

Our year

An aerial photograph of a red fishing boat on a body of water. The boat is filled with fishing gear, including large coils of rope and several red and white buckets. Four fishermen wearing blue jackets and conical hats are visible on the boat, handling a large green net that is partially submerged in the water. The water has a yellowish-green hue.

- The 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in June 2022 resulted in a series of important outcomes, including decisions on an emergency response to the food crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic and a ground-breaking agreement on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies.
- Following MC12, members focused on implementing outcomes and on how to approach areas such as agriculture, WTO reform and a second wave of negotiations on fisheries subsidies.
- DG Okonjo-Iweala urged members to find solutions wherever they can, especially in topics such as green technologies, services, digital commerce and inclusiveness.
- In December 2022, the General Council agreed that MC13 will be held in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) in February 2024.



Trade negotiations and discussions

Intensive negotiations in the run-up to the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in June 2022 culminated in a series of important outcomes at MC12. These included decisions on an emergency response to the food crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic and a ground-breaking agreement on curbing harmful fisheries subsidies, the first WTO agreement to have an environmental objective at its core.

To build on the success at MC12, DG Okonjo-Iweala convened retreats on fisheries subsidies and agriculture later in the year, providing opportunities for members to reflect on the way forward.

The retreat on fisheries subsidies focused on how to approach a second wave of negotiations while the agriculture retreat considered fresh approaches to the talks to try to overcome entrenched differences. At a meeting on WTO reform, members emphasized the importance of the reform process and the need in particular for a resolution of the issues surrounding the dispute settlement system.

In December, the General Council agreed that MC13 will be held in Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates) in the week of 26 February 2024 and that MC14 will be hosted by Cameroon at a date to be determined.

The DG underlined the need to ensure the benefits of trade are felt by all. She urged members to avoid divisive debates and to find solutions wherever they can, especially in areas such as green technologies, services, digital commerce and inclusiveness.

See pages 48-73.



MC12

produced a series of important outcomes in areas such as health, food security and fishing subsidies



MC13

United Arab Emirates will host MC13 in February 2024

Fishermen in Quang Ngai, Viet Nam.



Implementation of WTO agreements and trade monitoring

The General Council continued to be an important forum for WTO members to raise trade concerns, including on the WTO response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the consequences of the war in Ukraine.

Following the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12), the General Council began to review progress in implementing MC12 outcomes, in particular on WTO reform, the waiver decision on COVID-19 vaccines and work on e-commerce.

Together with the Director-General and the chairs of WTO councils and committees, the General Council Chair took steps to advance work on the reform process, including in areas such as dispute settlement, with the aim of achieving concrete milestones by MC13.

On e-commerce, key issues raised by members included the need to bridge the digital divide, the importance of an adequate legal and regulatory framework, and the benefits of sharing best practices.

The Agriculture Committee launched a work programme to address the food security concerns of vulnerable economies.

WTO members remained divided on whether to extend the MC12 decision on COVID-19 vaccines to diagnostics and therapeutics, with the General Council agreeing to extend the deadline for reaching a decision.

Following up on a declaration adopted at MC12, the Agriculture Committee launched a work programme to address the food security concerns of vulnerable economies.

The WTO's latest trade monitoring report revealed that members introduced trade restrictions at an increased pace between October 2021 and October 2022, in particular regarding exports, at a time of economic uncertainty exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the food security crisis. However, some of these export restrictions were in place for only a short period of time.

See pages 74-131.

Dispute settlement

WTO members filed in 2022 eight requests for consultations, the first stage in the dispute settlement process, compared with nine in 2021. By the end of 2022, a total of 615 disputes had been initiated under the Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU) since the establishment of the WTO in 1995.

Nine panel reports were circulated in 2022. The Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) adopted two panel reports during this period. Two arbitration decisions and two arbitration awards were circulated during the year. As of the end of December 2022, panel proceedings were ongoing in 18 disputes.

Members continued to put forward proposals on launching the Appellate Body selection process. The latest proposal, circulated in September 2022 by Mexico on behalf of 127 members, was considered by the DSB at its meetings up to end-2022. However, in the absence of consensus, all seven positions on the Appellate Body remained vacant and no appeals could be heard.

One notification of appeal was filed in 2022 by Indonesia. As of 31 December 2022, appeals in 25 disputes were pending before the Appellate Body.

At the 12th Ministerial Conference in June 2022, ministers agreed to talks on addressing concerns with respect to the dispute settlement system, with a view to securing a fully functioning system by 2024.

See pages 132-135.

Dr Athaliah Molokomme chaired the Dispute Settlement Body in 2022.



Supporting development and building trade capacity

The Committee on Trade and Development discussed initiatives to boost developing economies' integration into the global trading system. The share of least-developed countries (LDCs) in global merchandise exports remained unchanged – at 0.93 per cent in 2021 – while their share in world commercial services exports declined to 0.49 per cent, from 0.53 per cent in 2020.

Disbursements under the WTO-led Aid for Trade initiative, which seeks to help developing economies and LDCs benefit from trade, rose to US\$ 48.7 billion in 2020, up from US\$ 47.2 billion in 2019. The Aid for Trade Global Review in July brought together over 1,000 participants, with the event focusing on how to help developing economies and LDCs build resilience to ensure sustainable development.

As of end-2022, projects worth US\$ 90 million were supported by the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), a multilateral partnership

dedicated to assisting LDCs use trade as an engine for growth. The EIF has supported over 16,000 micro, small and medium-sized enterprises in LDCs since 2010.

The Standards and Trade Development Facility, a global partnership helping developing economies meet international standards for food and plant trade, approved US\$ 7 million for projects in 2022, up from US\$ 3.6 million in 2021.

Approximately 5,500 government officials participated in training activities organized by the WTO to improve understanding about the multilateral trading system – a one-third increase on 2021.

In December, the WTO hosted the inaugural World Trade Congress on Gender to discuss women's empowerment through trade, bringing together over 80 speakers for the three-day event.

See pages 136-151.



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Outreach

The WTO played an active role at the COP27 Climate Summit in Egypt in November. “Trade is the missing part of the puzzle for more ambitious, more effective climate action,” DG Okonjo-Iweala said at the launch of the 2022 World Trade Report, which focused on climate change and international trade.

Alongside the heads of the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, International Monetary Fund, World Bank Group and World Food Programme, the DG called for an urgent response to the food security crisis, noting that 349 million people across 79 economies are acutely food insecure.

At a G20 summit in November, the DG warned against fragmenting the world trading system along geopolitical lines, telling G20 leaders “we need to strengthen trade cooperation, not weaken it”.

The DG and FIFA President Gianni Infantino signed a memorandum of understanding on how international trade and football can stimulate economic growth and social inclusion.

The Prime Minister of Barbados, Mia Mottley, delivered the inaugural Presidential Lecture at the WTO, focusing on reinventing the global order to address the world’s most pressing challenges.

The 2022 Public Forum, under the theme “Ambition to action”, was attended by nearly 1,300 participants.

The DG received in Washington DC the National Foreign Trade Council Foundation’s prestigious World Trade Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to furthering open trade.

See pages 152-183.



1,300

Approximately 1,300 people attended the 2022 Public Forum

