

A brief history

The WTO began life on 1 January 1995 but its trading system is half a century older. Since 1948, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) had provided the rules for the system. Whereas GATT had mainly dealt with trade in goods, the WTO and its agreements now cover trade in services, and in traded inventions, creations and designs (intellectual property).



'94

April

Marrakesh Agreement establishing the WTO is signed.

'99

September

Mike Moore (New Zealand) becomes WTO Director-General.

November

Third Ministerial Conference takes place in Seattle, US.

2000

January

Negotiations begin on services.

March

Negotiations begin on agriculture.

'96

December

First Ministerial Conference takes place in Singapore.

'97

December

70 WTO members reach a multilateral agreement to open their financial services sector.

'01

November

Fourth Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar. Doha Development Agenda is launched.



WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

'95

January

The WTO is born on 1 January.



May

Renato Ruggiero (Italy) takes office as WTO Director-General.

'98

May

Second Ministerial Conference takes place in Geneva.

'02

September

Supachai Panitchpakdi (Thailand) is elected WTO Director-General.

'03

September

Fifth Ministerial Conference takes place in Cancún, Mexico.

'04

July

Ministerial discussions on the Doha Round take place in Geneva.

'05

September

Pascal Lamy (France) becomes WTO Director-General.

December

Sixth Ministerial Conference takes place in Hong Kong, China. Aid for Trade initiative is launched. Hong Kong Declaration is approved.



'06

June

Ministerial discussions on the Doha Round take place in Geneva.

September

First WTO Public Forum takes place in Geneva.



'07

January

Viet Nam becomes the WTO's 150th member.

November

First Global Review of Aid for Trade takes place in Geneva.

'08

July

Cabo Verde joins the WTO.

Ministerial discussions on the Doha Round take place in Geneva.

'09

April

DG Pascal Lamy reappointed for second term of four years.

July

Second Global Review of Aid for Trade takes place in Geneva.

September

First WTO Open Day in Geneva.

November

Seventh Ministerial Conference takes place in Geneva.

'10

January

New "Chairs Programme" launched to support developing country universities.

September

Second WTO Open Day in Geneva.



'11

July

Third Global Review of Aid for Trade takes place in Geneva.

December

Eighth Ministerial Conference takes place in Geneva.

'12

April

Montenegro joins the WTO.

May

Samoa joins the WTO.

August

Russia and Vanuatu join the WTO.

'13

February

Laos joins the WTO.

March

Tajikistan becomes the 159th member of the WTO.



September

Roberto Azevêdo (Brazil) takes office as WTO Director-General.



December

Ninth Ministerial Conference takes place in Bali, Indonesia. "Bali Package" adopted.

Joining the WTO

The Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos) and Tajikistan formally joined the WTO in 2013, raising WTO membership to 159. The Bali Ministerial Conference in December adopted the accession terms of Yemen and cleared the way for the country to join the WTO. The WTO provided further technical assistance to acceding governments, including a five-day seminar in Geneva. The China Programme, which aims to strengthen the participation of least-developed countries (LDCs) in the WTO, was extended for a further year.

At the Ninth Ministerial Conference in Bali, ministers approved the accession of Yemen after 13 years of negotiations. Yemen will become a WTO member 30 days after notifying its acceptance and depositing the Instrument of Acceptance of its Accession Protocol with the WTO Secretariat. The accession will bring the WTO another step nearer its goal of universal membership. Several acceding governments are entering decisive stages of their accession negotiations. These include Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, the Bahamas, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kazakhstan, Serbia and the Seychelles.

Director-General Roberto Azevêdo issued the Fifth Annual Report on WTO Accessions in November 2013. The report provides

detailed information on work on WTO accessions, the benefits of WTO membership, policy issues and challenges in 2013, and a thematic focus on transparency obligations and notifications.

Stepping up technical assistance

Technical assistance was strengthened in 2013, with acceding governments invited to participate in over 100 technical assistance events.

In September, the WTO Secretariat organized a five-day seminar – the Global Seminar on WTO Accessions – on the theme of “Safeguarding and strengthening the rules-based multilateral trading system”. Held in Geneva, the seminar gave officials of

Membership of the WTO (as of 31 December 2013)

Member ¹	Year of accession	Member	Year of accession	Member	Year of accession
Albania	2000	Czech Republic	1995	Jamaica	1995
Angola	1996	Democratic Republic of the Congo	1997	Japan	1995
Antigua and Barbuda	1995	Denmark	1995	Jordan	2000
Argentina	1995	Djibouti	1995	Kenya	1995
Armenia	2003	Dominica	1995	Korea, Republic of	1995
Australia	1995	Dominican Republic	1995	Kuwait, the State of	1995
Austria	1995	Ecuador	1996	Kyrgyz Republic	1998
Bahrain, Kingdom of	1995	Egypt	1995	Latvia	1999
Bangladesh	1995	El Salvador	1995	Lao People's Democratic Republic	2013
Barbados	1995	Estonia	1999	Lesotho	1995
Belgium	1995	European Union	1995	Liechtenstein	1995
Belize	1995	Fiji	1996	Lithuania	2001
Benin	1996	Finland	1995	Luxembourg	1995
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	1995	France	1995	Macao, China	1995
Botswana	1995	Gabon	1995	Madagascar	1995
Brazil	1995	The Gambia	1996	Malawi	1995
Brunei Darussalam	1995	Georgia	2000	Malaysia	1995
Bulgaria	1996	Germany	1995	Maldives	1995
Burkina Faso	1995	Ghana	1995	Mali	1995
Burundi	1995	Greece	1995	Malta	1995
Cambodia	2004	Grenada	1996	Mauritania	1995
Cameroon	1995	Guatemala	1995	Mauritius	1995
Canada	1995	Guinea	1995	Mexico	1995
Cabo Verde	2008	Guinea-Bissau	1995	Moldova, Republic of	2001
Central African Republic	1995	Guyana	1995	Mongolia	1997
Chad	1996	Haiti	1996	Montenegro	2012
Chile	1995	Honduras	1995	Morocco	1995
China	2001	Hong Kong, China	1995	Mozambique	1995
Colombia	1995	Hungary	1995	Myanmar	1995
Congo	1997	Iceland	1995	Namibia	1995
Costa Rica	1995	India	1995	Nepal	2004
Côte d'Ivoire	1995	Indonesia	1995	Netherlands	1995
Croatia	2000	Ireland	1995	New Zealand	1995
Cuba	1995	Israel	1995	Nicaragua	1995
Cyprus	1995	Italy	1995	Niger	1996

¹ Members are mostly governments but can also be customs territories.

acceding governments and WTO members the opportunity to exchange views and share experiences and best practices on WTO accession negotiations. It also reviewed the results of 31 concluded Article XII accessions – countries that have joined since the establishment of the WTO in 1995.

The Secretariat continued with the implementation of China's LDCs and Accessions Programme (China Programme). The programme aims to strengthen LDC members' participation in the WTO and to assist acceding LDCs. From 15 to 18 October 2013, the second high-level roundtable was held in Luang Prabang, Laos, focusing on the "Future of the multilateral trading system: perspectives of least-developed countries and Article XII members". As part of the China Programme, five more interns were selected to participate in the internship scheme at the WTO Secretariat. At the Ninth Ministerial Conference, Director General Azevêdo and China's Trade Minister Hucheng Gao signed a new memorandum of understanding, extending the China Programme for another year.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) and the WTO Secretariat continued their work under the joint ITC-WTO programme in support of the private sector in acceding developing countries and LDCs. Working Party chairs visited several acceding governments to meet key domestic stakeholders to promote outreach, answer questions and improve understanding of WTO membership.

The Accessions Division also undertook briefings for newly designated Working Party chairs and new delegates as well as workshops for parliamentarians and civil society. Several post-accession technical assistance activities took place focusing on

implementation of the negotiated accession commitments and general membership obligations.

Transparency was further enhanced by regular meetings of the Informal Group on Accessions, through the WTO accessions newsletter, the Director-General's Annual Report on WTO Accessions and the annual accessions' outreach dialogue with WTO groupings. In 2013, this dialogue included the LDCs' Consultative Group, the Informal Group of Developing Countries, the Asian Group of Developing Members, the Latin American and Caribbean Group, the African Group and the Arab Group.



Background on joining the WTO

The WTO is open to states or customs territories with full autonomy over their external commercial relations. To join the WTO, a government has to bring its economic and trade policies in line with WTO rules and principles, and negotiate with interested, individual trading partners on guaranteed minimum levels of access to their domestic markets for goods and services. It can take many years to become a WTO member because it requires the full support and consensus of the existing membership. However, the accession process is designed to ensure that new members are able to participate fully in the multilateral trading system from the outset.

159 members (as of 2 March 2013)

Member	Year of accession	Member	Year of accession	States/customs territories seeking to join the WTO (as of 2 March 2013)
Nigeria	1995	Sri Lanka	1995	Afghanistan*
Norway	1995	Suriname	1995	Algeria
Oman	2000	Swaziland	1995	Andorra
Pakistan	1995	Sweden	1995	Azerbaijan
Panama	1997	Switzerland	1995	Bahamas
Papua New Guinea	1996	Chinese Taipei	2002	Belarus
Paraguay	1995	Tanzania	1995	Bhutan*
Peru	1995	Tajikistan	2013	Bosnia and Herzegovina
Philippines	1995	Thailand	1995	Comoros*
Poland	1995	The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)	2003	Equatorial Guinea*
Portugal	1995	Togo	1995	Ethiopia*
Qatar	1996	Tonga	2007	Iran
Romania	1995	Trinidad and Tobago	1995	Iraq
Russian Federation	2012	Tunisia	1995	Kazakhstan
Rwanda	1996	Turkey	1995	Lebanese Republic
Saint Kitts and Nevis	1996	Uganda	1995	Liberia, Republic of*
Saint Lucia	1995	Ukraine	2008	Libya
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	1995	United Arab Emirates	1996	São Tomé and Príncipe*
Samoa	2012	United Kingdom	1995	Serbia
Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of	2005	United States of America	1995	Seychelles
Senegal	1995	Uruguay	1995	Sudan*
Sierra Leone	1995	Vanuatu	2012	Syrian Arab Republic
Singapore	1995	Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	1995	Uzbekistan
Slovak Republic	1995	Viet Nam	2007	
Slovenia	1995	Zambia	1995	
Solomon Islands	1996	Zimbabwe	1995	
South Africa	1995			
Spain	1995			

Countries that officially became WTO members in 2013

Lao PDR*	2 February 2013
Tajikistan	2 March 2013

Countries that completed their WTO accession negotiations in 2013

	Date of approval of Accession Package**
Yemen*	4 December 2013

* Least-developed country.

** Formal WTO membership is subject to the ratification of the Accession Protocol by Yemen's Parliament and the subsequent notification and deposit of the Instrument of Acceptance of the Protocol with the WTO Director-General.

Welcoming new members

In 2013, the Ninth WTO Ministerial Conference approved the accession package of Yemen. Formal membership is now subject to the ratification of Yemen's Accession Protocol by the Yemeni parliament and the subsequent notification and deposit of the Instrument of Acceptance of the Protocol with the Director-General of the WTO. The negotiated terms and conditions contain commitments covering all WTO rules.

The WTO accession process promotes the integration of new members into the global economy subject to binding and enforceable trade rules. Yemen undertook to liberalize its trade regime and accelerate its integration into the world economy. Yemen's accession package contains specific commitments binding it to WTO rules and includes, where necessary, specific transition periods, which have been negotiated to respond to particular needs in a given area. It contains negotiated concessions and commitments on market access for goods and services.

The Ministerial Conference approved Yemen's accession package on 4 December, after 13 years of negotiations. Yemen will become a WTO member 30 days after it notifies the WTO of its acceptance of the accession terms and conditions.

Yemeni Minister of Industry and Trade, H.E. Dr Saadalden Talib, said: "Sometimes, countries experience changing fortunes. But

the very essence of a country and the history and civilization of trade remain. Our country has been trading for at least five or six hundred years – in fact, since the Spice Route. As a member of the WTO, we aim to strengthen that role and to connect with everybody in the world. We want to share our history, our products and our culture, as we have done with Indonesia – the host of this Ministerial Conference – for so many centuries."

Director-General Roberto Azevêdo congratulated the Government of Yemen on its domestic reforms and said: "Yemen will be our 160th member – and our 35th LDC [least-developed country] member. It is a further, positive step towards universality."

During the accession process, WTO members have worked with Yemen to adapt its trade laws to WTO rules and train its government officials. WTO members are committed to continue to provide Yemen with required technical assistance in its post-accession process.





Yemen

Accession Working Party report

Number of paragraphs	287
Paragraphs with commitment language	28

Market access for goods

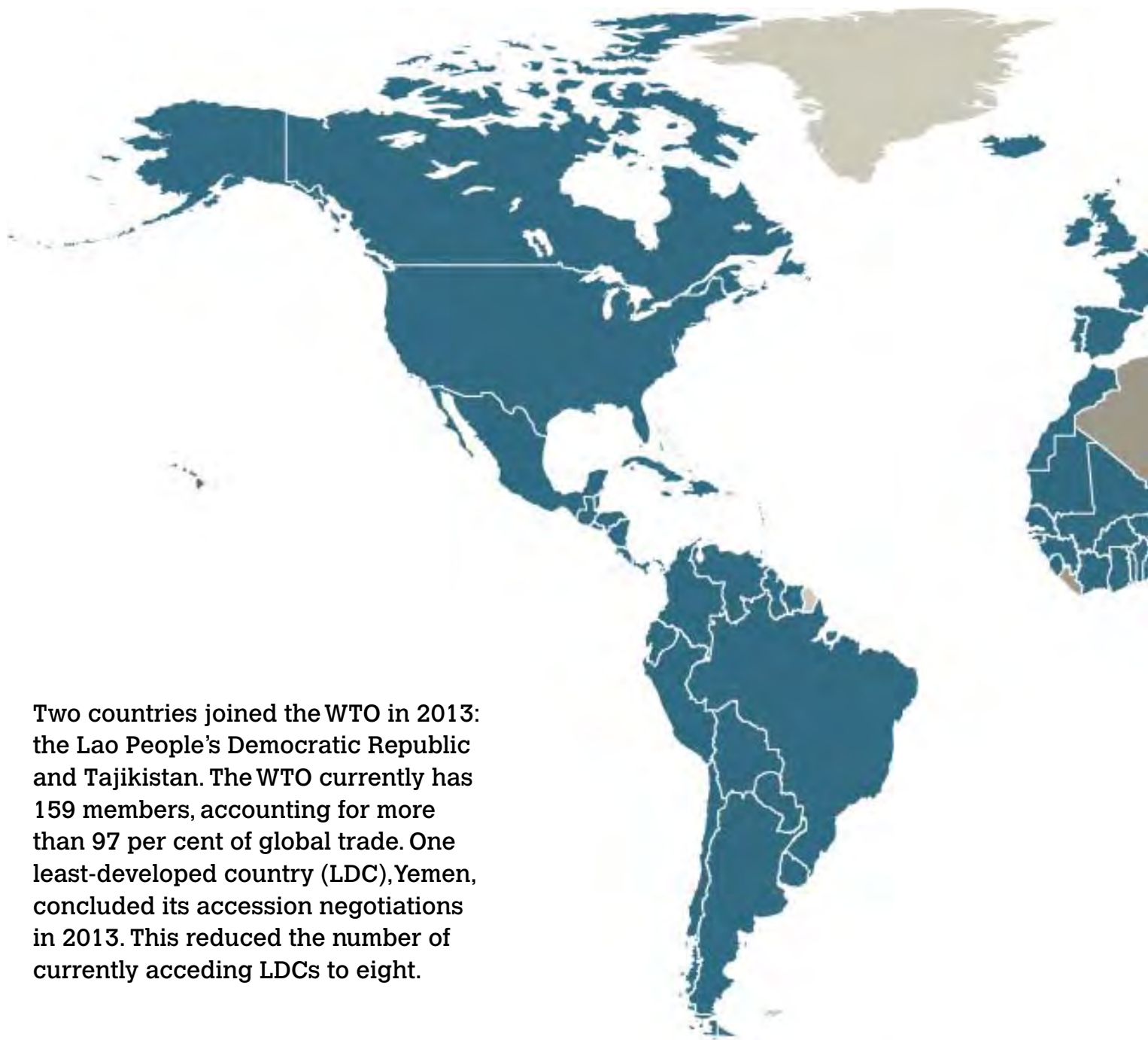
Average final bound tariff rates:	
All goods	21.1%
Agricultural goods	24.9%
Non-agricultural goods	20.5%

Market access for services

Sectors	11
Sub-sectors	78

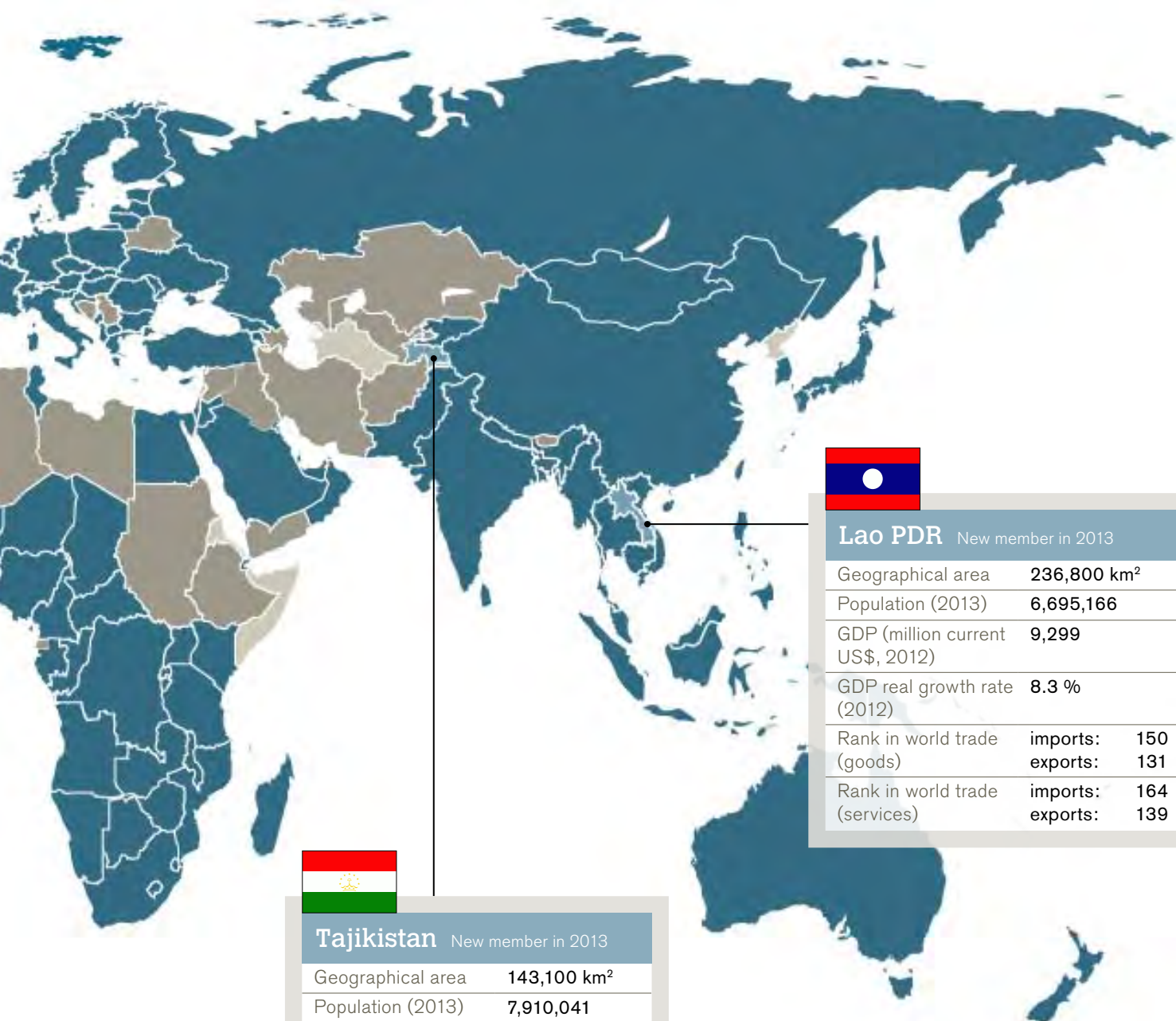


A global membership



Two countries joined the WTO in 2013: the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Tajikistan. The WTO currently has 159 members, accounting for more than 97 per cent of global trade. One least-developed country (LDC), Yemen, concluded its accession negotiations in 2013. This reduced the number of currently acceding LDCs to eight.

- WTO members
- New members in 2013
- Observers
- Non-members



Tajikistan <small>New member in 2013</small>	
Geographical area	143,100 km²
Population (2013)	7,910,041
GDP (million current US\$, 2012)	6,987
GDP real growth rate (2012)	7.5 %
Rank in world trade (goods)	imports: 135 exports: 146
Rank in world trade (services)	imports: 134 exports: 132



Lao PDR <small>New member in 2013</small>	
Geographical area	236,800 km²
Population (2013)	6,695,166
GDP (million current US\$, 2012)	9,299
GDP real growth rate (2012)	8.3 %
Rank in world trade (goods)	imports: 150 exports: 131
Rank in world trade (services)	imports: 164 exports: 139

Source: WTO and World Bank