

Spotlight: Public Forum 2018

The Public Forum debated how technological and other developments will affect trade in 2030. It attracted over 2,500 participants and staged a record number of sessions – 111 – on its themes of sustainable trade, technology-enabled trade and a more inclusive trading system. For the first time, the Forum held a session organized entirely by youth.



Policy-makers and representatives of government, business, workers, consumers and civil society (see Figure 1) came together at the 2018 Public Forum in October for three days of debate on how technological and other developments will affect trade in 2030 and beyond, and how to manage the major social and economic challenges technological change will bring.

Under its main theme of “Trade 2030”, the WTO’s biggest outreach event attracted over 2,500 participants from over 100 countries, with a record number of 111 sessions taking place.

High-level sessions

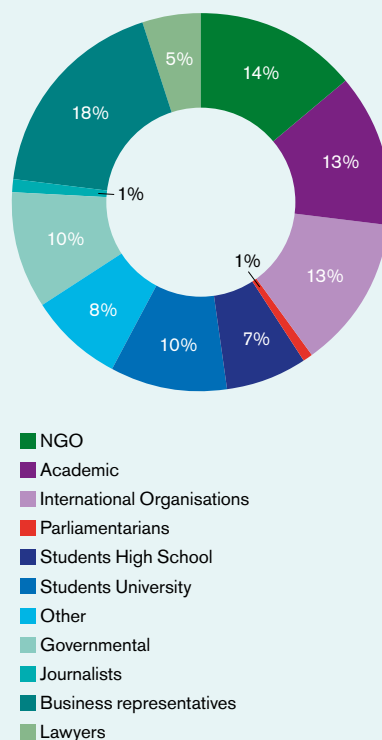
Keynote speakers at the opening plenary session stressed the importance of innovation and flexibility in adapting to the new global trading environment. DG Azevêdo underlined the need “to set a path towards better global trade by 2030 – trade that is even more sustainable and inclusive. We can’t put progress on hold until we’re ready. We have to start talking now. We have to get involved.”

Jack Ma, co-founder of the Alibaba Group, sounded an optimistic note. “All these things will fundamentally change the way we do trade, but for sure most businesses will benefit. We will create

a lot more jobs than we expected,” he said. Other speakers included: Erik Solheim, former Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, Christine Bliss, President of the US-based Coalition of Services Industries (CSI) and two young entrepreneurs, Laura Behrens Wu, CEO and co-founder of Shippo, a multi-carrier shipping platform, and Tunde Kehinde, co-founder of Lidya, a finance company for small business.

The Forum saw the launch of the WTO’s flagship publication, the World Trade Report, which focuses on how digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, 3D printing and Blockchain are transforming trade. A panel of experts, while optimistic about the future, agreed that digital technologies pose challenges to global trade regulation and that governments must work hard for coordinated solutions.

Figure 1: Public Forum participation in 2018





A high-level leadership dialogue on “Making Trade Work for the Environment, Prosperity and Resilience” (see page 96) was hosted by Mr Solheim and DG Azevêdo. “We must do everything we can ... to unlock trade in green sectors and move us towards more sustainable ways of consuming and producing. When we do this, we will find huge opportunities for prosperity and jobs,” Mr Solheim said.

Youth

For the first time, the Forum held a session organized entirely by youth. The session was based on a report prepared by the Global Shapers Community, a network of young people. Sixty city-based hubs from 42 countries, representing 800 young people, contributed to the report.

Participants highlighted that digital technology will redefine the workplace and business processes but many countries are ill-prepared to embrace the impact of new technologies. As “the generation of tomorrow”, they called for a “seat at the table” in order to shape the trade policies of the future.

Side events

A record number of 27 exhibitors, including international organizations and businesses, showcased their products and work relating to trade. Among them were companies offering innovative and sustainable technological solutions that are contributing towards greener, more inclusive economies. Exhibitors included Universal Robots, which displayed one of the robots that is changing the future of manufacturing.

The WTO Bookshop and Library organized three “Meet the Author Sessions” at which authors discussed their recent titles.

Small Business Champion

The Institute of Export and International Trade was declared a “Small Business Champion” (see page 156).

