

# ACCESSION TO THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

## SUPPORTING INTEGRATION INTO THE MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEM



### GLOBAL CONTEXT

Countries wishing to accede to the World Trade Organization (WTO) consider membership as one important means of integrating beneficially into the international trading system and the global economy. Yet accession to the WTO is a long and complex negotiation process that requires extensive human resources and institutional capacities, including sectoral expertise. Many countries that request to accede, particularly least developed countries (LDCs) and small economies, face particular constraints and challenges, such as limited analytical capacity to support trade and impact analysis and lack of resources to respond to information requests during the accession process, as well as other limitations.

UNCTAD assistance serves as an important reinforcement of capacity in trade-related negotiations for countries engaged in the WTO accession process. Support includes training of government officials and other relevant stakeholders on particular WTO agreements and assisting countries in the preparation of memorandums of foreign trade regime and other key accession documents, as well as exchange of experiences and lessons learned. UNCTAD has assisted both large economies that have acceded to the WTO, such as China and the Russian Federation, as well as African countries, LDCs and countries in with economies in transition, including Kazakhstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Samoa, Seychelles, Tajikistan, Vanuatu and Yemen. As a part of its support, UNCTAD has developed a series of training modules to raise awareness and understanding of economic and technical aspects of the multilateral trading system, trade agreements and related issues, such as agriculture, non-agricultural sectors, services, intellectual property rights and regional trade agreements. Beyond the accession process, UNCTAD supports countries that have recently acceded in the implementation of their WTO commitments.

### HOW DOES UNCTAD DELIVER SUPPORT TOWARDS ACCESSION?

UNCTAD undertakes technical assistance activities to benefit countries acceding to the WTO, pursuant to its intergovernmental mandate, as agreed at the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (1996) and reaffirmed successively at each quadrennial ministerial conference since then. Most recently, the 2012 Doha Mandate (paragraph 56 (a)) states: "UNCTAD should provide developing countries, in particular LDCs, and countries with economies in transition that are acceding to WTO with technical assistance and capacity-building prior to, during and in the follow-up to the accession process, depending on their level of development and needs."

Assistance is demand-led, tailored to and focused on the requirements and needs of beneficiary countries, while ensuring full national ownership of the accession process. Priorities are established at the national level through a multi-stakeholder approach involving all relevant actors including civil society, taking into account the different levels of development of countries. UNCTAD support draws on its research, intergovernmental and expert meetings and technical assistance work. Assistance aims at enabling national trade officials

**PROGRAMME  
FACTS AND FIGURES**

Scope of the programme  
on accession to the WTO:  
All countries not originally WTO members

Programme start date: 1996

Number of countries assisted to date: 35

Programme website:  
[unctad.org/WTO-accession](http://unctad.org/WTO-accession)



to meet accession requirements at the technical and policy levels, increasing their knowledge of the international trading system and multilateral trade negotiations techniques and strategies, and facilitating the formulation and implementation of trade policies. Through training and capacity-building, the human, institutional and regulatory capacities of national trade institutions and frameworks can be enhanced and awareness among civil society, increased.

Activities can include needs assessment; training and capacity-building in trade policy; formulation of trade policies and definition of national policy objectives; sectoral and impact assessment studies; technical advisory missions on substantive issues of the accession process; reviewing and/or assisting in drafting of trade-related domestic legislation; building national research capacity; internships for trade policymakers, as well as workshops and training sessions for the negotiating team, policymakers, private sector, academia and civil society; facilitating exchanges of experience between acceding and recently acceded WTO members; and dissemination of trade policy information and multimedia training material.

## RESULTS AND IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- Since WTO was established in 1995, most countries that were not original members have applied for accession, or at least indicated their interest in doing so, and have counted on UNCTAD assistance.
- UNCTAD has provided and continues providing technical assistance to Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Algeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belarus, Bhutan, Cambodia, Cabo Verde, the Comoros, China, Ethiopia, Equatorial Guinea, Jordan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Kazakhstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Liberia, Nepal, Tajikistan,

Timor-Leste, the Russian Federation, Turkmenistan, Serbia, Sao Tome and Principe, Samoa, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, the Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Viet Nam and Yemen. Of the countries assisted:

- 12 are LDCs
- Kazakhstan, Seychelles and Yemen became full members of WTO in 2014–2015.
- A 2015 external evaluation, in assessing subprogramme 3 (international trade), pointed to recognition of UNCTAD's comparative advantages: "Stakeholders note that UNCTAD provides valuable support to LDCs and developing countries in pre-accession and accession stages in ways that others cannot... Unlike WTO, which can only address technical aspects related to rules and must refrain from any policy advice, UNCTAD's mandate tasks it with providing advice on policy options and alternatives for acceding States and backstopping the accession process. UNCTAD has flexibility to advise on bilateral and regional trade agreements, which are beyond the mandate of WTO."

### DONORS/ FUNDING SOURCE

**Current:** Norway, Finland, Sweden (through the United Nations Industrial Development Organization)

**Past:** Germany, Norway, the United Kingdom

*"My colleagues were very impressed with [UNCTAD] knowledge and experience in trade matters. The [draft] Trade Development Act has come out very well..."*

Joint Secretary, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bhutan, following an UNCTAD consultative mission to the country, 2015

*"I am also very happy to have had the opportunity to see UNCTAD deliver and perform so well at the country level... UNCTAD does make a difference, a message I have conveyed to my capital in capital letters."*

Ambassador (Norway) and member of team of independent evaluators, at the UNCTAD Working Party on the Strategic Framework and Budget, 2006