

Annual Report

2026



About this report

This report covers WTO activities in 2025 and the early part of 2026. At the start of the report, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala reflects on the current challenges facing world trade and the role of the WTO. The report also covers the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference, which took place from 26 to 30 March 2026.

Further information about the WTO's activities is available on the WTO website: www.wto.org

Who we are

The World Trade Organization deals with the global rules of trade between WTO members. Its main function is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible.

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The cut-off date for data included in this report is end-May 2026.

Cover image: An electronics assembly factory in the United Kingdom.



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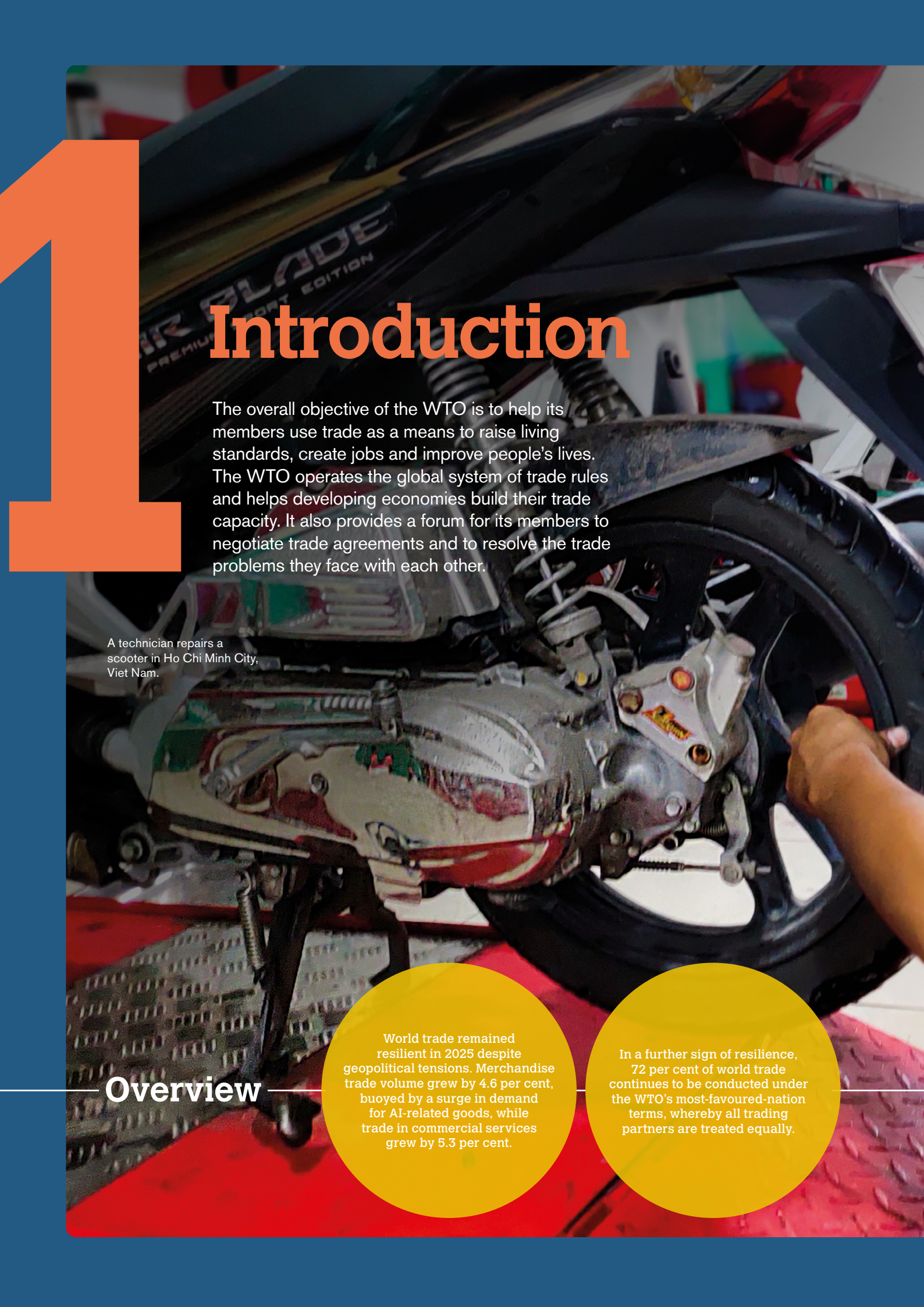
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1 Introduction

The overall objective of the WTO is to help its members use trade as a means to raise living standards, create jobs and improve people's lives. The WTO operates the global system of trade rules and helps developing economies build their trade capacity. It also provides a forum for its members to negotiate trade agreements and to resolve the trade problems they face with each other.

A technician repairs a scooter in Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam.

Overview

World trade remained resilient in 2025 despite geopolitical tensions. Merchandise trade volume grew by 4.6 per cent, buoyed by a surge in demand for AI-related goods, while trade in commercial services grew by 5.3 per cent.

In a further sign of resilience, 72 per cent of world trade continues to be conducted under the WTO's most-favoured-nation terms, whereby all trading partners are treated equally.



A landmark achievement in 2025 was the entry into force of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies following ratification of the Agreement by two-thirds of WTO members. It is the first WTO agreement with environmental sustainability at its core.

The 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Cameroon in March 2026 saw ministers adopt decisions on fisheries subsidies, small economies, and special and differential treatment for developing economies. They also came close to decisions on WTO reform and e-commerce, with discussions continuing in Geneva.

At MC14, over 60 WTO members representing some 70 per cent of global trade adopted a pathway to bring into force the Agreement on E-Commerce through interim arrangements. It is the world's first set of global digital trade rules.



Message from Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

The global trading system continues to face challenges on a scale unseen since it was established 80 years ago in the wake of the Second World War. Alongside rapid technological change and rising geopolitical tensions, the world seems to move from one crisis to the next, with recent conflicts from the war in Ukraine to the Iran war having major effects on the prices and availability of energy, food and other vital commodities.

And yet global trade showed considerable resilience in 2025, the main period covered by this report, which provides an overview of WTO activities over the past year. World merchandise trade grew by 4.6 per cent, in volume terms, as a surge in demand for AI-related goods offset the negative impact of tariff increases and trade policy uncertainty. Services trade grew by 5.3 per cent, also in volume terms. The value of global goods and services

trade, on a balance-of-payments basis, reached a record high US\$ 34.65 trillion in 2025, up 7 per cent year-on-year. WTO rules continue to play an important role in underpinning this resilience: around 72 per cent of global goods trade continues to flow on the core most-favoured-nation tariff terms members commit to at the WTO.

In response to the Strait of Hormuz crisis, countries responded more with trade-facilitating rather than trade-restrictive measures, lifting trade restrictions and facilitating trade in oil and gas products. This approach, which stands in contrast to initial responses to other recent crises, shows how an interconnected trading system can help to bring about resilience when the world is tested by conflict. It demonstrates the importance of cooperation among governments, international organizations and the private sector to mitigate the impacts of crises. It also demonstrates the need for information-sharing in fora such as the WTO.

Beyond the overall resilience in global trade, one bright spot for the WTO in 2025 was the entry into force of our Fisheries Subsidies Agreement following its ratification by two-thirds of WTO members. By curbing harmful subsidies worth billions of dollars, the Agreement promises to have a major impact on preserving global fish stocks

and on protecting the livelihoods of over 250 million people worldwide who depend on this sector for their day-to-day subsistence – while freeing up public revenue that could be redirected to a better purpose.

A key feature of the Agreement was the establishment of the Fish Fund to help developing economies implement its provisions. The Fund has now received over USD 20 million in contributions from members. Almost USD 3 million of

project grants were approved last year by the Fund's Steering Committee, followed by an additional set of grants totalling slightly over USD 2 million in the first half of 2026.

Within WTO councils and committees, much of 2025 was devoted to preparations for the WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference – MC14 – in March 2026 in Yaoundé, Cameroon. WTO reform was at the centre of these discussions, as members sought to establish a post-

MC14 workplan for delivering long-overdue reforms to ensure the WTO remains fit for purpose in a much-changed global economy. As I see it, members can and should use today's disruptions as an opportunity to strengthen what is still working well at the WTO, to repair what is not, and most excitingly, to begin to fill gaps in the global trade rulebook that would help countries take advantage of emerging commercial opportunities in areas like services, digital, and green trade.

In response to the Strait of Hormuz crisis, countries responded more with trade-facilitating rather than trade-restrictive measures, lifting trade restrictions and facilitating trade in oil and gas products.

At MC14, WTO reform was a key theme, with ministers also devoting sessions to exchange views and find ways forward on fisheries subsidies, e-commerce, agriculture, investment facilitation for development, dispute settlement reform and the needs of developing and least-developed countries.

Ministers from a wide cross-section of WTO members converged on next steps for reform, although their plan could not be formally adopted because it became linked to the proposed extension of the e-commerce moratorium, a longstanding agreement not to levy customs duties on cross-border digital transmissions, on which consensus proved out of reach in the time available. Intensive work is now under way in Geneva on the full spectrum of reform areas – including the foundational issues, decision-making, development, and level playing field matters that ministers discussed at MC14. As members requested, this work is firmly anchored in the General Council, and led by its Chair, Ambassador Clare Kelly of New Zealand, with the support of five facilitators. The goal is to lay the groundwork for outcomes between now and the Fifteenth Ministerial Conference in 2028.

In Yaoundé, members did recommit to continuing fisheries subsidies negotiations to further enhance the

provisions of the Fisheries Subsidies Agreement. They also agreed to help small economies integrate more effectively into world trade and improve the implementation of special and differential treatment for developing economies.

Plurilateral agreements featured prominently at MC14. The Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement promises to de-risk much-needed investment into developing economies by simplifying procedures, cutting red tape, and signalling the commitment of its more than 130 participants to improving their respective business

climates. Of the WTO's 166 members, 165 have now indicated support for formally integrating this agreement into the WTO legal framework. Work continues in Geneva to achieve consensus.

Meanwhile, 67 members – representing 70 per cent of global trade – announced at MC14 that they were adopting

interim arrangements to implement their Agreement on Electronic Commerce, which sets out the first global baseline for digital trade rules. While some members have raised questions about these arrangements, projections suggest that implementation of the Agreement by its participants could boost global trade by up to USD 2.4 trillion by 2040 – and by as much as USD 8.7 trillion were it to be implemented multilaterally.

The Fisheries Subsidies Agreement promises to have a major impact on preserving global fish stocks and on protecting the livelihoods of over 250 million people.

With respect to dispute settlement, the WTO last year continued to see active engagement by members, despite the fact that the Appellate Body remains inoperative. Members brought thirteen new cases to the Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) in 2025, while five panel reports were circulated. Parties notified two mutually agreed solutions to the DSB while two arbitration proceedings were completed. In addition, Chair of the Dispute Settlement Body, Ambassador Guilherme Patriota of Brazil, has been consulting with members on dispute settlement system reform.

The WTO remains committed to providing technical assistance to government officials to improve their understanding of WTO agreements and their ability to participate in trade negotiations. Over 13,000 officials, many of them from Africa and the Asia-Pacific, benefited from this assistance in 2025. In addition, the WTO continues to play an active role in multi-agency initiatives, such as the Enhanced Integrated Framework – aimed at helping LDCs harness trade for growth – and the Standards and Trade Development Facility, which helps developing economies meet food safety requirements for global trade.

Finally, the WTO made important analytical contributions to ongoing

policy debates. For instance, our 2025 World Trade Report examined the potential of artificial intelligence to lower trade costs, boost productivity and expand access to global markets, but also warned that action is needed to narrow digital divides for these gains to translate into growth that is shared across rich and poor countries. The WTO also played host to some of these conversations, through our Public Forum on digital trade, and our Presidential Lecture Series, where we had the pleasure to welcome former Chancellor of Germany Angela Merkel to share insights on how more effective multilateral cooperation can bolster women's economic empowerment along with global trade.

As the report makes clear, the WTO continues to deliver important economic benefits for people, businesses, and countries around the world. But it can and should do more. The ongoing crises contain opportunities to reform and improve the WTO. I hope members will seize them.



DR NGOZI OKONJO-IWEALA
DIRECTOR-GENERAL

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

14th Ministerial Conference

The WTO's 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Yaoundé, Cameroon, concluded on 30 March 2026 with the adoption of decisions relating to fisheries subsidies, small economies, and special and differential treatment for developing economies. Ministers came close to adopting texts on WTO reform and e-commerce but could not reach consensus. Discussions on outstanding issues are continuing in Geneva.



Concluding session of MC14 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

MC14 took place at a time of severe geopolitical tensions as economies around the world faced the consequences of the conflict in the Middle East and other ongoing issues affecting global trade.

The conference, which took place from 26 to 30 March, brought together almost 2,000 trade officials, including 77 ministers and 26 vice ministers, from the WTO's 166 members as well as representatives from civil society and the business community.

In her opening remarks, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said she was hopeful the gathering of trade ministers would find the political will to overcome differences and advance work on important topics on the MC14 agenda despite the difficulties facing the multilateral trading system.

DG Okonjo-Iweala said: "It is no secret that the world trading system is experiencing the worst disruptions in the past 80 years. The world order and multilateral system we used to know has irrevocably changed. We must look



to the future. That means figuring out what worked well in the old order, so we can keep it and build on it. It means figuring out what did not work well, so we can repair it. And it also means identifying the gaps in the renewed order we are shaping, so we can close them."

The opening session included a celebration of the entry into force of the WTO Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies earlier this year. Three WTO members - Paraguay, Samoa, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines - deposited their instruments of acceptance, bringing the number of WTO members having formally accepted the Agreement to 119.

WTO reform was an important area of work during the conference, with ministers actively engaged in breakout sessions on various topics, including

WTO foundational issues, decision-making, past mandates, development and level playing field issues. Each session was guided by a minister-facilitator, who fostered discussions aimed at guiding substantive work beyond MC14.

Ministerial sessions also took place on dispute settlement reform, fisheries subsidies, the incorporation of the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement into the WTO framework, the e-commerce work programme and moratorium, agriculture, and development (including issues related to least developed countries). Minister-facilitators guided the discussions, with participants seeking to provide political direction for the work ahead.

The discussions followed on from a number of events held on the eve of the conference. These included the

Opening ceremony of MC14.





Ministerial Session on E-commerce Work Programme and Moratorium.

Below: Ministerial Session on Agriculture.

launch of Phase 3 of the Enhanced Integrated Framework, a programme dedicated to helping least developed countries use trade as an engine of growth. Other events included a Business Forum, which brought together the public and private sectors to discuss key challenges facing the multilateral trading system, and the first-ever Civil Society Dialogue, which invited African civil society leaders and experts to exchange views on how global trade can boost Africa's growth.

On Day 2 of the Conference, 66 WTO members, covering approximately 70 per cent of global trade, adopted a pathway to bring into force the Agreement on Electronic Commerce through interim arrangements while continuing to work towards its incorporation into the WTO legal framework of rules. The Agreement is the world's first set of global digital trade rules.

The closing ceremony saw the adoption of three decisions:

- a Ministerial Decision on Fisheries Subsidies committing members to continue to engage in negotiations on fisheries subsidies, with the aim of making recommendations to MC15 to achieve comprehensive disciplines on fisheries subsidies
- a decision on improving the integration of small economies into the multilateral trading system

- a decision on improving implementation of the provisions of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures Agreement and the Technical Barriers to Trade Agreement relating to special and differential treatment for developing economies.

WTO members reached a high level of convergence on a WTO reform work plan. However, the draft declaration could not be adopted as it became interlinked with a decision on the work programme on e-commerce and the extension of the e-commerce moratorium (see page 53), where

members were unable to reach consensus in the time available. The draft declaration on WTO reform and a draft decision on e-commerce were annexed to the summary of the MC14 Chair, who told members to conclude their negotiations in Geneva.

At the closing ceremony, the Chair of MC14, Cameroon's Minister of Trade Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana, said ministers worked to conclude as many issues as possible across the various areas of negotiation during the four-day meeting. He thanked ministers and delegations for their "tireless work" and commended





them for having “shown constructive participation through very long days and short nights”.

However, “we ran out of time”, he said, with regard to several outstanding issues, including the WTO’s work programme on electronic commerce and the continuation of the existing moratoriums on customs duties for electronic transmissions and non-violation complaints under the Agreement on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). The MC14 Chair recommended that discussions on these topics continue in Geneva.

In her closing remarks, DG Okonjo-Iweala welcomed progress in the discussions on a work programme for advancing talks on WTO reform, the decision on advancing work on

further disciplines on harmful fisheries subsidies, and talks on other issues. “A lot was accomplished,” she said. “We decided to work differently.

I think we have a new WTO way of working to modernize the way we do business, so we can be more nimble, more responsive as we move forward.” She suggested members use the draft texts developed over the four days of ministerial discussions to finalize agreements on outstanding issues in Geneva.

At the end of the conference, WTO members participating in the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement issued a joint ministerial declaration underlining that 165 out of the WTO’s 166 members now support incorporating the Agreement into the WTO framework as a plurilateral agreement and committing

participants to continue exploring practical pathways for its effective implementation.

DG Okonjo-Iweala congratulates MC14 Chair Luc Magloire Mbarga Atangana at closing session of Conference.



IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Global trade developments and outlook

World trade grew faster than expected in 2025, with the volume of world merchandise trade rising 4.6 per cent in volume terms (up from 2.7 per cent in 2024) while commercial services trade grew 5.3 per cent.

The strong growth in merchandise trade reflects a surging demand for artificial intelligence (AI)-related goods, which offset the negative impacts of higher tariffs and increased trade policy uncertainty. In value terms, merchandise trade increased by 7 per cent to US\$ 26.26 trillion, while commercial services trade rose 8 per cent to US\$ 9.56 trillion (see Figure 1). More moderate trade expansion is expected for 2026 due to the impact of the conflict in the Middle East, among other factors.

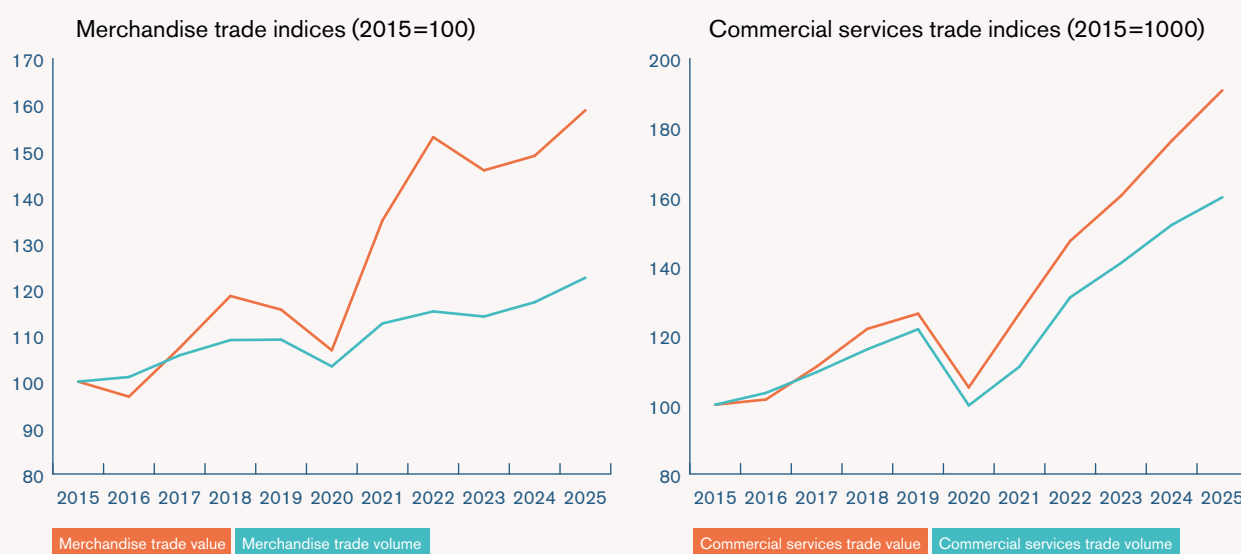
Merchandise trade

Growth in world merchandise trade volume in 2025 (4.6 per cent) was stronger than world GDP growth at market exchange rates (2.9 per cent), marking a departure from the near parity between trade and GDP growth in 2024 (2.7 per cent and 2.9 per cent, respectively). Most regions recorded positive growth in both exports and imports

China remained the world's largest merchandise exporter in 2025, with

exports valued at US \$3.77 trillion, representing a 17.5 per cent share of world trade (excluding intra-EU trade). Meanwhile, the United States continued to be the largest merchandise importer, with imports of US\$ 3.51 trillion, representing a 15.9 per cent share of world trade. Taken as a whole, the European Union was the second largest trader in both exports and imports, with extra-EU trade exports of US\$ 2.99 trillion and extra-EU imports of US\$ 2.84 trillion, respectively representing 13.8 per cent and 12.9 per cent of world trade.

Figure 1: World merchandise and commercial services trade, 2015-25
Indices, 2015=100



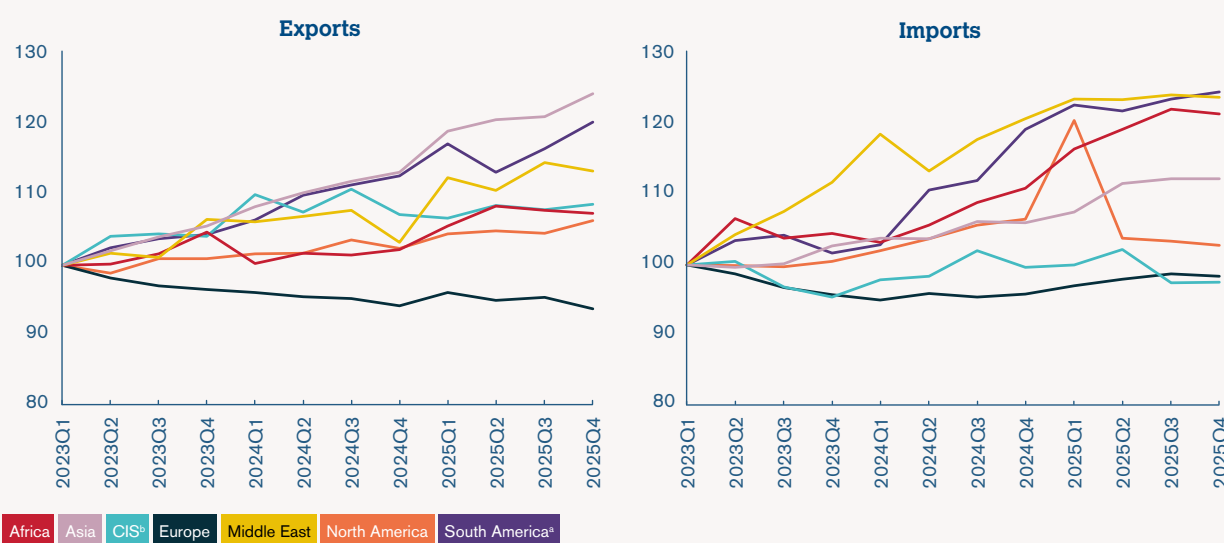
Note: Merchandise trade refers to average of exports and imports. Services trade refers to exports.

Sources: WTO-UNCTAD.



Figure 2: Merchandise export and import volume indices by region, 2023Q1-2025Q4

Volume index, 2023Q1=100



a Refers to South and Central America and the Caribbean.

b Refers to Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), including certain associate and former member states.

Note: Quarterly merchandise trade volume indices may diverge slightly from annual indices due to differences in data availability and methodology.

Source: WTO-UNCTAD.

Merchandise trade in early 2025 was boosted by the front-loading of imports ahead of expected higher tariffs imposed by the United States. Imports in North America rose sharply in the first quarter before falling in the second quarter. The region's import growth continued to slow after higher tariffs came into effect mid-year, but imports were buoyed by inflows of AI-enabling goods (see Figure 2).

The Middle East recorded the strongest export volume growth (12.9 per cent) of any region in 2025, followed by Africa (10.3 per cent), and Asia (9.5 per cent). Asian economies was the main driver of global merchandise trade volume

growth, contributing 71 per cent of total growth as Chinese exports expanded across multiple destinations. At the same time, the value of China's shipments to the United States fell by around 20 per cent, continuing the decline in bilateral goods trade between the two economies. Meanwhile, the highest import volume growth was recorded by South and Central America and the Caribbean (10.4 per cent), the Middle East (10.4 per cent) and Africa (8.7 per cent).

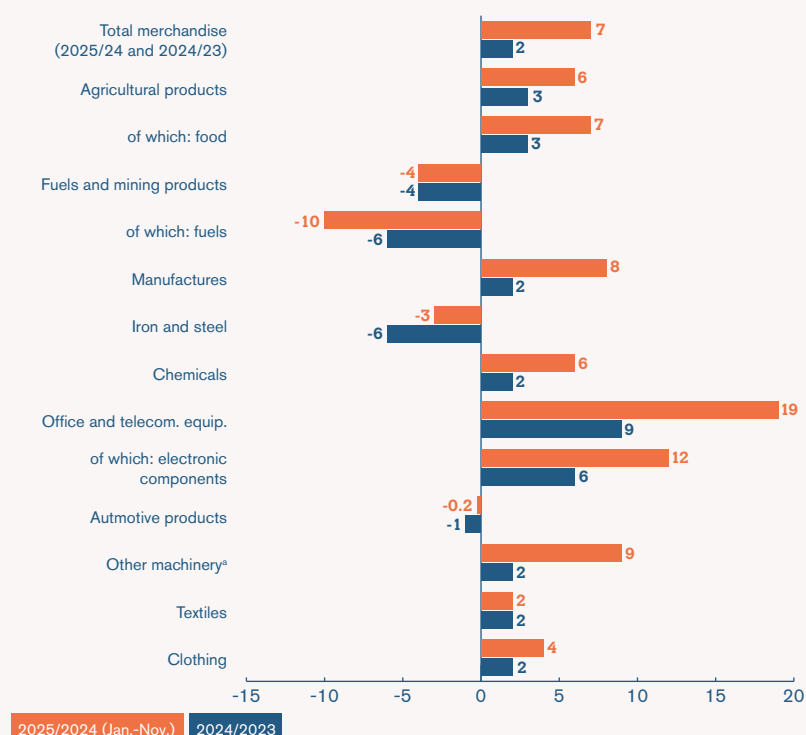
Measured in value (US dollar) terms, world merchandise trade growth was stronger in 2025 than in 2024 (see Figure 3). Office and

telecommunications equipment recorded the strongest growth last year (19 per cent), reflecting rising demand for digital infrastructure and computing equipment.

The value of world trade in AI-enabling goods was up more than 20 per cent in 2025, causing its share in total merchandise trade to climb to 16.8 per cent by the end of the year, up from 13.0 per cent in the first quarter of 2024 (see Figure 4). These products accounted for 42 per cent of merchandise trade growth in 2025 despite representing only one-sixth of total merchandise trade. Asia made the largest regional contribution to AI enabling goods

Figure 3: Year-on-year merchandise trade growth by product, 2025 (January-November for product breakdown) and 2024

% change in US\$ values



Total merchandise trade growth based on average of exports and imports.

a Includes electrical machinery, non-electrical machinery and power-generating equipment.

Source: WTO-UNCTAD for total merchandise, WTO estimates for products.

trade growth, followed by North America and Europe.

Services trade

In 2025, commercial services trade increased by 8 per cent in value terms, reaching US\$ 9.56 trillion (see Figure 5). Growth slowed slightly compared with 2024, as travel services have largely returned to their pre-pandemic levels. Nevertheless, all of the major services categories recorded positive growth in 2025.

The value of transport services increased by 2 per cent in 2025 to US\$ 1.54 trillion, following an 8 per cent rise in 2024. This weaker growth reflects developments in maritime transport and lower shipping rates than in 2024. International travel remained resilient despite rising geopolitical uncertainty as travel services continued to expand, reaching US\$ 1.89 trillion in 2025, an increase of 8 per cent in value terms.

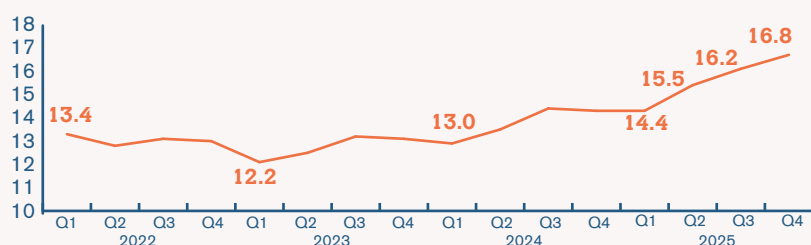
The category “other commercial services”, which encompasses a wide variety of services ranging from financial to professional services, recorded continued strong growth, rising 10 per cent in 2025 to US\$ 5.78 trillion. The increase was partly driven by rapid growth in computer services, reflecting rising demand for computing capacity, data processing and software development as individuals and businesses increasingly adopted AI technologies.

Services export growth varied across major economies in 2025. Taken as a whole, the European Union remained the largest exporter and importer of commercial services, with extra-EU exports of US\$ 1.76 trillion and extra-EU imports of US\$ 1.61 trillion. The next largest services trader was the United States, with exports of US\$ 1.21 trillion and imports of US\$ 870 billion.

Figure 4: AI-enabling merchandise trade, 2025

Percentage share and percentage points contributions

Share of AI-enabling goods in world merchandise trade value, 2022-2025

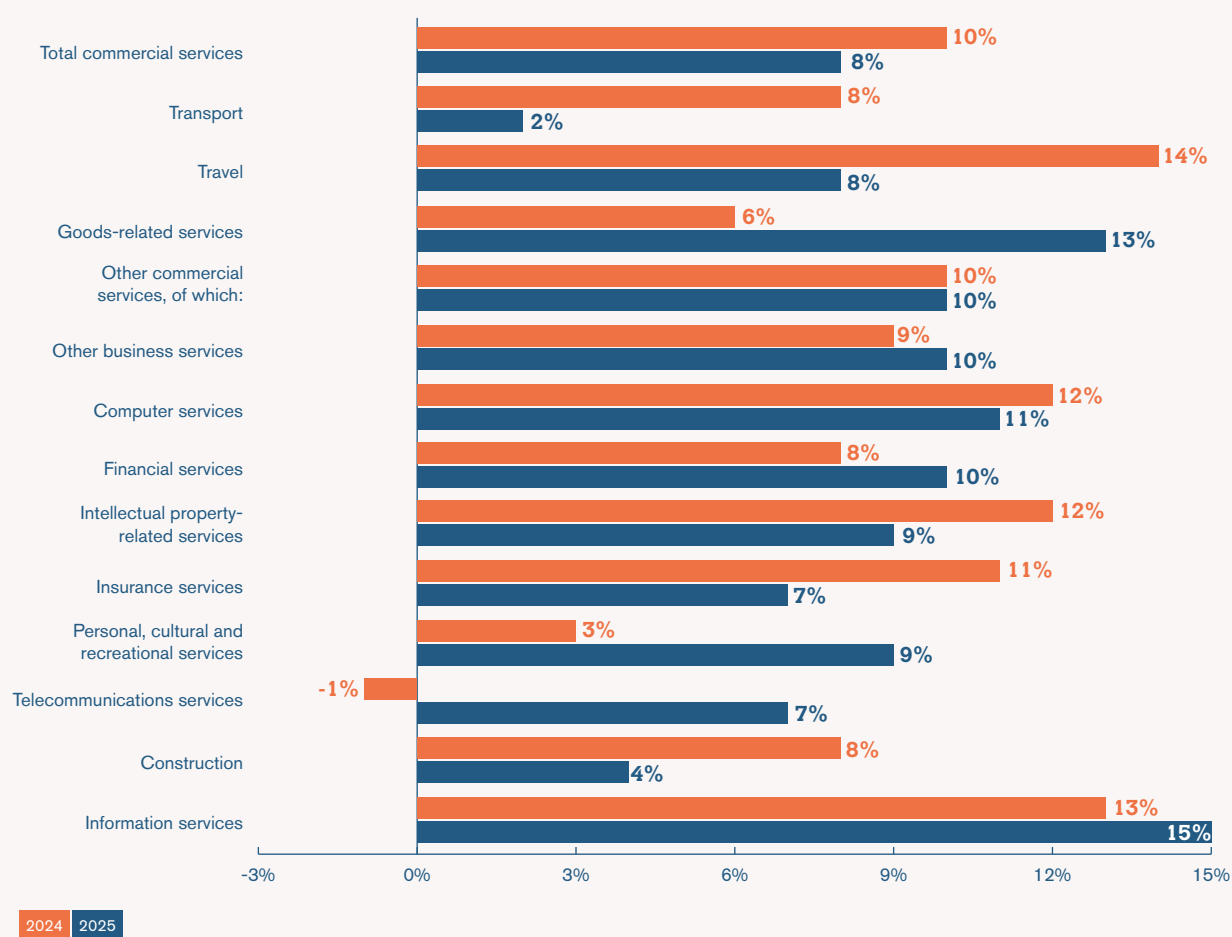


Note: Trade is an average of imports and exports. Estimates for AI-enabling goods trade are based on available reporters in the Trade Data Monitor. Data for Viet Nam are mirrored. Data for Q4 2025 include estimates for economies for which full Q4 data had not been published as of 9 March 2026. The trade contribution of AI-enabling goods is minor for regions other than North America, Europe and Asia, and is not included in the chart.

Source: WTO Secretariat estimates.



Figure 5: Commercial services trade growth by sector, 2024-25
Annual % change



Note: Services trade measured as exports. Other commercial services are ranked according to their relative share in services trade.

Source: WTO estimates for subsectors of other commercial services. WTO-UNCTAD for total commercial services and main sectors.

Outlook for trade in 2026

Prospects for world trade in 2026 remain uncertain. In March, WTO economists predicted 1.9 per cent growth in merchandise trade volume under a baseline scenario, but conflict in the Middle East could reduce it to 1.4 per cent. Similarly, commercial services trade volume was expected to grow 4.8 per cent under the baseline scenario, with growth

potentially reduced to 4.1 per cent due to the Middle East conflict. However, sustained investment in AI could lift trade growth for the year. These estimates remain highly uncertain due to the unpredictability of the conflict and the unknown durability of AI-related investment.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

World trade success stories



Women entrepreneurs process dried mango in Burkina Faso.

BURKINA FASO

Mango sector provides export opportunities for women entrepreneurs

The Association Burkinabé Action Solidarité Femmes/Enfants (ABASF/E) specializes in the processing and export of dried mango, an important agricultural product in Burkina Faso. Close to 80 per cent of the country's population relies on agriculture, making it a key element of the country's livelihood. The mango sector alone provides around 64,000 direct and indirect jobs.

"The dried mango industry in Burkina Faso has incredible potential. This is about more than trade – it is about improving livelihoods, promoting women's empowerment and achieving sustainable economic growth," said marketing manager Olia Ouedraogo. With strong demand, particularly from Europe, the global dried fruit market is expected to reach US\$ 10 billion by 2027.

Despite this potential, dried mango producers in Burkina Faso face multiple challenges, ranging from market access, limited trade infrastructure and difficulties in accessing finance. "Meeting sanitary and phytosanitary standards, for

example, can be extremely costly. Just to get certified, we have to bring in foreign auditors, which adds to the expense. For small-scale producers, this is a major barrier," says Olia.

With support from key international partners – including the Dutch Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing economies, the Global Trade Helpdesk and the Standards and Trade Development Facility (see page 102) – the association has overcome some of these challenges. Through training and coaching, as well as support to participate in trade fairs, the association has helped entrepreneurs strengthen their export capacity and tap into new export destinations such as the European Union.

"The WTO has an important role to play in creating a level playing field in which small exporters, particularly women entrepreneurs, have a genuine opportunity to succeed," says Olia.

Source: WTO Secretariat.



BHUTAN

Modernizing cotton production unlocks international markets

The Thongsa Common Facility Centre, established in 2022 with Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) support, provides farmers and weavers with a place to process their yarns. It has become a driver of Bhutan's cotton based weaving and rural economic development.

Located in Pemagatshel, in south-east Bhutan, it was created to modernize cotton processing, strengthen the weaving value chain and help artisans expand from small scale craft producers to competitive participants in higher value markets.

Production processes in Thongsa, such as ginning, were slow, fully manual and physically demanding. Ginning and carding required up to a month of labour. With limited product variety and almost no exposure to external buyers, local weavers were confined to low wages, unable to leverage the commercial potential of their traditional craft.

The EIF's project helped reshape production and export readiness. Modern ginning and carding machines dramatically increased efficiency while weavers received training in improved weaving and machine operation techniques, dye making and colour mixing.

Together, these changes enabled entrepreneurs to diversify into a broader and higher value

product range – including traditional jackets, skirts, blankets and baskets – produced to improved quality standards, allowing export of products to the European market.

Processing times fell dramatically, annual cotton production rose and women's incomes increased significantly.

Source: Enhanced Integrated Framework.

Artisans process local cotton for weaving in Pemagatshel District, south-east Bhutan.





BANGLADESH

Young entrepreneurs at the forefront of semiconductor boom

By plugging into Bangladesh's burgeoning semiconductor industry, Prime Silicon Bangladesh is creating high-value jobs for young engineers and putting Bangladeshi chip design on the global map.

Originally headquartered in California, Prime Silicon chose Bangladesh as its base for chip design operations – one of the most critical and knowledge-intensive segments of the semiconductor value chain. In just a few years, the local industry has taken off.

"Bangladeshi firms in this sector are growing at 40–50 per cent annually," says Prime Silicon CEO Tareq Khan. "Export orders reached US\$ 11 million last year and are projected to hit US\$ 17 million this year. Our ambition is US\$ 100 million in the near term and US\$ 1 billion in annual revenue within the next decade."

Rapid growth, however, has exposed a major constraint: a talent shortfall. To address the looming shortage of skilled engineers, Prime Silicon has partnered with the government to scale up training.

The momentum is growing. Young entrepreneurs – many recent university graduates – are launching start-ups to capture opportunities in the expanding semiconductor

Testing semiconductors in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

ecosystem with the help of trade support.

"Larger firms are mentoring these start-ups, providing training and outsourcing parts of their projects," says Tareq. "There is also a growing push to link up with universities for research and development of new design methodologies and intellectual property rights – following models that have worked in advanced economies," he adds.

Source: Aid for Trade initiative.



LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Innovative food safety projects boost cocoa exports

A naturally occurring element in Andean soils once threatened the future of cocoa exports across Latin America and the Caribbean. Elevated cadmium levels in cocoa beans raised food safety concerns – because of a potential cancer risk and other disease risks – and triggered stricter international requirements, putting smallholder livelihoods and market access at risk.

With support from the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), two complementary regional projects turned this challenge into an opportunity for collaboration and

innovation. Across Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, with participation from Trinidad and Tobago, these projects strengthened scientific, technical and institutional capacity to manage cadmium in cocoa.

One of the most significant achievements was the upgrading of laboratory systems. More than 25 national and private laboratories improved quality assurance practices, while the piloting of portable X-ray fluorescence technology made cadmium testing faster, cheaper and feasible in the field.

The projects, one implemented by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture and the other by Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, invested heavily in people. Through a train-the-trainer approach, thousands of farmers received practical guidance, ranging from soil

and fertiliser management to the use of low-cadmium practices.

An independent evaluation confirmed that the projects successfully reduced cadmium-related trade risks and strengthened regional cooperation. Evidence generated through the projects contributed to the development of the Codex Code of Practice for the Prevention and Reduction of Cadmium Contamination in Cocoa Beans, anchoring regional experience in global standard-setting and creating opportunities for scaling up these approaches worldwide.

Source: Standards and Trade Development Facility.

A farmer harvests cocoa pods on a plantation in Colombia.

