

Joining the WTO

- **WTO members agreed that Comoros is progressing well towards accession. Many members said it was important that Comoros joined by the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference, set for February 2024.**
- **Timor-Leste has taken decisive steps towards concluding its accession negotiations, WTO members agreed. Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs Joaquim Amaral underlined that membership is a strategic priority.**
- **President Shavkat Mirziyoyev declared Uzbekistan’s intention to conclude accession negotiations in 2023.**

Accession of Comoros moves to final stages

At the eighth Working Party meeting held in January 2023, members agreed that Comoros is progressing well towards WTO accession. Many members said it is important that Comoros joins by the 13th Ministerial Conference, set for February 2024. The Government of Comoros said it is committed to making the necessary effort and to working towards achieving this goal.

Working Party Chair, Ambassador Omar Zniber of Morocco, had reported to the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in June 2022 that the successful conclusion of bilateral market access negotiations with all interested members had marked an important milestone in this process.

On the draft Report of the Working Party – a key element of the final accession package passed on to the Ministerial Conference or the General Council for approval – the Chair noted at the Working Party meeting that many chapters were at an advanced stage. Work needs to focus on the elaboration of agreed language for the commitments and the integration of issue-specific action plans, he said.

“My wish for the new year is to help our Comorian friends conclude their accession. I am sure that this objective is within reach,” Ambassador Zniber said. He urged the WTO Secretariat, WTO members and the broader international community of bilateral and multilateral development partners to intensify their support for the country’s efforts.

Timor-Leste aims to join WTO in 2023

At the fourth meeting of the Working Party, held on 30 September, WTO members noted the decisive steps taken by Timor-Leste towards concluding WTO 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.



164

WTO members, accounting for 98% of world trade



25

countries are negotiating WTO membership



Workers pick ylang ylang flowers for distillation into aromatic oil in Hayoho, Comoros. The Government of Comoros is committed to joining the WTO by the 13th Ministerial Conference in February 2024.



Coordinating Minister of Economic Affairs and accession chief negotiator Joaquim Amaral underlined that WTO membership is a strategic priority for Timor-Leste together with membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. He reiterated the country's commitment to maintaining momentum in the negotiations and reaching the goal of WTO accession in 2023.

During MC12, Timor-Leste announced the finalization of bilateral market access negotiations with Australia and New Zealand and its decision to join the Joint Initiative on

Services Domestic Regulation (see page 69), making it the first least-developed country (LDC) and acceding government to do so. Since then, Timor-Leste has signed two more bilateral market access agreements, with the Philippines and Canada, and advanced negotiations with six other members. It also announced its decision to join the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) and the ITA Expansion Agreement (see page 102).

At the September Working Party meeting, the Chair – Ambassador Rui Macieira of Portugal – said his objective is to finalize the

A farmer works in a rice field near Loihuno, Timor-Leste. Decisive steps have been taken by Timor-Leste towards concluding WTO accession negotiations.

remaining issues before the next meeting of the Working Party so that elements of a draft accession package, representing the results of both the multilateral and bilateral negotiations, could start to emerge.

Uzbekistan reaffirms commitment to intensify accession efforts

In a recorded statement to the fifth Working Party meeting in June 2022, Sardor Umurzakov, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Investments and Foreign Trade, stressed WTO accession is a priority of the country's development strategy for 2022-26.

In March 2022, WTO Deputy Director-General Xiangchen Zhang spoke at the Tashkent International Investment Forum where he underlined "WTO members are ... keen to

see progress and welcome Uzbekistan as a fully-fledged member of the Organization".

In December, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev declared Uzbekistan's intention to conclude accession negotiations in 2023. In line with this objective, the Uzbek Government presented an ambitious roadmap to prepare for a new phase of accelerated negotiations.

Uzbekistan submitted a full set of accession documentation in preparation for the 6th Working Party meeting.

Equatorial Guinea submits foreign trade memorandum

In December, the Minister of Trade and Promotion of Small and Medium Enterprises handed over the Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime of Equatorial Guinea to DG



Blacksmiths forging tools in Bukhara, Uzbekistan. WTO accession is a priority of the country's development strategy for 2022-26.

Okonjo-Iweala. The memorandum is the first step in the negotiating process, providing the basis for WTO members to start examining Equatorial Guinea's foreign trade regulations.

Equatorial Guinea applied for WTO accession in 2007 and the Working Party on the accession of Equatorial Guinea was established in February 2008.

New accession

At a meeting of the General Council in February 2022, WTO members agreed to establish the Working Party on the Accession of Turkmenistan. It is the last former Soviet republic to apply for membership.

Technical assistance and outreach

A High-level Regional Dialogue for Arab Accessions took place in February 2022. The session focused on how to assist Arab acceding governments advance closer to WTO membership. Participants stressed the many challenges beyond trade faced by several Arab countries still outside the WTO.

In early February 2023, the 11th China Round Table on WTO Accessions was held in Lao PDR under the theme "WTO Accessions and Trade Integration: Stories from the Asia-Pacific". Discussions covered the contributions of Asia-Pacific economies to the multilateral trading system, exploring LDC accession and post-accession best practices. A high-level session launched a study titled "Lao PDR: a Retrospective on 10 Years of WTO Membership".

In May 2022, the WTO issued a paper exploring the impact of WTO accession on LDCs and best practices for accessions based on the experience of nine members. The study – Accessions of LDCs to the WTO – summarizes the commitments undertaken and looks at the challenges and opportunities of WTO membership for LDCs.

During 2022, the Secretariat delivered in collaboration with other partners about 60 training activities to acceding governments. To formalize the Secretariat's coordinating role, a new Coordination Group on



Accessions-related Technical Assistance was launched in July at the 2022 Aid for Trade Global Review (see page 141). The Group will serve as a forum for development partners and acceding governments to exchange information on WTO accession-specific needs and assistance.

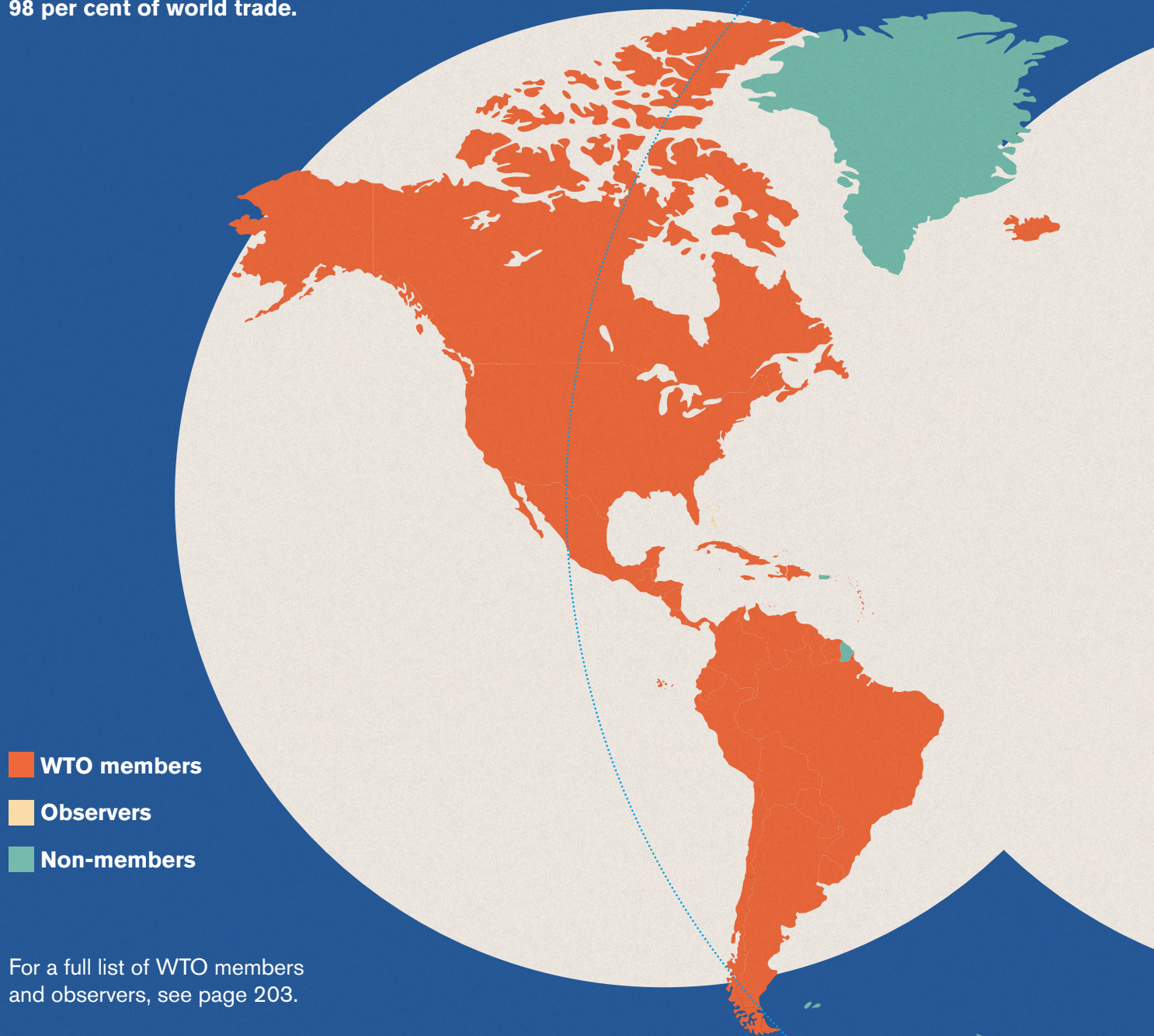
Textile factory workers in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan. The country is the last former Soviet republic to apply for WTO membership.

The Secretariat also organized technical assistance roundtables for the accessions of Comoros, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan in 2022.

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

A global membership

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



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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.

