

Concept note for session at WTO TS4D event

Time and place: 4 December 2025, 2.30pm-3.40pm, WTO, Room D, Geneva

Summary

Making the Invisible Visible: Data for Services Trade and Development Policy.

Much of global services trade remains unseen in policy, despite the growing importance of the service economy. This session will share country experiences, identify needs, and highlight innovative uses of data to answer key policy questions and strengthen the evidence base for inclusive, sustainable, services-led economic diversification and structural transformation. It will also showcase UNCTAD's new Primer, featuring 20 key datasets and mapping major data gaps and capacity needs.

Background

Services are the invisible frontier of global trade. They move goods, finance transactions, enable digital exchanges and increasingly determine competitiveness in manufacturing, agriculture and mining. Yet much of their scope and impact remain unseen in statistics and, therefore, underappreciated in policy. Without a clear picture of who trades services, how they are supplied, and where value is created, countries risk missing opportunities for diversification, investment, and export growth.

Building on the outcomes of UNCTAD16, this discussion will explore how better use of services-trade data can help policymakers seize opportunities. Policy makers need better data to address key policy questions such as:

Who is trading? What is being traded and what mode of supply is being used? Who benefits? How do services enhance competitiveness and strengthen manufacturing, mining and agricultural exports? What new opportunities arise from digital transformation? How are services creating new opportunities in the green transition?

Making fuller use of existing information and closing data gaps are essential for designing trade in services and development policies that foster inclusive, resilient, sustainable services-led economic diversification and structural transformation.

Main objectives

- Share experiences in using data to design and implement trade in services and development policies, highlighting key policy questions, data needs and lessons learned;
- Share innovative use cases on improving and applying existing data, such as administrative, private sources and platform data; and
- Identify opportunities for cooperation and support to strengthen services-trade data ecosystems and inform policy decisions to promote inclusive and sustainable services-led economic diversification and structural transformation.



Programme

Chair and moderator: Ms. Luz María de la Mora, Director, Division on International Trade and Commodities, UNCTAD

Welcoming remarks by UNCTAD and ECLAC

Panel:

- H.E. Ms. Nahida Sobhan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- H.E. Ms. Sofía Boza, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Chile to the WTO, UNCTAD, WIPO and ITC in Geneva
- H.E. Mr. Richard Brown, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Jamaica to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva
- H.E. Mr. Elvis Toolouta Shiweda, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Namibia to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva

Discussants:

- Ms. Anu Peltola, Director, Statistics, Data and Digital Service, UNCTAD
- Mr. Matteo Fiorini, Trade Policy Analyst, Trade Policy Division, OECD

Open discussion