



## Membership

The WTO currently has 164 members. The accession process for new members promotes their integration into the global economy.





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Joining  
the WTO

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A global  
membership



# Joining the WTO

- Comoros made progress towards the finishing line in accession talks and aims to conclude negotiations in 2022. Timor-Leste, another least-developed country, sets the goal of completing accession negotiations by early 2023.
- Sudan resumed formal accession talks after a four-year break.
- Turkmenistan applied to join the WTO, becoming the last former Soviet republic to do so.
- China's 20th anniversary of WTO membership was marked with a high-level forum.



## Key developments in 2021



**1. Comoros**  
sets end-2022  
accession target

**2. Timor-Leste**  
seeks to finish accession  
by early 2023

**3. Sudan**  
resumes formal  
accession talks

**4. Turkmenistan**  
applies to join  
the WTO

**5. Curaçao**  
begins accession  
negotiations

### 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.

### Comoros makes progress towards WTO accession

The accession of Comoros is the WTO's most advanced least-developed country (LDC) accession dossier, according to Deputy Director-General Xiangchen Zhang. He was speaking at a roundtable organized by Comoros, the WTO and the Standards and Trade Development Facility in January 2022 to discuss technical assistance and capacity-building needs of Comoros.

At the 6th working party meeting in September, the Government of Comoros reaffirmed its commitment to completing the accession in 2022. Mzé Abdou Mohamed Chanfiou, Minister of Economy, Industry and Investment and accession chief negotiator, said: "Comoros is counting on technical assistance to help it meet the obligations arising from its accession." WTO members welcomed the efforts of Comoros to modernize its trade regime, while noting that advancing the domestic legislative reform process would be key to wrapping up the accession in 2022.





"I think we are entering the final phase. My goal is to find a way to complete this accession in 2022," said the Working Party Chair, Ambassador Omar Zniber of Morocco.

#### **Timor-Leste aims to complete accession by early 2023**

Timor-Leste, which started its accession process in 2016, held its second working party meeting in July, only nine months after the first.

Comoros aims to complete its accession process by end-2022.

José Ramos-Horta, former President of Timor-Leste and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, said: "Timor-Leste is fully committed to abide by the principles, objectives and rules of the WTO." He was among 81 government officials, including nine ministers, joining the meeting virtually from the capital, Dili.

Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs and accession chief negotiator Joaquim Amaral expressed his government's determination to complete the WTO accession process within the coming year. Members continued the examination of the foreign trade regime of Timor-Leste and agreed to explore the possibility of issuing "Elements of a Draft Working Party Report" to mark progress made in this accession.

#### **Sudan formally resumes accession talks**

After a four-year break, the Working Party on the Accession of Sudan officially resumed its work by holding its 5th meeting in July. It was preceded by an informal meeting in March.

At the formal session, Ali Giddo Adam Bashr, Minister of Trade and Supply and accession chief negotiator, said: "The transitional government has placed economic reform as one of its priorities and WTO accession is one of the vehicles to drive this agenda through Sudan's integration into the global economy."





At the meeting, members welcomed the formal resumption of Sudan's accession. They pledged full support for its efforts, including through the provision of technical assistance. As a next step, the WTO Secretariat will prepare the Elements of a Draft Working Party Report.

#### Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan prepare for working party meetings in 2022

A WTO Secretariat team, led by DDG Zhang, visited Tashkent in October. Sardor Umurzakov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investment and Foreign Trade of Uzbekistan, reiterated his government's firm commitment to WTO accession as a policy priority and an integral part of its wide-ranging reform agenda. DDG Zhang commended the Uzbek Government for pursuing an ambitious domestic reform agenda and for its efforts to use the accession process as part of its development strategy.

Azerbaijan circulated updated negotiating inputs to the Working Party in preparation for its next meeting. The date of the meeting will be decided once a new Chair is appointed.

#### Curaçao submits Memorandum on Foreign Trade Regime

Curaçao circulated the Memorandum on its Foreign Trade Regime in September, 18 months after the establishment of its working party. The memorandum is the first step in the negotiating process, providing the basis for WTO members to start examining Curaçao's foreign trade regime.

#### New application

In November, Turkmenistan applied to join the WTO and requested that its application be considered for action by the General Council in early 2022. At a meeting of the General Council in February 2022, WTO members agreed to initiate negotiations on the country's accession. It is the last former Soviet republic to apply for membership.

#### Technical assistance and outreach

In March 2021, the WTO Secretariat organized a two-week virtual training course on trade in services for all acceding

Timor-Leste seeks to accede to the WTO by early 2023.



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A total of 24 countries is seeking to join the WTO.

governments. In addition, the Secretariat delivered tailored-made training activities to many acceding governments on a range of different topics, depending on the stage of the accession process. Collaboration with other partners was an important part of this technical assistance.

#### **China Programme on LDC Accessions**

The 10th China Round Table on WTO Accessions, held virtually in January 2022, celebrated 10 years of the China Programme, with participants reflecting on its impact on the accession of LDCs and discussing the future direction of this initiative. The event also provided an opportunity for trade experts to present a study reviewing the results of accession for the nine countries that have joined the organization as LDCs since 1995 – Nepal, Cambodia, Cabo Verde, Samoa, Vanuatu, Lao PDR, Yemen, Liberia and Afghanistan.

#### **Accession anniversaries**

A High-Level Forum co-organized by the WTO Secretariat and the Permanent Mission of China on 10 December marked China's 20th anniversary of WTO membership. The event highlighted the significance of China's accession for the multilateral trading system and discussed China's participation in the work of the organization.

DG Okonjo-Iweala said that China's accession was a "pivotal event in the history of the multilateral trading system". Chenggang Li, Permanent Representative of China to the WTO, underlined the great transformation experienced by China. "We have seen great changes. With its accession to the WTO, China substantively opened its market of goods and services," he said.

In July, Afghanistan and Liberia marked five years of WTO membership. The Secretariat launched studies examining their experiences since joining the WTO, including economic

performance, the fulfilment of obligations and participation in the work of the WTO.

#### **Trade for Peace**

On 25 March 2021, the Trade for Peace Network was launched at a meeting attended by ambassadors from WTO members and observers, heads of international organizations and experts involved in the WTO Trade for Peace initiative (see page 176).

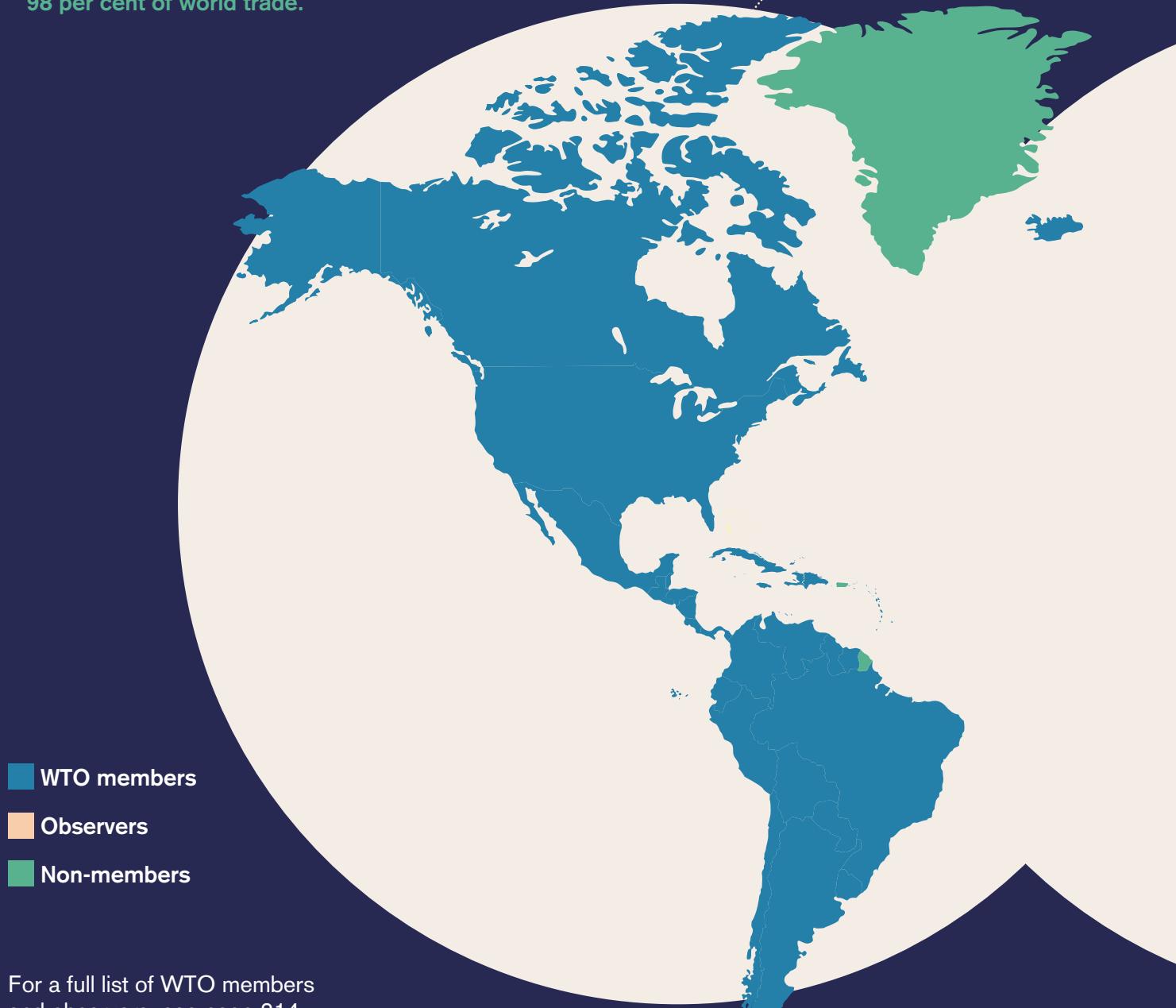
For a full list of WTO members and observers, see page 214.



 **WTO members agreed in February 2022 to initiate membership talks for Turkmenistan, the last of the former Soviet republics to apply for WTO membership.**

# 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 214.

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.



