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Vineyards around Kafraya, in the Bekaa Valley, Lebanon.

Main post-accession challenges faced by Arab members which have acceded since 1995

Concluding accession to the WTO marks a turning point for an acceding government. Once accession negotiations are concluded and the economy or state becomes a member of the WTO, it embarks on an effort to implement new legal obligations that affect all sectors of the economy. This has been the case of the five Arab governments which acceded under Article XII of the WTO Agreement. Jordan became a member on 11/04/2000, Oman on 9/11/2000, Saudi Arabia on 11/12/2005, Yemen on 26/06/2014 and Comoros on 21/08/2024.

Despite differences in the length of their accession processes, the types of obligations and commitments undertaken by the five members bear a lot of similarities in terms of the reforms they entail. Many such reforms involved legislative and regulatory amendments, while others involved institutional changes. The five members encountered numerous challenges that reflect the complexities associated with aligning domestic policies and practices with international trade standards.

In broad terms, and in addition to the elements referred to in Section 2, examples of post accession challenges faced by the Arab members that have acceded since 1995 include:

- Reviewing and amending laws and regulations to comply with WTO obligations. Such a process covers a wide range of regulatory frameworks relating to cross-border goods trade and all services sectors covered by the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), as well as laws, regulations and enforcement procedures protecting intellectual property rights. This also covers certain aspects of cross-cutting regulations related to investment, competition and labour as they relate to services trade.
- Establishing mechanisms to ensure continued compliance with WTO obligations within government structures to guarantee that ongoing policy-making and related regulatory activities are consistent with WTO rules and commitments. This also includes, where necessary, the establishment of specialized units or departments to handle WTO-related matters.
- Maintaining domestic procedures (judicial, arbitral, or administrative tribunals) for the independent and impartial review of administrative decisions, at the request of a private market operator (e.g. a service provider).
- Complying with WTO transparency and notification obligations as required by different agreements relating to trade in goods and services. The collection, processing and timely submission of such notifications requires organizational structures and trained personnel to ensure that obligations are met.
- Building capacity within government agencies and training personnel on policy and regulatory matters related to WTO agreements. In some cases, this includes specialized training related to certain agreements or sectors of the economy. Building such a human resource base goes a long way to ensuring understanding of obligations and compliance therewith.
- Maintaining and nourishing the negotiating capacity developed during the accession negotiations to ensure effective participation as a member in ongoing work. This includes participation in the daily work of WTO regular bodies as well as in rule-making negotiations.
- Fostering effective inter-agency coordination to guarantee effective trade policy management and regulatory consistency. This involves the establishment of consultative mechanisms across a wide range of government agencies responsible for different sectors of the economy. This is necessary to guarantee that government policies and measures are domestically coherent and consistent with WTO obligations.

- Consulting with stakeholders in the private sector is also necessary, particularly with private agencies with delegated regulatory responsibilities, such as professional associations, to oversee the measures they take (e.g. setting qualification requirements for the practice of a regulated profession). Additionally, it is necessary to consult with a wide range of private sector and civil society stakeholders to ensure that the process of trade policy-making and regulation is inclusive and well informed.
- Enhancing data collection mechanisms to capture and monitor statistics and information relating to trade in goods and services to ensure compliance with WTO obligations, including by other WTO members.
- Enhancing public awareness about the benefits and implications of accession to the WTO to facilitate understanding by business, civil society and the general public, of the benefits of a competitive market environment and the resulting different way that trade is conducted.

In analysing the challenges faced by Comoros, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen arising from their WTO accession processes, it becomes evident that each member encountered different obstacles, rooted in their specific economic and institutional contexts. These challenges reflect the complexities associated with aligning domestic policies, regulatory frameworks and institutions with global trade standards and commitments imposed by WTO membership. Throughout this process, the members have relied on technical assistance, capacity-building initiatives and international support to navigate these challenges effectively, ultimately working towards full compliance with WTO regulations.

It should be noted that, in addition to the general obligations contained in the WTO agreements, acceding governments negotiate commitments that relate to different areas of laws and regulations. These are commitments governing trade in goods and services, and intellectual property, as indicated in Tables 14 and 15.

Table 14. Types and frequency of commitments of Arab members having joined after 1995

Type of commitment	Frequency of commitments among Arab members having joined after 1995
State ownership and privatization - state trading entities	5
Pricing policies	8
Trading rights	6
Other duties and charges	4
Tariff rate quotas, tariff exemptions	3
Fees and charges for services rendered	7
Application of internal taxes and imports	5
Quantitative import restrictions, including import prohibitions, quotas, and licensing systems	11
Customs valuations	5
Pre-shipment inspection	4

Table 14. Types and frequency of commitments of Arab members having joined after 1995 (continued)

Type of commitment	Frequency of commitments among Arab members having joined after 1995
Anti-dumping, countervailing duties and safeguard regimes	5
Export restrictions	7
Industrial policy, including subsidies	6
Technical barriers to trade	10
Sanitary and phytosanitary measures and other regulations	16
Trade-related investment measures	5
Free zones, special economic areas	5
Agricultural policies (b) Exports	2
TRIPS commitments	4
Textile regimes	1
Investment regime	2
Transit	1
Export subsidies	3
Government procurement	3
Trade agreements	4
Transparency - publication of information on trade	1
Transparency - notifications	1
Framework for making and enforcing policies	8
Rules of origin	5
Other customs formalities	3
Agricultural policies (a) Imports	1
Agricultural policies (c) Internal Policies	1
Notifications	2
Total	154

Source: World Trade Organization.

Table 15. Services-specific commitments for Arab members having acceded since 1995

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

Source: World Trade Organization.

In order to provide more clarity regarding the post-accession challenges the five Arab members had to address, it is important to recall the elements of treaty commitments they undertook as a result of the accession. In the case of Comoros, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen such commitments included the following:

Investment regime

Commitments on the investment regime have been undertaken by Saudi Arabia. They relate to laws and government policies that oversee how assets, whether financial, intangible or land, can be acquired. Commitments focused on ensuring equal treatment between foreign and domestic investors. In addition, the investment regimes of all Arab members acceding to the WTO post 1995 had to be in conformity with their obligations and commitments under the GATS as they relate to the treatment of services suppliers of other members supplying services through mode 3 (commercial presence) whether in the form of a subsidiary or a branch.

State ownership and privatization

These commitments have been undertaken by all five Arab members that have acceded since 1995. They relate to the level of control and influence the government has over companies which are state-owned or controlled. Obligations also include

provisions of WTO agreements, particularly Article XVII (State Trading Enterprises) of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) 1994, the WTO Understanding of Article XVII, and Article VIII (Monopolies and Exclusive Service Suppliers) of the GATS. The focus is mainly on state-owned enterprises and entities with special or exclusive privileges in the domestic market. Also, there are notification obligations to ensure transparency, non-discrimination, and that such enterprises operate based on commercial considerations. In the case of Saudi Arabia, there is a commitment to provide annual reports on the status of privatization in the Kingdom to enhance transparency.

Pricing policies

Pricing policies can have far-reaching trade implications. They determine the wholesale and retail prices of goods and services produced. For example, price controls by the government or state trading entities resulting in “dual pricing” are particularly significant when they relate to energy goods and services. This is because the price of energy goods and services determines the cost of products of energy-intensive industries (e.g. steel manufacturing) along the entire domestic supply chain. This, in turn, results in a competitive advantage for domestic products over imported similar products.

The five Arab members that acceded from 1995 have obligations to apply any price controls in accordance with GATT Articles III (National Treatment) and XI (1) (General Elimination of Quantitative Restrictions), as well as the Agreement on Agriculture.

Additional commitments by Saudi Arabia included provisions to ensure that producers and distributors of products subject to pricing policies operate based on normal commercial considerations, with full cost recovery and reasonable profit. They emphasize the need for transparency and the elimination of additional pricing margins for locally manufactured products.

Trading rights

Governments frequently adopt laws and regulations requiring traders to register the fact that they engage in the business of importing and exporting. Restrictive

conditions attached to the right to trade in goods are inconsistent with basic GATT principles of non-discrimination and national treatment (NT). Commitments relating to trading rights ensure that these principles are not violated by acceding governments.

The five Arab members have obligations pursuant to Articles VIII (Fees and Formalities Connected with Importation and Exportation), XI (General Elimination of Quantitative Restrictions), and III (NT) of the GATT 1994, to ensure that laws, regulations, fees, charges and taxes related to trading rights are non-discriminatory and not trade restrictive.

Fees and charges for services rendered

These are charges imposed by government authorities for services rendered on or in connection with importation, typically for services such as customs clearance, exchange control, consular transactions, such as consular invoices and certificates, and so forth. GATT 1994 treats them differently from customs duties and "other duties and charges", which protect domestic production and raise revenue. The basic rule in this case is that such fees and charges must be limited to the approximate cost of the services rendered.

WTO members have an obligation to apply such fees and charges for importation or exportation in a manner consistent with Articles VIII (Fees and Formalities connected with Importation and Exportation) and X (Publication and Administration of Trade Regulation) of the GATT 1994.

Application of internal taxes on imports

The GATT contains obligations regarding the way domestic taxes, such as consumption taxes, excise taxes or stamp duties, are applied to imported products. WTO members are permitted to impose indirect taxes on imported products, provided that imported foreign products from other WTO members receive treatment no less favourable than any other WTO member or even non-member. Imported products from other members must also receive no less favourable treatment than like products of domestic origin.

All domestic taxes on imported products therefore must be imposed in conformity with the provisions of Articles I (most-favoured nation – MFN) and III (NT) of the GATT as of the date of accession. In addition, Comoros undertook an additional commitment to replace its internal taxes by a value-added tax in accordance with an action plan agreed by the working party.

Quantitative import restrictions, including prohibitions, quotas and licensing systems

WTO provisions allow a margin of protection for domestic production. However, they favour the use of price-based measures over quantity-based restrictions on imports given that price-based measures are more transparent, predictable and less distortive to trade than quantitative restrictions. While WTO members are permitted to use customs duties, they should also be prepared to negotiate their reduction or elimination. Commitments relating to quantitative import restrictions are concerned with limiting the use of quantitative restrictions, including prohibitions, quotas and restrictive import licensing.

All WTO members must ensure that any measures they take regarding quantitative import restrictions or prohibitions are in conformity with their obligations under the relevant articles of the GATT. This includes Articles XI (General Elimination of Quantitative Restrictions), XIII (Non-discriminatory Administration of Quantitative Restrictions), XIX (Emergency Action on Imports of Particular Products), XX (General Exceptions) and XXI (Security Exceptions).

In addition to the general obligations, the five Arab members which have acceded since 1995 have also initiated specific individual commitments in this area. For example, Oman undertook to eliminate the import prohibition on petroleum products and eliminate quantitative restrictions on items such as fresh fruits, vegetables, long-life milk and eggs. Yemen committed to the immediate removal of import bans on coffee and mangoes, along with the cessation of seasonal restrictions on various agricultural products. Saudi Arabia committed to review and update the list of banned imports at least once a year, ensuring compatibility with WTO provisions.

Customs valuation

Obligations in this regard aim to create an objective, fair, uniform and neutral system for the valuation of goods for customs purposes that preclude the use of arbitrary or subjective customs values.

All WTO members undertake the obligations of the WTO Agreement on Implementation of Article VII (Valuation for Customs Purposes) of the GATT 1994 (the Customs Valuation Agreement) in full upon accession. In some cases, transition periods are agreed with arrangements for technical assistance, as in the case of Yemen.

Rules of origin

Rules of origin are necessary for the implementation of any measures that are based on the origin of the product. This is necessary to ensure compliance with WTO obligations, in many instances including the operation of provisions such as MFN treatment, trade remedies and countervailing duties, rules on preferential agreements and preferential schemes.

The five Arab members that acceded after 1995 have fully committed to the implementation of the WTO Agreement on Rules of Origin as of the date of their accessions.

Export restrictions

Quantitative restrictions on exports are generally prohibited by Article XI of the GATT 1994, as are import restrictions. There are, however, several exceptions to this rule, which are mainly restrictions which WTO members consider necessary for the protection of legitimate policy objectives covered by general exceptions provisions or their essential security interests. Acceding governments are expected to list all export restrictions that they maintain and any reasons for their continued application. They are expected to remove any restrictions that cannot be justified or for which the justification no longer exists. Any export restrictions must be consistent with the rules of the GATT, in particular, Articles XI (General Elimination of Quantitative Restrictions), XVII (State Trading Enterprises), XX (General Exceptions) and XXI (Security Exceptions).

Export subsidies

The WTO Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures prohibits the granting of subsidies on exports of non-agricultural products and defines these as subsidies contingent, in law or in fact, upon export performance. Oman, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Comoros have committed to eliminate all prohibited export subsidies upon accession to the WTO and comply with all notification requirements in this regard. They are also required to apply the obligations in the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures relating to industrial policy and support for local industries.

Technical barriers to trade (TBT)

The TBT Agreement aims to ensure that technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures are non-discriminatory and do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade. At the same time, it recognizes WTO members' rights to implement measures to achieve legitimate policy objectives, such as the protection of human health or the environment. The aim of WTO obligations in this area is to ensure that obstacles to trade created by technical regulations, standards and procedures for the assessment process are not more trade restrictive than necessary to achieve a legitimate policy objective.

Oman committed to applying all obligations under the WTO Agreement on TBT from the date of accession without the need for a transition period. It also confirmed the establishment of a work programme to review and replace existing mandatory standards with voluntary standards or technical regulations within a specified timeframe.

In addition to complying with all obligations under the WTO Agreement on TBT from the date of accession, Jordan committed to a gradual review of mandatory standards, with the goal of replacing them with voluntary standards or technical regulations, consistent with Article 2 of the TBT Agreement.

Saudi Arabia committed to complying with all obligations under the TBT Agreement from the date of accession without the need for a transition period.

Finally, as least-developed countries (LDCs), Yemen and Comoros undertook to progressively implement the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade over a transition period in accordance with agreed action plans, with full implementation by 31 December 2016 (Yemen) and 1 January 2027 (Comoros).

Sanitary and phytosanitary measures and other regulations

The aim of sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures is to protect human, animal and plant life and health. These measures strive to ensure that, for instance, food is safe for human consumption. They apply to both domestic and imported products alike. In the case of imported products, for example, they may require that they come from disease-free areas or require specified treatment or processing of products. By their very nature, SPS measures restrict trade in products that do not conform to their requirements. The WTO Agreement on SPS Measures recognizes the right of governments to apply such measures as may be necessary to ensure protection at the level they consider appropriate. However, the rules are designed to ensure that these measures do not create unnecessary barriers or disguised restrictions to international trade.

In terms of commitments undertaken by each of the five latest acceded Arab members, Oman committed to eliminating mandatory shelf-life standards for "shelf-stable foods" upon accession and stated its intention to establish regulations and procedures in line with international norms for "highly perishable refrigerated" food products within one year of accession.

Jordan committed to examining its shelf-life standards for shelf-stable food products immediately upon accession and promised to establish regulations and procedures in line with international norms for "highly perishable refrigerated" food products within one year of accession.

Yemen, an LDC, committed to ensure that any changes made in its laws, regulations and practices during the transition period would not result in a reduced level of consistency with the provisions of the SPS Agreement than existed on the date of accession.

It aimed to progressively implement the provisions of the SPS Agreement within a specified timetable, with full implementation by a specified date.

Saudi Arabia undertook the commitment to align its SPS measures with international standards, including those of the Codex Alimentarius Commission, World Organization for Animal Health, and the International Plant Protection Convention. It also confirmed its commitment to transparency by publishing SPS measures in advance of their application and notifying changes to WTO members.

Similarly, as an LDC, Comoros also committed to implement the SPS Agreement progressively in line with an action plan. It confirmed that at the time of accession, existing laws and future measures would be consistent with the provisions of the SPS Agreement and that its full implementation would begin on 1 July 2025 without transition.

Trade-related investment measures

The WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMs) reaffirms and clarifies two sets of existing GATT obligations – those relating to domestic purchasing requirements contrary to the national treatment provisions in Article III, and the obligation of the general elimination of quantitative restrictions in Article XI. Acceding governments typically commit to not maintaining measures contrary to the TRIMs Agreement and would apply the TRIMs Agreement from the date of accession without recourse to any transitional period.

Oman, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and Comoros all committed to the full implementation of the TRIMs Agreement as of the date of accession.

Free zones, special economic areas

The GATT 1994 does not deal with free zones as a separate topic. Therefore, documentation submitted by acceding governments refers to free zones and free economic zones but also uses other terms such as special economic areas, free ports, industrial zones, etc. Commitments in this area focus on acceding governments committing to administering free zones or special economic areas in compliance with WTO provisions.

Oman undertook commitments to administer any free zones or special economic areas in compliance with various WTO provisions, including subsidies, TRIMs and the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). Goods produced in these zones, under provisions exempting imports and imported inputs from tariffs and certain taxes, would be subject to normal customs formalities when entering the rest of Oman, including the application of tariffs and taxes.

Jordan pledges that free zones or free economic zones in Jordan will be fully subject to the commitments outlined in its Protocol of Accession to the WTO Agreement. It ensures enforcement of its WTO obligations in these zones, including commitments derived from the TRIPS Agreement. Goods produced or imported into the zones under special tax and tariff regimes will face normal customs formalities, tariffs and taxes when entering the rest of Jordan.

Yemen also committed to establish free zones under its laws, fully subject to WTO agreements and the commitments made in its Protocol of Accession to the WTO Agreement; it ensures the enforcement of its WTO obligations in these zones. Goods produced in free trade zones or areas under tax and tariff provisions exempting imports and imported inputs from tariffs and certain taxes will be subject to normal customs formalities when entering the rest of Yemen.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia also committed to administering any free zones or special economic zones in compliance with various WTO provisions, including subsidies, TRIMs and TRIPS. Goods produced in these zones under tax and tariff provisions exempting imports and imported inputs from tariffs and certain taxes and charges will be subject to normal customs formalities when entering the rest of Saudi Arabia.

Finally, in addition to making a commitment that any special economic zones would be established in accordance with the WTO Agreement and obligations, Comoros stated that goods produced in a free zone and sold within the ordinary customs area would be affected by normal duties and taxes levied on imported goods.

Trade in services

In relation to trade in services, acceding governments face a particular challenge in relation to regulatory and institutional reforms, considering that services trade includes cross-border mobility production factors. This has always been one of the greatest challenges that governments and policymakers face in liberalizing the services sector under sound regulatory conditions. The five Arab members are no different in that respect.

A main challenge arises from the fact that the GATS is structurally more complex than the GATT. Among the most conspicuous differences are the existence of four modes of supply by which international services trade is conducted. This feature is a function of the definition of trade in services to include not only the cross-border movement of products, as in the case of merchandise trade, but also the cross-border movement of factors of production (capital and labour) to allow the presence of service suppliers in export markets.

Services trade liberalization under the GATS is also defined differently, compared to goods trade. Unlike the GATT which liberalizes trade through prohibiting quantitative restrictions and reducing tariffs, the GATS provides for two parameters, namely, market access and NT, to determine the conditions of entry and participation in a member's market.

This relatively complex structure of the Agreement is intended to enable members to accommodate sector- or mode-specific constraints they may encounter in the scheduling process and to progressively liberalize their services trade in line with their national policy objectives and levels of development. Complexity can thus be viewed, in part, as necessary to reconcile effectiveness and legal enforceability with flexibility for individual economies. Nonetheless, this represents significant challenges to national administrations implementing the Agreement.

To have a clear understanding of the scope and depth of such commitments, it is important to recall the legal scope of application of the GATS to domestic regulatory frameworks and the sectoral coverage of the Agreement.

In terms of the legal scope of application and the challenge it represents, the GATS applies to all measures by members affecting trade in services regardless of the policy framework in which a measure is taken (e.g. goods trade, investment, competition, financial or any other policy area). It also does not matter in this context whether a measure is taken at central, regional, or local government level, or by non-governmental bodies exercising delegated powers.

The GATS covers all services sectors. This in itself is a challenge as it relates to the multitude of policy and regulatory frameworks relevant to the implementation of the Agreement. Services sectors are classified by the United Nations Central Product Classification system to cover the following categories:

- Business services (including professional services and computer services);
- Communication services;
- Construction and related engineering services;
- Distribution services;
- Educational services;
- Environmental services;
- Financial services (including insurance and banking);
- Health-related and social services;
- Tourism and travel-related services;
- Recreational, cultural and sporting services;
- Transport services;
- Other services not included elsewhere.

These sectors are further subdivided into a total of some 160 subsectors. While this list represents the sectoral coverage of the GATS, it does not represent the sectoral coverage of a member's schedule of specific commitments, which varies from one member to another. Under this classification system, any service sector, or subsector, may be included in a member's schedule of commitments with specific market access and national treatment commitments. The five Arab members that have acceded since 1995 have submitted their schedules with extensive commitments touching upon 12 categories but varying in their coverage across the 160 subsectors.

With this comprehensive sectoral coverage, there is only one sector-specific exclusion from the coverage of the GATS. This relates to most of the air transport sector. The only three subsectors covered are aircraft repair and maintenance services, the selling and marketing of air transport services, and computer reservation system services.

The other blanket exemption from the sectoral coverage of the agreement is "services supplied in the exercise of governmental authority" or what is referred to as government services which are supplied neither on a commercial basis, nor in competition with one or more service suppliers. Typical examples may include police, fire protection, monetary policy operations, mandatory social security systems, and tax and customs administration.

This provides broad and diversified coverage of specific commitments across many sectors with diverse policy and regulatory frameworks for serious challenges to policymakers and regulators. It requires an unprecedented level of policy coherence and consistency of regulatory approaches to be achieved through effective consultative mechanisms. It also requires a regulatory mindset which continuously observes relevant obligations under the GATS.

Assessment of post-accession policy, regulatory, institutional and other reforms to improve the business environment

In principle, obligations arising from the provisions of the WTO agreements require an acceding government to bring all its laws and regulations into conformity with such obligations.

Regulatory and institutional reforms

The five members which have acceded since 1995 have undertaken significant reform steps at the regulatory and institutional levels.

Jordan has established its Foreign Trade Policy and Relations Department in the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Supplies which is responsible for all matters relating to multilateral WTO trade agreements.

Since its accession, Jordan has been reviewing and amending its laws, as well as establishing the adequate monitoring institutions to conform with its WTO obligations. Several new laws have been introduced, including laws on import and export, customs, economic zone, competition, investment, income tax, trade remedies – covering anti-dumping, subsidies and countervailing, and safeguard measures – and other laws relating to intellectual property rights, telecommunications, transportation, banking and insurance regulation, among other laws related to the financial sector.

Oman has made several institutional and legal reforms since its accession where new ministries, authorities and committees have been established, and several laws were adopted to enhance the implementation of its WTO commitments.

Oman established the National Committee on WTO Accession in 2001 to deal with all WTO-related matters. It acts under the chair of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and Investment Promotion, and comprises representatives from various ministries, the customs authority and the private sector. In 2014, Oman established the National Committee on Trade Facilitation to comply with Article 23.2 of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. The Committee is composed of both governmental authorities and private sector representatives. Its main objective is to facilitate trade while modernizing border enforcement services.

Since its accession, Oman has established the Public Authority for Consumer Protection; the Public Authority for Investment Promotion and Export Development; the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion; and the Oman Investment Authority.

Oman has also created several trade and trade-related laws. It has issued a new consumer protection law; a new foreign capital investment law; adopted new legislation on competition and anti-monopoly;

and a privatization law. It has also ratified the Trade Facilitation Agreement and the Protocol Amending the TRIPS Agreement.

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MCI) is responsible for trade-policy formulation and implementation, including ensuring compliance with the WTO agreements. It coordinates with other ministries and trade-related bodies, and the Saudi negotiating team in charge of discussing and assessing WTO-related issues that are composed of representatives from the MCI, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economy and Planning, Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency. The private sector provides inputs to trade policy formulation by communicating its views either directly to the MCI or through the chambers of commerce and industry.

There was a significant change in Saudi Arabia's institutional framework for trade policy formulation and implementation in recent years which is mainly aligned to the objectives of Vision 2030.¹ It established the General Authority for Foreign Trade (GAFT) in 2019 as a separate public entity to take over all the responsibilities related to foreign trade that were previously carried out by the Ministry of Commerce. The GAFT is currently responsible for all trade policy matters, including negotiations. The Government also transformed the Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority into the Ministry of Investment in 2020, established the Saudi General Authority for intellectual property in 2017, and the Ministry of Industry and Mineral Resources in 2019, among other restructuring initiatives.

The Government in Yemen also developed a national strategy along with action plans for implementation of full WTO commitments immediately after formal accession was completed on 26 June 2014. Shortly after the formal accession, political instability in the country brought the process to an almost complete halt. Nevertheless, the Government periodically and continuously reviews the implementation of the different commitments with a view to implementing them as soon as the situation allows, including evaluating and amending the plans as necessary.

Among the most notable recent legislative and regulatory reforms that were implemented post-accession was the establishment of the National Committee for Trade Facilitation (NCTF) in accordance with Article 23 (2) of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), by Ministerial Resolution No. 12 of 2021. Several associated activities were also implemented in relation to fulfilling Yemeni commitments; including conducting a comprehensive needs assessment to appraise the extent to which the Yemeni legislation and regulations are compatible with the implementation of the TFA.

A wide-ranging capacity-building and institutional reform programme was implemented to assist different government agencies responsible for border management and to facilitate trade and reduce non-tariff barriers. Regarding customs, it covers valuing goods under GATT Article VII (valuation for customs purposes), setting up an authorized economic operator, using post-audit checks, adopting risk management and pre-clearance procedures and strengthening the capacities of the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, and the Standards and Metrology Authority, in implementing the SPS and TBT agreements. On the other hand, the implementation of commitments with transition periods in other areas is falling behind schedule and stipulated dates have lapsed.

Similarly, Comoros has developed a post-accession strategic plan to serve as the guiding framework for implementing the commitments undertaken during the accession negotiations and to identify areas where additional implementation support will be required. In addition to helping the country fulfil its WTO commitments, the plan aims to stimulate the business and economic environment to attract investment, strengthen competitiveness, and facilitate the shift towards the market economy model.

In line with its post-accession strategy, Comoros hosted a national awareness-raising workshop in November 2024, in collaboration with the WTO Secretariat and the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF). The workshop provided a platform to engage with key stakeholders from the public and private sectors on the best practices to meet WTO membership obligations and explore new development opportunities.

In addition, the Government of Comoros has received support from the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility for the implementation of the TFA, particularly the TFA notifications and the technical assistance needed to enforce the TFA provisions under Category C.² While regulatory reforms are underway in this area, especially in customs, further assistance is required to expedite the process. For instance, aligning the capacity of local officials with global standards and strengthening public understanding of the TFA and its procedures.

In the lead up to WTO accession, the Government of Comoros, through Presidential decree No. 23-060/PR, reformed its regulations on rice imports by ending the monopoly of the state-owned enterprise ONICOR (*Office National pour l'Importation et la Commercialisation du Riz*) and opening the market for competition from the private sector. This development marked a major step in the liberalization of this sector, a concern that was raised during the accession negotiations.

With the support of the World Bank and the European Union, Comoros has been working to formulate new rules and requirements to ensure the seamless and transparent participation of the private sector. According to a Ministerial Order published in April 2024, these rules require enterprises to demonstrate financial guarantees, commercial and tax registration and compliance with health and environmental standards. In addition, the Order states that the minimum import quota is 5,000 tonnes for private enterprises, while ONICOR maintains a higher annual quota of 45,000 tonnes which will reduce progressively every year.

Activities and participation in the WTO and other international organizations

Participation of newly acceded members in WTO daily work often depends on the availability of representational capacity in Geneva. Understandably, this would vary from one member to another.

Jordan became a member of the WTO on 11 April 2000. It is a signatory to the WTO's Information Technology

Agreement and an observer to the Government Procurement Agreement. Jordan has never participated in any dispute settlement proceedings at the WTO as a complainant, a respondent, or a third party.

Jordan is participating in the "recently acceded members" group and is a member of the WTO Arab Group. It has also submitted proposals together with other members, such as small, vulnerable economies.

Jordan has submitted several notifications to the WTO, mainly in the areas of agriculture domestic support and export subsidies, quantitative restrictions, preferential rules of origin, regional trade agreements (RTAs), trade remedies, SPS, TFA and TRIPS. Jordan has not submitted any notifications under the GATS.

Oman has been a member of the WTO since 2000. It is a party to the Information Technology Agreement, and an observer to the Agreement on Government Procurement and to the Committee on Trade in Civil Aircraft. In 2017, Oman ratified the Trade Facilitation Agreement. Oman has never been either a complainant or a defendant in any WTO dispute. It has been a third party in 13 cases. It is a member of the Asian group of developing members and the Article XII members negotiation group, for members having joined since 1995.

Oman has made several notifications to the WTO on issues related to domestic support and export subsidies, RTAs, trade remedies, import licensing procedures, trade facilitation, SPS, TBT, TRIPS, TRIMs and state trading enterprises.

Saudi Arabia became a member of the WTO in 2005. It is an observer to the Agreement on Government Procurement and the Committee on Trade in Civil Aircraft. In 2016, Saudi Arabia ratified the Protocol concerning the TFA. Saudi Arabia also accepted the Protocol Amending the TRIPS Agreement in 2012, which came into force on 23 January 2017. It has never been a complainant under the WTO dispute settlement mechanism, but it was a respondent in two cases and participated as a third party in 49 cases.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is also a member of the Article XII members negotiation group, the WTO Arab

group, the group of Asian developing members, and the informal group of developing countries.

Saudi Arabia has made notifications to the WTO on agriculture domestic support and export subsidies, RTAs, the Agreement on Import Licensing, the TFA, Agreement on Rules of Origin, trade remedies, SPS TBT, TRIMs, TRIPS and the GATS.

Yemen has been a member of the WTO since 26 June 2014. It has never been a complainant or a respondent under the WTO dispute settlement mechanism but was a third party in two cases.

Yemen is a member of the Asian developing members group, the G90,³ and the LDCs group. It co-sponsored the investment facilitation for development initiative in 2021. Yemen has made notifications to the WTO on rules of origin and SPS.

Comoros has been a member of the WTO since 21 August 2024. It has not engaged in any complaints or defence under the WTO dispute settlement mechanism. Furthermore, it is a member of the Organisation of African, Caribbean and Pacific States, the African group, the G90 and the LDCs group.

Comoros has notified the WTO on the category commitments and transparency notifications under the TFA and on export subsidies under the Agreement on Agriculture.

Interactions with existing and prospective trading partners

Jordan

Jordan is a member of eight regional and bilateral trade agreements with major trading partners (covering 52 economies). These agreements mainly cover trade in goods, while two of them also cover trade in services. Jordan is a member of the following agreements:

Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and economic integration agreement with the United States

The Agreement entered into force in 2001. Its objective is to strengthen economic ties, promote investment and employment opportunities and improve

the competitiveness of both members. The Agreement covers trade in goods and services, protection of intellectual property rights, the environment, labour and e-commerce. However, as of August 2025, an import tariff of 15 per cent applies following unilateral tariff action.

FTA with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)⁴

The Agreement entered into force in 2002. It covers trade in goods, government procurement, and intellectual property rights.

FTA with the European Union

The Agreement entered into force in 2002. It covers trade in goods, investment, government procurement and intellectual property rights. It provides for the establishment of a free-trade area lasting a maximum of 12 years from the date of entry into force of the FTA, i.e. to 2014. The rules of origin are set out in Protocol 3 of the Agreement. Evidence of the originating status of products is furnished by the EUR.1 movement certificate. Diagonal cumulation of origin is foreseen in Protocol 3.

Pan-Arab Free Trade Agreement (PAFTA)⁵

The Agreement entered into force in 1998 with full implementation in 2005 and covers trade in goods. Under the Agreement, all trade barriers among its members were eliminated without exception. Nonetheless, non-tariff barriers, in particular standards, lengthy bureaucratic and administrative procedures at the borders, and transit fees, are still reported as costly and lengthy procedures. The treaty also provides for rules of origin. The principal entity responsible for implementing the programme is the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States.

FTA and economic integration agreement with Singapore

The Agreement entered into force in 2005. It covers trade in goods and services, domestic regulation, government procurement, intellectual property rights and investment. Currently, 153 lines remain dutiable, in Harmonized System (HS) sections II, III, IV and XVII by Jordan.

The Agadir Agreement

This is a free trade agreement which entered into force in 2007 and covers trade in goods. The Agreement is between Jordan and Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia. It commits the parties to substantially removing all tariffs on trade between them and to intensifying economic cooperation regarding standards and customs procedures. The Agreement also covers government procurement, financial services, contingency measures, intellectual property and dispute settlement. It adopts the Pan-Euro-Mediterranean rules of origin, which allow for diagonal cumulation of origin amongst its members, meaning that inputs originating in any of them, in the European Communities (EC) members or in EFTA members, may be used for the purpose of duty-free exports to EC markets under their association agreements with the EC.

FTA with Canada

The Agreement entered into force in 2012. It covers trade in goods and investment. Tariffs remain dutiable by Jordan in HS sections I and IV (live animals and animal products and prepared foods).

Economic integration agreement with Arab countries

The Arab agreement on trade in services entered into force in 2019. Current members are Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates with the possibility for other League of Arab States members to become parties. The Agreement has not been notified to the WTO.

FTA with the United Kingdom

The association Agreement entered into force in 2021. It covers trade in goods. The Agreement preserved most of the links between the parties under the 1997 Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an association between the EU and Jordan, and provided for the elimination of customs duties between the two parties. The share of duty-free lines applicable to imports from the United Kingdom immediately at the entry into force of the Agreement was 97.1 per cent, corresponding to 98.9 per cent of total imports from the United Kingdom during the period 2018–2020.

Oman

Oman has engaged in five regional and bilateral trade agreements with major trading partners that cover trade in goods, while three of them cover trade in services.

GCC customs union⁶

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) was created in May 1981. Its main objectives are regional cooperation and integration in economic, social and cultural affairs. The Gulf Common Market was officially launched in January 2008. Since January 2003, the GCC states have operated a common external tariff of between 0 per cent and 5 per cent for most products, and a common law on customs procedures and valuation. On 1 January 2008, the members of the GCC also formed a common market for services. The GCC also had common legislation on contingency measures, veterinary quarantine and plant quarantine.

PAFTA agreement

The agreement entered into force in 1998 with full implementation in 2005. It covers trade in goods (see above).

FTA and economic integration agreement with the United States

The agreement entered into force in 2009. It covers trade in goods and services, but also has provisions on investment, IPR, e-commerce, labour, environment and dispute settlement. It provides for tariff elimination in agricultural and non-agricultural goods over a maximum of 10 years, although a large share of products were granted duty-free access immediately. In 2018, 100 per cent of the United States' tariff lines became duty-free. However, as of August 2025, an import tariff of 10 per cent applies following unilateral tariff action.

FTA and economic integration agreement between GCC and Singapore

The agreement entered into force in 2013. It covers trade in goods and services, investment, rules of origin, standards, customs procedures, government procurement, electronic commerce, intellectual property, movement of natural persons and economic

cooperation. With the agreement's entry into force, approximately 94 per cent of all tariff lines of GCC member states qualified for immediate duty-free treatment, while an additional 2.7 per cent of tariff lines qualified for duty-free treatment as of 2018. In terms of services, both parties have committed to liberalizing various sectors beyond their WTO commitments.

The services sectors covered include professional services (legal, accounting and engineering) and business services (construction, distribution and hospitals).

FTA and economic integration agreement between GCC countries and EFTA

The agreement entered into force in 2014. It covers trade in goods (industrial and processed agricultural goods, fish and other marine products), trade in services, government procurement and competition policy. Certain topics, such as intellectual property rights and investment, were left for subsequent negotiations after the entry into force of the agreement. Bilateral agricultural agreements cover basic agricultural products and are an integral part of the legal instruments establishing the free trade area between the GCC and EFTA.

Economic integration with Arab countries

Oman is a member of the Arab Agreement on Trade in Services that entered into force in 2019. Current members are Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The Agreement has not been notified to the WTO.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is part of four regional and bilateral trade agreements that cover trade in goods; two of them cover trade in services.

GCC customs union

The agreement entered into force in 2003. The details are the same as indicated for Oman.

PAFTA agreement

The agreement entered into force in 1998 with full implementation in 2005. It covers trade in goods.

FTA and economic integration agreement between GCC and Singapore

The agreement entered into force in 2013. It covers trade in goods, rules of origin, customs procedures, trade in services, government procurement and electronic commerce. The parties agreed to negotiate investment issues at a later stage. GCC member states agreed to eliminate tariffs on 99 per cent of Singaporean exports.

FTA and economic integration agreement between EFTA and GCC

The agreement entered into force in 2014. The details are as presented for Oman.

Agreement on trade in services between Arab economies

The agreement entered into force in October 2019 and was concluded among the members of the League of Arab States. Current members are Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The Agreement has not been notified to the WTO.

Yemen

Yemen is only a member of PAFTA, which entered into force in 1998 with full implementation in 2005. The agreement covers trade in goods.

Comoros

Comoros is a member of several regional trade agreements covering goods and services.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

Comoros is party to the OIC General Agreement for Economic, Technical and Commercial Cooperation among member states. Among other objectives, the OIC aims to strengthen intra-Islamic economic and trade cooperation to achieve economic integration.

Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA)

Comoros has been part of the COMESA free trade area since 2012 and does not apply import duties on products from COMESA member states. COMESA's FTA covers rules of origin, a Simplified Trade Regime, trade facilitation and non-tariff barriers (NTBs). In addition, it has adopted the COMESA categorization of goods, a customs code aligned with COMESA as

well as the COMESA Common Tariff Nomenclature. COMESA hopes to become a customs union once four remaining countries join the free trade area and the tripartite FTA (COMESA, ASEAN Economic Community, South African Development Community) is established.

Southern African Development Community (SADC)

Comoros is a member of the SADC Agreement covering goods and services and which entered into force in 2022. However, according to the WTO database on RTAs, the Protocol on Trade in Goods and Services is applied by all SADC members except a few, including Comoros.

African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)

Comoros ratified the AfCFTA in 2023. Covering more than 50 economies across Africa, the AfCFTA aims to promote deeper economic integration in the continent through the creation of a single market for goods and services targeting the elimination of tariffs and NTBs and the liberalization of services trade. Additionally, it focuses on investment cooperation, intellectual property rights, trade facilitation as well as dispute settlement.

Comoros – European Union Everything but Arms (EBA)

As a beneficiary of the EBA framework, just like many other LDCs, imported goods from Comoros to the EU, except arms and ammunitions, are exempt from tariffs and quotas.

European Union Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EU iEPA) – Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA)

Finally, Comoros signed the EU-ESA iEPA with the European Union in July 2017 and ratified it in February 2019. The Agreement also includes Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Zimbabwe and covers, amongst other areas, rules of origin, fisheries, trade defence, technical barriers to trade and dispute settlement. According to a report of the working party, the group is discussing other areas of collaboration in SPS, competition, services, investment and e-commerce and development cooperation. These negotiations aim to support the achievement of a fully operational EPA.

Assessment of economic performance since WTO accession by reviewing economic and trade aggregates

This section aims to assess the economic performance of four of the five Arab economies since their WTO accession in 1995. The analysis spans the five years preceding accession through the most recent available data. Both Jordan and Oman acceded to the WTO in 2000, Saudi Arabia in 2005 and Yemen in 2014.

It should be noted, however, that economic performance is generally the result of multiple enabling factors that relate to domestic economic policies which go beyond the scope of trade policy and may relate to natural endowments. Therefore, it is difficult to establish a direct causality between WTO accession and the trade policy changes it brings on the one hand, and the outcome of economic performance on the other. However, it is also clear that sound trade policies that foster competition and provide stability and predictability of market opportunities can significantly enhance economic performance and contribute to sustained economic growth.

Empirical evidence supports these broader benefits. WTO research estimates that economies undergoing rigorous accession negotiations grow 1.5 per cent faster than they would otherwise during their accession period (Brotto *et al.*, 2024). If we look at economies that have acceded since 1995, or these economies minus Yemen, the estimates are close to 1 per cent. In other words, the Arab economies that acceded after 1995, except for Yemen, saw even greater growth during the pre-accession period during which they were undergoing rigorous accession negotiations (Brotto *et al.*, 2024). Regression results for the effect of WTO accession on economic growth for Arab members having acceded after 1995 are included in Annex III.

For the first few years following accession, both groups – Arab members having acceded since the creation of the WTO in 1995, and Arab members acceding

prior to this,⁷ – experienced relatively similar trends in GDP per capita growth. However, starting around the fifth year post-accession, Arab economies which acceded after 1995 began to exhibit substantially higher growth rates compared to their counterparts which had acceded prior to 1995, with the growth rate of GDP per capita almost doubling by the tenth year after accession (see Figure 4). This divergence aligns with recent WTO research, which finds that generally, economies undertaking rigorous accession negotiations and implementing comprehensive reforms during accession tend to experience stronger economic performance (Brotto *et al.*, 2024).

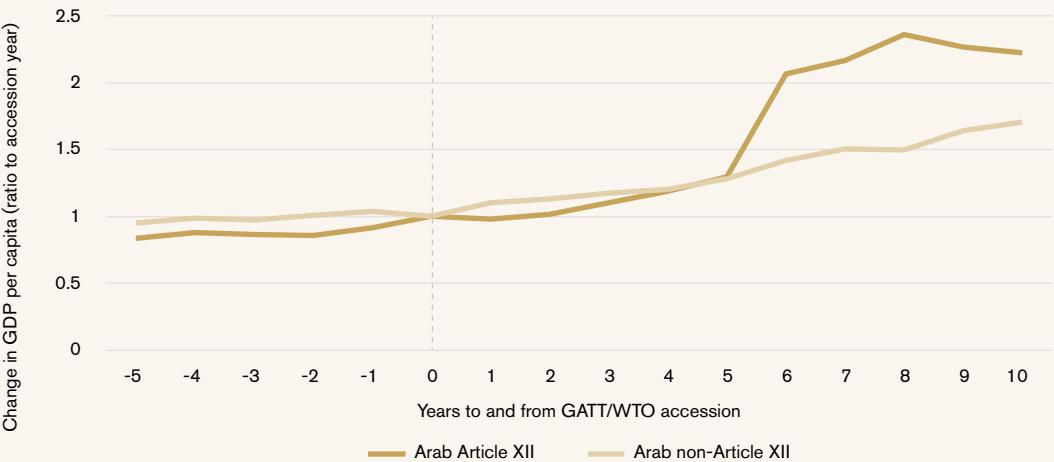
The sharp increase in GDP per capita after the fifth year, for Arab economies having acceded since 1995, highlights the potential benefits of the accession process, particularly as these members committed to deeper trade liberalization and structural reforms. In contrast, those which joined the GATT/WTO prior to 1995 without comprehensive commitments, display a more gradual and less pronounced growth trajectory over the same period.

Figure 5 shows the change in GDP per capita for individual Arab economies having joined since 1995 – Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen – compared to Arab economies having joined before 1995, from five years prior to WTO accession to 10 years post-accession. Overall, the trend for Arab economies having joined before 1995 has been positive but gradual, with modest growth observed throughout the period compared to economies who have joined since 1995.

Among the more recently acceded economies, Jordan and Oman exhibit similar trends, with relatively stable GDP per capita growth in the pre-accession period, followed by consistent growth after WTO accession. Both economies saw accelerated growth around the five-year mark, with more rapid growth in Oman between the fifth and eighth years following accession.

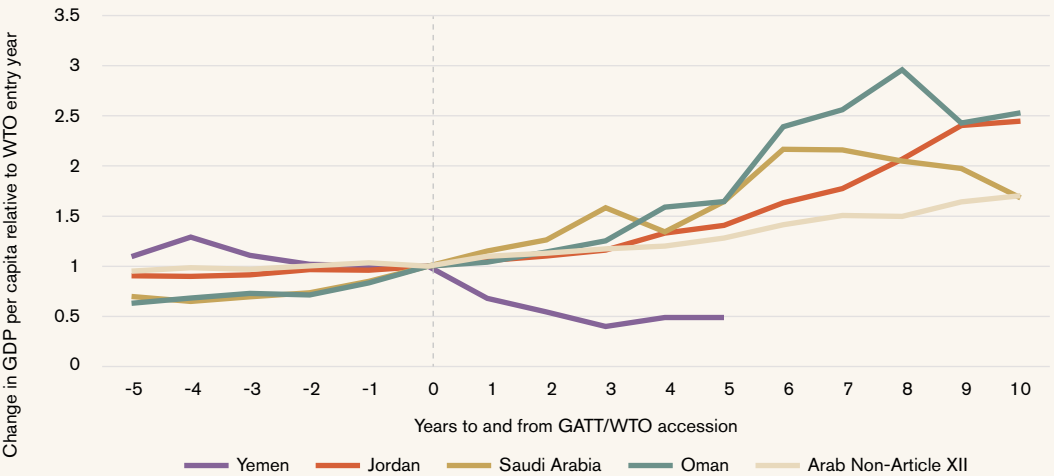
In contrast, Yemen presents a markedly different trajectory. While GDP per capita remained relatively stable pre-accession, it declined sharply post-accession due to the onset of a devastating conflict in 2014, coinciding with the year of its accession. This conflict severely hampered Yemen's economic

Figure 4. Change in GDP per capita of Arab economies relative to having joined prior to 1995 (GATT) or after 1995 (WTO)



Source: World Trade Organization.

Figure 5. Change in GDP per capita for Arab economies by member and WTO accession status



Source: World Trade Organization.

performance, distinguishing its growth path from other Arab economies which acceded post 1995.

The trend for Arab economies that acceded under the GATT remains more gradual, with modest growth observed throughout the period compared to those that acceded under the WTO.

Trade growth in goods and services

It is expected that WTO membership will expand market opportunities, and the variety of goods and services traded, leading to productivity growth and welfare gains for newly acceded members. WTO membership and related reforms decrease trade policy uncertainty and enable long-term investment decisions made by market operators. Moreover, the fixed costs of trade and firms' barriers to market entry tend to decrease (Bernier and Schlandt, 2018).

This section considers whether WTO membership increased trade and fostered economic growth for the first four Arab members that acceded to the WTO, between 2000 and 2014, under Article XII. As trade boosts growth, the effects of trade and growth are measurable. It was estimated that a rise of one percentage point in the ratio of trade to GDP increases income per capita by between 0.5 per cent and 2 per cent (Brotto, Jakubik and Piermartini, 2020).

For Arab members acceding after 1995, the data used refers to the period between 1995 and 2023. For Arab members that acceded prior to the entry into force of the WTO in 1995, the data refers to the period between 1990 and 2023.

As indicated in Figure 6, merchandise exports and imports growth, averaged across the first four Arab members having joined since 1995, increased substantially in the years following accession and were significantly stronger than for members having joined before 1995.

For Arab members having acceded after 1995, both merchandise exports and imports grew significantly faster, during the period immediately preceding accession but especially in the years following accession. In contrast, both imports and exports for Arab members having acceded prior to 1995 grew at a much slower pace, with exports peaking at approximately US\$ 25 billion and imports reaching US\$ 20 billion following 10 years from accession.

Merchandise exports rose from around US\$ 20 billion, five years prior to accession, to over US\$ 80 billion by year three post-accession. A dip occurred after year three, but exports rebounded and accelerated significantly between years five and eight, peaking at over US\$ 100 billion before a slight decline by year 10. In particular, Oman's trade balance generally remained positive both before and after accession, reflecting strong exports in fuel, mining, iron and steel; its highest export growth rates were recorded in 2000 at 56.38 per cent and again in 2022 at 49.03 per cent, even though imports also climbed substantially.

Saudi Arabia, with an economy dependent on oil, also registered a positive merchandise trade balance overall, although export and import growth rates have fluctuated in step with global oil prices. Post-accession reforms targeted non-oil sectors and showed some success in diversifying export composition.

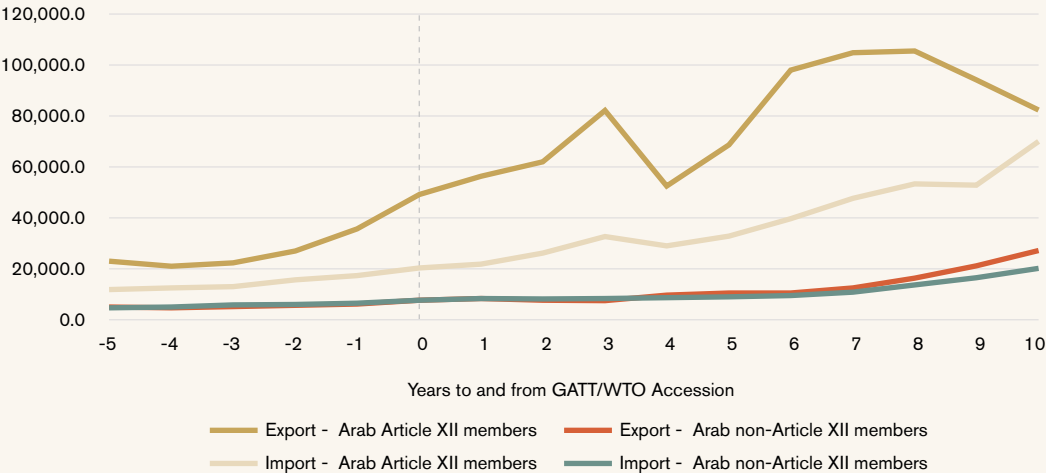
Merchandise imports for Arab members having acceded since 1995 grew from around US\$ 10 billion five years before accession and peaked at around US\$ 70 billion by year 10. A steady increase is observed from the accession year onwards, highlighting the growing trade integration and openness post-accession. Despite some fluctuations, imports rebounded strongly and continued to grow.

In comparison, imports of Arab members having acceded prior to 1995 grew more gradually. For example, Jordan's merchandise trade deficit expanded significantly after its WTO accession, from US\$ 2,698 million in 2000 to US\$ 14,910 million in 2022, as imports grew across key product categories such as agricultural goods, chemicals and machinery. Yemen consistently faced trade deficits which rose to US\$ 9,625 million in 2014, followed by a drastic 78.9 per cent decline in exports in 2015. Despite modest increases in 2017, ongoing conflict has severely constrained its ability to capitalize on WTO membership.

Services trade has exhibited similar growth trends since accession, reflecting the same mix of policy reforms, external shocks and underlying sectoral strengths across these more recent Arab members.

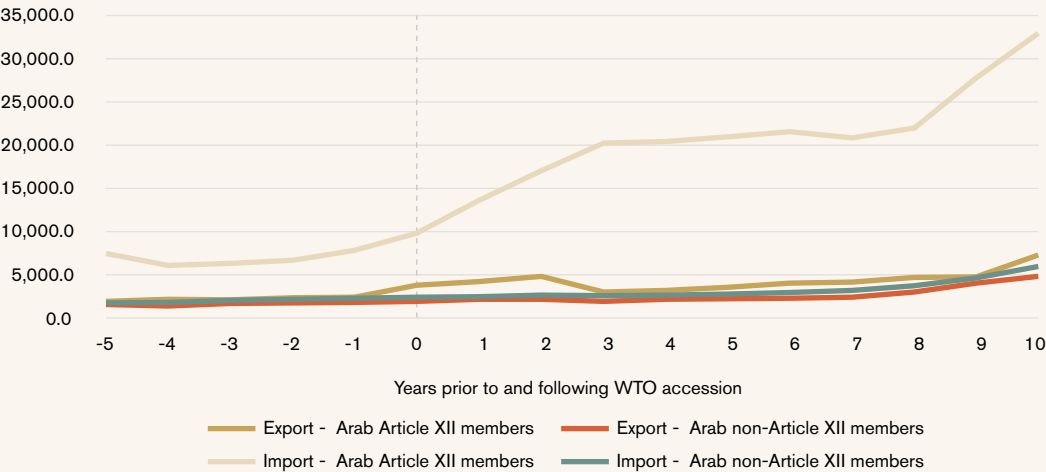
Figure 7 presents the value of exports and imports of services by Arab members, both having acceded after

Figure 6. Merchandise trade for Arab members having acceded prior to 1995 (GATT) and after 1995 (WTO) (US\$ millions)



Source: World Trade Organization.

Figure 7. Trade in services for Arab members having acceded after 1995 (under Article XII) and before 1995 (non-Article XII) in US\$ millions



Source: World Trade Organization.

WTO accession in 1995 and those having acceded prior to this date, from five years before to 10 years after WTO accession.

Arab members which acceded after 1995 experienced a sharp increase in services imports post-accession, reflecting greater market access and openness following economic reforms. In contrast, Arab members which acceded prior to 1995 exhibited a much slower and more gradual increase in services imports, whilst services exports for Arab members having acceded after 1995 followed a more modest growth trajectory. Exports gradually increased both pre-and post-accession, and the overall trend remained positive, with exports reaching just over US\$ 7 billion by year 10.

Although each Arab economy which acceded after 1995 contributes to this broader upward trend, their individual experiences vary depending on factors such as economic diversification, dependence on travel or transport services, and the severity of external shocks.

Jordan's services sector constitutes an important share of GDP, while services exports accounted for 15 to

20 per cent of GDP during the period 2005–2022 (except for 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic) and 16.5 per cent in 2022. Jordan's services exports recovered quickly after the COVID-19 pandemic growing by 80 per cent and 76 per cent respectively in 2021 and 2022 after falling by 68.15 per cent in 2020.⁸ Jordan also witnessed a high growth rate in its exports in 2008 at 30.24 per cent before declining sharply by almost 12 per cent in 2015.⁹

In the case of Oman, services exports, although a smaller share of GDP (2 to 5 per cent between 2005 and 2022), grew steadily until the 2020 downturn, with travel and transportation playing key roles; the highest recorded uptick was 60.8 per cent in 2022.

Saudi Arabia's services exports make up 1 to 4 per cent of GDP, primarily in travel for religious tourism; post-accession, exports generally rose except during global shocks, with the highest post-pandemic bounce of 209.54 per cent in 2022. Yemen's services base remains small, historically at 1 to 5 per cent of GDP, and has been severely constrained by internal instability, particularly since 2014.

Endnotes

1. Launched in 2016, Vision 2030 is a road map aimed at implementing structural and comprehensive reforms in the public sector, the economy and society, enhancing focus on strategies and investments in key sectors, and encouraging new growth opportunities.
2. Category C refers to provisions of the Trade Facilitation Agreement that developing countries and least-developed countries will implement after a transitional period, often requiring additional technical assistance and capacity building to do so. These countries must notify the WTO of their specific implementation dates and the support they need to fulfil these commitments.
3. The G90 is an alliance between the poorest and smallest developing countries, 64 of which are members of the WTO.
4. EFTA members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland.
5. PAFTA members are Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen.
6. GCC members are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.
7. Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, Kuwait, Mauritania, Morocco, Qatar, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.
8. WTO Stats, <https://stats.wto.org/>.
9. WTO Stats, <https://stats.wto.org/>.