timor-Leste acceded to the WTO in 2024. Since then, it has been aligning its national framework with the realities of modern global trade. As part of its post-accession strategy, it has already approved a government resolution on rules of origin and prepared draft laws on competition policy, export promotion and industrial property. Its Trade Information Portal has been helping businesses navigate international markets.

Timor-Leste has also been making progress in meeting WTO commitments. “We are up to date on applied tariff and import licensing requirements. We are also making steady progress on our trade facilitation notifications. The real secret has been our mindset: learning-by-doing,” said Timor-Leste Ambassador António da Conceição. In 2025, Timor-Leste became the first LDC to kick-off negotiations to join the WTO’s Government Procurement Agreement with an ambition to table its market access offer by mid-2026.

Timor-Leste’s accession to the ASEAN in 2025 marked another important milestone for trade integration with its neighbours. “We see WTO and ASEAN memberships as mutually reinforcing, providing long-term stability and a strong foundation for our economic development and regional integration,” added Ambassador da Conceição.

Source: LDC success stories on the WTO website, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/timorlestessldc_e.htm

Technical assistance

Strengthening the institutional capacity of trade experts from developing economies, including LDCs, has been a central pillar of WTO's technical assistance work. Since 2006, the WTO Secretariat has helped over 178,000 government officials sharpen their skills in trade-related topics, with women accounting for almost half of all participants (45 per cent).

An evaluation of WTO technical assistance covering the period 1995–2021 provided the first comprehensive, evidence-based assessment of how trade-related capacity building contributes to long-term trade outcomes. The findings underscore that Aid for Trade delivered through trade policy and regulatory assistance is most effective when it goes beyond awareness-raising to build advanced, operational capacity among public officials.

One of the clearest lessons from the evaluation is that depth of learning matters. Technical assistance structured around progressive learning pathways, particularly advanced-level activities, has a markedly stronger impact on how developing economy officials engage with WTO processes. Advanced activities, which typically involve more specialized content, applied exercises and sustained engagement, are associated with significantly higher participation in WTO bodies than introductory training alone. This suggests that Aid for Trade is most effective when it supports officials not only to understand WTO rules, but also to apply them in practice within their domestic administrations.

The evaluation further highlights that participation in WTO bodies through notifications of trade measures is a critical transmission channel between capacity building and trade performance. Notifications are a core transparency obligation

under WTO agreements and a practical expression of regulatory capacity. The analysis shows that advanced technical assistance is particularly effective in increasing notification compliance, and that participation in WTO bodies through the submission of formal notifications under WTO agreements has the strongest and most consistent association with improved trade outcomes among developing economies and LDCs. This finding reinforces the idea that regulatory transparency is not merely a compliance exercise, but a foundation for predictable trade relations that support exports and imports alike.

Many developing economies and LDCs carry a significant backlog of unfulfilled notification obligations, often reflecting capacity constraints rather than a lack of commitment. The evaluation shows that economies with higher notification activity, particularly in areas such as agriculture, market access and services, tend to perform better in trade terms. By helping officials understand notification requirements, organize domestic data and engage with WTO committees, Aid for Trade delivered by the WTO Secretariat contributes directly to reducing trade bottlenecks and strengthening the regulatory environment for trade.

The results also point to important differences across policy areas, offering valuable lessons for the future of Aid for Trade. Technical assistance in SPS measures stands out as particularly effective.

SPS-related capacity building shows stronger effects on participation in WTO bodies than most other topics, especially when delivered through innovative approaches which have been pioneered by the WTO SPS team, such as coaching, action plans and structured follow-up over time. These

methods appear to be especially successful in translating training into concrete regulatory outputs, including notifications and substantive engagement in WTO committees. The SPS experience demonstrates how Aid for Trade can maximize impact by combining technical content with sustained, practice-oriented learning.

Another key insight from the evaluation is that the structure of the assistance matters more than how it is delivered. While e-learning has expanded the reach of Aid for Trade and performs well in many areas, advanced and sequenced learning activities, regardless of delivery mode, show the strongest links to improved trade performance. This finding highlights the importance of learning design, progression and follow-up.

Taken together, the evidence paints a coherent picture of how Aid for Trade in trade policy and regulation delivers impact. By strengthening the capacity of officials to engage with WTO

rules in a practical and sustained manner, WTO technical assistance supports more effective participation in the multilateral trading system. This participation, particularly through notifications, enhances transparency, predictability and confidence among trading partners, contributing over time to improved trade performance.

WTO members have established various programmes to help developing economies, including LDCs, participate more actively in the work of the organization. These range from the United Kingdom's Trade and Investment Advocacy Fund²⁷ to China's LDCs and Accessions Programme and day-to-day support to the LDC Consultative Group through the work of Summit Alliance International.²⁸ The expertise offered by the Advisory Centre on WTO Law (ACWL) has also been essential in strengthening the trade capacity of developing economies, including LDCs (see [Box 2.6](#)).

Box 2.6: **Strengthening developing economies' legal capacity to trade**

The Advisory Centre on WTO Law has played a central role in enabling developing economies and LDCs to participate more effectively in the multilateral trading system and to take advantage of the opportunities associated with WTO membership.

The creation of the ACWL reflected a shared understanding among its developed and developing economy founders that the WTO operates as a complex, rules-based legal system requiring specialized expertise. For reasons of independence and impartiality, the ACWL was set up outside the WTO itself; it has since delivered more than 4,000 legal opinions and has assisted in more than 70 WTO disputes.

Developing economies that are WTO members or in the accession process may become ACWL members and use its services (42 do so at present). These economies pay a one-off accession fee.

They receive legal advice and training free of charge and fees paid for assistance in dispute settlement are substantially below commercial rates. In addition, any economy designated by the United Nations as

an LDC that is a member of the WTO or acceding to the organization may access the ACWL's services without becoming an ACWL member (43 do so at present).

The ACWL's day-to-day work of responding to requests from governments entitled to its services for advice on a wide range of issues relating to WTO law is arguably its most valuable contribution. Although many governments rarely engage in WTO disputes, all require ongoing legal advice in relation to their participation in the multilateral trading system.

The ACWL provides legal opinions on WTO law free of charge at the request of developing economy members and LDCs, and on a strictly confidential basis. These opinions address questions of law only; the ACWL does not provide political advice and is not permitted to develop or pursue its own positions or agenda on issues arising in the WTO. The ACWL responds to requests for around 200 legal opinions from approximately 40 governments each year, giving them access to "in-house" expertise on WTO law comparable to that available to developed economies.

Opinions may concern the daily functioning of the WTO and the legal dimensions of ongoing negotiations. Many governments request advice from the ACWL on their existing or proposed domestic laws and regulations and on the extent to which they are consistent with WTO rules. This enables them to ensure compliance with their WTO obligations. Governments also ask the ACWL to advise on the WTO-consistency of measures in other economies that affect their market access. In the words of one LDC user, "[The] ACWL's services are very effective ... for a better understanding and enforcement of commitments under international trade rules. We appreciated their responsiveness, their availability and the depth of their analyses of the legal issues."

Training is another key pillar of the ACWL's work and is also free for eligible governments. The ACWL conducts a range of training programmes for officials from developing members and LDCs based in Geneva, in English and French. The ACWL also organizes tailored, country-specific seminars delivered either in Geneva, by videoconference, or in national capitals. Additional initiatives include a discussion group for women delegates in Geneva and a secondment programme under which government lawyers may work at the ACWL as paid trainees for a nine-month period each year.

In 2024, the ACWL General Assembly agreed to reduce its accession fees. Several developed economy members, including Australia, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway and the United Kingdom, have provided funding for additional developing economies to join the ACWL. Three new members joined in 2025 (Barbados, Belize and Ghana), with further accessions expected in 2026.

The ACWL was established in 2001 to promote inclusivity, fairness and equality within the WTO trading system by providing legal assistance, advice and training to developing members, including LDCs.

Source: Olga Falgueras del Alamo, ACWL.

Support has been provided to help developing members, including LDCs, set up permanent missions in Geneva. A total of 154 members and 21 observers now have a presence there (see [Box 2.7](#)). For non-resident delegations from developing economies, including LDCs, the WTO Secretariat organizes “Geneva

Weeks” every two years, which enable these delegations to get the latest updates on different areas of the WTO’s work. Forty Geneva Week events have been held since 1999, with the participation of over 1,400 delegates, with women comprising 37 per cent of recorded participants.

Box 2.7:

Samoa: Building a pathway to global markets

What began as one young official’s first international trip became a national pathway into the multilateral trading system.

“My recommendation is that if you are a WTO member and you want to engage, you need to do it as a resident – but Geneva Week helps bridge the gap.”

– H.E. Nella Tavita-Levy, Ambassador of Samoa to the WTO

For many non-resident WTO members, Geneva Week serves as an important bridge into the day-to-day work of the multilateral trading system. Samoa’s experience illustrates how repeated engagement through Geneva Week, technical assistance and sustained participation in WTO processes, can strengthen national trade capacity over time.

As Samoa’s Ambassador (Amb.) to the WTO, H.E. Nella Tavita-Levy, has seen this evolution first hand over the course of her career in trade policy. When she joined the Department of Trade, Commerce and Industry in 1999 as a young trade officer, Samoa had recently applied for WTO membership, in April 1998. At the time, the system was distant and technical. Participation in a trade policy course for least-developed countries soon provided an opportunity to engage internationally and gain exposure to the multilateral trading system.

By 2003, she was Principal Trade Policy Officer, suddenly immersed in WTO processes which she describes as “overwhelming but transformative”. That immersion never really stopped. Regular participation in WTO Geneva Weeks, ministerial conferences and bilateral meetings gradually deepened Samoa’s institutional fluency in Geneva’s trade ecosystem, as well as Amb. Tavita-Levy’s own experience navigating it.

During Samoa’s accession, Geneva Week became more than a calendar event; it was a working tool. It allowed officials to combine accession working party and bilateral meetings, tap directly in

to the WTO Accessions Division, and translate Geneva-based discussions into clarity back home. What once felt remote from the capital became concrete and actionable.

The payoff was immediate. Samoa moved from drafting trade-related measures in relative isolation to systematically checking new policies against WTO rules. Over time, this discipline helped produce the country's first unified trade policy document – a significant shift in how trade governance worked at home.

Amb. Tavita-Levy also credits WTO technical assistance and repeated exposure to Geneva with building national confidence. Samoan officials returned home better equipped to negotiate – multilaterally, regionally and bilaterally – and better prepared to explain trade policy domestically.

For Amb. Tavita-Levy, having a mission in Geneva, established in 2022, enables the deepest engagement. But for non-resident members, Geneva Week and other technical assistance are indispensable: structured, efficient ways to stay connected to negotiations, people and emerging issues that shape global trade.

Samoa's experience highlights how sustained exposure to these processes can strengthen domestic trade policy-making over time. Samoa's story shows that in global trade, access is not just about markets. It is about being in the room – and having a pathway to get there.

Source: Interview with Ambassador Nella Tavita-Levy of Samoa by Roberta Allport, WTO Secretariat.

Regional integration

Trade support has helped boost regional integration. Between 2006 and 2024, 208 regional trade agreements (RTAs) were signed with the participation of at least one developing economy, of which 88 were RTAs between developing economies. During this period, US\$ 2.5 billion has been disbursed to support regional integration efforts.

The proliferation of RTAs has also encouraged developing economies, especially in certain regions, to enter into integration arrangements. This has increased demand for understanding evolving trade disciplines and for implementing them.

For example, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) aims to accelerate continental integration. Estimates vary, but once fully implemented, the AfCFTA is expected to increase intra-African trade by up to 25 per cent by 2040 (UNECA, 2022), boost income by up to 7 per cent by 2035 and lift an additional 30 million people from extreme poverty (World Bank, 2020).

The AfCFTA builds on WTO disciplines by liberalizing 90 per cent of tariffs, allowing longer implementation periods for LDCs, aligning its SPS and TBT frameworks with WTO rules to address non-tariff

barriers and streamline notifications, and advancing services trade through market access opening. The AfCFTA also includes disciplines on intellectual property, competition, investment, digital trade and

economic empowerment of women and young people. Aid for Trade efforts have been helping AfCFTA member states to negotiate and implement the Agreement and to improve regional infrastructure (see [Box 2.8](#)).

Box 2.8:

TradeMark Africa: Unlocking the continent's trade potential

By driving down trade costs, TradeMark Africa is helping African exporters trade at a faster pace and compete globally.

Africa's trade potential has long been constrained by lack of infrastructure, fragmented regulations and non-tariff barriers within the continent and beyond. TradeMark Africa works with governments, regional economic communities and development partners to tackle these constraints, investing in cross-border infrastructure, digital trade systems and harmonized standards and protocols.

The results are tangible. "For the One-Stop-Border-Posts we have supported, the time needed to cross the border has been reduced by an average of 70 per cent. At the ports of Mombasa and Dar Es Salaam, the time has been cut in half," says TradeMark Africa CEO David Beer.

Delivering a substantive reduction in trade barriers requires an integrated approach. "This means ensuring that all the pieces of successful trade facilitation are done together: the hard infrastructure; the digital systems; standards and other protocols; liaison between government and the private sector; and effective trade policy," Mr Beer notes.

With the implementation of the AfCFTA, these gains can be scaled up continent-wide. "TradeMark Africa is supporting AfCFTA implementation within and across regional economic communities by helping the Secretariat implement its vision. It is also assisting members at the national level and putting in place cross-border trade facilities and digital systems," says Mr Beer.

Looking ahead, market demands are changing. Consumers are looking at ways that products are made and transported. "Trade facilitation for the future must also help Africa become a pioneer in developing green exports and adopt climate resilient infrastructure," says Mr Beer. "We envisage bringing partners together around a US\$ 210 million green corridor programme that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in trade corridors while helping to safeguard the continent's economic future," he adds.

Source: LDC success stories on the WTO website, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/tmeassldc_e.htm

Trade support is also being provided to help developing economies co-operate on issues of common interest. For example, members of ASEAN recently completed negotiations on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement, with a view to achieving greater regulatory coherence and facilitating digital trade in the region, which is expected to be signed at the 49th ASEAN Summit in November 2026. Meanwhile, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), with support from

the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre, aligned its tariff system with the Harmonized System (HS) 2022, creating a more consistent and up-to-date classification of products across all members (see [Box 2.9](#)). In addition, with the support of the European Union, CARICOM created a regional database of non-conforming measures (NCMs) across services, non-services sectors, and horizontal policy areas such as taxation, investment and company formation.

Box 2.9: **CARICOM – building a regional single market**

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which is made up of 15 member states and 6 associated members, aims to advance regional integration through the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, promoting the movement of goods, services, capital and selected labour alongside coordinated economic policies and support for less-developed members.

CARICOM economies represent a regional market of approximately 19 million people, with a combined GDP of US\$ 121.2 billion. While the region is increasingly services-oriented, with imports of US\$ 20.7 billion, high food import dependence (US\$ 4.25 billion) highlights persistent structural vulnerabilities and reliance on external trade.²⁹

As a WTO-notified customs union and economic integration arrangement, CARICOM covers trade in goods and services alongside broader single-market disciplines. It complements its internal single market with a network of trade agreements with regional and international partners.³⁰ Separately, CARICOM member states, together with the Dominican Republic under the Caribbean Forum, have concluded economic partnership agreements with key economies such as the European Union and the United Kingdom.³¹ Together, this institutional architecture provides the framework through which CARICOM engages with external partners and supports regional integration within the multilateral trading system.

Regional trade integration in practice

CARICOM's integration framework is not only defined by agreements, but also put into practice through targeted, hands-on projects led by the Secretariat with support from international partners. One example is the modernization of the Common External Tariff for goods. With support from the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre, CARICOM aligned its tariff system with the Harmonized System (HS) 2022, creating a more consistent and up-to-date classification of products across all members. This helped reduce discrepancies in how goods are classified at

borders, making trade within the region smoother and more predictable, while also improving interactions with external partners. The process also highlighted the importance of strong coordination at the national level and preparedness within customs administrations.

A complementary example of support for services and investment liberalization is the EU-funded CARICOM Secretariat initiative to identify and classify non-conforming measures (NCMs), which combines policy analytics with durable capacity building.

Completed in June 2025, the study undertook a comprehensive legislative and regulatory audit across key sectors,³² as well as regimes governing taxation, investment, landholding and company incorporation. The project produced a regional database that can be used to support trade negotiations and guide policy reforms. Importantly, it also included training and a shared methodology, enabling members to update and expand this work over time. This combination of practical analysis and capacity building has strengthened CARICOM's ability to design and implement trade policy in a sustained way.

Source: Roberta Allport, WTO Secretariat.

While some progress has been made to support developing economies in negotiating and implementing trade agreements, further efforts are needed to provide cutting-edge factual analysis, with a view to identifying emerging

trade issues that could be taken forward in future negotiations. Sharing experiences grounded in local realities can provide valuable insights on the various challenges developing economies face in integrating into regional and global trade.

Strengthening capacity to trade

The WTO was 10 years old when the Aid for Trade initiative saw the light of day at the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference in 2005. At that time, many of the transition periods included in the Uruguay Round agreements with a view to helping developing economies implement trade rules had lapsed. In addition, developing

economies were also concerned that they could not benefit from market access opening because they did not have sufficient capacity to export.

In order to implement the results of the negotiations and to build necessary capacity,

Aid for Trade was created. Its primary objectives were to help developing economies negotiate and implement trade rules and tackle adjustment costs resulting from greater participation in global trade, thereby helping to strengthen the global trading system with the WTO at its core.

Since 2006, US\$ 795 billion has been disbursed in Aid for Trade, reflecting its continued importance. Most of it has been disbursed to bolster infrastructure and productive capacity in developing economies, including LDCs. At the same time, only 3 per cent has been channelled into trade policy and regulation, an area which is of critical importance for helping developing economies make better use of the WTO.

Over the past 20 years, Aid for Trade discussions have evolved given the shifting landscape of global trade, including technological breakthroughs and geopolitical developments. Serving as a forum for coordination, the WTO has regularly taken stock of global Aid for Trade efforts, including through the Global Reviews of Aid for Trade held every two years and the joint WTO-Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development “Aid for Trade at a Glance” reports. Themes reviewed over the past 20 years range from resource mobilization and Aid for Trade results to value chain integration, trade costs and connectivity, and more recently, diversification, inclusion and sustainability. During this period, the initiative’s goal of using trade integration to help developing economies, including LDCs, fully realize their trade potential has remained core to its activities.

Early “Aid for Trade at a Glance” reports underscored the importance of transparency, accountability and alignment with country ownership principles. It was also underlined that Aid for Trade could deliver tangible gains in trade performance, economic growth and poverty reduction, especially when

anchored in national development strategies. Since then, many developing economies, including LDCs, have integrated trade into their national development plans.

As global trade became increasingly digitalized and more fragmented in recent years, Aid for Trade priorities have evolved to address emerging constraints facing developing economies, including LDCs. The reports highlighted that integrating into global value chains required more than export growth; it depended on efficient logistics, access to finance, skills development, and supportive regulatory frameworks aligned with business needs. Persistently high trade costs – driven by inefficient border procedures and infrastructure gaps – continued to limit participation in world trade, particularly for LDCs and small businesses, making full implementation of the WTO’s Trade Facilitation Agreement critical.

At the same time, digital connectivity has emerged as a key driver of competitiveness and inclusion. Closing the digital divide through investment in information and communications technology infrastructure, enabling regulations, and public-private partnerships, is considered essential to ensure that Aid for Trade supports the inclusive integration of developing economies into global markets.

The role of the initiative in promoting diversification and fostering resilience, sustainability and inclusion has featured prominently in recent years, particularly in response to global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitical uncertainty and extreme weather events. The findings of the early reports suggest that developing economies continue to rely on trade integration to achieve structural transformation and economic diversification.

Roadmap to the 20th anniversary: reinforcing trade potentials

Implementation of Aid for Trade projects over the past two decades has helped WTO members identify practical ways of making the WTO's Aid for Trade work more relevant to their evolving needs. Building on members' feedback, the Chair of the WTO Committee on Trade and Development, Ambassador Ram Prasad Subedi of Nepal, devised the "Roadmap to the 20th anniversary: reinforcing trade potentials" to set the framework for Aid for Trade work in the run-up to its 20th anniversary.³³

The roadmap emphasizes the need to let more voices from beneficiaries and development partners be heard, with a view to sharing knowledge in the Aid for Trade forum.

In 2025, members shared experiences on Aid for Trade interventions regarding trade policy and regulations and took stock of global Aid for Trade efforts. Representatives from Australia, Barbados, Burundi, Cambodia, Canada, China, the European Union, Japan, Lao PDR, the United Kingdom, as well as the EIF, the International Trade Centre, the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat, the Standards and Trade Development Facility and TradeMark Africa, provided insights into Aid for Trade efforts and practices, with the aim of encouraging greater integration of developing economies, including LDCs, into global trade.

The discussions highlighted the importance of country ownership and demand-driven

trade support to strengthen the participation of developing economies, including LDCs, in trade negotiations and in global trade.

Better coordination between the WTO and capitals was seen as essential to improve policy coherence and maximize the impact of Aid for Trade. Proactive engagement in capitals, however, was also considered important for prioritizing trade development solutions responsive to local contexts.

Knowledge sharing was identified as a critical driver of trade development. While many developing economies already have technical capacity, access to information on global best practices, trade disciplines and export development tools helps tailor solutions to national development needs.

Members' experiences emphasized that small, targeted and co-created interventions – involving governments, the private sector and donors – can have long-term impacts on investment and competitiveness. For example, the African Union Development Agency and Japan International Cooperation Agency have been implementing the Africa Kaizen Initiative aimed at bolstering the competitiveness of African businesses.

Continuous productivity and quality improvements, as well as adaptive, locally grounded solutions, were considered key, with the Pacific Aid for Trade Strategy cited as a positive example (see [Box 2.10](#)).

Box 2.10:**Pacific Islands Forum: Making trade work across the Pacific****By pooling resources, Pacific economies are working together to cut trade barriers and boost competitiveness.**

The Pacific is home to some of the world's most remote economies. Small domestic markets, vast distances to export markets, and high trade costs have limited the region's competitiveness. To tackle these shared constraints, Pacific trade ministers adopted the Pacific Aid for Trade Strategy in 2020, focusing on e-commerce, services, connectivity and regional integration.

Since then, economies have pooled resources to turn strategy into action. The Pacific E-commerce Strategy is helping firms sell goods and services to customers far beyond their shores. "About a quarter of the 54 priority measures – ranging from harmonized e-commerce laws to skills training and expanded information technology (IT) infrastructure – have already been implemented," says Andrea Giacomelli, Advisor at the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. At the same time, Rapid Trade in Services Assessments are helping governments cut regulatory barriers and identify new export opportunities.

Meeting international standards has also been critical. Through the Pacific Quality Infrastructure initiative, regional standards have been developed for cassava production and energy-efficient buildings, while work continues to upgrade kava and apiculture value chains. "These include ensuring quality standards and improving export opportunities with support from development partners, including Australia, the European Union, the EIF and the STDF," said Mr Giacomelli.

Trade facilitation remains a priority. With implementation rates of the TFA hovering around 42 per cent, the Pacific Regional Trade Facilitation Strategy sets out 22 regional actions to improve border controls, speed up customs clearance, and expand electronic information exchange.

The approach is deliberately pragmatic. "Our work in the region provides a good example of how to do more with less," Mr Giacomelli says. "We focus on a limited set of long-term initiatives and regional actions that our members can pursue by pooling resources, with coordinated support from donors and implementing agencies," he adds.

Source: Challenges and success stories on the WTO website, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/cssta4t-pacificislands_e.htm

The important role of preferential market access for developing economies, including LDCs, was reaffirmed by WTO members. They also emphasized the need for better dissemination of information to SMEs on how to effectively use trade preferences

and comply with rules of origin associated with preference schemes. Strengthening trade support networks and export development programmes was also seen as vital for helping SMEs exploit market opportunities (see [Box 2.11](#)).

Box 2.11:
Lao PDR: Building trade pathways for Lao exporters

By leveraging South-South cooperation, Lao PDR is connecting its entrepreneurs to consumers worldwide.

For decades, geography has shaped the economic story of Lao PDR. With no direct access to the sea and limited transport connectivity, moving goods beyond its borders has often come at a high price. Logistics costs have been steep, infrastructure underdeveloped and access to global markets constrained – particularly for SMEs.

Lao PDR's partnership with China was part of the solution to improve infrastructure and strengthen Lao's capacity to trade. One key breakthrough has been progress on SPS compliance – often a hidden barrier for agricultural exports.

“With Chinese support, Lao PDR has built disease control laboratories and monitoring stations. As a result, 35 agricultural products – 31 plant species and four animal species – now meet SPS requirements and are being exported to Chinese consumers,” said Sengdeun Sayasone, Director-General in the Cabinet Office of the Laos–China Cooperation Committee.

The launch of the Lao-China railway, in 2021, has increased daily freight traffic from two trains to 18, connecting Lao PDR with 19 economies and regions, including China, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. “It has been a game changer,” Mr Sayasone says.

Beyond moving goods more quickly and cheaply, the railway has brought broader social and economic benefits. Railway vocational colleges are helping participants develop local technical skills, while resettlement villages along the route are boosting livelihoods in surrounding communities.

Physical infrastructure is only part of the story. Digital trade is emerging as another critical lever for a landlocked economy. Lao PDR has upgraded the IT systems within the Ministry of Industry and Trade, built e-commerce platforms and deployed a national fibre-optic backbone under the Digital Silk Road initiative. “These tools are giving our small and medium-sized enterprises a digital gateway to global markets,” says Mr Sayasone.

Source: Challenges and success stories on the WTO website, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/cssta4t-laopdr_e.htm

Discussions among WTO members have also pointed to a tectonic shift from grants to large-scale investment partnerships which offer access to significantly larger pools of finance by mobilizing private capital. This approach is

considered key for expanding infrastructure development opportunities, while at the same time placing a spotlight on the need for creating an enabling environment for trade and investment (see Box 2.12).

Box 2.12: Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement

The Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement aims to help developing economies, including LDCs, make investment policies more transparent and to streamline investment-related procedures with a view to attracting and expanding foreign direct investment.

The initiative began in 2017, when a group of developing economy and LDC WTO members started discussions on investment facilitation for development. The structured discussions began after the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, when 70 members sponsored a Joint Ministerial Statement which aimed at developing a multilateral framework on investment facilitation.

In February 2024, the text of the Agreement on Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD Agreement) was finalized by the participating members and made public. The Agreement aims to improve the business environment by cutting red tape and simplifying investment-related procedures. Currently, more than three quarters of WTO members, including around 90 developing economies and LDCs, are member parties to the IFD Agreement.

The IFD Agreement follows a similar approach to the TFA on special and differential treatment. It provides implementation flexibilities for developing and LDC member parties tailored to their individual capacity and resources. The Agreement allows for self-designation of provisions according to three categories: A) implementation upon entry into force; B) implementation after a transition period; and C) implementation after a transition period with the provision of technical assistance. Additional flexibilities are granted to LDC members.

With support available for needs assessments, developing and LDC member parties can define a specific transition period for each provision of the Agreement consistent with their implementation capacity, and identify the technical assistance and capacity building required for its implementation. As of April 2026, 27 needs assessment projects had already been undertaken.

At the end of the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference in Cameroon in 2026, the 129 member parties to the Agreement issued a Ministerial Declaration underlining the importance of integrating the IFD Agreement into the WTO rulebook. Members called for timely implementation of the Agreement and for collective efforts to be intensified to advance IFD needs assessments and relevant technical assistance, as well as capacity building for the implementation of the IFD Agreement.

Source: Oscar Douglas, WTO Secretariat.

Looking ahead, discussions continue to highlight that Aid for Trade support should be more tailored to local contexts and address both traditional trade

challenges and emerging priorities, such as digital trade, inclusiveness and transition to net zero carbon emissions.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL)

Most Aid for Trade projects are implemented at the country level with diverse monitoring and evaluation models. There is no single monitoring and evaluation framework to assess effectiveness and the impact of different types of projects in support of trade development.

Members' deliberations have identified the need for greater attention to MEL, with a view to maximizing the impact of trade development interventions. The need to define the purpose of MEL in accountability or learning was considered as the first step. Learning was deemed especially valuable for strategic decisions and continuous improvement. A suggestion was made to replace long static reports with interactive dashboards. It was also recommended that MEL be integrated into strategy refreshes and budget planning.

Establishing the logic behind any intervention was also considered essential. Evolving a Theory of Change co-created with relevant stakeholders was thought to be vital for guiding trade development projects. Embedding learning in design, engaging stakeholders throughout and integrating evaluation from the start were highlighted as cornerstones of strong MEL practice.

Prioritizing evaluation criteria, reducing and focusing evaluation questions, and integrating cross-cutting issues where most relevant were considered important in developing agile MEL frameworks. Using established definitions and methods, including trade and investment flows, can keep key performance indicator measurements consistent. Meanwhile, impact metrics related to growth and poverty reduction often require costly modelling or surveys. A mixed-methods approach, combining portfolio data with thematic and country

case studies, was recommended to boost rigour. Quantifying qualitative data further strengthens aggregation, comparison and overall learning.

Leadership commitment and broad stakeholder participation throughout the process were seen as vital for effective MEL. Early alignment between funders and national partners, and balanced decision-making that empowers field teams while retaining central oversight and real-time monitoring, to support quick course-correction and better outcome tracking, were considered among the main drivers of efficiency. Examples of strong MEL practices included the STDF, the Fisheries Funding Mechanism and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, all of which apply expert-driven, collaborative MEL systems to design, assess and measure programme outcomes.

It was also noted, however, that limited technical capacity, uneven data standards, weak sectoral data systems, and difficulty of linking project activities to broader development outcomes were among the main challenges in using MEL systems to drive continuous improvement.

Key lessons learnt emphasized the need to focus on the data that inform decision-making while adapting standardized MEL frameworks to local realities. Building a sustainable MEL ecosystem requires strengthening local capacity through targeted training, adopting modern digital data systems, and embedding MEL across national and sectoral plans. Success hinges on clear policies and standards, adequate resources and basic results-based management training, combined with strong follow-up mechanisms to ensure recommendations lead to real improvements.

Looking ahead

The trends in developing economies' trade over the last two decades, the quality of integration into world trade, and the evolution of negotiations and discussions in the WTO offer some pointers to the Aid for Trade initiative going forward. It is evident that gaps continue to persist in trade capacity in an ever-increasing complex trading environment.

International trade has continued to face formidable challenges in view of the pandemic and geopolitical tensions associated with fragmentation and conflicts. This has had an impact on the delivery of trade capacity-building support. The evolving global economic situation means that donor governments and multilateral institutions have to address a variety of pressing challenges facing the international community. New commitments in ODA are affected by all these developments, with resources directed increasingly towards humanitarian purposes or non-economic objectives. As a result, development cooperation policies are being shaped by these trends.

It is in this context of declining ODA, and an impending need to look at domestic priorities in the economies of development partners, that the future of Aid for Trade needs to be reimagined, according to WTO members.³⁴

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development systematically tracks the delivery of Aid for Trade. Most of the Aid for Trade resources are provided through bilateral channels and established mechanisms between the donor and the recipient. WTO members review the outcome of these endeavours.

WTO discussions on Aid for Trade remain crucial for shining a spotlight on the needs of developing economies. In recent years, Aid for Trade discussions have allowed WTO members to share best practices and to gain insights into the realities on the ground. Meanwhile, funding decisions remain within the remit of the development cooperation ministries or agencies in donor capitals.

A potential area for improvement for the Aid for Trade initiative could be better coordination between officials working in capitals and delegates working in Geneva, WTO members have stressed.³⁵ The coordination challenge is also acute within economies, as ODA is dealt with mostly by finance ministries, whilst trade matters are vested in departments of trade. For instance, a concessional loan from the World Bank would traditionally be the responsibility of an economy's finance ministry, with the trade ministry having to compete with other ministries, such as health and education, for the allocation of this funding.

All these challenges underscore the need to make maximum use of available resources that can be allocated to trade capacity building. Past Aid for Trade surveys have revealed that developing economies continue to need physical infrastructure support. At the same time, in view of the evolving nature of production and trade, increased support for new areas, such as digital trade, is emerging as a priority.³⁶ Improving infrastructure must go hand in hand with efforts to address skills gaps and to seize the opportunities arising from digital trade and new forms of trade cooperation, experts have emphasized.³⁷ The need for support in the areas of trade policy and regulations has been increasingly highlighted in recent Aid for Trade discussions.³⁸

WTO members have stressed that all possible avenues for mobilizing resources for developing economies need to be explored. For some years, South-South cooperation has been helping developing economies realize tangible gains, especially in the context of regional integration. As preferences provided by developed economies diminish, and graduation from LDC status becomes more likely for many economies, the latter need to explore new export markets. This can lead to trading opportunities with economies beyond the region.

Over the past 20 years, Aid for Trade support for economic infrastructure and productive capacity building has mainly consisted of long-term engagement with international financial institutions based on the modalities agreed with them by the recipient government. Such support is widely considered to be aimed at economy-wide efficiency improvements, and may not generate a new trade activity per se. It is therefore important to focus on providing support directly to the trade sector, as members have emphasized.³⁹ This support can be in the form of promoting the development of tradeable goods, institutional strengthening or trade policy support (in the areas of trade negotiations or WTO agreement implementation).

To generate a bigger pool of resources, development partners have started to reorient their approach to development interventions. For example, the European Union launched its Global Gateway strategy in 2021, with a view to strengthening sustainable infrastructure globally through a public-private partnership approach.⁴⁰ One of its flagship initiatives is the Lobito Corridor railway project, which aims to connect mineral-rich Zambia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Angola to global markets.⁴¹ This type of

strategic partnership is a model that can be replicated in other regions to create opportunities for increased trade. The Global Gateway also prioritizes digital connectivity and energy transition, which require substantial investments in developing economies.

The principles of country ownership and partnerships remain essential for trade capacity building, as underscored by WTO members.⁴² The tightening of development cooperation budgets emphasizes the need to attract all possible sources of funding. One option is to explore partnerships with institutions that have the mandate to work with the private sector to broaden access to resources and to provide the relevant expertise. An example is the Cotton Partnership, launched by the WTO and FIFA in 2024, to help the Cotton-4 economies (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali) tap into the opportunities offered by global sports-apparel value chains. This kind of initiative can help developing economies boost their productive sectors, thereby improving trade prospects.

In line with the Roadmap to the 20th Anniversary, mobilizing alternative sources of funding, including from the private sector, has been an area of member discussions.⁴³ It was determined that while official development assistance has helped build the foundation, private sector partnerships and capital can complement public efforts in supporting trade expansion.

The discussions highlighted that multilateral development banks have been shifting from a traditional “aid” model toward an “investment partnership” model, where public finance is used more strategically to mobilize private capital. Capital-intensive assets such as ports, roads, railways, border facilities, logistics hubs and multimodal corridors were identified as well suited

for public-private partnerships. At the same time, it was noted that private financing can only make a difference when accompanied by effective trade facilitation and regulatory reforms.

A regional example from the Caribbean underscored that the core challenge is not simply access to capital. It is about preparing projects that investors can support. This means integrating bankability into the project design from the beginning, including by adding revenue streams that make ports and logistics projects financially viable.

It was acknowledged that concessional Aid for Trade funding could absorb risks private investors cannot take on, helping to unlock larger private investment, including through guarantees. In this context, success shifts from disbursements made, to investment that has been mobilized – and to how well funds can be reused over time. Such an approach could bring essential resources to support the needs of developing economies, for them to adjust to the changing nature of world trade and to remain competitive in the global market.

Annex 2.1: Composition of groups

DEVELOPING ECONOMIES include:

Latin America (including the Caribbean):

- Mexico (classified within North America in the WTO's World Trade Statistical Review);
- Central America: Belize; Costa Rica; El Salvador; Guatemala; Honduras; Nicaragua; and Panama;
- South America: Argentina; Bolivia, Plurinational State of; Brazil; Chile; Colombia; Ecuador; Guyana; Paraguay; Peru; Suriname; Uruguay; and Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of;
- The Caribbean: Antigua and Barbuda; Bahamas; Barbados; Cuba; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Grenada; Haiti; Jamaica; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; and Trinidad and Tobago.

Non-EU south-eastern Europe:

- Albania; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Moldova, Republic of; Montenegro; North Macedonia; Serbia; Türkiye; and Ukraine.

Africa:

- North Africa: Algeria; Egypt; Libya; Morocco; and Tunisia.
- Sub-Saharan Africa: Angola; Benin; Botswana; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cabo Verde; Cameroon; Central African Republic; Chad; Comoros; Congo; Côte d'Ivoire; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Djibouti; Equatorial Guinea; Eritrea; Eswatini; Ethiopia; Gabon; The Gambia; Ghana; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Kenya; Lesotho; Liberia; Madagascar; Malawi; Mali; Mauritania; Mauritius; Mozambique; Namibia; Niger; Nigeria; Rwanda; Sao Tomé and Príncipe; Senegal; Seychelles; Sierra Leone; Somalia; South Africa; South Sudan; Sudan; Tanzania; Togo; Uganda; Zambia; and Zimbabwe.

Middle East:

- Bahrain, Kingdom of; Iran; Iraq; Israel; Jordan; Kuwait, the State of; Lebanese Republic; Oman; Qatar; Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of; Syrian Arab Republic; United Arab Emirates; and Yemen.

Developing Asia:

- Afghanistan; Bangladesh; Bhutan; Brunei Darussalam; Cambodia; China; Fiji; Hong Kong, China; India; Indonesia; Kiribati; Korea, Republic of; Korea, Democratic People's Republic of; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Macao, China; Malaysia; Maldives; Micronesia, Federated States of; Mongolia; Myanmar; Nauru; Nepal; Pakistan; Palau; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Samoa; Singapore; Solomon Islands; Sri Lanka; Chinese Taipei; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Tonga; Tuvalu; Vanuatu; and Viet Nam.

DEVELOPED ECONOMIES include:

North America (excluding Mexico for this report):

- Canada; United States of America.

Developed Europe:

- Andorra; Austria; Belgium; Bulgaria; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Denmark; Estonia; Finland; France; Germany; Greece; Hungary; Iceland; Ireland; Italy; Latvia; Liechtenstein; Lithuania; Luxembourg; Malta; Netherlands; Norway; Poland; Portugal; Romania; Slovak Republic; Slovenia; Spain; Sweden; Switzerland; and United Kingdom.

Developed Asia:

- Australia; Japan; and New Zealand.

COMMONWEALTH OF INDEPENDENT STATES (CIS) including certain associate and former member states include:

- Armenia; Azerbaijan; Belarus; Georgia; Kazakhstan; Kyrgyz Republic; Russian Federation; Tajikistan; Turkmenistan; and Uzbekistan.

Annex 2.2: LDC-specific decisions taken in favour of least-developed countries

27 May 2009	Preferential Tariff Treatment for Least-Developed Countries (WT/L/759) – Decision on Extension of Waiver The decision extended the waiver contained in Decision WT/L/304 allowing developing economies to provide preferential tariff treatment to LDC products until 30 June 2019.
17 December 2011	Preferential Treatment to Services and Service Suppliers of Least-Developed Countries (WT/L/847) The services waiver decision allowed members to provide preferential treatment to services and service suppliers of LDCs with respect to market access (Article XVI) and, subject to approval by the Council for Trade in Services, any other measures.
17 December 2011	Accession of Least-Developed Countries (WT/L/846) The decision directed the Sub-Committee on LDCs to develop recommendations to further strengthen, streamline and operationalize the 2002 accession guidelines (WT/L/508).
25 July 2012	Accession of Least-Developed Countries (WT/L/508/Add.1) The 2012 accession guidelines included provisions to strengthen, streamline and operationalize the 2002 accession guidelines. The guidelines established benchmarks on market access negotiations on goods and services, and provisions with respect to special and differential treatment (including transition periods), transparency and technical assistance.
11 June 2013	Extension of the Transition Period under Article 66.1 for Least Developed Country Members – Decision of the Council for TRIPS (IP/C/64) The decision constituted the second extension of the transition period under Article 66.1 of the TRIPS Agreement (first extension: IP/C/40). The decision allowed LDCs to delay the implementation of the TRIPS Agreement other than the core non-discrimination provisions (Articles 3, 4 and 5) until 1 July 2021.

28 June 2013	WTO Work Programme for the Least-Developed Countries (WT/COMTD/LDC/11/Rev.1) Like the LDC Work Programme of 2002 (WT/COMTD/LDC/11), the revised work programme focused on seven systemic questions for LDCs, including market access issues, technical assistance and capacity-building initiatives and accessions. The revision included, <i>inter alia</i>, the incorporation of the United Nations Istanbul Programme of Action for LDCs for the Decade 2011–2020.
07 December 2013	Preferential Rules of Origin for Least-Developed Countries (WT/L/917) The decision provided for multilateral guidelines for preferential rules of origin to help LDCs better use preferences accorded to them. The decision encouraged members to draw upon elements of the guidelines when developing the rules of origin of their preferential market access schemes for LDCs.
07 December 2013	Operationalization of the Waiver Concerning Preferential Treatment to Services and Service Suppliers of Least-Developed Countries (WT/L/918) The decision outlined the process for the operationalization of the services waiver (WT/L/847). It also recognized the need to strengthen LDCs' domestic services capacity to make use of existing opportunities and any preferences in the future.
07 December 2013	Duty-Free and Quota-Free (DFQF) Market Access for Least-Developed Countries (WT/L/919) According to the decision, developed economy members that do not yet provide DFQF market access for at least 97 per cent of products originating from LDCs, shall seek to improve their DFQF coverage prior to the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference. Developing economy members, declaring themselves in a position to do so, shall seek to provide DFQF market access for products originating from LDCs, or to seek to improve their DFQF schemes prior to the 10th WTO Ministerial Conference.
06 November 2015	Extension of the Transition Period under Article 66.1 of the TRIPS Agreement for Least Developed Country Members for Certain Obligations with respect to Pharmaceutical Products (IP/C/73) The decision of the TRIPS Council extended the transition period for implementation of Sections 5 and 7 of Part II of the TRIPS Agreement with respect to pharmaceuticals until 1 January 2033 or until such a date on which an LDC ceases to be a least-developed country member, whichever date is earlier.
30 November 2015	Least Developed Country Members – Obligations under Article 70.8 and Article 70.9 of the TRIPS Agreement with respect to Pharmaceutical Products (WT/L/971)

	The decision of the General Council exempts LDC members from the application of mailbox requirements and exclusive marketing rights for the same time period until 1 January 2033 or until such a date on which they cease to be an LDC member, whichever is earlier.
19 December 2015	Preferential Rules of Origin for Least Developed Countries (WT/MIN(15)/47, WT/L/917/Add.1)
	The decision provided guidance for rules of origin with regard to the assessment of substantial transformation, cumulation possibilities and documentary requirements.
19 December 2015	Implementation of Preferential Treatment in Favour of Services and Service Suppliers of Least Developed Countries and Increasing LDC Participation in Services Trade (WT/MIN(15)/48, WT/L/982)
	The decision extended the LDC services waiver until 2030 and instructed the Council for Trade in Services to monitor the operation of preferences notified to the WTO.
02 March 2017	Decision on Template for the Notification of Preferential Rules of Origin for Least Developed Countries (G/RO/84)
	The decision provided a template for notifications of preferential rules of origin.
14 June 2019	Request for Extension of the Waiver for Preferential Tariff Treatment for Least Developed Countries (G/C/W/764)
	The waiver contained in the decision of 15 June 1999 (WT/L/304) is extended until 30 June 2029.
29 June 2021	Extension of the Transition Period under Article 66.1 for Least Developed Country Members (IP/C/88)
	The decision constituted the third extension of the transition period under Article 66.1 of the TRIPS Agreement. The decision allowed LDCs to delay the implementation of the TRIPS Agreement other than the core non-discrimination provisions (Articles 3, 4 and 5) until 1 July 2034 – or when a particular economy ceases to be in the least-developed category if that should happen before 2034.
23 October 2023	General Council Decision on Extension of Unilateral Duty Free and Quota Free Preferences in favour of Countries Graduated from the LDC Category (WT/L/1172)
	The decision encourages preference-granting members to provide a smooth and sustainable transition period in accessing duty-free and quota-free market access.

2 March 2024	Ministerial Decision – WTO Smooth Transition Support Measures in favour of Countries Graduated from the LDC Category (WT/L/1189) MC13 LDC graduation decision gives LDC graduates three additional years to adjust to WTO rules and disciplines, and access to LDC-specific technical assistance.
14 July 2026	General Council Decision – Special and Differential Treatment Agreement Specific Proposals (Paragraph 8 Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration (WT/MIN(24)/DEC) and Paragraph 4 of WT/MIN(24)/36; WT/L/1191) (WT/L/1245) The Decision indicates that the Committee on Trade and Development, Special Session has fulfilled its commitment to undertake discussions to improve implementation of S&DT under the TRIPS Agreement. It also notes that any further discussions on improving implementation of the provisions of the TRIPS Agreement may continue in the Council for TRIPS based on proposals from members.
14 July 2026	General Council Decision – Enhanced Integrated Framework (WT/L/1246) The Decision welcomes the launch of EIF Phase 3 which will run until December 2031 and confirms that the implementation of the EIF will not involve any cost to the regular budget of the WTO.

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UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) (2022), "AfCFTA to significantly increase traffic flows on all transport modes", available at <https://www.uneca.org/stories/african-continental-free-trade-area-%28afcfta%29-to-significantly-increase-traffic-flows-on-all>.

World Bank (2020), "The African Continental Free Trade Area: Economic and Distributional Effects", Washington, D.C.: World Bank Group, available at <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/216831595998182418>

Endnotes

- 1 See the statistical definition in Annex 1.
- 2 ODA-eligible developing economies are defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and available on the following link: <https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/topics/policy-sub-issues/oda-eligibility-and-conditions/DAC-List-of-ODA-Recipients-for-reporting-2025-flows.pdf>. The non-ODA eligible economies include some economies that have a significant share of exports, i.e., Republic of Korea and Singapore.
- 3 Sectoral shares are calculated using export-weighted totals, adding up reported sectoral exports across economies and dividing by total merchandise exports. In 2006, sectoral disaggregation is missing for several LDCs, predominantly small exporters, while two larger exporters (the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Myanmar) report total merchandise exports without sectoral detail. As a result, the pie charts – which only reflect economies with complete sectoral reporting – differ from the export-weighted shares, which account for total merchandise exports. Differences between the two measures reflect data coverage and reporting constraints in the early period rather than changes in underlying trade structure.
- 4 Greater concentration among the largest exporters is also observed for landlocked developing countries (LLDCs). Merchandise exports of LLDCs grew on average by 5.8 per cent between 2006 and 2024, reaching US\$ 286.7 billion in 2024. LLDCs' share in world merchandise exports increased from 0.86 per cent in 2006 to 1.17 per cent in 2024. Within the LLDC group, the top 10 exporters accounted for 74.4 per cent of the LLDC group's exports. Between 2006 and 2024, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan remained the top exporters. Meanwhile, Mongolia increased in prominence.
- 5 Hong Kong, China; Korea, Republic of; and Singapore are also among the top exporters, but they are non-ODA eligible economies.
- 6 WTO members (32): Antigua and Barbuda; Barbados; Belize; Bolivia, Plurinational State of; Cabo Verde; Cuba; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; El Salvador; Fiji; Grenada; Guatemala; Guyana; Honduras; Jamaica; Maldives; Mauritania; Mauritius; Mongolia; Nicaragua; Panama; Papua New Guinea; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Samoa; Seychelles; Sri Lanka; Tonga; Trinidad and Tobago; Vanuatu.
WTO observers negotiating accession (1): Bahamas.
- 7 WTO official document: WT/COMTD/LDC/W/68.
- 8 WTO official document: WT/COMTD/W/301.

- 9 2017 G20 Leaders' Declaration available at https://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2017/2017-G20-leaders-declaration.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com; 2017 G7 Leaders' Declaration available at https://www.g7.utoronto.ca/summit/2016shima/ise-shima-declaration-en.html?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
- 10 WTO official document: WT/MIN(26)/39.
- 11 WTO official document: WT/MIN(26)/38.
- 12 SDG Target 2.b aims to correct agricultural market distortions by eliminating export subsidies to achieve Zero Hunger by 2030.
- 13 WTO official document: WT/MIN(22)/29.
- 14 Cotton-4 plus members include: Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali plus Côte d'Ivoire.
- 15 WTO official document: WT/MIN(24)/36.
- 16 WTO official document: WT/MIN(26)/37.
- 17 WTO official documents: [WT/L/917](#) and [WT/L/917/Add.1](#).
- 18 WTO official document: [G/RO/95](#).
- 19 In 2025, the LDC Group made suggestions on possible best practices related to (i) the method of calculation of value in rules based on the percentage criterion; (ii) the level of ad valorem percentages; (iii) rules based on a change of tariff classification; (iv) consignment of goods; (v) proof of origin and self-certification; and (vi) cumulation.
- 20 Preferential Treatment to Services and Service Suppliers of Least-Developed Countries, 17 December 2011 (WTO official document [WT/L/847](#)).
- 21 Operationalization of the Waiver Concerning Preferential Treatment to Services and Service Suppliers of Least-Developed Countries, 11 December 2013 (WTO official documents [WT/MIN\(13\)/43](#), [WT/L/918](#)).
- 22 Implementation of Preferential Treatment in Favour of Services and Service Suppliers of Least-Developed Countries and Increasing LDC Participation in Services Trade, Nairobi, 15–18 December 2015 (WTO official documents [WT/MIN\(15\)/48](#), [WT/L/982](#)).
- 23 In 2024, the LDC Group proposed a questionnaire as an optional tool to help analyse how LDC suppliers are interacting with consumers in preference-providing members (WTO official document RD/SERV/CTS/1).
- 24 WTO official document JOB/COMTD/LDC/7.
- 25 WTO official document: WT/L/1246.
- 26 WTO official documents: WT/L/508 and WT/L/508/Add.1.
- 27 The Trade Advocacy Fund is a UK-funded Aid for Trade programme which provides support to the day-to-day work of the ACP group, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. It also provides travel support to the officials from developing countries and LDCs.

- 28 Summit Alliance International (SAI) is a consultancy firm funded by the UK through their Trade Advocacy Fund. SAI consultants work on a daily basis with the LDC group, they prepare LDC group statements for all WTO official meetings and organize periodic LDC ministerial meetings and retreats for the LDC group.
- 29 <https://statistics.caricom.org/>.
- 30 See <https://caribbeantradelaw.com/trade-agreements>.
- 31 <https://rtais.wto.org/UI/PublicAllIRTAList.aspx>.
- 32 Six non-services sectors including agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, forestry, mining and quarrying and energy. Six services sectors including professional, computer and related, communications, education, financial, and air and maritime transport.
- 33 WTO official document: JOB/COMTD/AFT/7 available at https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/DD_Aid_for_Trade_Roadmap_to_the_20th_Anniversary_Factsheet_Web.pdf.
- 34 WTO official document: WT/COMTD/AFT/M/62.
- 35 WTO official document: WT/COMTD/AFT/M/62.
- 36 WTO (2024). Aid for Trade at a Glance report available at https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/a4tat glance2024_e.pdf.
- 37 WTO (2024a) Hoekman B., Aid for Trade in a changing global context: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/a4t_e/global_review24_e/a4t_global_context_2024_e.pdf.
- 38 WTO official documents: JOB/COMTD/AFT/6, JOB/COMTD/AFT/7; WT/COMTD/AFT/M/62; WT/COMTD/AFT/M/63; and WT/COMTD/AFT/M/64.
- 39 WTO official documents: JOB/COMTD/AFT/6, JOB/COMTD/AFT/7; WT/COMTD/AFT/M/62 and WT/COMTD/AFT/M/63.
- 40 WTO official document: WT/COMTD/AFT/M/64.
- 41 Summary of the experience-sharing session on LDC graduation held on 25 March 2024 under the aegis of the Sub-Committee on LDCs is available at https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/devel_2503202415_e/Summary_Experience%20Sharing%20Session_LDC%20Graduation.pdf.
- 42 WTO official document: JOB/COMTD/AFT/11 and WT/COMTD/AFT/M/62.
- 43 Summary of the experience-sharing session on Leveraging private sector partnerships for trade held on 20 April 2026 under the aegis of the Aid for Trade session of the CTD is available at https://www.wto.org/library/events/event_resources/aid_2004202610/additional_link_218.pdf.