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## Membership

The WTO is open to states and customs territories with full autonomy over their external commercial relations. The accession process promotes the integration of new members into the global economy.



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the WTO

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membership



A meeting of WTO members at the WTO's headquarters in Geneva.

# Joining the WTO

- A working party was established for Curaçao, taking the number of WTO working parties overseeing accession negotiations to 23.
- The working party on Timor-Leste's accession held its first meeting. Work resumed on the accessions of Ethiopia and Uzbekistan after breaks of several years. Comoros entered the final stage of its accession negotiations.
- The WTO held its first Accessions Week – a series of webinars examining how WTO accession can be a catalyst for economic reform.
- A Trade for Peace Week in December featured discussions on the impact of trade, job creation and technology on peace-building and prepared the way for further cooperation between the trade and peace communities.



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WTO working parties overseeing accession

## Key developments in 2020

**1. Curaçao**  
Working party established

**2. Timor-Leste**  
Working party held first meeting

**3. Ethiopia**  
Work resumed on accession



**4. Uzbekistan**  
Work resumed on accession

**5. Comoros**  
Entered final stage of accession negotiations



Twenty-three countries and customs territories are seeking to join the WTO.

### Background

The WTO is open to states or customs territories with full autonomy over their external commercial relations. To join, a government has to bring its economic and trade policies in line with WTO rules and principles and negotiate with WTO members the guaranteed minimum levels of access to its domestic markets for goods and services. The accession process promotes the integration of new members into the global economy. It begins when WTO members accept an application and establish a working party. It concludes when WTO members and the acceding government accept negotiated terms of accession.

### Working party for Curaçao

A working party for Curaçao was established in March 2020, taking to 23 the number of working parties overseeing accession negotiations for countries seeking to join the WTO. Since the WTO was launched in 1995, 36 members have joined the organization.

Curaçao is a constituent country and separate customs territory within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It applied for accession in October 2019. “We will actively support the role of the WTO in organizing and nurturing effective global economic governance, especially where it concerns the interests of small island developing states within the WTO,” said Caryl M.C. Monte, Curaçao’s Chief Negotiator for WTO accession.



### Timor-Leste formally starts its accession process

The first meeting of the Working Party on the Accession of Timor-Leste in October 2020 reviewed the data provided by the country on its trade regime. The WTO Secretariat was mandated to prepare a factual summary of the discussions to date, which will form the basis for further negotiations. Timor-Leste submitted its application for accession in November 2016. The working party was established in December 2016.

“Timor-Leste prioritizes WTO membership as it would help to leverage the ongoing improvements in its infrastructure, human capital and administrative capacity, and to accelerate growth and economic diversification,” said Joaquim Amaral, Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs and WTO chief negotiator.

### Ethiopia and Uzbekistan reactivate accession negotiations

Members welcomed the resumption of Ethiopia’s WTO membership negotiations at the fourth meeting of the working party on the

country’s accession, held in January 2020. It was the first meeting in almost eight years. Mamo Mihretu, senior advisor to the Ethiopian Prime Minister and chief trade negotiator, urged members to accelerate negotiations in consideration of Ethiopia’s status as a least-developed country (LDC).

WTO members welcomed the resumption of Uzbekistan’s accession at the fourth working party meeting in July 2020, nearly 15 years after the previous formal meeting. Uzbekistan’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade, Sardor Umurzakov, stressed the government’s commitment to the accession process.

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“Timor-Leste prioritizes WTO membership as it would help to leverage the ongoing improvements in its infrastructure, human capital and administrative capacity, and to accelerate growth and economic diversification”- Joaquim Amaral, WTO chief negotiator



### Comoros enters final phase of accession negotiations

At the fifth meeting of the Working Party on the Accession of the Union of the Comoros in September 2020, the Comoros reaffirmed its strong commitment to conclude accession negotiations. Members welcomed the efforts of the Comoros to bring its trade regime into conformity with WTO rules but underlined that significant progress will be needed, especially on the legislative front.

Ethiopia resumed accession negotiations after an eight-year pause.

“The efforts undertaken by acceding governments to join the organization are a force for change” - DDG Alan Wolff

### Somalia submits data on trade regime

Three years after the establishment of its working party, Somalia circulated a memorandum on its trade regime, the first step in the process for negotiations with WTO members. In October 2020, Mikael Anzén of Sweden was appointed as chair of the working party.

### New observer

In May 2020, Turkmenistan requested observer status in the WTO and indicated its intent to initiate accession negotiations within five years. The General Council accepted the request in July 2020. Turkmenistan becomes the last former Soviet republic to establish a formal relationship with the WTO.

### Technical assistance and outreach

The WTO Secretariat organized a range of technical assistance and capacity-building activities, including through virtual platforms. These included the first Accessions Week – a series of webinars that emphasized the benefits of WTO accession as a catalyst for economic reforms.

At a time when the WTO is under heightened scrutiny and reform of the WTO is a subject of concern for all, the efforts undertaken by acceding governments to join the organization are a force for change, Deputy Director-General Alan Wolff told the opening session in June. The WTO also held a two-week virtual training course on agriculture in the context of accession negotiations.

In 2020, the Secretariat organized two regionally focused dialogues, one on Africa and another on the Arab region, where a large number of countries have yet to accede to the WTO.

The Third Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions for Africa was held in February in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and focused on



“Deepening Economic Integration in Africa through WTO Membership and AfCFTA (African Continental Free Trade Area) Implementation”.

The first Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions for the Arab Region was organized in collaboration with the Arab Monetary Fund and the Islamic Development Bank in November on “Arab Perspectives on WTO Accessions and the Multilateral Trading System”. The virtual workshop provided a platform for increasing knowledge of the WTO accession process, accession-related rules and the state of play of Arab accessions.

The ninth China Round Table on WTO Accessions took place virtually in December. Under the theme “25 years of WTO accessions in review”, it paid tribute to the contribution of accessions to the organization since its establishment in 1995. It also discussed how to make WTO membership universal and what more can be done to assist the most vulnerable countries seeking WTO accession.

Under the “Trade for Peace through WTO Accessions” initiative, in December the Secretariat hosted the first edition of the

Trade for Peace Week. The discussions highlighted the impact of trade, job creation and technology on peace-building.

In remarks at the opening session, DDG Alan Wolff said the initiative could contribute to making the trading system more agile, responsive, humane and fit for purpose. There was much more that the trade and peace communities could and must do together, he added.

Launched in 2017, the Trade for Peace initiative aims to assist fragile and conflict-affected countries through WTO accession.

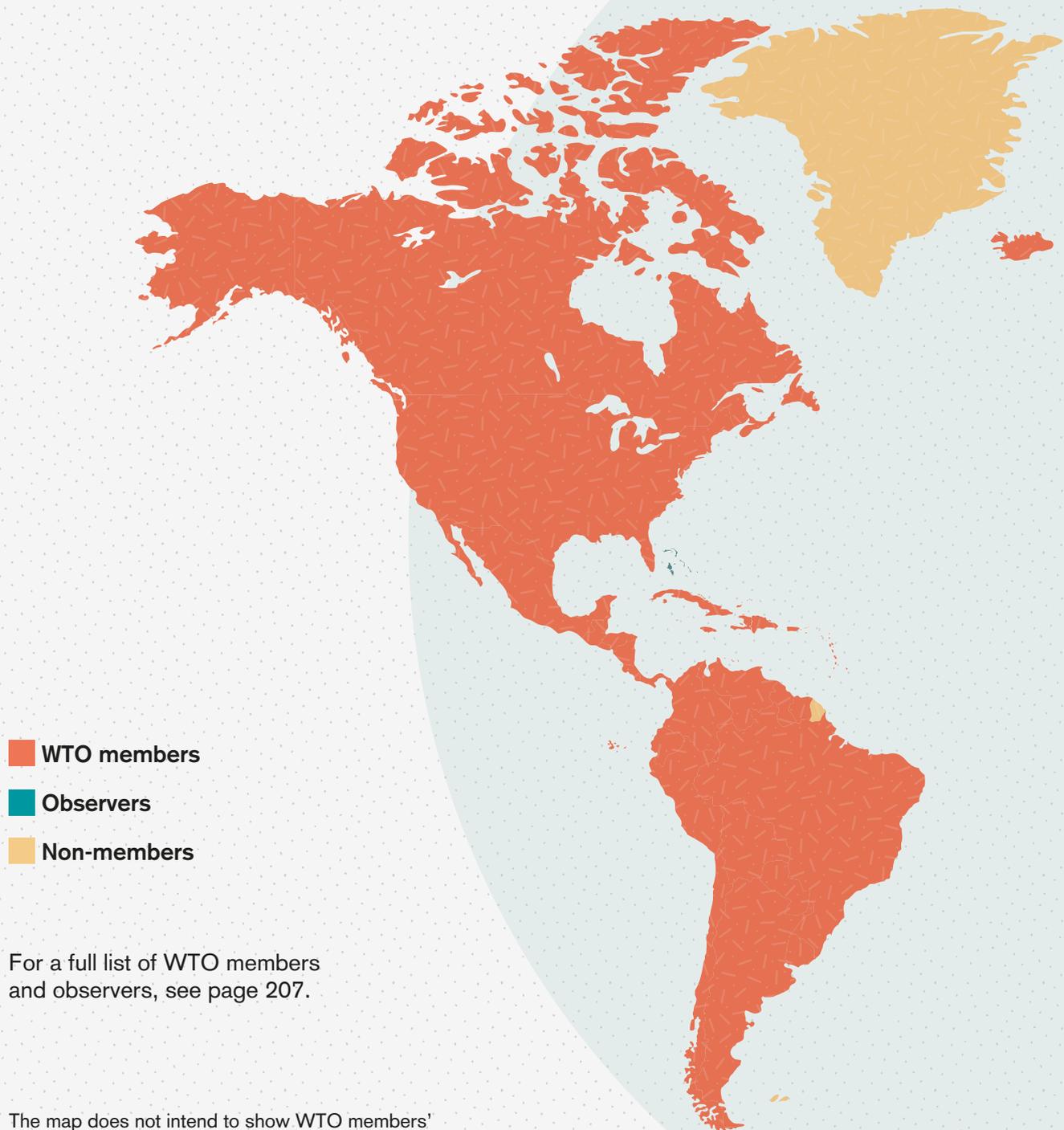
For a full list of WTO members and observers, see page 203.

A wool carpet workshop in Uzbekistan’s Kachka Daria province. Uzbekistan has stressed its commitment to the country’s accession process, which resumed in 2020.

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# A global membership

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



For a full list of WTO members and observers, see page 207.

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.

