



## Membership

- > Seychelles and Kazakhstan became the newest members of the WTO in 2015, bringing the WTO's total membership to 162.
- > The WTO membership packages of Liberia and Afghanistan were approved at the Tenth Ministerial Conference in Nairobi.
- > Least-developed countries now represent more than one-fifth of the WTO membership.

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# Joining the WTO

Seychelles and Kazakhstan became the 161<sup>st</sup> and 162<sup>nd</sup> members of the WTO in 2015. In December, the Tenth Ministerial Conference approved the WTO membership packages of Liberia and Afghanistan, which will become members once they have ratified their entry accords. These new accessions bring the WTO closer to its target of achieving universality, with the current membership representing 98 per cent of world trade.

Seychelles became a WTO member on 26 April 2015, followed by Kazakhstan on 30 November. Liberia and Afghanistan have until June 2016 to ratify their respective accession packages. They will become WTO members 30 days after notifying the acceptance of these packages to the WTO Director-General. Least-developed countries (LDCs) now represent more than a fifth of the WTO membership. A number of other aspiring members (see list on page 180) made progress with their accession negotiations.

The accession packages, or entry terms, contain specific commitments binding the countries to WTO rules, including negotiated concessions and commitments on market access for goods and services. The WTO accession process promotes the integration of new members into the global economy and in return acceding economies undertake to liberalize their trade regimes.

The length of accession processes varies depending on the negotiating commitment of the acceding economy, the degree to which its trade rules are already WTO-consistent and the mix and complexity of the subject matter of the negotiation, which differs from one accession to another.

## Seychelles

Seychelles became the 161<sup>st</sup> WTO member, ending 20 years of negotiating its accession terms with WTO members. "I am delighted to welcome the Republic of Seychelles as the 161<sup>st</sup> member of the WTO," said Director-General



Seychelles President James Michel signs the Instrument of Acceptance of the WTO Accession Protocol on 25 March 2015.



# 162

The WTO has 162 members following the accession of Seychelles in April 2015 and of Kazakhstan in November 2015.

## Background on joining the WTO

An important goal of the newly created WTO in 1995 was to make the organization universal in coverage. In the past two decades, 34 members have joined, including China, Russia and Saudi Arabia, vastly expanding the global coverage of WTO rules. 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 trading partners on guaranteed minimum levels of access to their domestic markets for goods and services.

Roberto Azevêdo. “This is great news for Seychelles’ economy and, therefore, for the people of Seychelles. It is also a boost for the WTO and a vote of confidence in the Organization.”

Following signature of the ratification of the WTO Accession Protocol, Seychelles President James Michel said: “It is a proud moment for Seychelles to have taken this final step towards WTO accession. As a Small Island Developing State, we are reliant on open access to trade in goods and services both to ensure that the basic needs of our people are met, and to ensure that we continue to create opportunities for wealth creation and prosperity. As we join this world trading body, we look forward to working with the WTO Secretariat to further help us in building our capacity.”

## Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan became the 162<sup>nd</sup> WTO member, closing a 20-year long chapter of negotiating its accession terms with WTO members. DG Azevêdo said: “I think this is a truly historic occasion for Kazakhstan, and for the WTO. We are delivering a result which will have a major economic impact, a major systemic impact, and a major human impact. Because, crucially, the benefits of accession can help to create jobs, raise incomes, and improve people’s lives. For Kazakhstan, this is an endorsement of the extensive programme of reforms which you have undertaken. And it is a message to the world that Kazakhstan is open for business.”

Speaking at the General Council meeting of 27 July 2015, where WTO members formally adopted Kazakhstan’s terms of entry, Kazakhstan’s President Nazarbayev said: “We are sincerely grateful to each of the WTO member states for their constructive approach and support throughout a very



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DG Azevêdo and President Nazarbayev signed the Protocol on the Accession of Kazakhstan on 27 July 2015.

tough negotiation process. For a long time now, we have been shaping our economic policies in the spirit of the WTO, by removing barriers, acting as an engine of regional integration and promoting the principles of open collaboration. Effective implementation of the reforms will help to shape a brand new institutional environment”.



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Liberia’s President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, at the ceremony marking the approval of Liberia’s accession during the Tenth Ministerial Conference.

## Liberia

The accession negotiations of Liberia took eight years. Congratulating Liberia on its achievement, Kenya’s President Uhuru Kenyatta said: “I am pleased that this decision was taken here in Nairobi, on African soil, at the WTO’s Tenth Ministerial Conference. Without a doubt, WTO membership carries considerable gains and benefits. Liberia’s accession package provides a platform for continuing domestic reforms and should inspire other African countries in their domestic measures.”

Liberia’s President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, said that Liberia’s accession to the WTO “marks another turning point in our history, particularly in our journey of economic transformation for inclusive growth. Our transformation can neither be done alone, nor in isolation, but by forging partnerships. We appreciate the collective efforts of our partners who have made this accession a resounding success. We fully subscribe to the African common position on strengthening the rules-based multilateral trading system to create the Africa that we want”.

## Membership

### Liberia



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#### Market access for goods

Average final bound tariff rates:

All goods 26.7%

Agricultural goods 23.8%

Non-agricultural goods 27.2%

#### Market access for services

Sectors 11

Sub-sectors 102

In welcoming the approval of Liberia's terms of entry, DG Azevêdo paid tribute to the "engagement and leadership" of the President of Liberia. "It is particularly appropriate that, at this first ministerial conference in Africa, we are welcoming a new African member," he said. "I hope that this achievement here today will help Liberia to continue on the path of hope, progress and development."

### Afghanistan

The accession negotiations of Afghanistan took 11 years. On 17 December, at the Nairobi Ministerial Conference, Mohammad Khan Rahmani, First Deputy Chief Executive of Afghanistan, declared: "Today is a historic day for the people of Afghanistan who have embraced democratic values and market economy principles. Our WTO membership will cement our long-standing commitment to an open economy, transparency, rule of law, good governance, non-discrimination, and market instruments for the development of our economy and the private sector, and for the alleviation of poverty. Trade-led growth will create new economic opportunities and jobs, especially for women; it will reduce poverty and increase prosperity. It will certainly contribute in a major way to dramatically reducing extremism and achieve regional peace and security."

DG Azevêdo paid special tribute to the government of Afghanistan for "this historic achievement" and for having undertaken an "extensive programme of domestic reforms to accelerate economic growth despite very challenging circumstances". He said: "Afghanistan's WTO accession is a clear sign for all the world to see that the country is building a business-friendly environment. I am confident that WTO membership will contribute to establishing a firm foundation for Afghanistan's future development and prosperity."



Afghanistan's WTO membership terms were formally approved at a special ceremony attended by Afghanistan's First Deputy Chief Executive Mohammad Khan Rahmani during the Tenth Ministerial Conference.

### Afghanistan



#### Accession Working Party report

Paragraphs with commitment language 37

#### Market access for goods

Average final bound tariff rates:

All goods 13.5%

Agricultural goods 33.6%

Non-agricultural goods 10.3%

#### Market access for services

Sectors 11

Sub-sectors 104

## 20 years

1995  2015

Seychelles and Kazakhstan both concluded 20 years of negotiations when they became WTO members.

## New publications

The WTO launched a new publication in October entitled *WTO Accessions and Trade Multilateralism: Case Studies and Lessons from the WTO at Twenty*, which looks at how the organization's ever-expanding membership has increased the scope of the multilateral trading system. Speaking at the launch, DG Azevêdo said: "By bringing an increasing number of countries together in an atmosphere of cooperation and shared rules, the multilateral trading system is a means not just to achieve growth and development, but also to support peaceful relations."



# 19

19 countries are currently negotiating WTO membership.

The Director-General issued the Seventh Annual Report on WTO Accessions in November 2015. The report provides detailed information on work on WTO accessions, accession events and initiatives during the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the WTO, including post-accession support and the trade and economic performance of economies that have joined the WTO since 1995.

## Technical assistance

Acceding economies participated in over 40 WTO technical assistance activities in 2015, with six acceding economies acting as hosts for some of these events. Beneficiaries included Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran, Liberia and Seychelles.

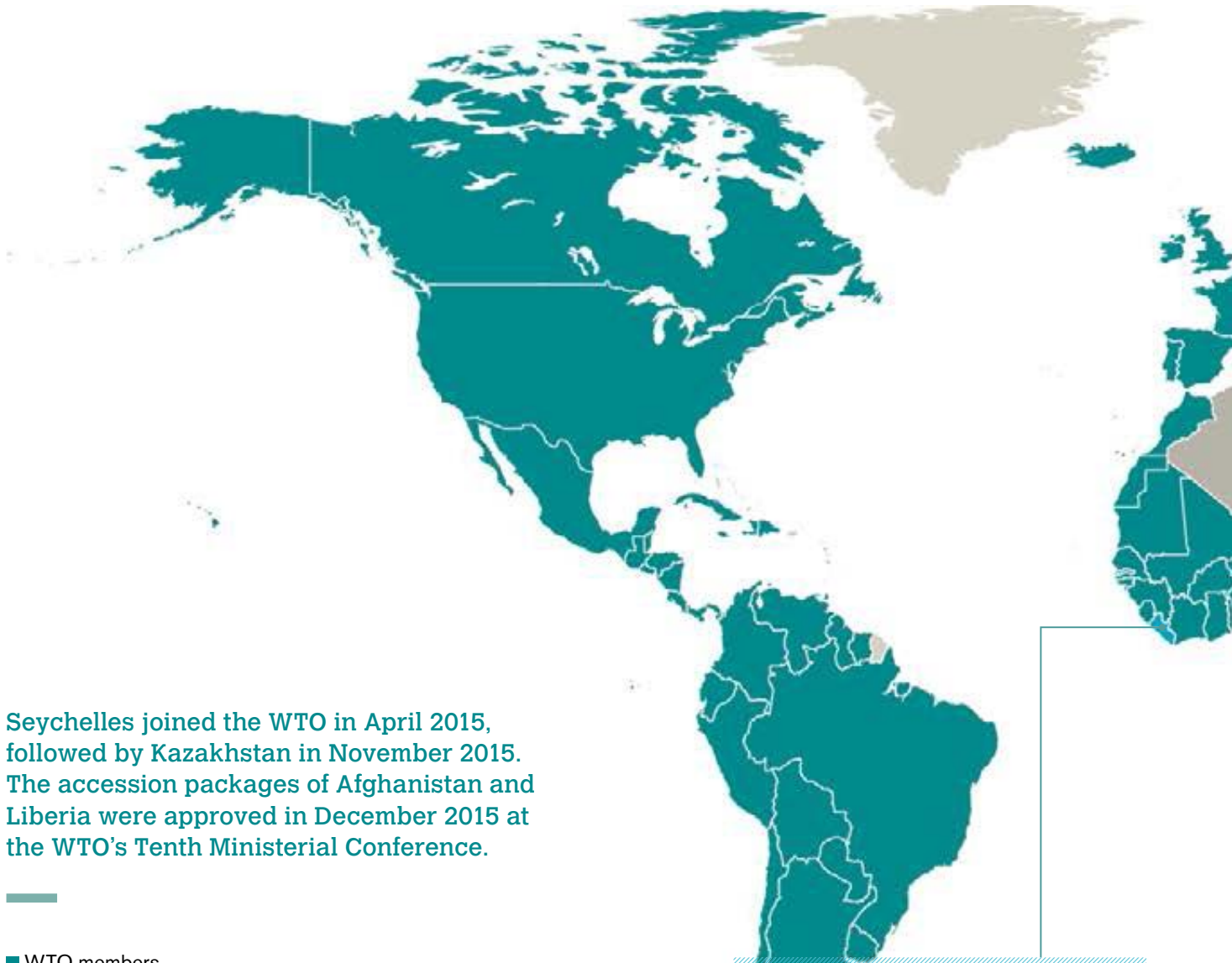
The WTO Secretariat continued with the implementation of China's Least-Developed Countries and Accessions

Programme (known as the China Programme). This initiative aims to assist acceding LDCs and to strengthen LDC members' participation in the WTO. Two round tables were held in 2015, the first in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, on 2-4 June, and the second in Nairobi, Kenya, on 13-14 December, just before the Ministerial Conference. The beneficiary economies included all acceding economies and several WTO members. As part of the programme, four interns (from Afghanistan, Brazil/Colombia, Montenegro and Uganda) were selected in 2015 to participate in the internship scheme at the WTO Secretariat.

The Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) (see page 128) continued to provide technical assistance and capacity-building support in selected acceding economies. For Liberia, the EIF-funded project was coordinated with the Swedish National Board of Trade. The International Trade Centre (ITC) and the WTO Secretariat continued their work under the joint ITC-WTO programme, launched in 2009, in support of the private sector in acceding developing economies and LDCs. Working party chairs visited several acceding economies 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.

Awareness of accession activities was further enhanced by regular meetings of the Informal Group on Accessions, the WTO accessions newsletter, the Director-General's Annual Report on WTO Accessions and the annual accessions outreach dialogue with WTO groupings. In 2015, this dialogue included the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries, the Asian Group of Developing Members, the Arab Group, the African Group and the LDC Consultative Group. A follow-up briefing for LDCs was provided at the 75<sup>th</sup> session of the Sub-Committee on LDCs.

# A global membership



Seychelles joined the WTO in April 2015, followed by Kazakhstan in November 2015. The accession packages of Afghanistan and Liberia were approved in December 2015 at the WTO's Tenth Ministerial Conference.

- WTO members
- New members in 2015
- WTO membership package approved in 2015
- Observers
- Non-members

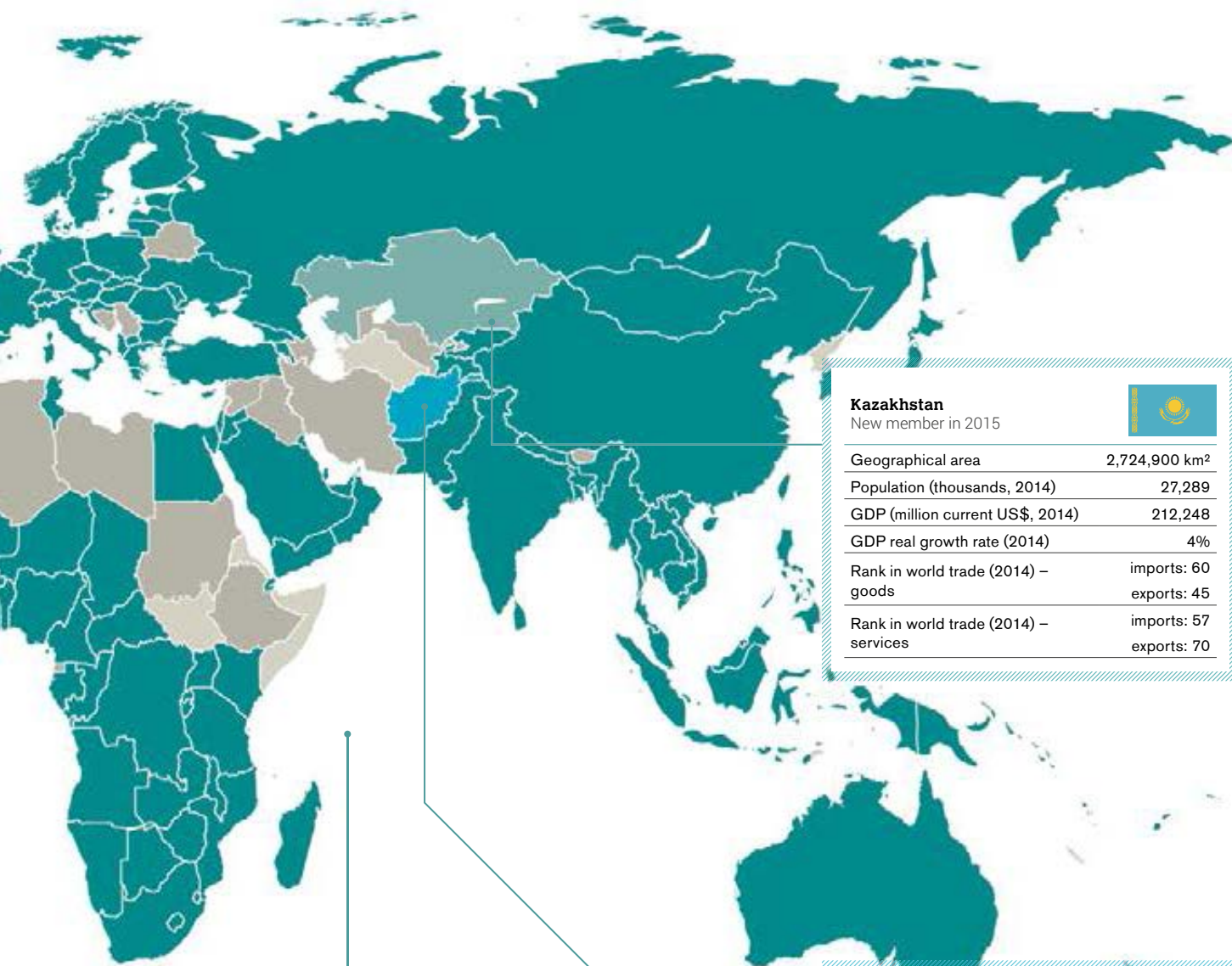
Source: WTO.

For a full list of WTO members and observers, see page 180.

**Liberia**

WTO membership package approved in 2015

Geographical area	111,369 km <sup>2</sup>
Population (thousands, 2014)	4,397
GDP (million current US\$, 2014)	2,027
GDP real growth rate (2014)	9%
Rank in world trade (2014) – goods	imports: 170 exports: 162
Rank in world trade (2014) – services	imports: 162 exports: 157



### Kazakhstan

New member in 2015



Geographical area	2,724,900 km <sup>2</sup>
Population (thousands, 2014)	27,289
GDP (million current US\$, 2014)	212,248
GDP real growth rate (2014)	4%
Rank in world trade (2014) – goods	imports: 60 exports: 45
Rank in world trade (2014) – services	imports: 57 exports: 70

### Seychelles

New member in 2015



Geographical area	455 km <sup>2</sup>
Population (thousands, 2014)	92
GDP (million current US\$, 2014)	1,406
GDP real growth rate (2014)	3%
Rank in world trade (2014) – goods	imports: 167 exports: 165
Rank in world trade (2014) – services	imports: 170 exports: 148

### Afghanistan

WTO membership package approved in 2015



Geographical area	652,230 km <sup>2</sup>
Population (thousands, 2014)	31,281
GDP (million current US\$, 2014)	20,842
GDP real growth rate (2014)	2%
Rank in world trade (2014) – goods	imports: 109 exports: 163
Rank in world trade (2014) – services	imports: 110 exports: 87

