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Submissions from entities in the United Nations system, international organizations and other stakeholders on their efforts in 2025 to implement the outcomes of the WSIS

Submission by

World Trade Organization

This submission was prepared as an input to the report of the UN Secretary-General on "Progress made in the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the World Summit on the Information Society at the regional and international levels" (to the 29th session of the CSTD), in response to the request by the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 2006/46, to the UN Secretary-General to inform the Commission on Science and Technology for Development on the implementation of the outcomes of the WSIS as part of his annual reporting to the Commission.

DISCLAIMER: The views presented here are the contributors' and do not necessarily reflect the views and position of the United Nations or the UN Trade and Development.

WSIS Follow up Reporting 2025 – WTO submission

PART ONE: Executive summary

The work of the WTO relates most directly to WSIS action lines on information and communications infrastructure (C2), building confidence and security in the use of ICTs (C5), the enabling environment (C6), ICT applications and particularly e-business (C7), and international and regional cooperation (C11).

Over the year, WTO Members have continued considering a wide variety of issues related to ICT and ICT-enabled trade across different bodies and agreements of the WTO, with a growing interest in the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) and other emerging technologies. This included discussions under the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce which addressed issues related to digital infrastructure and connectivity amongst others, deliberations under the Committee on the Information Technology Agreement (ITA), enhanced discussions in the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Committee) on international standards for Critical and Emerging Technologies (CETs), experience-sharing in the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Committee), discussions on ICT and ICT-related measures in the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG) and the Council for Trade in Services (CTS), and continued efforts to improve the measurement of digital trade. This was complemented by analytical work, research and technical assistance activities and events. These various streams of work are expected to continue in 2026, in recognition of the impact that ICT developments and new technologies have on global trade.

PART TWO: Overview of trends and experiences

Issues relevant to ICT continue to be raised in various WTO bodies and have been the subject of various initiatives. This year, many activities and discussions have revolved around issues related to digital trade/e-commerce,¹ the digital divide, and emerging technologies.

In the e-commerce discussion under the Work Programme, the focus has been on the development dimension. Discussions and experience-sharing have touched upon issues related to digital infrastructure, connectivity, and internet access, as well as regulatory frameworks related to e-commerce and the impact of AI on digital trade.

Issues related to AI and emerging technologies have been raised across various WTO bodies. There has been a marked increase in discussions on technology-related regulatory measures and issues in the TBT and SPS Committees, the Council for Trade in Goods and the Council for Trade in Services. In September 2025, the Secretariat published the [World Trade Report 2025: Making trade and AI work together to the benefit of all](#), which finds that with the right policies in place, AI can boost trade by nearly 40% by 2040.

In relation to the development aspects of e-commerce, WTO Members continue to examine specific challenges and opportunities of developing countries, LDCs and small economies, and how to support their efforts to integrate into digital trade. The WTO Secretariat continues to offer technical assistance activities at the national and regional levels. In cooperation with the World Bank, it has concluded the pilot phase of the "Digital Trade for Africa" project ([WTO | Digital Trade for Africa project](#)) in September 2025.

PART THREE: Description of

(a) policies, programmes and projects

Information Technology Agreement (ITA): In 2025, ITA Participants have continued the work on addressing remaining classification divergences; identifying non-tariff barriers in the area of global trade of ICT products; as well as expanding participation to the Agreement. One thematic session has been scheduled in November on Opportunities of ITA Participation. Two thematic sessions on ITA and Artificial Intelligence related topics have been planned for 2026.

TBT and SPS – standards and regulations: There continues to be a marked increase in notifications to, and discussions at, the TBT Committee on a wide range of digital technology-related regulatory measures and issues: from IoT, 5G, 3D printing, robotics, drones and autonomous

¹ The terms "e-commerce" and "digital trade" are used interchangeably. Under the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, e-commerce is defined as the production, distribution, marketing, sale or delivery of goods and services by electronic means. The statistical definition of digital trade is all international trade that is that is digitally ordered and/or digitally delivered.

vehicles, to AI and cybersecurity.² As a result, the TBT Committee is becoming a key global forum of regulatory dialogue and cooperation in these areas. In 2025, discussions on AI stood out as a particularly prominent focus on the Committee's agenda. In particular, a thematic session on International Standards for Critical and Emerging Technologies (CETs) examined standardization efforts and their use in regulations and conformity assessment, with a focus on AI/Machine Learning, semiconductors/microelectronics, and GPS-related services.³ These discussions highlight the growing importance of international standards in ensuring interoperability, safety and trust in rapidly evolving digital technologies, while also addressing the participation challenges faced by developing and least-developed Members.⁴ In parallel, the Committee also organized an information session on non-tariff measures under the ITA, in collaboration with the ITA Committee, further strengthening cross-committee cooperation on digital and technology-related regulatory issues.⁵

Experience-sharing on new technologies and AI continues in the SPS Committee. In November 2025, the Committee will hold a [Thematic Session on Science-Based Import Controls to Facilitate Safe Trade](#). The session will include discussion on digital technologies, including electronic certification and use of AI to manage SPS risks at the border.

Trade in goods: In 2025, the Council for Trade in Goods received an increasing number of trade concerns related to measures by Members, including the introduction of export bans and new export controls, which other Members consider to be trade disruptive. This included measures on advanced microchips, semiconductors and semiconductor manufacturing equipment, and other inputs for the manufacture of advanced ICT products, such as certain rare earths (e.g. gallium, germanium, yttrium, etc.) and other inputs (e.g. indium, tungsten, molybdenum).⁶

Trade in services: The Council for Trade in Services continued to address specific trade concerns regarding ICT and ICT-related measures in 2025. These concerned issues such as cybersecurity, mobile applications, and investment in semiconductors, AI, and quantum technology.

Electronic Commerce: Discussions on e-commerce at the WTO continue under two parallel tracks: multilaterally, under the Work Programme on Electronic Commerce, and plurilaterally, under a Joint Statement Initiative by a group of Members that has concluded negotiations on a set of baseline rules on e-commerce. In addition, e-commerce-related issues are also being raised in other bodies.

- **Work Programme on Electronic Commerce:** discussions under the Work Programme continue with a particular emphasis on the development dimension. In the horizontal discussions under the General Council, Members have discussed issues related to the digital divide, such as connectivity, digital infrastructure and digital industrialization; legal and regulatory frameworks; and issues related to AI and emerging technologies. Members shared their national and regional experiences, raised specific challenges, and discussed the role of the WTO and other institutions in supporting the digital economy. Members also discussed the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions. At Members' request, the WTO Secretariat is developing a database of technical assistance and capacity building programmes in support of digital trade/e-commerce.
- Electronic commerce was also discussed in some of the subsidiary bodies charged with the implementation of the Work Programme. In the Council for Trade in Services (CTS), Members continued to share information about developments and experiences related to e-commerce, for instance in terms of South-South cooperation. Delegations highlighted the usefulness of the horizontal discussions under the General Council, and some noted the potential for complementary work to be carried out in the CTS, calling for a particular focus on the development dimension. In the Committee on Trade and Development (CTD) WTO Members engaged in discussions around the reinvigoration of the work entrusted to the CTD under the Work Programme.
- **Joint Statement Initiative on Electronic Commerce:** negotiations of the Agreement on Electronic Commerce were concluded in 2024. Supported by 71 Members, the text contains articles that aim at enabling electronic transactions and promoting digital trade facilitation, ensuring an open environment for digital trade, and promoting trust in e-commerce. Efforts

² See https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/trading_with_intelligence_e.pdf

³ The discussion was built on previous TBT Committee thematic sessions on "intangible digital products" and "cybersecurity of software-enabled and/or network connected goods" (20 June 2023). For more information see [WTO | Thematic session on International Standards for Critical and Emerging Technologies \(CETs\)](#).

⁴ See World Trade Report 2025 https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/wtr25_e.pdf, pp. 11, 92.

⁵ [ICN/TBT/38](#).

⁶ See for example [ICT-related concerns at the CTG in the WTO Trade Concerns Database](#).

are ongoing to promote broader participation in the agreement, build consensus for its incorporation into the WTO framework, and foster better understanding of its provisions.

Work Programme on Small Economies: WTO Members continue to examine specific challenges and opportunities of small economies in global trade, including digital trade. The WTO Secretariat Note titled "[Challenges and opportunities for small economies in using e-commerce and digital ecosystem to drive competitiveness](#)" highlighted that global digitally delivered services trade has been growing substantially, with growth in SVEs lagging behind the global average. At the same time, and despite variations, SVEs on average performed well in terms of both internet access and affordability, though further enabling factors might be required to benefit from digital trade.

Aid for Trade: The Aid for Trade work under the aegis of the WTO's Committee on Trade and Development explores possible ways of integrating developing countries into the evolving digital trade landscape. The [Roadmap to the 20th anniversary of Aid for Trade](#) highlights digital trade among priority areas for Members' discussions in 2025 and 2026. In 2025, Members examined ways to [fast-track digital trade growth](#). The discussions identified that levels of [digital integration](#) varied across regions and levels of development. It was noted that while developed economies adopted enabling policies aimed at creating an environment for digital trade to flourish, lower-income countries, including LDCs, lagged behind with regard to digital integration. A suggestion was made to adopt context-specific policies. For example, the implementation of the [Digital Trade Protocol of the African Continental Free Trade Area \(AfCFTA\)](#) could boost intra-regional trade by over 10%, provided complementary policies address regulatory fragmentation, infrastructure gaps, SME finance, and cybersecurity.⁷

Measurement of digital trade: In 2025, the WTO continued to update its estimates on trade in digitally delivered services. Comprehensive statistics on exports and imports of digitally delivered services by main sector were released in the new interactive [WTO | Statistics - Global Services Trade Data Hub](#). In addition, WTO released the digitally deliverable trade on a bilateral basis.

WTO Secretariat:

- There has been an increasing demand for technical assistance and capacity building on e-commerce. In fact, a large number of WTO Members identified digital trade as a priority area in the recent Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC) survey on technical assistance planning for the upcoming biennium. The WTO Secretariat has responded to this demand with seminars and technical assistance activities held either online or in person to enhance Members' understanding of the state of play in e-commerce discussions in the WTO, and on measuring digital trade. Technical assistance carried out in 2025 has also mainstreamed WSIS-related topics and included subject-matter specific sessions, such as on the links between digital trade, digital technologies (including AI) and intellectual property protection.
- In 2025, the WTO Secretariat launched the second in a series of online courses on [Trade in the Digital Era](#). The first course provides an overview of the rise of the digital economy and discusses the benefits and challenges related to digital trade. The second course focuses on key concepts underpinning digital trade. Three additional courses are in development namely on WTO rules related to digital trade, on emerging technologies with a particular focus on AI and blockchain, and on digital trade provisions in regional trade agreements.
- The WTO, in partnership with the World Bank, concluded the pilot phase of its "Digital Trade for Africa" project ([WTO | Digital Trade for Africa project](#)) in September 2025. The project is aimed at supporting interested African countries' efforts to close gaps in connectivity and regulatory infrastructure. A similar endeavour, focused on Latin America and the Caribbean, was launched in 2025, in collaboration with the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB).
- The WTO Secretariat and the International Trade Centre (ITC) jointly launched the [Women Exporters in the Digital Economy \(WEIDE\) Fund](#) in February 2024. The project's objective is to unlock opportunities for women in digital trade by improving access to finance, technical assistance, export markets as well as networks and support services.
- The 2025 edition of the [World Trade Report](#) focuses on AI and inclusivity. The Report reveals that, with the right enabling policies, AI could boost the value of cross-border flows of goods and services by nearly 40% by 2040 thanks to productivity gains and lower trade costs. However, for AI and trade to contribute to inclusive growth — with benefits shared widely

⁷ Ferracane, M., (2025). The Brussels effect in Africa: is it beneficial for intra-regional trade in digital services? in *Journal of International Economic Law*, Volume 28, Issue 1, March 2025, Pages 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jiel/jqae059>.

- policies need to be in place to bridge the digital divide, invest in workforce skills, and maintain an open and predictable trading environment.
- The [WTO Public Forum](#) held in September featured many sessions focused on the digital economy, e-commerce and emerging technologies.

(b) Future actions or initiatives

The activities indicated above represent ongoing work of the WTO, most of which will continue into the foreseeable future. Questions of obstacles such as low connectivity in developing countries, lack of capacity of MSMEs, and inadequate regulatory frameworks, along with information-sharing on policies and experiences may also be expected to remain on the agendas of the WTO bodies. Given the wide range of issues under discussion, a trend toward seeking views of various stakeholders by such means as seminars and panels may also continue.