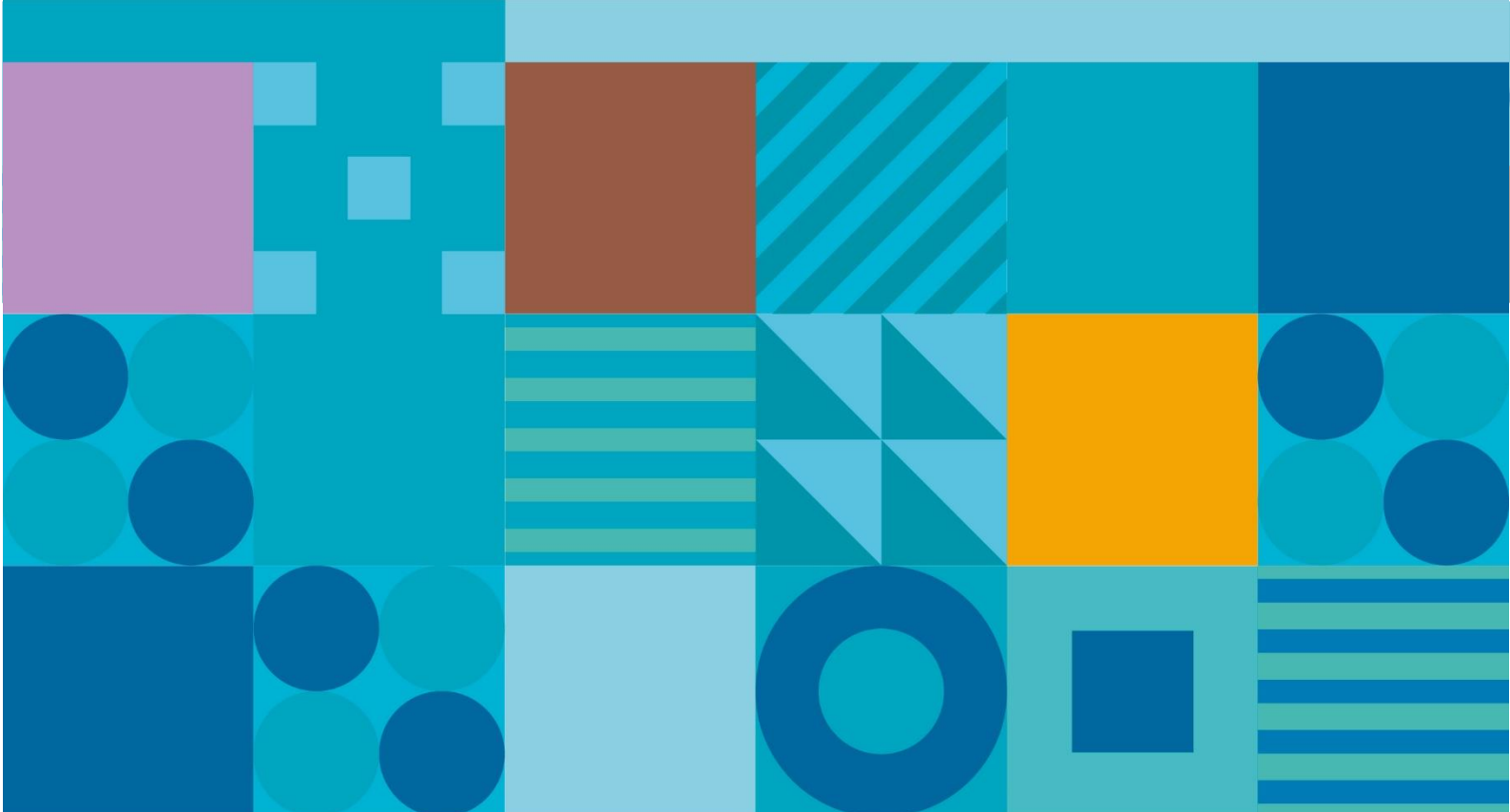
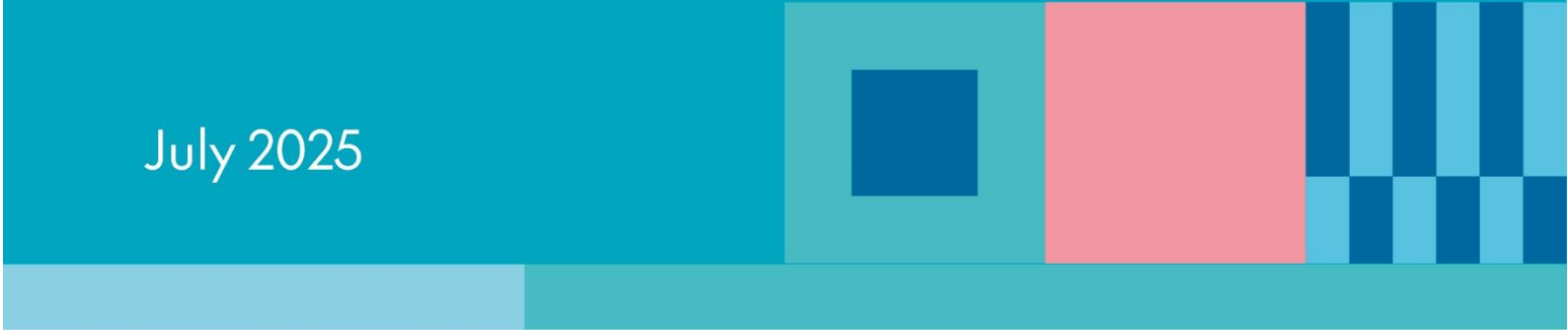




Global Youth Consultations on Trade

A report by
the WTO Young Trade Leaders

July 2025



Young Trade Leaders

For people and planet

Disclaimer

This report has been prepared by the 2024 WTO Young Trade Leaders under their own responsibility. The views expressed in the report do not necessarily reflect the positions or opinions of the WTO Secretariat or WTO Members.

About the Young Trade Leaders programme

The Young Trade Leaders Programme aims to foster a better understanding of the WTO's work and international trade among young people.

WTO Young Trade Leaders are exceptional young people who have a clear understanding of how trade can be of benefit to people and planet. They bring new perspectives and ideas about the role of trade and the WTO while also having the opportunity to learn about the organization's work and play a role in advancing its mission.

For more information, please visit: www.wto.org/ytl.

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Young Trade Leaders

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Executive Summary

The Global Youth Consultations Report on Trade presents the outcomes of a series of regional consultations led by the 2024 WTO Young Trade Leaders, convening over 100 young people in 2025 across six continents to articulate their priorities, insights, and recommendations on international trade policy.

These youth-led dialogues explored core themes such as sustainability, digital trade, inclusivity, economic justice, and multilateral cooperation. Participants identified systemic challenges - including knowledge gaps, limited access to finance, regulatory fragmentation, and unequal representation - but also provided innovative, solution-driven ideas tailored to regional contexts.

Despite varied geographies and socio-economic conditions, a common narrative emerged: trade can be a tool to confront the world's evolving challenges. To do this, it must look not only at economic metrics, but also seek to weave values of equity, environmental stewardship, and intergenerational fairness into its fabric. Youth expressed a strong appetite to influence trade governance and called for institutional mechanisms that embed their voices in decision-making processes.

This report amplifies those voices, offering targeted, regional recommendations to inform policy-making in the WTO and at all levels. It serves as both a record of youth-led insights and a call to action for trade institutions - including at the global, regional, national and local levels - to meaningfully engage the next generation in shaping reforms that deliver a more inclusive and sustainable global economy.

Foreword

It is my great pleasure to introduce the Global Youth Consultations on Trade report by the inaugural cohort of WTO Young Trade Leaders. This report is based on regional consultations with young people about their attitudes towards trade policy. Its findings are as fascinating as they are significant. For instance, trade is widely viewed as a tool to address pressing global issues including climate change and rising inequality.

I want to congratulate our eight Young Trade Leaders – students, entrepreneurs and young professionals – from the around the world. Their boundless enthusiasm and fresh ideas are why we established the programme. The programme's aim was to bring the views of young people closer to the WTO, and to bring the WTO closer to young people. These consultations, and this report, have done both.

As we navigate an increasingly difficult global environment, the energy and ideas of young people can help us to spot, and to seize, the opportunities amidst the challenges. The WTO has a responsibility to move with the times and to meet the demands and expectations of a new generation. As the report makes clear, young people recognize trade and the WTO's role in promoting growth, development and diversity, but don't shy away from pointing to the system's shortcomings as well.

The need for reform of the WTO is clearly echoed by the next generation of traders, policy makers and thinkers. We owe it to them to listen and consider their thoughts carefully. I encourage governments and decision-makers to review the report's findings and consider ways to further integrate the views of young people into policymaking.

All the best,

Ismaila Dieng

Director, Information and External Relations
World Trade Organization

Introduction

At a time of rising geopolitical uncertainty, economic transformation, and accelerating technological change, it has never been more vital to hear the voices of young people and their ideas for renewing trust in multilateralism and shaping the future of global trade. Young people are not only future decision-makers – they are active contributors to a rapidly evolving global economy. Yet, their voices remain underrepresented in the very institutions that will govern the world's future.

The Global Youth Consultations on Trade was launched to address this critical gap by engaging youth aged 18-30 across continents in solutions-focused dialogue on the future of international trade policy. Led by the 2024 WTO Young Trade Leaders, the initiative convened a series of online regional consultations seeking to further democratise access to trade discourse and empower young people to contribute directly to global policy conversations.

These consultations aimed to uncover the priorities, challenges, and aspirations of youth on key trade-related themes, including sustainability, digital trade, inclusivity, and human rights. The result is a globally-informed, youth-authored report that captures the collective intelligence and lived experience of a generation already reshaping the landscape of global trade and economic justice. The findings affirm a clear message: the future of international trade must be shaped not only by economic imperatives, but by the values of inclusion, sustainability, and intergenerational equity.

While this report reflects the insights of young people who participated in the consultations, it is important to acknowledge that it does not represent the complete spectrum of global youth perspectives. In particular, there remain gaps in representation from historically underrepresented economies and least-developed countries (LDCs). We therefore recommend the WTO and its members to continue their engagement with a broad cross-section of young people to enhance and build upon the findings presented.

By incorporating a wider range of youth perspectives into multilateral trade dialogue, this project contributes to more inclusive discussions at the WTO and supports efforts to ensure global institutions remain responsive to future challenges. This report presents the key findings, insights, and policy recommendations that emerged from the Global Youth Consultations on Trade - offering a blueprint for a global trade architecture centred on innovation and sustainability.

Methodology

Approach

- Regional Consultations: Six online consultation sessions were held between March and April 2025, each focusing on a different continent: Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania.
- Participant Demographics: Each consultation engaged its youth aged 18–30 with diverse backgrounds, including students, entrepreneurs, and young professionals in trade-related sectors.
- Discussion Format: Sessions were facilitated using a semi-structured format with thematic prompts to encourage candid and region-specific insights. Breakout rooms were used to allow deeper discussion.
- Themes Covered: Each session explored key areas including:
 - a. Digital and sustainable trade
 - b. Youth engagement in trade governance
 - c. Regional trade barriers and opportunities
 - d. Human rights and environmental concerns
 - e. Trade literacy and misinformation
 - f. Structural inequalities in the global trading system

Data Collection and Analysis

- Qualitative Input: Participant responses, quotes, and group summaries were documented in real time by facilitators.
- Thematic Synthesis: Findings were synthesized using grounded thematic analysis, identifying recurring issues, regional differences, and cross-cutting recommendations.
- Validation: Draft findings were circulated among Young Trade Leaders and select participants for feedback, ensuring accuracy and integrity in representing youth perspectives.

Continental Insights – Africa

Overview

The African regional consultation united diverse voices to discuss critical challenges and opportunities in international trade, with a particular focus on the intersection between continental integration through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) – a landmark opportunity – and global multilateral trade under the WTO framework. The consultation emphasised the complementary rather than competitive relationship between regional trade integration and global trade participation, positioning African youth at the centre of both continental economic integration and global trade engagement.

Key Themes and Findings

Knowledge Gaps and Awareness Challenges

Young African entrepreneurs and potential traders identified significant knowledge barriers regarding international trade mechanisms. Many participants revealed that they were unfamiliar with key regional trade instruments, particularly the AfCFTA, despite its direct relevance to their business aspirations. Many young people perceive international trade as an exclusively technical domain reserved for policy makers and established businesses, rather than recognising their role as current and future stakeholders in a global trading system that has the potential to deliver meaningful growth and development.

“Capacity gaps persist in understanding trade systems and navigating international opportunities, especially for youth outside formal academic or legal settings.” - Participant

Market Access and Information Asymmetries

Participants identified that there was difficulty in accessing reliable market information and connecting with qualified suppliers and buyers across borders. However, the keynote speaker informed participants about the AfCFTA Africa Trade Observatory which includes a centralised platform which provides HS codes, market access and product information to traders.

“Among the key challenges we face are limited access to finance. While trade is typically viewed as the territory of policymakers, it's becoming clear that young entrepreneurs have a vital role to play as key stakeholders in shaping its future.” - Eric Andrew, WTO Young Trade Leader from Nigeria

Financial Access and Risk Perception

Access to trade finance emerged as a fundamental barrier, with young entrepreneurs facing difficulties due to their age and perceived risk profiles. Traditional financial institutions often view youth-led businesses as high-risk investments, making it difficult to secure the capital necessary for cross-border trade activities that could create new opportunities and transform communities.

“We need access to trade finance which is tailored to young entrepreneurs if we want to enhance youth participation and foster equitable trade.” - Nasubila Ng’ambi, WTO Young Trade Leader from Malawi

Regulatory Harmonisation and Simplification

The need for simplified and harmonised regulations was emphasised as crucial for enabling seamless intra-African trade and building the foundation for global market participation. Young participants particularly struggle with navigating different regulatory requirements, documentation processes, and compliance standards across multiple jurisdictions, often lacking the resources to engage professional services for regulatory guidance. The AfCFTA presents a major opportunity for continental integration, by incorporating modern provisions that simplify and facilitate trade participation through the African Trade Observatory.

“There is a clear call for governments to harmonise rules and simplify processes to foster a more seamless and youth-inclusive trading environment.” - Participant

Digital Innovation and E-commerce Opportunities

Participants identified that they are not merely participating in these sectors but are actively driving innovation and creating new models for cross-border commerce. However, regulatory frameworks often lag behind technological innovations, creating uncertainty and barriers for digital-first businesses seeking to expand across borders. The need for adaptive regulatory approaches that support rather than hinder digital innovation was emphasised.

“Expanding access to digital infrastructure and training can empower young people to take advantage of cross-border digital trade opportunities.” - Participant

Recommendations

1. Establish Youth Trade Information Hubs
 - Create comprehensive, accessible online platforms with verified supplier and buyer databases. Provide market intelligence and step-by-step guides for cross-border trade
 - Integrate platforms across AfCFTA member states and link to global trade databases
2. Youth-Focused Trade Finance Mechanisms
 - Design innovative financing products specifically for young entrepreneurs
 - Include risk-sharing mechanisms and peer-to-peer lending platforms
 - Implement government-backed guarantee schemes addressing unique youth business risk profiles
3. Digital Trade Frameworks
 - Create adaptive regulatory frameworks supporting digital innovation in trade
 - Ensure appropriate consumer protection and market integrity
 - Develop clear guidelines for e-commerce, digital payments, and cross-border data flows, at the multilateral level and at regional level including in the AfCFTA
4. Pan-African Youth Trade Facilitation Program
 - Develop comprehensive end-to-end support for young entrepreneurs in international trade. Include market research, partner identification, and financing support
5. Implement Regulatory Simplification Initiatives
 - Accelerate harmonisation of trade regulations across African countries
 - Develop user-friendly guides and digital tools for regulatory navigation

Continental Insights – Asia

Overview

The Asian regional consultation brought together young leaders from across East, Southeast, and Central Asia to discuss trade-related challenges and opportunities unique to the region. Participants emphasised the transformative role of youth in strengthening multilateralism, promoting sustainable and ethical trade, and shaping a more inclusive global trading system. Despite their diverse national contexts, a unifying theme emerged: Asia's youth are ready to lead - if given the tools, platforms, and institutional support to do so.

Key Themes and Findings

Youth Engagement and Regional Trade Governance

Participants voiced concern about the lack of youth representation in trade policy processes, despite emerging engagement through academia, social media, and entrepreneurship. They highlighted that trade discussions are sometimes inaccessible or overly politicised, with young people only seeing the "trickle-down" effects of decisions made behind closed doors. They stressed their eagerness to participate and lead in shaping an enhanced trade architecture.

"Most Indonesians don't necessarily understand what the WTO does... because the agreements are made at the global level. We only experience it at the very end." - Participant

Technology and Sustainable Development

Youth identified the digital economy and AI-related industries as critical growth sectors in Asia. However, they raised concerns about unchecked investment, environmental degradation, and regulatory loopholes. Participants emphasised the need for youth-led watchdog mechanisms and green innovation incentives that encourage sustainable trade and investment.

Trade Literacy and Misinformation

There is a persistent disconnect between public understanding and the role of the WTO. Media coverage tends to focus on disputes, creating scepticism, especially in developing countries. Participants urged for greater public education campaigns to emphasise the WTO's positive impact on development, sustainability, and poverty alleviation, targeted at youth-oriented audiences. Young people have an important role to play, raising awareness of the opportunities presented by trade and a multilateral system that supports the people and the planet.

"When the media talk about the 'WTO', it's often about trade wars and tariffs. Not about the benefits - like poverty reduction or environmental standards." - Sunny Li, WTO Young Trade Leader from China

Sustainability, Trade, and Youth Activism

From plastic bans in Bali to bamboo-based innovation in China, Asian youth are pushing sustainability through grassroots advocacy and circular economy projects. However, many noted that green alternatives remain too expensive for widespread adoption in developing contexts without trade incentives or support. WTO initiatives such as the Plastics Dialogue, rules to regulate fisheries subsidies, and fossil fuel subsidy reform discussions are examples of plurilateral and multilateral frameworks that can guide national and local standards.

"The price is worth it - but the cost of green consumption is a real issue. Consumers need incentives, and governments must act." – Elina Sultanbekova, WTO Young Trade Leader from Kyrgyz Republic

Multilateralism and Regional Unity

Youth expressed a strong commitment to multilateralism rooted in a shared history and a promising future. There was consensus that Asian economies must continue to formulate context-specific trade frameworks that reflect regional priorities and cultural realities.

Recommendations

1. Institutionalise Youth Participation in Trade Governance
 - Continue to elevate WTO youth initiatives such as the Young Professionals Programme and the Young Trade Leaders Programme as vessels of global youth engagement
 - Encourage further youth participation at key WTO events, such as Ministerial Conferences, the Public Forum and other fora
2. Support Youth-led Trade Education Initiatives
 - Fund and create programs that translate WTO rules into accessible formats (videos, social media, school curricula)
 - Support university-led trade awareness campaigns
3. Promote Sustainable Trade Through Incentives and Standards
 - Recognize a Green Labelling Framework that encourages environmentally responsible trade products from developing economies
 - Provide further trade-based solutions targeted to youth-led green startups in Asia
4. Strengthen Asia's Regional Trade Voice
 - Facilitate intra-Asian youth trade dialogues to build consensus and regional priorities
 - Provide technical and legal assistance to smaller Asian economies engaged in trade disputes
 - Disseminate more widely WTO dispute outcomes, including those involving environmental and development issues

Continental Insights – Europe

Overview

The European regional consultation brought together young leaders from across the continent to discuss their vision for a fairer, more inclusive, and sustainable global trading system. Participants demonstrated a clear commitment to rethinking trade from both economic and ethical standpoints. As representatives of a region deeply embedded in the multilateral system, European youth voiced support for progressive trade reforms, while offering nuanced critiques of power asymmetries, environmental responsibilities, and institutional effectiveness.

Key Themes and Findings

Equity, Capacity, and Special & Differential Treatment

Participants underscored the importance of tailoring trade obligations to the development stage of each country, echoing the need for continued support through Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT). However, concerns were raised about self-designation of development status in the WTO and ambiguities in development classification.

“Maybe we should revisit how countries self-designate as ‘developing’. Some large economies still benefit from this status while others are left behind.” - Participant

Environmental Standards and Quality of Life

European youth emphasised the need to reconcile trade with environmental justice and quality of life. There was strong support for high environmental and labor standards, but also recognition that rigid compliance burdens may disproportionately impact developing nations unless paired with technology transfer and capacity-building. Balancing these two priorities will be key to supporting long-term sustainable growth and development.

“It’s a complicated issue - some countries simply don’t have the capacity to comply with strict environmental or labor rules.” - Participant

Technology, Trade, and Global Health

Technology was viewed as a double-edged sword: a powerful enabler of innovation and inclusion, yet a source of new vulnerabilities like cyberattacks and digital inequality. Young people saw opportunities for AI, data sharing, and cross-border collaboration - especially in healthcare and biotech - to reshape trade positively. Ambitious standards in these areas could strengthen global governance while unlocking potential for developing countries.

“With health data sharing, we can accelerate pharmaceutical innovation and pandemic preparedness. But IP rights and data security remain big challenges.” - Participant

Regional Trade Blocs: Efficiency vs. Exclusion

While some participants were concerned that regional trade blocs could entrench inequalities or fragment global trade, others viewed them as pragmatic vehicles for progress - especially when global consensus for multilateral agreements is hard to achieve.

Greenwashing, Populism, and Short-Termism

There was concern about the weaponisation of trade policy, as well as the risk of greenwashing by corporations and states. Many argued that trade policy must shift toward long-term thinking, accounting for future generations, not just election cycles or corporate returns.

“We need to rethink trade in future-forward terms. Young people are better positioned for this because we’ve grown up surrounded by long-term crises.” - Participant

Youth Involvement and Institutional Reform

Participants agreed that youth should not only be consulted but embedded in trade decision-making, bringing fresh ideas, ethical clarity, and long-term perspectives. There was also a strong call for reform of multilateral institutions to strengthen enforcement, transparency, and accountability.

“International institutions need more power to enforce green and inclusive trade policies. Talking isn’t enough.” - Participant

Recommendations

1. Modernise Development Classifications in WTO
 - Review and update self-designation rules for developing country status
 - Implement clearer criteria that reflect current economic realities
2. Balance Environmental Standards with Capacity Building
 - Promote technology transfer, green finance, and technical assistance to help developing countries meet environmental standards
 - Establish an ITC/UNCTAD mechanism to support environmental compliance in low-capacity countries
3. Enhance Trade-Technology Governance
 - Regulate digital trade, including at the WTO, through strong cybersecurity and privacy frameworks
 - Facilitate international collaboration on digital health, AI ethics, and intellectual property reform in areas such as biotechnology
4. Advance Regionalism as a Stepping Stone
 - Support regional trade initiatives that model inclusive and sustainable trade practices
 - Encourage cooperation between blocs to prevent trade fragmentation and exclusion
5. Incorporate Long-Term Thinking into Trade Policy
 - Require environmental and social impact assessments for major trade agreements
 - Promote intergenerational impact analysis within the WTO policy making process
6. Embed Youth in Trade Institutions
 - Create structured youth advisory roles in WTO and trade-related forums, building on the success of the Young Trade Leaders programme
 - Fund global youth-led trade forums and innovation challenges tied to WTO reform agendas

Continental Insights – Latin America

Overview

The South American regional consultation showcased the unique perspectives of youth from across the continent - united by a strong call for inclusion, fairness, and innovation in global trade. Participants highlighted how trade systems could do more to address global and domestic inequalities. At the same time, they voiced optimism and presented a roadmap for how young people can be powerful actors in reshaping trade for a more equitable and sustainable future.

Key Themes and Findings

Youth as Drivers of Innovation and Digital Transformation

Young people in South America emphasised their capacity to catalyse innovation in global trade through digital technologies and adaptive business models. At the same time, many highlighted that digital infrastructure and literacy remain insufficient across the region, limiting youth potential in sectors such as e-commerce, digital services, and fintech. A global framework for digital trade rules led by the WTO could serve as an accelerator for regional change.

Inclusive Trade Policymaking and Institutional Gaps

There was a strong sentiment that youth voices are underrepresented in regional and international trade policymaking. Many participants urged for more institutional mechanisms to facilitate youth engagement in trade reform, policy dialogues, and WTO forums.

"In Latin America, there are very few spaces for youth to participate in trade policymaking. This exclusion limits their influence in shaping a fairer system - governments need to create real, institutional pathways for youth inclusion." - Florencia Mastrorilli, Young Trade Leader from Argentina

Unequal Benefits and Structural Barriers in Trade

Participants suggested that large multinational corporations can benefit more easily from global trade, with SMEs, women, and marginalised groups – particularly indigenous and rural communities – lagging behind. Barriers include bureaucracy, non-tariff barriers, outdated competition laws, and lack of access to financing.

Trade as a Tool for Tackling Inequality

There was a complex discussion around trade's role in tackling inequality. Young people expressed concern that without inclusive and intersectional trade policies, benefits would remain concentrated among major players. Gender, environmental justice, and the informal sector in labor were repeatedly raised as central issues. Policymakers could consider incorporating policies similar to the binding inclusivity protocol developed under the AfCFTA's Protocol on Women and Youth.

"Trade can widen gender gaps unless accompanied by policies addressing structural barriers like unpaid care work and access to finance." - Participant

Balancing Protection and Integration

While some participants acknowledged the need to protect local industries, they cautioned against long-term protectionism that breeds inefficiency and corrupt practices. There was widespread agreement on the need for any industrial protection to be targeted, transparent, and time-bound, coupled with policies to support innovation, R&D, and competitiveness.

"Protection should be temporary and goal-oriented. Long-term protection can backfire if industries become reliant and fail to adapt." - Participant

Recommendations

1. Enhance Youth Participation and Trade Literacy
 - Institutionalise youth representation in national and regional trade bodies
 - Establish WTO-sponsored and/or government-sponsored leadership programs and youth trade fellowships across South America

- Translate WTO mechanisms and trade principles into accessible formats for youth and civil society
- 2. Support Digital Trade Infrastructure
 - Increase investment in broadband access and digital trade infrastructure in rural and underserved areas
 - Support youth-led digital trade startups through funding, mentorship, and inclusion in public procurement schemes
- 3. Promote Equity in Global Trade Rules
 - Push for uniform implementation of WTO principles to reduce discrimination against developing countries, and further scale up technical assistance to developing countries to enable greater implementation
 - Advocate for inclusive trade platforms that support SMEs, women, and indigenous entrepreneurs and small-business owners with simplified procedures and tools
- 4. Integrate Social and Environmental Justice in Trade
 - Embed environmental and ethical standards in trade agreements and supply chains
 - Incentivise green trade practices through sustainability certifications and fair trade incentives
 - Promote trade in climate-friendly services and products (e.g., renewable energy, circular economy models), at the WTO and at the regional and local levels
- 5. Balance Domestic Protection and Global Openness
 - Ensure protection policies include sunset clauses to avoid long-term dependency
 - Educate and support local industries in achieving export readiness, especially in culturally significant sectors
 - Improve domestic competition laws to level the playing field for local firms competing with large multinationals

Continental Insights – North America

Overview

The North America regional consultation united young leaders from Canada, Mexico and the United States, to discuss the interconnected challenges facing international commerce, from indigenous rights and intellectual property access to the digital transformation of trade infrastructure. The participants emphasised the need for more inclusive and accessible trade frameworks that can address the complex realities of North America's diverse economies. Their insights reflect both the opportunities and tensions inherent in the region's trade relationships, particularly in the context of evolving political dynamics and technological disruption.

Key Themes and Findings

Inclusivity and Marginalised Communities

Young people identified the specific challenges faced by indigenous communities in Mexico, where language barriers and lack of information about trade and intellectual property rights create significant disadvantages. Participants highlighted how these groups have not been able to fully exploit the benefits of the multilateral trading system despite being directly affected by its policies.

“Tourists haggle over prices for our handmade textiles, but no one explains to us how trade rules could protect our art.” - Participant

Capacity Building for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises

Participants emphasised that under the current trade infrastructure large corporations can benefit more easily, while barriers exist for smaller businesses that lack resources to navigate complex regulatory frameworks. Young people from different regions could play a role in developing and delivering capacity-building programs, bringing fresh perspectives and technological fluency to traditional trade education approaches.

“Small businesses drown in paperwork. We need a single digital platform to navigate trade rules.”

- Participant

Digital Trade and E-commerce Governance

The discussion emphasised the importance of advancing plurilateral negotiations at the WTO on e-commerce, recognising that digital trade represents a fundamental shift in how global commerce operates. Participants highlighted that timely and inclusive rulemaking in this area is essential to ensure international trade frameworks remain responsive to rapid technological change.

“For trade to work for everyone, we need to create systems that include marginalised communities, simplify access for small businesses, and modernize rules for digital and e-commerce markets” -

Hugh Jones, Young Trade Leader from Canada

Regional Trade Dynamics and Political Tensions

Participants discussed how trade wars and protectionist policies have prompted countries to diversify their trading partnerships and consider alternative arrangements. Mexico's exploration of new trade agreements with Brazil and other South American countries was highlighted as an example of how nations are adapting to changing political dynamics.

“As trade wars escalate, countries like Mexico are diversifying – seeking new partners like Brazil to stay resilient in a shifting global landscape.” - Participant

Labor Rights and Social Considerations

The integration of labor protections into trade agreements emerged as a priority for participants, who emphasised that trade frameworks must consider worker welfare alongside commercial interests. They highlighted the importance of ensuring that trade policies translate into tangible benefits for working families rather than remaining abstract economic concepts.

Recommendations

1. Institutional Reforms for Greater Inclusivity
 - Formulate and execute trade impact assessments for vulnerable populations
 - Host regular forums and committees that centre indigenous voices
2. Enhanced Support for Small Enterprises
 - Expand free courses on trade related topics, covering practical skills such as accessing capital, understanding IP rights and navigating export procedures
 - Promote partnerships between public and private institutions to create more efficient capacity-building programs that reach a wider audience for small enterprises
 - Ensure programs are designed with meaningful input from young professionals
3. Digital Trade Development Framework
 - Prioritise trade agreements that fully integrate digital commerce provisions, including by incorporating the WTO plurilateral agreement on e-commerce into the WTO framework and encouraging further discussions at the multilateral level
 - Formally integrate young trade professionals into trade policy development processes, recognising their expertise in digital technologies
4. Strengthening Regional Cooperation
 - North American countries should explore opportunities to establish common ground between various regional trade agreements to reduce regulatory complexity but maintain policy flexibility
 - Develop mechanisms to navigate political tensions in trade relationships while focusing on economic interests and mutual benefits

Continental Insights – Oceania

Overview

The Oceania regional consultation united young leaders and policymakers to reimagine a trading system that prioritises fairness, sustainability, and intergenerational equity. Participants – representing small island states, developed economies, and emerging markets – emphasised the unique challenges of their region: geographic isolation, climate vulnerability, and reliance on multilateral trade frameworks. Unlike regions with large populations or easily traversed land borders, Oceania's relatively smaller economies depend heavily on predictable, long-term access to investment, technology, and distant markets. This geographic reality has created both vulnerabilities and opportunities that require innovative policy responses. While supporting the WTO's role in stabilising global commerce, youth called for necessary reforms to address power imbalances, environmental degradation, and the digital divide.

Key Themes and Findings

Equity for Small and Vulnerable Economies

Participants highlighted how current trade rules can disadvantage small island states and middle-power economies. Unlike continental economies that can rely on regional trade networks, Pacific nations must maintain relationships across vast ocean distances, making them particularly vulnerable to disruptions in the multilateral trading system. While the WTO's dispute settlement system was acknowledged as a vital mechanism for upholding trade rules, young participants highlighted that challenges remain – particularly for Least Developed Countries (LDCs), which may lack the financial and technical resources to engage on an equal footing with larger economies. Participants identified that there was a need for specific Special & Differential Treatment provisions for climate-vulnerable states.

Need for Climate Change Adaptation

Youth identified climate adaptation as inseparable from trade policy, citing examples like rising sea levels disrupting Pacific supply chains and droughts harming agricultural exports. Participants

emphasized that Pacific island nations face disproportionate impacts from environmental degradation caused by larger economies' subsidy programs, and that these impacts will be particularly felt by future generations. There was universal praise for the 2022 WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement which prohibits government support for illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, but also demands to expand it to target subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing. The 2022 Agreement demonstrates the continued capacity for international institutions such as the WTO to conclude multilateral agreements even in today's complex international environment.

"Australia's coal exports might boost GDP today, but what's the cost to our region's future?" - Australian Participant

Technology: Bridge or Barrier?

Digital tools were seen as both empowering and exclusionary. E-commerce platforms were highlighted as becoming too influential, while telehealth and edtech were hailed as opportunities for remote communities. Participants called for policies ensuring that digital trade development does not exacerbate existing inequalities between connected and isolated populations.

"If a single company controls Pacific digital trade, whose rules will we follow?" – Participant

Industrial Policy and Geopolitical Risks

Young people debated the resurgence of industrial subsidies, especially in clean energy sectors. While some supported strategic self-sufficiency, others warned of a "zero-sum race to the bottom". Participants identified a need for ethical safeguards against labor exploitation in renewable energy sectors and greater WTO oversight of green subsidies to prevent market distortion.

Recommendations

1. Reform Subsidy Rules

- Encourage governments to ratify the 2022 WTO Fisheries Subsidies Agreement to ensure its prompt entry into force and expand it through follow-up provisions that prohibit additional subsidies contributing to overcapacity and overfishing
 - Create a "Green Subsidy Code" to regulate clean energy incentives fairly
2. Address Climate-Trade Issues
 - Establish a Pacific Climate Trade Fund for infrastructure adaptation
 - Encourage private sector companies to adopt trade justice audits to assess the human rights and environmental implications of their activities
 3. Make Digital Trade More Inclusive
 - Develop principles for equitable digital trade governance
 - Increase investment in digital infrastructure and skills
 - Protect data sovereignty while enabling cross-border data flows
 4. Redefine Development Status
 - Replace self-designation with objective metrics (e.g., climate vulnerability indices)
 - Grant automatic and permanent Special and Differential Treatment to Small Island Developing States (SIDS), including provisions that streamline access to technical assistance, longer implementation timelines for WTO agreements, and exemptions from dispute settlement retaliation measures, in recognition of their unique structural vulnerabilities and limited negotiating capacity
 5. Enhance Youth Engagement
 - Create permanent youth advisory mechanisms in trade institutions
 - Support youth-led trade research and innovation initiatives
 - Increase transparency and accessibility of trade negotiations to young people

Conclusion

The Global Youth Consultations Report on Trade reaffirms what young people across continents have long known: international trade is not neutral and does not exist in a vacuum – it shapes lives, communities, and futures. From around the world, young people are no longer content to inherit trade systems built without their input. They are calling for transformation grounded in sustainability, equity, and inclusion.

Through these regional consultations, youth have identified clear barriers – from access to information and finance, to exclusion from decision-making spaces. But they have also offered bold, practical solutions: regulatory reform, digital inclusion, climate-aligned trade, and meaningful youth participation in multilateral processes with the WTO at its centre.

This report is more than a compilation of insights – it is a blueprint for a trade architecture that recognizes youth not just as future beneficiaries, but as present-day changemakers. For the WTO and its members, the message is clear: engaging young people is not symbolic – it is strategic. To future-proof trade, institutions must embed youth voices, invest in youth capacity, and co-create a global economy that works for all generations.

The work does not end here. This report marks a beginning – a foundation upon which further consultations, partnerships, and reforms must be built. Trade must evolve, and youth must help lead that evolution.