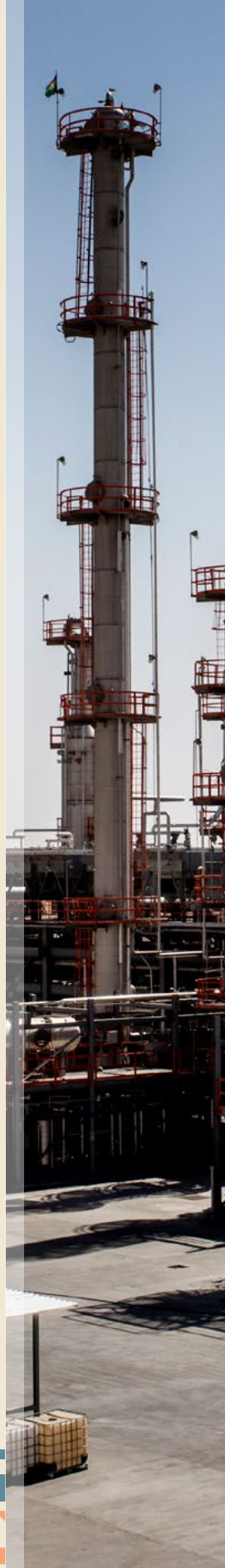


2

SECTION

Main elements of the accession process and reforms upon accession

Overview of the accession process and outcomes	26
Challenges faced and solutions found throughout the accession process	40
Technical assistance and capacity-building needs during the accession process	44





The Kar group oil refinery, Erbil, Iraq.

Overview of the accession process and outcomes

The accession process is a complex procedure that economies aspiring to become WTO members must undergo to become fully-fledged members of the multilateral trading system. The process of acceding to the WTO is designed in accordance with the nature of the organization as a contractual framework of legally binding agreements in which members exchange rights and obligations. All members are bound by the rules and disciplines laid out in these agreements, and their individual market access commitments contained in their individual schedules. All such obligations and commitments are enforceable through the WTO dispute settlement mechanism.

By becoming a WTO member, a country/territory agrees to uphold and adhere to a set of international rules and principles governing trade. The process of joining the WTO aims at reaching an agreement between the acceding government and the WTO members on the terms of accession. This entails agreement on all obligations and commitments the acceding government would undertake. The process is also designed to guarantee that the acceding government's laws, regulations and practices are in compliance with its WTO obligations. In this context, the act of acceding to the WTO represents the willingness of a new member to embrace a range of commitments and obligations that shape its integration into the global trading system.

The realm of legal obligations within the WTO can be categorized as two overarching types, each serving a distinct purpose in fostering equitable and predictable global trade:

a. Standardized obligations: This category encompasses obligations and disciplines comprised in the WTO agreements and which are uniformly applicable to all WTO members. They establish a baseline of conduct and expectations for all members. These standardized obligations serve to create a fair and transparent trading environment of stability and predictability of trade conditions, and to promote mutual cooperation.

b. Customized and negotiated commitments:

The second type of legal obligations involves specific commitments tailored to the unique circumstances of each individual member. These commitments are not preordained; rather, they are negotiated taking into consideration the economic and trade priorities of each member. Such commitments on trade in goods and trade in services are set in individual schedules for each member. In addition, for members which have joined since 1995, there are further specific commitments recorded in the protocol of accession, a document that delineates the specific terms and conditions under which the new member will join the WTO.

In essence, the act of joining the WTO constitutes the conscious choice to actively participate in the global trading system. By embracing the above legal obligations, economies contribute to the shared objective of promoting fair, open and mutually beneficial trade interactions on a global scale. At the same time, a WTO member benefits from the predictability and stability of trading conditions that secure export opportunities.

The legal basis of WTO accession

Article XII of the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization (the Marrakesh Agreement) outlines the conditions and process for a state or a separate customs territory to become a member of the WTO and adhere to its agreements. It states that:

- "1. Any State or separate customs territory possessing full autonomy in the conduct of its external commercial relations and of the other matters provided for in this agreement and the Multilateral Trade Agreements may accede to this Agreement, on terms to be agreed between it and the WTO. Such accession shall apply to this Agreement and the Multilateral Trade Agreements annexed thereto.
2. Decisions on accession shall be taken by the Ministerial Conference. The Ministerial Conference shall approve the agreement on the terms of accession by a two-thirds majority of the Members of the WTO.
3. Accession to a Plurilateral Trade Agreement shall be governed by the provisions of that Agreement."

Possession of full autonomy in the conduct of its external commercial relations

Article XII (1) of the Marrakesh Agreement stipulates that for a state or separate customs territory to join the WTO, it must have complete independence in managing its external commercial relationships and other relevant matters outlined in the WTO agreements. This signifies that the entity seeking accession should have the ability to make its own trade decisions and fully participate in international trade negotiations. While international inter-governmental organizations are normally made up of sovereign states, Article XII opens a possibility for trading partners who are not fully-fledged sovereign states to accede to the WTO under two conditions:

- i. they must be separate customs territories, and
- ii. they must possess full autonomy in the conduct of their external commercial relations.

Such separate customs territories have the same rights and obligations as any other member.¹

Acceding to the Agreement

Article XII (1) provides that a state or separate customs territory can join the WTO by becoming a party to the agreements outlined in the WTO's framework. These agreements include both the Marrakesh Agreement and the Multilateral Trade Agreements that are annexed to it. Therefore, joining the WTO involves adhering to the principles and rules set forth in the Articles of those agreements. In addition, the terms and conditions for accession to be inscribed in schedules and protocol of accession are subject to negotiation and agreement between the aspiring member and the WTO.

Terms to be agreed on

Article XII provides no guidance, either on the terms to be agreed on between the acceding state or separate customs territory and the WTO, nor the procedures to be followed.

The purpose of this provision is to offer a flexible framework for negotiation, to ensure that the “terms” eventually agreed upon are adapted to each individual case of accession when it comes to specific commitments contained in schedules and the protocol of accession. Accordingly, every accession is distinct and worked out individually.

The conditions for entry always relate to the policy framework and the legal and organizational structure of the joining government and thus differ for each accession.

While Article XII does not outline precise steps for the accession process, a series of procedures and practices – giving structure to the process – have been developed by members, with the help of the WTO Secretariat. The main elements of that structure include (i) the examination of the foreign trade regime of the acceding state or separate customs territory, (ii) the negotiation and establishment of a schedule of concessions and commitments to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 (GATT 1994), (iii) the negotiation and establishment of a schedule of specific commitments to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), (iv) agreement on the report of the working party, and (v) agreement on a Decision and a Protocol setting out the terms of accession.

Accession shall apply to this agreement and the Multilateral Trade Agreements annexed thereto

Article XII (1) provides that “accession shall apply to this agreement and the Multilateral Trade Agreements annexed thereto”. Accordingly, when a new member accedes to the WTO, it thereby abides not only by the Marrakesh Agreement itself, but also by the various Multilateral Trade Agreements² that are attached as annexes to the Marrakesh Agreement.

Annex 1A (Multilateral Agreements on Trade in Goods) includes the GATT 1994, which establishes principles for the trade of goods among all WTO members as well as other agreements relating to trade in goods. Annex 1B contains the GATS, and Annex 1C includes the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). These multilateral annexes cover core areas of international trade and are binding on all WTO members.

Annex 2 contains the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes, and Annex 3 contains the Trade Policy Review Mechanism. Both are also binding on all members as part of a single undertaking.

Annex 4 contains plurilateral agreements which, while part of the WTO Agreement, are binding only on members that have accepted them. They neither create

rights nor obligations for other members. Currently, Annex 4 contains only two agreements: the Agreement on Trade in Civil Aircraft and the Agreement on Government Procurement.

The Ministerial Conference shall approve the agreement on the terms of accession by a two-thirds majority of the members

Article XII (2) of the Marrakesh Agreement outlines the process by which decisions on accession to the WTO are made. This paragraph deals specifically with the decision-making aspect related to the approval of the terms of accession for a new member.

The competent organ to take decisions regarding accession is the Ministerial Conference – the highest governing body of the WTO. It consists of all WTO members and typically convenes every two years to discuss various trade-related matters and decide on key issues concerning the functioning of the WTO. During the period between two Ministerial Conferences such decisions have been taken by the General Council as provided for in Article IV:2 of the Marrakesh Agreement.

Although Article XII refers to a two-thirds majority, since 1995 decisions on accession have always been taken by consensus in accordance with WTO practice (Article IX:1 of the Marrakesh Agreement).

Preparedness

Before delving into the accession process phases it is worth mentioning that the preparation for a negotiation is as important, if not more, as the negotiation itself. This requires, (a) building political support, (b) forming a stable negotiating team, (c) crafting a negotiating strategy, (d) understanding rights and obligations arising from accession, and (e) learning from the experiences of others, which are all pivotal steps in this process. By following these steps, aspiring members can enhance their chances of a smooth and successful accession experience.

Building political support

One of the most vital steps in the path to accession is garnering political support from the relevant stakeholders. The decision to apply for membership should be rooted in a consensus among the key players of the nation. Internal negotiations can often prove to be more challenging than

the external ones with existing members. The need for widespread support among various groups, including government ministries, parliamentarians and private sector representatives, cannot be stressed enough.

For example, from the very beginning, a robust political commitment in Saudi Arabia was evident. The Council of Ministers displayed a strong desire to join the WTO and actively aligned the business environment with WTO agreements to streamline the accession process. Furthermore, royal decrees were promptly issued to accelerate the accession procedure. This commitment remained unwavering throughout the negotiation phase, ultimately resulting in Saudi Arabia's successful accession to the WTO. Additionally, the Council of Ministers remained well-informed about the progress of negotiation at every stage.

Similarly, since its first working party meeting in 2016, Comoros demonstrated strong political commitment to completing its WTO accession process, despite facing significant resource constraints at the time. Jordan, Oman and Yemen, also, emphasized the importance of strong political will and leadership in concluding their accession.

Establishing a stable negotiating team

A stable negotiating team is considered the backbone of the accession process. Ideally, it needs to be established well before the formal negotiations commence. The composition of this team should be carefully considered, ensuring the inclusion of trade and legal experts and economists. Furthermore, a chief negotiator with a clear negotiating mandate on all aspects of the accession negotiations should lead the team. This ensures a unified and expert-driven approach.

In addition to the primary accession team, it is necessary to establish an inter-agency process. This process brings together stakeholders from various ministries, including those dealing with trade-related issues. The engagement of parliamentarians and the business community is crucial, as their input and support are vital throughout the process. The minister responsible for the accession negotiations – or another relevant high-ranking government official – should ideally head this inter-agency process, providing it with the necessary political weight. In practice, most governments create a National Committee on WTO Accession.³

Formulating a negotiating strategy

A well-defined negotiating strategy is indispensable for successful accession. Before engaging in negotiations, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of the objectives, economic priorities and the interests of both the applicant government and potential trading partners. These strategies should be derived from the domestic reform process and equip the negotiating team to defend its interests effectively.

Knowing your rights and obligations

Accession candidates must possess a comprehensive knowledge of their rights and obligations within the framework of the WTO agreements. Waiting until formal negotiations commence to build this knowledge is a risky approach. Technical assistance can be sought from the WTO as well as from various organizations and member governments, which can help strengthen the technical capacity of the negotiating team. Acquiring a firm grasp of the rules and responsibilities can significantly bolster the applicant's position in the negotiations.

Learning from others

Lastly, learning from the experiences of others who have successfully completed the accession process can provide invaluable insights. Establishing contacts with governments that have previously undergone accession can help identify the challenges and pitfalls to be avoided. This knowledge exchange allows for better preparation and a more informed approach to negotiations.

The phases of accession

The accession process consists of several key elements, each playing a crucial role in determining the economy's eligibility and commitment to the multilateral trading system. It typically spans multiple stages and requires extensive negotiations and engagement with existing WTO members. The aspiring member must in principle be open to negotiate with the entire WTO membership. In practice, only a relatively small subset of the membership actively engages with the applicant in the framework of a WTO accession working party.

Each stage is pivotal in ensuring that aspiring WTO members are not only aligned with the organization's principles but also prepared to contribute to the global trade community effectively.

Simultaneously, bilateral negotiations are conducted with individual interested WTO members to address concerns and requests related to specific market access issues concerning trade in goods and services.

The negotiation process can be lengthy and demanding. It requires the applicant to provide detailed information about their economic policies, trade regime, domestic laws and regulations. Additionally, the applicant is expected to undertake significant domestic reforms to align their trade practices with WTO rules and agreed specific commitments.

These reforms, which encompass broader economic and governance frameworks, such as tariff reduction, regulation of state-owned enterprises, intellectual property protection and the establishment of independent tribunals, can drive meaningful institutional changes, enhancing governance metrics such as non-discrimination, transparency and due process. Notably, economies with weaker institutions tend to experience a stronger growth and investment boost from WTO accession due to the benefits of policy anchoring.

Once the working party is satisfied with the applicant's commitment to WTO rules and principles, and all bilateral negotiations are completed, the terms of accession are finalized. Accordingly, the working party presents its final report containing all elements of the terms of accession to the General Council for approval. Subsequently, the applicant becomes a WTO member 30 days after notification of its acceptance of the agreement.

While the average time of all completed accessions from the date of the establishment of the working party to the date of membership is 10 years and 4 months, the average for Arab members having acceded since 1995 (under Article XII) is 9 years and 3 months.

However, the average duration of the overall accession process for all acceding governments is 18 years and 11 months, while for Arab acceding governments it is 20 years and 6 months in many cases, with intervening periods of stagnation by acceding governments. Table 6 shows the time taken for each phase of the accession of the five Arab members that have completed accession since 1995.

Table 6: Overview of the time taken for accession for Arab economies having acceded since 1995

	Comoros		Jordan	
	Date	Time since memo	Date	Time since memo
Application	Feb-07		Jan-94	
Working party established	Oct-07		Jan-94	
Memorandum	Oct-13		Oct-94	
1st meeting of working party	Dec-16	3 years, 2 months	Oct-96	2 years
Draft working party report	Feb-18	4 years, 4 months	Apr-99	4 years, 6 months
Report adopted by working party	Jan-24	10 years, 3 months	Nov-99	5 years, 1 month
Report adopted by Council	Mar-24	10 years, 5 months	Dec-99	5 years, 2 months
Membership	Aug-24	10 years, 10 months	Apr-00	5 years, 6 months
Total time	17 years, 6 months		6 years, 4 months	

Source: World Trade Organization.

Accession to the WTO typically follows a standardized structure, indicated in Figure 2, beginning with the submission of a membership application. Next, the working party is formed, followed by a fact-finding phase. Subsequently, negotiations take place, culminating in the adoption of the Accession Protocol.

Table 7 shows a summary of the accession process of the five Arab member accessions by date of each key step in the accession.

Phase 1: Letter of application and establishment of the working party

i. Letter of application

Governments that are not yet members of the WTO have the option of becoming WTO observers before initiating their accession application. However, there is no requirement for them to take this step, and in recent times, aspiring WTO members have shown a preference for bypassing observer status and directly commencing the accession process. In the case of Lebanon notably, the request was withdrawn shortly

after its presentation when an application to accede to the WTO was made (Williams 2008).⁴

The accession process begins with a formal letter of application to the Director-General of the WTO. Therein interested governments must submit a formal application, expressing their intention to join the organization and outlining their trade policies and legislative framework.

Typically conveyed in the form of a letter, this message explicitly states the government's intention to accede to the WTO under Article XII of the Marrakesh Agreement. While there are no strict formatting requirements, clarity is paramount. Some applicants choose to include additional language, such as a request for the application to be shared with all WTO members and to be included on the agenda for an upcoming meeting of the WTO General Council. This initial step sets the formal documentation process in motion.⁵

Following receipt by the Director-General, the Secretariat, on behalf of the chairperson of the

Oman		Saudi Arabia		Yemen	
Date	Time since memo	Date	Time since memo	Date	Time since memo
Apr-96		Jun-93		Apr-00	
Jun-96		Dec-95		Jul-00	
Jun-96		May-96		Nov-02	
Apr-97	10 months	May-96	1 year, 10 months	Nov-04	2 years
Mar-99	2 years, 9 months	Jan-00	5 years, 6 months	Dec-09	7 years, 1 month
Sep-00	3 years, 3 months	Oct-05	11 years, 3 months	Oct-13	10 years, 1 month
Oct-00	3 years 4 months	Nov-05	11 years, 4 months	Dec-13	11 years, 1 month
Nov-00	3 years, 5 months	Dec-05	11 years, 5 months	Jun-14	11 years, 7 months
4 years, 7 months		12 years, 6 months		14 years, 7 months	

General Council, checks if the request would achieve consensus among WTO members before it is placed on the agenda of the General Council. Subsequently, the General Council schedules the accession request for discussion during an upcoming meeting, where it evaluates the application and establishes a working party.

The chairperson of the General Council often extends an invitation to the representative of the applicant government to present an overview of its current trade and economic framework, to provide clarity on the motivations behind the accession application. It is advantageous for the applicant to affirm alignment with WTO requirements or demonstrate active efforts to implement necessary reforms, ensuring compliance with WTO regulations. Governments also emphasize aspects of particular significance to them, such as their economic development status or their transition towards a market-based economy. These discussions shape the initial evaluation of the applicant's readiness for WTO membership. Thereafter, a working party is established.

ii. *Establishment of the working party*

The General Council's decision to proceed with an accession request leads to the creation of a working party, tasked with conducting an in-depth investigation of the applicant's trade regime and assessing the extent of its compatibility with WTO rules. The chairperson of the General Council outlines the terms of reference for the working party and invites the applicant government to collaborate with the Secretariat's Accessions Division in preparing the essential documentation required for the working party's consideration. All accession working parties have been given the same terms of reference.

It is important to note that all interested WTO members have the option to join the working party on accession. The composition of these parties can thus vary significantly from one accession to another, but it tends to reflect economic influence and specific interests, rather than representing the entire WTO membership. While not all members actively participate in the work of the working party due to resource constraints, they choose to focus on matters aligned with their primary trade interests.

Figure 2. The WTO accession process in brief

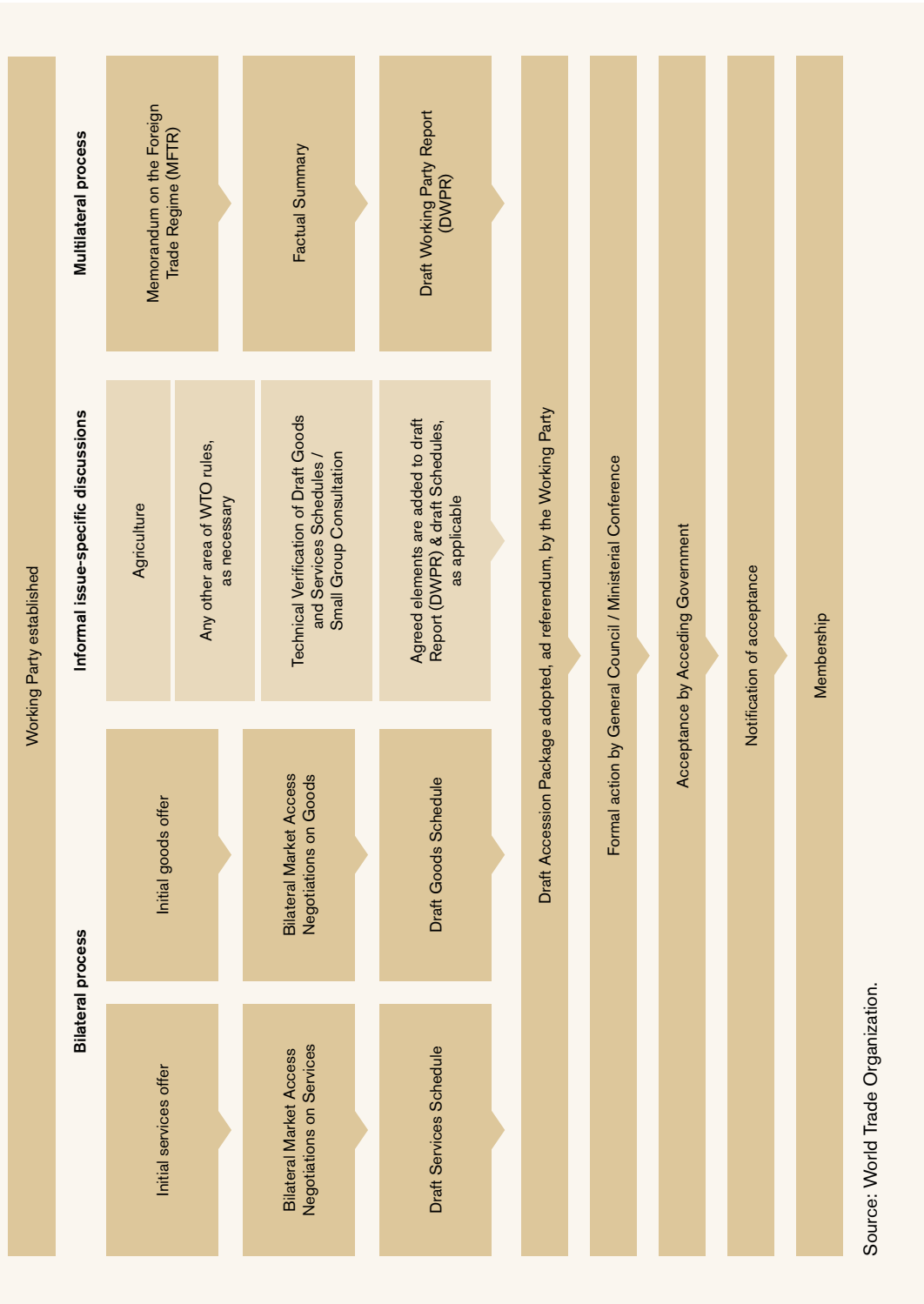


Table 7. Summary of the accession process for five concluded Arab member accessions

	Comoros	Jordan	Oman	Saudi Arabia	Yemen
Working party established	09/10/2007	04/10/1995	26/06/1996	21/12/1995	17/07/2000
Working party meeting (first meeting – number of meetings)	02/12/2016 (10)	28/10/1996 (5)	30/04/1997 (6)	03/05/199 (14)	30/11/200 (11)
Memorandum on Foreign Trade Regime	25/10/2013	10/10/1994	29/10/1996	15/05/1996	20/11/2002
Factual summary	26/04/2017	/	12/03/1998	29/10/1998	06/09/2005
Working party draft report (first circulation – number of revisions)	22/02/2018 (6)	08/10/1999 (1)	02/09/1999 (3)	11/01/2000 (6)	14/12/2009 (5)
Number of questions	1,179	929	808	1,218	1,164
Initial goods offer (first circulation – number of revisions)	07/10/2016 (1)	03/07/1998 (0)	29/10/1997 (4)	24/09/1997 (4)	12/09/2005 (3)
Initial services offer (first circulation – number of revisions)	07/10/2016 (1)	07/01/1999 (1)	29/10/1997 (5)	24/09/1997 (2)	17/08/2005 (3)
Membership date	21/08/2024	11/04/2000	09/11/2000	11/12/2005	26/06/2014
Length of accession process	16 years, 10 months	4 years, 6 months	4 years, 6 months	9 years, 11 months	14 years, 2 months

Source: World Trade Organization.

The General Council chairperson designates the working party's chairperson in consultation with both members and the applicant economy. Typically, these consultations are facilitated by the WTO Secretariat, acting on behalf of the General Council chairperson. The formal confirmation of the appointment occurs through an announcement during a General Council meeting or by written procedure via communication by the chairperson of the General Council. The chosen chairperson is typically a resident ambassador in Geneva. While the acceding government may propose names for consideration, the final selection requires the consensus agreement of all WTO members. Lebanon's working party chairmanship was historically assigned to France, whereas Iraq's working party is chaired by Saudi Arabia.

The chairperson's responsibilities within the working party are not formally documented, but it is evident that their role is to guide discussions in a fair and objective manner. Occasionally, they may leverage their position to propose ideas that facilitate these discussions, but their capacity for initiating action is constrained since accession negotiations primarily occur between the working party members and the acceding government.

During crucial phases of the process, both the chairperson and the Secretariat may visit the capitals of acceding countries. These visits have proven instrumental in stimulating and expediting accession proceedings. Such visits consistently involve engagement with high-level government and parliamentary officials, as well as meetings with representatives from the public and private sectors and the media.

Phase 2: Fact finding

In the initial phase of the working party process, the focus is on gathering factual data about the applicant's trading regime. This fact-finding phase serves two fundamental objectives. First, it aims to identify any necessary adjustments the applicant must make to align its laws, rules and administrative procedures with WTO criteria. Second, it establishes a robust foundation for discussions on market access for goods and services.

The acceding economy kicks off this phase by presenting a comprehensive document known as the Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime (MFTR), which meticulously outlines its foreign trade policies, laws, regulations and practices. Upon receiving the MFTR, working party members submit written enquiries to the acceding government seeking clarifications or additional information as needed.

The working party bases its report on the applicant's foreign trade regime by utilizing the MFTR as its cornerstone. Having a comprehensive and precise document greatly simplifies the subsequent stages of the accession process. According to the procedures, the Secretariat may assess the MFTR's alignment with the Outline Format found in Annex I of Procedures for Negotiations under Article XII.⁶ In some instances, applicants have been requested to provide additional

information to support their MFTR, or to update their MFTR, before the working party examination can commence.

The MFTR comprises seven major sections, covering all aspects from the economy's overview to international trade policies and legal frameworks. It is a substantial commitment for the acceding government, both in terms of resources and time. Nevertheless, a thorough MFTR constitutes a critical basis for launching discussions in the working party. The detailed and accurate submission of this document eases subsequent steps in the joining procedures. The major sections are as follows:

- Introduction;
- Economy, economic policies and foreign trade;
- Framework for making and enforcing policies affecting foreign trade in goods and services;
- Policies affecting trade in goods;
- TRIPS regime;
- Trade-related services regime;
- Institutional base for trade and economic relations with third countries.

A list of the subjects covered by each of these headings is set out in the annexes of WTO official document WT/ACC/22/Rev.1, here summarized in Table 8. Additional information required for the accession process is set out in Table 9.

Table 8. Accession documentation requirements

Type of information	Information required	WTO document reference
General	■ Outline format for a Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime, ■ Statistics and publications, ■ List of laws and regulations	■ WT/ACC/22/Rev.1, Annex I ■ WT/ACC/22/Rev.1, Annex II ■ WT/ACC/22/Rev.1, Annex III
Trade in goods	■ Questionnaire on import licensing procedures, ■ Customs valuation agreement, ■ Technical barriers to trade information, ■ Questionnaire on state trading	■ WT/ACC/22/Rev.1, Annex IV ■ WT/ACC/22/Rev.1 Annex V ■ WT/ACC/22/Rev.1, Annex VI ■ WT/ACC/22/Rev.1, Annex VII
Trade in services	■ Services sectoral classification list	■ WT/ACC/22/Rev.1, Annex VIII
Foreign trade agreements	■ List of foreign trade agreements	■ WT/ACC/22/Rev.1, Annex IX

Source: World Trade Organization.

Table 9. Supplementary documentation required for accession

Type of information	WTO document reference
Domestic support and export subsidies in agriculture	WT/ACC/22/Add.1
Technical barriers to trade, Sanitary and phytosanitary, Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, Industrial subsidies	WT/ACC/22/Add.2

Source: World Trade Organization.

Furthermore, the applicant must engage in written question-and-answer sessions with interested WTO members. These sessions aim to clarify the intricacies of the applicant's foreign trade regime. The questions cover various aspects of the MFTR and help in identifying areas of potential concern or disagreement. These discussions pave the way for the evaluation of the applicant's compliance with WTO criteria.

iii. Working party examination of applicant's trade regime

Only once the solid factual foundation of the MFTR and written questions and answers are submitted, the working party convenes its first meeting. During this initial meeting, the applicant introduces their case, outlining their trade and economic framework and expressing their expectations.

The working party's main objective during this phase is to delve into the MFTR, its accompanying documentation, and the questions and answers. The aim is to seek further clarifications where necessary, particularly regarding compliance with the WTO Agreement and Multilateral Trade Agreements. The working party might convene several meetings before concluding the evaluation of the MFTR.

This stage involves separate evaluations of each subject within the MFTR, examining relevant legislation and regulations. The process may also require additional consultations and informal meetings with the applicant, working party members and the Secretariat to ensure a smooth transition to the subsequent phases.

As the fact-finding process unfolds, potential areas of disagreement with WTO agreements gradually emerge. To maintain transparency and facilitate discussions, an informal document, called the Factual Summary of Points Raised, is often requested from the Secretariat to summarize the discussions within the working party and to highlight established and pending issues. Ultimately, this document lays the groundwork for the future draft working party report, which will include commitments the applicant must accept alongside factual information.

Phase 3: Negotiations

Once the factual basis has been established, the working party moves forward to discuss the conditions of accession. Governments aspiring to join the WTO commit to adhering to its rules and regulations. See Table 10 for recently acceded Arab members.

In the working party, negotiations on general rules pertaining to the WTO agreements are conducted on a multilateral basis. These negotiations are critical, as the commitments established within the working party are expected to be followed by the acceding governments and will be enforceable under the WTO Dispute Settlement Understanding.

Negotiating the terms of accession is a multifaceted process involving different stages. First, multilateral negotiations within the working party focus on the rules the applicant must accept. In addition, on some occasions members and the acceding government may discuss draft commitment language in bilateral or even plurilateral settings among interested parties.

Table 10. Accession in numbers: completed accessions

Recently acceded Arab member	Length of accession process	Number of Working Party meetings held	Number of documents issued	Number of questions replied to	Number of legislations submitted to Working Party
Comoros	17 years, 6 months	10	84	1,179	157
Jordan	6 years, 3 months	5	53	929	52
Oman	4 years, 5 months	6	52	808	55
Saudi Arabia	12 years, 5 months	14	98	1,218	95
Yemen	13 years, 11 months	11	98	1,164	58

Source: World Trade Organization.

iv. Negotiation of rules

Rules negotiations often take place within the multilateral setting of the working party. Here, governments are encouraged to update and adapt their strategies as the accession process progresses. This typically entails the preparation of legislative action plans to address specific issues, ensuring alignment with WTO agreements. Interested members may even request draft legislation to be supplied, a practice aimed at preventing legislative revisions that could later be rejected on non-compliance grounds.

The negotiation process typically commences when working party members submit suggested texts for inclusion in the draft report. Progress in other negotiation areas, such as bilateral goods and services discussions, is considered in this decision-making process. The final text for inclusion in the working party report encompasses commitments that the acceding government is willing to accept regarding trade rules.

Additionally, informal consultations and discussions take place within subgroups of working party members interested in specific topics, such as agricultural support and export subsidies. In some instances, other issues like sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS), technical barriers to trade (TBT), or even the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) may also be addressed.

v. Negotiations on agricultural support and export subsidies

Negotiations on agricultural support and export subsidies are a significant part of some WTO accession negotiations. These discussions rely on factual information provided by the applicant in the form of WTO documents and supporting tables containing data on domestic support and export subsidies. The tables are subject to continuous revisions to address member concerns effectively. Given the systemic importance of this information, discussions typically occur in informal meetings with interested WTO members.

The Secretariat facilitates these discussions. The final tables serve as the foundation for commitments related to Total Aggregate Measurement of Support and Export Subsidies in Agriculture in the Schedule of Concessions and Commitments on Goods.

vi. Negotiation of tariff concessions

The applicant engages in bilateral discussions with interested working party members regarding the terms to be agreed on market access commitments for goods and services. Negotiations cover a range of issues, including tariff bindings for goods. It also covers specific services commitments under the GATS on national treatment and market access. Negotiations also address exemptions from the most-favoured nation (MFN) provision to be listed in the relevant Annex to the GATS.

The negotiation of tariff concessions is a critical aspect of the accession process, focusing on trade in goods. Bilateral negotiations based on offers and requests are conducted to discuss tariff concessions. While either the applicant or members can initiate these negotiations, it is customary for members to wait until the acceding government submits an initial offer of suggested bound rates.

Early offers on tariffs are frequently submitted between the first and second working party meetings. The simultaneous submission of offers for both goods and services would enable the acceding government to engage in parallel negotiations with interested members, potentially facilitating progress in the negotiations.

Bilateral negotiations on tariffs usually coincide with working party meetings. Negotiations may vary in intensity, depending on the quality of offers and the complexity of the issues. Bilateral agreements are signed between the parties involved and an original signed and initialed copy is deposited with the Secretariat, forming the basis for the creation of a consolidated draft Goods Schedule.

The draft Schedule – comprising the results of all signed bilateral agreements – is then distributed to all signatories for review and verification, ensuring that concessions accurately reflect individual negotiations with the acceding government. The final agreed tariffs for non-agricultural products for the five most recently acceded members are shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Tariff commitments for non-agricultural products for Arab members having joined the WTO since 1995

Member	Average final bound rates, %
Comoros	19.3 (9.8) ⁷
Jordan	15.2
Oman	11.6
Saudi Arabia	10.5
Yemen	20.5

Source: World Trade Organization.

vii. Negotiation of specific commitments on services

Negotiating specific commitments on services mirrors the processes for tariff negotiations, relying on offers and requests. These negotiations typically begin following a multilateral evaluation of the applicant's services regime.

The process commences with the multilateral circulation of the applicant's initial offer, which is structured in line with all GATS Schedules. Interested members engage in bilateral conversations with the applicant, aiming to align commitments with their expectations and requests and to understand the applicant's viewpoint.

Negotiations on services and tariffs often occur concurrently, with some members urging the applicant to broaden the scope and quality of their offers. The number of negotiating rounds is influenced by the applicant's willingness to accommodate members' requests.

Once bilateral agreements have been reached, the Secretariat compiles them into a draft Services Schedule, reflecting the least restrictive commitment in cases where multiple commitments have been made in a given sector. The draft is then reviewed by all signatories to ensure alignment with GATS requirements and the outcomes of bilateral negotiations. The agreed commitments for services can be found in Table 12.

Table 12. Services-specific commitments for Arab members that joined the WTO after 1995

Member	No. of services subsectors
Comoros	107
Jordan	110
Oman	98
Saudi Arabia	120
Yemen	78

Source: World Trade Organization.

Phase 4: Concluding negotiations and adoption of the accession protocol

All agreements need to be multilateralized before inclusion in the accession package. The package comprises the draft Report, including a draft Protocol and Decision, and the draft Goods and Services Schedules. While Figure 3 shows the frequency of commitments for the first four Arab members that acceded to the WTO after 1995, Table 13 shows a summary of Arab members accession market access outcomes on goods and services.

Upon completion of the working party report, it is presented before the General Council, marking a decisive step towards the applicant's formal accession. The working party chairperson introduces the report, offering the applicant's representative an opportunity to address the Council. The Council, comprised of WTO members, acknowledges the conclusion of negotiations.

The General Council then proceeds with the formalities, which include:

- i. Approving the text of the draft Protocol of Accession;
- ii. Adopting the draft Decision on Accession, adhering to the Decision-Making Procedures outlined in the WTO Agreement;
- iii. Adopting the working party's report in its entirety, including the schedules of goods and services appended as Addenda 1 and 2, respectively.

vii. Invocation of Article XIII of the WTO

Article XIII of the WTO Agreement (Non-application of Multilateral Trade Agreements between particular members) occasionally plays a role in the accession process. This provision allows members or the acceding government to notify the General Council – prior to the approval of the terms of accession – that they do not consent to the application of WTO rules between one another.

This mechanism has been invoked 12 times in the history of the WTO, with 10 invocations subsequently withdrawn. Only two invocations remain in force.

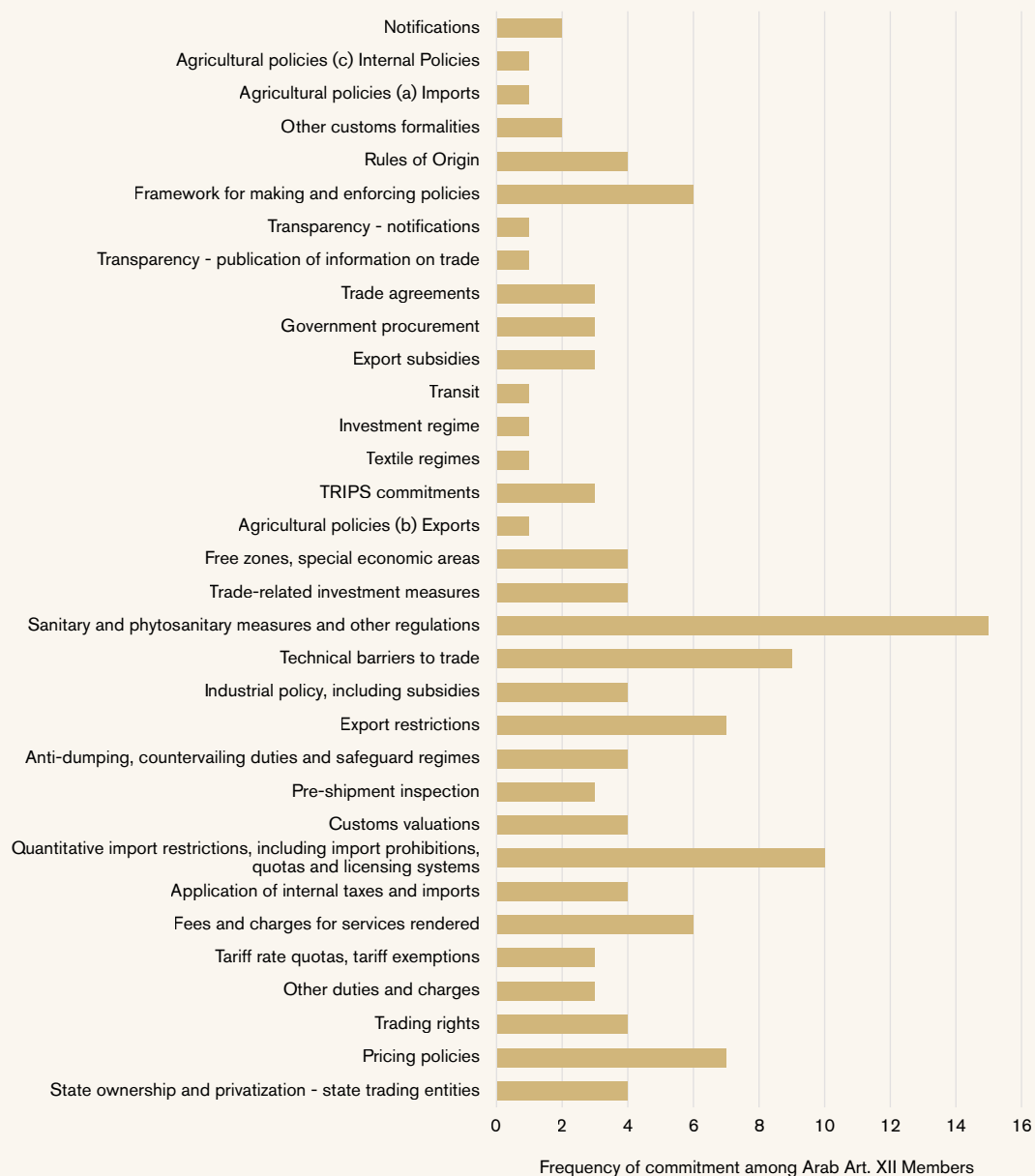
Table 13. Summary of accession market access outcomes on goods and services for Arab members that acceded after 1995

Arab members	Date of membership	Goods				Services
		Binding coverage (%)	Average final bound rate (%)			Number of services commitments
			All products	Agricultural products	Non-agricultural products	
Comoros	21/08/2024	100	19.6 (10.9)*	21.6 (17.4)*	19.3(9.8)*	107
Jordan	11/04/2000	100	16.3	23.6	15.2	110
Oman	09/11/2000	100	13.7	27.7	11.6	97
Saudi Arabia	11/12/2005	100	11.4	17.3	10.5	120
Yemen	26/06/2014	100	21.1	24.9	20.5	78

Source: World Trade Organization.

Note: *In the event that Comoros implements the Common External Tariff (CET) of COMESA, Comoros will further reduce its bound tariff rates as specified in an annex of its Goods Schedule. The average final bound rate after COMESA CET implementation is shown in parenthesis.

Figure 3. Frequency of commitments of Arab members having acceded after 1995 (excluding Comoros)



Source: World Trade Organization.

Challenges faced and solutions found throughout the accession process

Five Arab members that have acceded since 1995

Acknowledging the underrepresentation of the Arab region within the WTO and considering the experiences of the five Arab economies (Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Comoros) that have become members since the creation of the WTO in 1995, it is crucial to identify the primary challenges faced by governments seeking accession in the Arab world. These challenges encompass not only the diversity of policy contexts but also the hurdles encountered throughout the accession process. The aim here was to leverage this understanding to enhance the design of technical assistance for aspiring Arab acceding governments. The challenges encountered by the five Arab members during their accessions journey were categorized using a questionnaire (see Annex II).

The first category identified the primary challenges associated with trade and economic aspects that were encountered throughout the accession procedure. These challenges encompass various areas, including exchange rate and monetary policy, technical regulations (such as TBT, SPS and others), tariff adjustments, import regime, reforms related to services trade, such as financial, telecommunications, information technology services, transportation, distribution, energy, tourism, professional services, and so forth.

The main trade-related challenges are tariff reform and technical regulation. Responses to the questionnaires revealed that some of the WTO commitments posed challenges to monetary and financial policies, such as the amendment of tax laws and the customs tariff, removing subsidies and controlling expenditures, as in the case of Jordan. Some difficulties were encountered in domestic reform and in preparing sectors for global competition, especially services sectors, as was seen with Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Moreover, Jordan indicated difficulties in amending legislation related to agriculture to ensure the safety of food, plant and animal products. Saudi Arabia also indicated the challenge of unifying regulations. Oman on the other hand indicated that it did not face burdensome challenges, even though it did not benefit from the favourable treatment for developing economies requiring that all legislation be in place prior to accession, with just a few exceptions related to TBT and SPS. Yemen highlighted the impact of the international financial crisis in 2008 on the economy as a whole, at that time.

The second category of primary challenges encountered during the process encompassed issues that were unrelated to trade. These challenges could be associated with non-trade regulatory reforms or both internal and external political obstacles. The most reported challenge was the absence of open dialogue and effective communication among pertinent stakeholders to establish a lasting institutional communication channel. Yemen highlighted the major challenge of being confronted with conflicts and political instability, which negatively impacted its economic development and consequently led to delays in the accession process.

The third category pertains to the phases of the process where progress was slow and the primary reasons for these delays. The responses revealed that the accession process was accomplished through multiple rounds of negotiations, with intensified meetings aimed at reaching agreement on commitments related to market access for both goods and services.

For instance, Jordan successfully completed its negotiations through a series of five negotiating rounds. During these rounds, the Jordanian team dedicated to the accession process held extensive negotiating sessions with members, focusing on issues such as customs duty reductions, liberalization of trade in services, protection of intellectual property rights, import-export procedures, and so on. In contrast, Oman stood out as one of the economies to conclude its accession to the WTO in a short time period, achieving this milestone in less than five years.

Given the valuable insights gained from the experiences of the accession processes of the five Arab members that have joined since 1995, it was imperative to include a section in the questionnaire dedicated to solutions and policy recommendations. This section aimed to offer precise guidance that could be shared with the present Arab governments seeking accession. The responses to the questionnaire in this regard offered explicit and concrete recommendations, which are as follows:

- Having strong political will is a crucial factor for achieving swift and successful WTO accession.
- Maintaining well-established communication channels and conducting regular consultations among stakeholders is essential for the ongoing analysis of the amendments' impact on the economy.
- The presence of permanent and institutional coordination channels is vital to prevent redundant efforts and maintain progress in the accession process.
- Aligning the business environment with WTO agreements is a valuable step to streamline the accession process.
- It is imperative to have a highly experienced and well-informed chief negotiator, along with a skilled negotiating team, who remain largely unchanged for the duration of the process, to ensure prompt decision-making on negotiation matters and to maintain a cohesive negotiation process.
- Spending a full year as an observer before formally applying for membership is advisable to become well-acquainted with WTO rules and procedures.

Current Arab acceding governments

The challenges and difficulties faced by the five Arab members that acceded to the WTO after 1995, during their accession processes, provide useful guidance for the seven current Arab acceding governments, to accelerate the pace and lead the way in their negotiations. Algeria, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Syria are currently negotiating membership

and have been in the process for over 18 years; some of these governments have been inactive for many years.

For the current Arab acceding governments, the challenges faced throughout the accession process can be grouped into the same categories as presented for the five Arab members that have acceded since 1995, as seen in their responses to the questionnaire.

a. Challenges related to trade and the economy

i. Challenges related to tariff reforms and other import regime reforms

Before applying for accession to the WTO, Sudan implemented a tariff reform which brought down the maximum rate of import duties from 100 per cent to only 40 per cent, the minimum rate from 5 per cent to 0 per cent, and the simple average rate of tariffs from more than 100 per cent to 20.3 per cent. The main challenge Sudan is facing regarding tariff reforms during accession is to maintain the current level of tariff liberalization and comply with the locked-in principle, since – as an LDC – it heavily depends on tax revenues for its budget finance. There is always pressure to increase tariff rates in order to increase revenues.

The solution was to apply internal taxes such as value-added tax (VAT) and excise taxes on imported goods rather than increasing import duty rates, on the condition that they should be consistent with GATT Article III (National Treatment). Regarding import regime reform challenges, Sudan indicated that the successive depreciation of the exchange rate of the local currency since the late 1970s had not increased Sudanese exports, nor decreased imports because both exports and imports were affected by structural problems. Lebanon faced the same problem. In 2000, the Lebanese Government introduced VAT and lowered the levels of tariffs to an average of 5.85 per cent.

ii. Challenges related to non-compliance of some national laws and regulations

Algeria faced a significant hurdle in the form of its national laws and regulations not aligning with the rules and principles of the WTO. The non-compliance had

direct and indirect ramifications on various economic factors, including foreign direct investment (FDI), export and import regulations, monetary policy, monetary reserves and exchange rates. In Lebanon the alignment of laws and regulations with the international trade regime led to positive legislative reforms that benefitted the economy, but the journey to amend these laws and regulations was arduous and protracted. The process required international consultations involving both the private and public sectors.

iii. Challenges encountered through the reform process of the services sector

Algeria, Iraq and Sudan encountered challenges regarding trade in services reforms due to the absence of a single unified body or entity responsible for regulating the service sectors, a common challenge faced by others. This challenge became particularly evident with ongoing services negotiations within certain regional agreements and initiatives, such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, League of Arab States, African Continental Free Trade Area, and tripartite agreements. Additionally, the laws and regulations pertaining to trade in services were found to be lacking in comprehensiveness and did not demonstrate adequate interconnectedness with other regulatory frameworks.

To address this issue, Sudan made efforts to establish a dedicated department for trade in services, operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Trade and Supply. This department's primary role was to coordinate policies related to service sectors and facilitate the necessary amendments and compliance with relevant obligations.

iv. Technical regulations challenges

One of the main trade and economic challenges faced by Iraq and Sudan during the accession process is related to technical regulations such as TBT and SPS, among other measures. Moreover, another interrelated challenge are the disagreements between the competent government authorities because of overlapping mandates and functions, especially those related to technical regulations and coordination of commitments.

v. Challenges related to limited diversification

Lebanon's economy is heavily reliant on services and remittances from the diaspora, with limited diversification in terms of export products and markets. This makes it very challenging to compete effectively in international markets and to fully benefit from WTO membership. Other Arab acceding governments also face the same challenge of economic diversification, be it in different sectors. They need to effectively achieve progress on this front to be able to benefit from the export opportunities to be secured through accession.

vi. Challenges related to exchange rate and monetary policy

Sudan faces inconsistent fiscal and monetary policies as well as unstable exchange rates that are affecting FDI, eroding investor confidence and dissuading potential investment given the volatile financial environment. Another bottleneck area is the positive correlation between exchange rates and international trade flows, as a predictable exchange rate is considered to be an enabling factor for expanding trade. As for Sudan's exchange rate, instability emanates from its current account deficit originating from a significant deficit in the trade balance and a fiscal deficit, leading to exchange rate distortions.

On the other hand, Sudan witnessed a prolonged period of an overvalued exchange rate, which negatively affected exports and imports. Another problem faced by the Sudanese economy is the management of monetary policy during the accession process to the WTO and full interaction with international markets. One of the major difficulties in the implementation of monetary policy is the fiscal dominance that jeopardizes the autonomy of the central bank and negatively affects the performance of monetary policy, exchange rate, inflation rate and the consequent stability of prices. Algeria also referred to challenges related to exchange rates, monetary policy and balance of payments fluctuations.

vii Challenges encountered with high debt levels and unemployment

The high debt-to-GDP ratio limits a government's ability to invest in infrastructure and other areas needed for economic growth. Also, the higher the unemployment rate, particularly among young people, the lower the potential for economic growth and development. Lebanon suffers from both challenges, affecting the accession process negatively.

viii. Challenges correlating with financial and banking sector capabilities

Accession to the WTO will expose the financial and banking sectors to strong international competition. In Sudan, banks and other financial institutions are lagging in terms of quality and efficiency of services providing credit for the private sector and foreign currency reserves. Other Arab acceding governments face the same needs for an efficient and solid financial sector that can support economic growth and development.

b. Challenges unrelated to trade (political instability and conflicts)

Many Arab economies undergoing accession have faced overlapping non-trade challenges that have significantly constrained reform momentum.

Periods of heightened insecurity and external economic shocks have redirected government priorities toward short-term stabilization and security spending, narrowing fiscal space for long-term economic and trade reforms. Political fragmentation, frequent government changes, and electoral cycles have further delayed the adoption of key trade-related legislation and weakened policy continuity.

These pressures have often been compounded by broader economic crises marked by high inflation, currency depreciation, elevated public debt, and rising poverty, alongside social strains linked to refugee inflows. At the same time, outdated infrastructure, weak institutional capacity, and limited administrative coordination have undermined effective policy

implementation, while sanctions, regulatory restrictions, and limited access to international financial systems in some cases have constrained investment, technology transfer, and integration into global markets.

Solutions found throughout the accession process

The current Arab acceding economies propose the following useful insights, solutions and recommendations through their responses to the questionnaire:

- Overcoming the challenges will require significant reforms and developments in institutions, infrastructure and economic diversification. The WTO accession process can help to identify areas where reforms are needed and to access technical assistance and support to address these challenges. As the challenges are complex and interconnected, this will require sustained effort and cooperation by all concerned sectors.
- Continuous coordination with legislative authorities to accelerate the adoption of related federal draft laws such as laws on intellectual property rights (IPR), technical regulations and public health, as well as updating laws and regulations as needed.
- Adaptation and conformity of national legislation and laws in connection with the rules of the WTO, international agreements, as well as the conclusion and signing of bilateral agreements with members of the WTO.
- Adopting automated administrative systems across different fields.
- Monetary policy should address the current account deficit by devaluing the nominal exchange rate within a managed float exchange rate regime. In addition, it is vital to introduce some improvements to monetary policies to ensure their suitability for facing economic growth and development challenges.
- A comprehensive reform programme to improve the financial sector and to contribute positively to the overall macroeconomic situation. Implemented reforms may assist in eliminating some current

problems that financial institutions face in dealing with international trade and may lead to an effective engagement of financial institutions in international markets.

- Increase in public awareness of relevant issues for the WTO accession process, and the involvement of all actors in this process including public and private sectors as well as civil society.

Technical assistance and capacity-building needs during the accession process

The experience of the five Arab members having acceded after 1995

To provide better technical assistance for the current Arab acceding governments, it is useful to refer to the experience of the five Arab members that acceded since 1995 (Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Comoros).

The main technical assistance and capacity-building needs requested during the accession process by the five members to achieve full compliance with WTO agreements included:

- Strengthening technical capacity building in the following areas: trade facilitation, trade negotiation skills, customs valuation agreement, simplifying customs tariff and procedures, SPS, TBT, effective and efficient utilization of trade remedies. Harmonization of this legislation and procedures to comply with the WTO which represents best practices and provides a common framework for global trade.
- Developing and implementing trade policies in the areas of competition policy, IPR issues and modernization of IPR laws and regulations, e-procurement and warehouse management, translation of WTO agreements into Arabic, a regional information exchange centre, and development of standardization, testing and quality infrastructures. For instance, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO)

provided valuable technical assistance in drafting new IPR legislation and bringing Oman's existing trademark and copyright laws into conformity with WTO requirements.

- Strengthening the start-up and development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); strengthening systematic vocational training, enhancing SMEs' competitiveness in exports and supply chains particularly in the agriculture sector, enhancing the use of renewable energy by industries and supporting food security programmes. This is especially important for small economies like Comoros, which are highly dependent on food imports and remain vulnerable to climate and economic shocks that expose the country's agriculture sector to instability.
- Improving public awareness and developing a wider culture in the areas of IPR and trade facilitation.
- Upgrading international expertise in the preparation and adoption of standards, creation of legislative and institutional frameworks towards better business environments and promotion of investment, developing modern customs systems, and attaining good manufacturing practices. Mechanisms for increasing and sustaining public awareness campaigns, including among the private sector, during the accession process through national meetings and workshops regarding accession to the WTO as well as publishing reports for the public on progress made.

Currently acceding governments

The internal reforms carried out by the currently acceding governments had significant and positive impacts on developing their economies and diversifying national production. The acceding governments recommend that the WTO should commit itself to its mission of identifying areas where reforms are needed and assessing technical assistance and capacity-building needs to ensure they can be provided in a sustainable and long-lasting manner.

Regarding priorities determined by Iraq to assess its need for technical support in view of the accession process, it has cooperated with international organizations in the following ways:

- Conducting separate and specialized workshops organized by the Arab and International Monetary Funds.
- Cooperating with the International Trade Centre (ITC), under the "Strengthening the agriculture and agri-food value chain and improving trade policy" (SAAVI) programme. This project, funded by the European Union (EU), focuses on strengthening the trade policy framework, supporting the WTO accession process, economic policy formulation, institutional capacity building, and awareness raising.
- Cooperating with the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) and United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) through the Joint UNCTAD/IsDB project to support Iraq in trade policy reform and trade negotiations. The specific goal of the project is to support trade policy reforms and to enhance trade-related institutional frameworks, including in relation to Iraq's accession process.
- Cooperating with UNCTAD (2013–2016) in a capacity building project which focuses on trade policies and building the negotiating capabilities of the Iraqi negotiating team, in addition to cooperation with regard to trade in services.

The Government of Algeria carried out an assessment of its technical assistance needs regarding the Trade Facilitation Agreement in 2010, in cooperation with the WTO Secretariat, under the title "Self-Assessment of Needs and Priorities". The Government previously submitted requests for support to meet its technical assistance needs addressed to the WTO, IsDB, WIPO and UNCTAD.

This assistance is provided by organizing a set of training courses for government officials related to the accession file on various related topics (a workshop on the TRIPS Agreement and on the SPS and TBT agreements), in addition to some requests related to the technical aspects of the Algerian accession file. All of the technical assistance provided was effective in the field of competence of each authority, as it contributed to improving the job performance of government officials and enabled them to follow up the accession file efficiently, especially the technical issues.

Lebanon's case is unique, especially with the challenges faced by a shortage of human capital in public sector institutions and lack of technical skills. Since 2000, Lebanon has benefitted from various technical assistance programmes, projects, workshops, training courses and seminars offered through different institutions and organizations including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), WTO, Arab Monetary Fund (AMF), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the EU and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA). The Government of Lebanon did not conduct a technical assistance and capacity-building needs assessment study for the accession process. The most structured series of projects were provided by UNDP and USAID throughout Lebanon's accession process.

UNDP has been working with the Lebanese Ministry of Economy and Trade (MoET) for 20 years to support Lebanon's accession to the WTO among other economic policy files. The WTO Unit was first established through the project in 2000. Some of UNDP's contributions to the WTO accession process have been:

- Policy support: supporting the MoET in developing and implementing policies related to WTO accession, including improving the business environment, strengthening trade-related institutions, and promoting regional and international trade.
- Outreach and stakeholder engagement: working with the MoET to engage with stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society and other government agencies, to promote understanding and support for WTO accession.
- Capacity building: providing technical assistance to the MoET to help build its capacity to negotiate and implement WTO agreements. This has included training on trade policy, research and analysis, legal issues and negotiations.

PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Services Group implemented a technical assistance project in May 2000 with the aim of assisting the MoET in drafting the MFTR. A second USAID-funded technical assistance project related to Lebanon's WTO accession efforts

was initiated in June 2003 and ran until October 2007. During this phase, the project assisted in the preparation of background documents for working party meetings including the goods and services offers, drafting and translating legislation, and awareness raising.

From November 2007 to November 2012, another series of projects was implemented to assist the Government of Lebanon in the WTO accession process and to support USAID Lebanon's Assistance Objective 2 (AO2) – Economic Growth. The four core task activities were providing technical support for WTO accession, assisting in the implementation of key reforms, building institutional capacity and building public support for WTO accession.

In the case of Sudan, a “Capacity Building for Trade Negotiations: WTO Accession – A Model Framework” was adopted, which aimed to provide a conceptual “model framework”, looking at the case of WTO accession negotiations. It was prepared in the context of a pilot project to assist Sudan in its accession to

the WTO but is designed as a universally applicable high-level framework, to be adapted to the relevant circumstances as appropriate. Sudan conducted a round table meeting in June 2021 with donors and development partners where the National Secretariat for WTO Affairs presented technical assistance and capacity-building needs prepared by all the stakeholders.

During 2017–2018 Sudan received technical assistance funds from China and Japan, implemented through the ITC. These funds were used to translate some Sudanese laws from Arabic to English and to organize specialized workshops on SPS and TBT, trade remedies, industrial design, a public private dialogue workshop, trademarks and cotton, and services. These workshops were very beneficial and considerable numbers of officials from relevant authorities were trained. Recently, it approved the enhanced integrated framework of the Sudan Tier I project⁸ and currently is working on the national implementation arrangements which includes training and capacity-building activities for the public and private sector.

Endnotes

1. Examples of separate customs territories: Chinese Taipei; Macao, China; Hong Kong, China.
2. Agreements contained in Annexes 1, 2 and 3 of the Marrakesh Agreement are Multilateral Trade Agreements binding on all members and treated as a single undertaking.
3. In Yemen, domestic coordination and consultative mechanisms were made possible through the establishment of the National Committee on Trade Facilitation (NCTF) by Ministerial Resolution No. 12 of 2021, which included all government agencies and active representatives of the private sector. The Lebanese Government by the virtue of Council of Ministers decision No. 28 dated 26/5/1999 established the National Committee to prepare Lebanon for accession to the WTO. The National Committee is presided by the Minister of Economy and Trade and membership of the Director Generals of all relevant ministries and institutions as well as the Governor of the Central Bank. It also includes representatives from the private sector i.e. the Chambers of Agriculture, Industry and Trade, and the Lebanese Industrialists Association, among others.
4. Lebanon's request for observer status can be found in WTO official documents WT/L/283 and WT/GC/M/32, which were withdrawn and replaced by a request for accession: WTO official documents WT/ACC/LBN/1 and WT/GC/M/40.
5. Lebanon was one of the 33 founding members of the GATT in December 1948. However, Lebanon withdrew from the GATT on 29 December 1951 and denounced the GATT agreement. The reason behind this decision, as per the communication received from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lebanon was "owing to the necessity of readapting Lebanon's economic relations with other countries". On 29 December 1994, the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations in Geneva sent a note verbale to the GATT expressing Lebanon's willingness to re-join the GATT. In February 1999, Lebanon submitted its request to join the WTO according to Article XII of the Marrakesh Agreement.
6. WTO official document WT/ACC/22/Rev.1. Accession to the World Trade Organization. Procedures for Negotiations under Article XII; Note by the Secretariat.
7. In the event that Comoros implements the Common External Tariff of COMESA, Comoros will further reduce its bound tariff rates as specified in an annex of its Goods Schedule.
8. The Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) Tier 1 project is funded by the EIF, a multi-donor global partnership working closely with governments, development organizations and civil society to assist least-developed countries (LDCs) use trade as an engine for development and poverty reduction.