



Membership

- Liberia and Afghanistan joined the WTO in July 2016, bringing the WTO's total membership to 164.
- In December 2016, WTO members agreed to begin WTO membership negotiations for Somalia and Timor-Leste.
- Twenty-one governments are currently negotiating WTO membership.

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Joining the WTO

Liberia and Afghanistan became the 163rd and 164th members of the WTO in 2016. Members agreed to start WTO membership talks for the Federal Republic of Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste and to welcome them as observers to the WTO. Comoros kicked off its accession negotiations, while the working parties for the accession of Belarus and Sudan have resumed after interruptions of 12 and 13 years, respectively.

Liberia joined the WTO as its 163rd member on 14 July 2016, followed by Afghanistan, which became the organization's 164th member on 29 July 2016. Somalia and Timor-Leste took the first step in the process of becoming WTO members by sending applications to the Director-General requesting accession. Members agreed at a General Council meeting on 7 December to initiate membership negotiations. Two working parties were established to examine their respective applications.

Liberia and Afghanistan became WTO members 30 days after notifying the Director-General of the formal acceptance of their accession packages. Their accession increases the number of least-developed countries (LDCs) in the WTO and brings the WTO ever closer to its goal of universal membership. LDCs represent a fifth of the WTO membership.

The accession packages, or entry terms, contain specific commitments binding the countries to WTO rules, including 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 complexity of the subject matter of the negotiations, which differs from one negotiation to another.

Background on joining the WTO

Since the WTO was launched in 1995, 36 members have joined the organization, including China, Russia and Saudi Arabia, and 21 states or separate customs territories are seeking to join. 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 the WTO membership on guaranteed minimum levels of access to their domestic markets for goods and services.

Liberia

Liberia joined the WTO after eight years of negotiating its accession terms with WTO members. It became the eighth LDC to negotiate its accession to the WTO since the organization's launch in 1995.

Ahead of Liberia's accession, the WTO Secretariat organized a national workshop on 27-29 June in Liberia on the implementation of the country's WTO accession commitments and discussed how Liberia can take advantage of membership under the WTO's Least-developed Countries (LDCs) and Accessions Programme (also known as the China Programme). It was the first post-accession technical assistance activity organized by the WTO Secretariat and sponsored by the China Programme (see below).

"Liberia's accession underscores the WTO's commitment to supporting the participation of LDCs in the multilateral trading system," Director-General Roberto Azevêdo said. "WTO membership will help Liberia to benefit from the international trade and investment that is essential to build the economy and improve people's lives," he added.



Liberia became the 163rd member of the WTO on 14 July 2016.

Liberia

Accession Working Party report

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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



Afghanistan became the WTO's 164th member on 29 July 2016.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan joined the WTO some 12 years after starting its negotiations on accession terms with WTO members.

"This is an historic day for Afghanistan and its integration into the global economy," said Director-General Roberto Azevêdo. "We arrived at this point thanks to the commitment of President Mohammad Ashraf Ghani and the government of Afghanistan. WTO membership will be a foundation stone in the country's future development."

Afghanistan also ratified the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) (see page 73) and deposited the instrument of acceptance – signifying its formal acceptance – on the first day of its membership.

Afghanistan

Accession Working Party report

Paragraphs with commitment language	37
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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

Somalia

Somalia applied for WTO accession on 12 December 2015. Members agreed to establish a working party for its accession negotiations at the General Council meeting on 7 December 2016. Faduma Abdulahi Mohamud, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Somalia in Geneva, said: "Many developing countries, particularly LDCs, such as my own, are keen to join the WTO because, among other things, the WTO promotes lower trade barriers, fair competition, non-discrimination, encourages development and economic reform while providing flexibilities for adjustment."



On 7 December 2016, WTO members agreed to establish a working party for Somalia's accession negotiations.



Joining the WTO
www.wto.org/members

Membership

Somalia, an LDC, has a population of approximately 11 million. The 2012 Human Development Report estimated Somalia's gross domestic product per capita at US\$ 284 compared with the sub-Saharan Africa average of US\$ 1,300. Livestock is the backbone of the economy: 60 per cent of the population is dependent on livestock production.

Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste applied for WTO accession on 7 April 2015. Members agreed to establish a working party for its accession process at the General Council meeting on 7 December 2016. Estanislau Aleixo da Silva, Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs and Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries of Timor-Leste, said: "Timor-Leste prioritizes WTO membership as it would help to leverage ongoing improvements in its infrastructure, human capital and administrative capacity to accelerate growth and economic diversification."

Timor-Leste is also an LDC. It has a population of approximately 1.2 million. Some 72 per cent of households are rural and make their living from agriculture. The GDP per capita in Timor-Leste stood at US\$ 988 in 2015, equivalent to 8 per cent of the global average.



On 7 December 2016, WTO members agreed to establish a working party for Timor Leste's accession negotiations.

Comoros

The first meeting of the working party on the accession of the Comoros was held on 6 December 2016. The Comoros has set the 11th Ministerial Conference (MC11), to be held in Buenos Aires in December 2017, as the target date for the conclusion of its accession negotiations.



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Belarus

WTO members welcomed the resumption of WTO membership negotiations for Belarus when the working party on the country's accession met on 24 January 2017 – 12 years after its last formal meeting. At the meeting, the first since May 2005, Andrei Yeudachenka, First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, emphasized that WTO accession is a priority for the country.

Sudan

Sudan's membership negotiations resumed on 31 January 2017 – 13 years after the last working party meeting. In a statement, Sudan's Minister of International Cooperation, Osman Ahmed Fadul Wash, underscored the government's commitment to the accession process. He called on WTO members to accelerate negotiations, adding he hoped that Sudan would be in a position to accede to the WTO by MC11.

Technical assistance

Acceding governments were invited to participate in over 100 WTO technical assistance activities in 2016, including seminars, workshops, advanced trade policy courses, e-learning and trade policy forums. The WTO Secretariat continued to implement the China Least-Developed Countries and Accessions Programme (China Programme), which aims to assist acceding LDCs and strengthen LDC members' participation in the WTO. As part of the programme, four interns – from Angola, Iran, Mali and Tajikistan – will

participate in 2016-2017 in the internship scheme in the WTO Secretariat.

Several technical missions were undertaken to WTO acceding countries as well as countries that have shown interest in WTO accession to assist them in their accession processes and applications. The beneficiaries of these missions were Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Sudan, Timor-Leste and Turkmenistan.

The WTO Secretariat initiated several technical assistance activities in 2016. The first trade policy forum with a focus on Central Asia took place in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, in May 2016. Organized in partnership with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, it focused on WTO accessions and associated domestic reforms, and regional integration.

The first training course on trade in services for acceding governments was organized on 28 November to 2 December. Participants included 27 officials from 14 governments. Under the sponsorship of the China Programme, the WTO Secretariat also organized the first-ever dedicated training on post-accession, for Liberia (see above) and Afghanistan. The Afghanistan course took place in July in Bangkok, Thailand.

The WTO Secretariat continued to work on accessions with other institutions: the Enhanced Integrated Framework (see page 130), the International Trade Centre, the Swedish National Board of Trade, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific and the World Bank.



164

The WTO has 164 members following the accessions of Liberia and Afghanistan in July 2016.

Awareness of accession activities was further enhanced through outreach dialogue with WTO regional groups and the Director-General's Annual Report on WTO Accessions.

Accession Intelligence Portal

In 2016, the WTO Secretariat launched the Accessions Intelligence Portal (AIP), which contains information on all ongoing and completed WTO accessions since 1995 as well as other accession-related information, such as the process for becoming a WTO member, technical assistance activities, relevant publications and other resources.



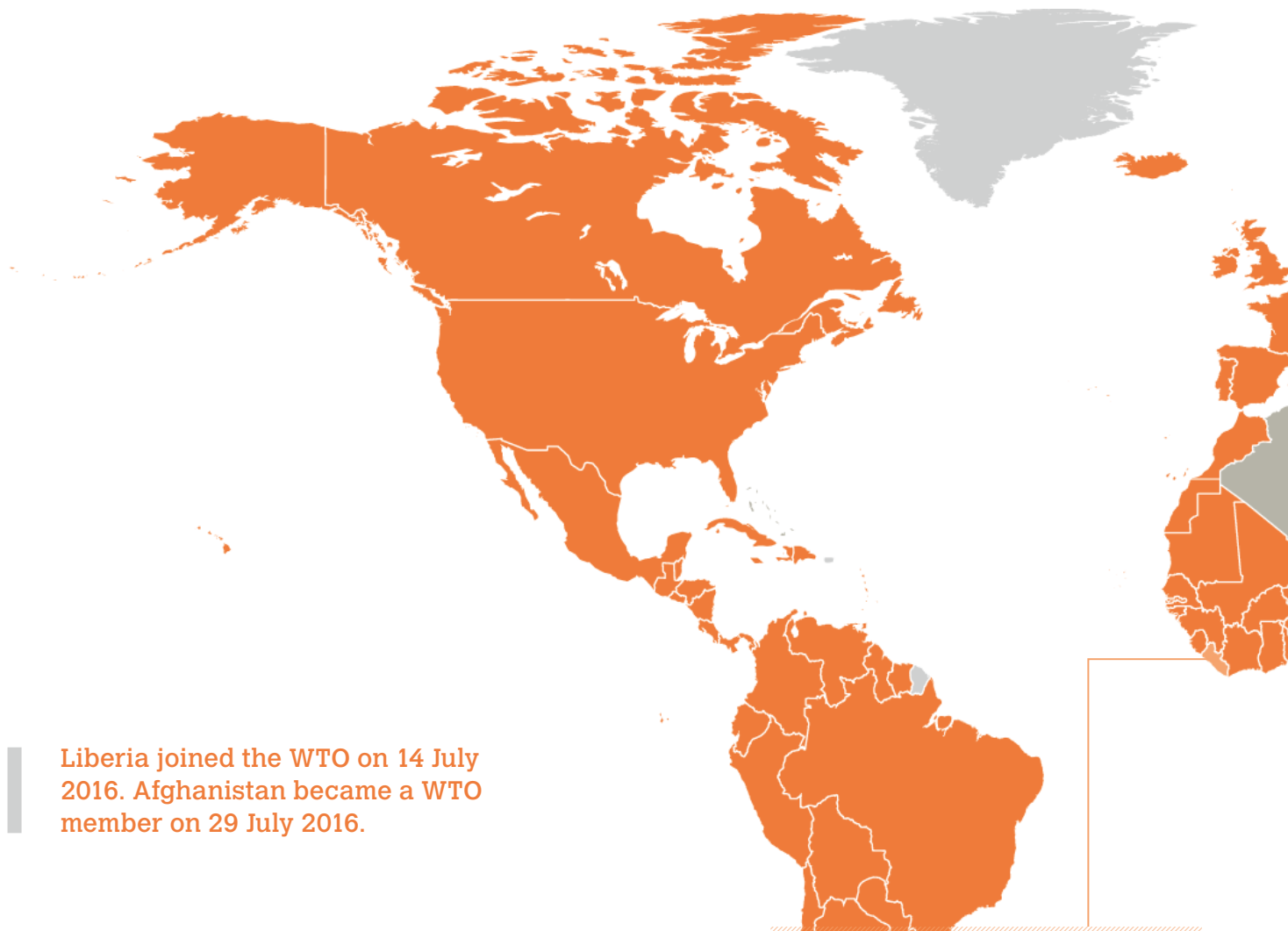
WTO OMC

21

21 governments are currently negotiating WTO membership.

A global membership

The WTO's 164 members represent 98 per cent of world trade.



Liberia joined the WTO on 14 July 2016. Afghanistan became a WTO member on 29 July 2016.

- WTO members
- New members in 2016
- New observers in 2016
- Observers
- Non-members

Source: WTO and World Bank.

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

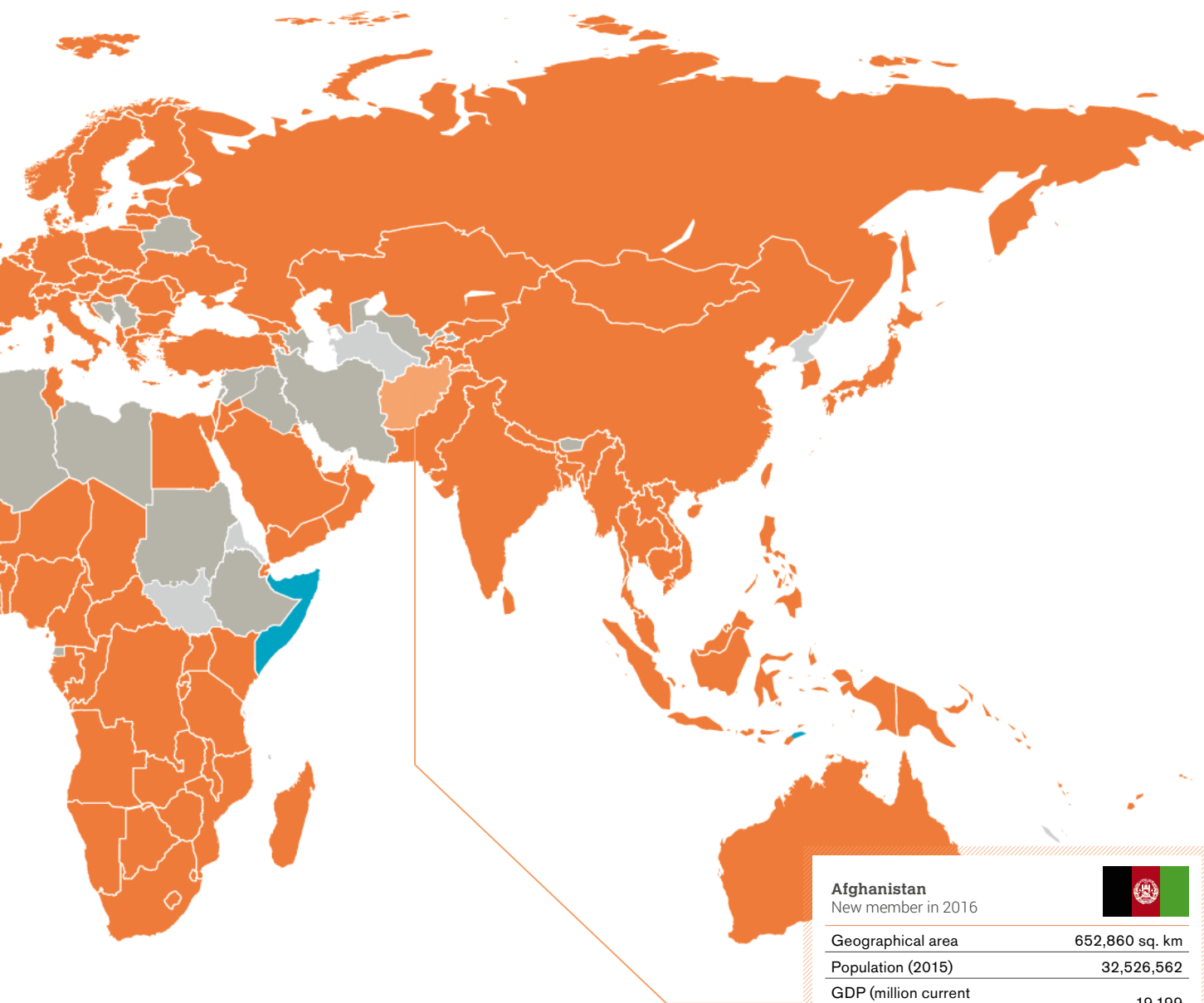
Liberia

New member in 2016



Geographical area	111,370 sq. km
Population (2015)	4,503,438
GDP (million current US\$, 2015)	2,053
GDP per capita (US\$, 2013-2015)	456
Trade per capita (US\$, 2013-2015)	359
Trade (% GDP, 2013-2015)	78.7
Rank in world trade (2015) – Exports	Merchandise: 171 Commercial services: 163
Rank in world trade (2015) – Imports	Merchandise: 149 Commercial services: 152





The map does not intend to show WTO members' non-metropolitan/overseas territories or the status of such territories in regard to the WTO agreements.

Afghanistan

New member in 2016



Geographical area	652,860 sq. km
Population (2015)	32,526,562
GDP (million current US\$, 2015)	19,199
GDP per capita (US\$, 2013-2015)	625
Trade per capita (US\$, 2013-2015)	171
Trade (% GDP, 2013-2015)	27.4
Rank in world trade (2015) – Exports	Merchandise: 164 Commercial services: 136
Rank in world trade (2015) – Imports	Merchandise: 120 Commercial services: 113

