

Key Points

The following key points illustrate the ways in which the WTO contributes to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Through its agreements, technical assistance, and multi-stakeholder initiatives, the WTO plays a key role in promoting inclusive economic growth, women's economic empowerment, sustainable resource management, and effective partnerships. These efforts help ensure that global trade supports sustainable development and benefits people and communities worldwide.



SDG 3: Good Health and Well-Being

- The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) provides a balanced framework that protects innovation while preserving flexibilities to support public health. Initiatives such as the 2001 Doha Declaration and the 2022 TRIPS Ministerial Decision reinforce members' ability to ensure access to medicines, including during health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.
- WTO technical assistance and trilateral cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) support members in implementing intellectual property (IP) rules that enhance access to health technologies. Strategic use of TRIPS flexibilities, voluntary licensing and technology transfer have become central to advancing health equity, particularly in low- and middle-income economies.
- Government procurement, including pooled purchasing and Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) flexibilities, play a crucial role in improving access to affordable medical products and strengthening health systems. During COVID-19, emergency measures under GPA 2012 helped members respond swiftly while maintaining transparency and competitiveness.
- Trade in health-related services has grown significantly, particularly through commercial presence (General Agreement on Trade in Services/GATS mode 3) and cross-border telehealth (GATS mode 1). While services trade can help address healthcare needs and workforce shortages, regulatory oversight is vital to ensure quality, patient safety and data protection.
- The GATS offers a flexible framework to support trade in health-related services, while preserving governments' right to regulate. Through greater transparency, regulatory cooperation, and the mutual recognition of qualifications, especially as advanced by the recent Services Domestic Regulation disciplines, it can help improve global access to health services and enhance overall health outcomes.



SDG 5: Gender Equality

- The WTO's Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender (IWG) advances SDG 5 by promoting gender-responsive trade policies and removing barriers to women's participation in global markets. Through initiatives such as the Gender Lens Framework and the Compendium of Financial Inclusion Initiatives, the IWG fosters inclusive legal and financial ecosystems for women entrepreneurs. Its international prize and cooperation with organizations like UNCTAD and the World Bank further incentivize systemic change toward women's economic empowerment in trade.
- The WEIDE Fund and the Partenariat pour le Coton promote women's economic empowerment through trade. WEIDE supports women entrepreneurs via digital skills, finance, and tailored support, aiming to empower 400 women in its first phase. The Partenariat pour le Coton links women in African cotton-producing countries to jobs in textile value chains, addressing gender-specific barriers and fostering inclusive industrial growth.

- Structural challenges, such as unequal access to finance, discriminatory norms and unpaid care work, limit women's involvement in trade. Gender-responsive policies are needed with financial inclusion strategies, with digital solutions and literacy programmes proving particularly effective for women in rural areas. Creating equitable economic opportunities for women worldwide demands cooperation across public and private sectors to overcome persistent barriers to trade participation.
- An increasing number of regional trade agreements (RTAs) include gender-related provisions, covering areas such as employment, education, safety and economic participation. These provisions demonstrate a growing commitment to women's economic empowerment through trade, however, many of these remain non-binding and are excluded from dispute settlement mechanisms, limiting their effectiveness.



SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

- WTO-led trade liberalization supports SDG 8 by promoting productivity, economic diversification and employment, but requires complementary policies in skills development, infrastructure, and institutions to ensure trade leads to inclusive and decent work outcomes.
- WTO membership drives economic growth through comprehensive reforms that enhance governance, attract investment and expand trade, while creating sectoral disruptions and job displacements that necessitate reskilling programs and innovation support for quality employment, particularly as advanced technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) reshape the global economy.
- To ensure AI-driven growth results in decent work, governments must invest in human capital (education, reskilling, social protection), digital infrastructure and inclusive policies. International cooperation is also essential to prevent widening digital divides.
- The WTO has a role to play in facilitating AI-related trade and ensuring trustworthy AI, although the rapid evolution of AI is prompting questions about the implications of AI for international trade rules. Mechanisms such as the TRIPS Agreement and Information Technology Agreement support technology diffusion and capacity-building in developing economies.
- International cooperation is essential to maximize AI's benefits while mitigating risks in trade, with the WTO uniquely positioned to foster dialogue on regulatory coherence and digital governance. By facilitating discussions across e-commerce and services regulations, the WTO can drive collaboration that ensures all members, especially developing countries, benefit from AI-driven trade transformation.



SDG 14: Life Below Water

- In June 2022, the WTO adopted the landmark Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS), marking a significant contribution towards achieving SDG 14. This Agreement introduces binding multilateral rules designed to curb harmful fisheries subsidies, aiming to address issues such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing and overfishing. For the AFS to enter into force, two-thirds of WTO membership (111 members) must deposit instruments of acceptance with the WTO.
- The AFS bars subsidies that (i) support vessels/operators engaged IUU fishing; (ii) target over-fished stocks (unless rebuilding measures are in place); and (iii) finance fishing in unregulated high-seas areas; members must also exercise "special care" where stock status is unknown.
- The AFS is expected to redirect resources from harmful subsidies towards sustainable fisheries management. It includes notification requirements that increase transparency about fisheries subsidies worldwide, which will help monitor and regulate their impact on global fish stocks and establishes the WTO Fish Fund to provide technical assistance to developing and least-developed country (LDC) members.

- Members also agreed at MC12 to continue negotiations on fisheries subsidies, with a view to making recommendations for additional provisions that will further build on the disciplines of the Agreement. These negotiations are ongoing.
- WTO rules support the development of sustainable ocean-based sectors by improving market access, reducing trade barriers, and fostering regulatory coherence. Agreements such as the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Agreement) and the GATS enable integration of eco-friendly marine products and services into global markets, supporting blue economy diversification in coastal developing economies and SIDS in line with SDG 14.



SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

- The WTO is leveraging strategic multi-stakeholder partnerships to advance SDG 17, with strong interlinkages to SDGs 5 (Gender equality) and 8 (Decent work), focusing on inclusive economic development through trade.
- Launched in 2024 with the International Trade Centre (ITC), the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund supports women entrepreneurs in developing countries, through financial aid and digital skills training, to gain market access, aiming to empower 400 women in its first phase. It mobilizes public-private funding and fosters gender-inclusive trade policies.
- The “Partenariat pour le Coton” – Cotton Value Chain Transformation – is a WTO-FIFA initiative that supports African cotton-producing countries (C4+). It helps them to move up the value chain by promoting local processing and exports of textiles and apparel, with a strong focus on regional integration and gender-responsive development.
- All of these initiatives demonstrate multi-stakeholder collaboration involving international organizations, governments, financial institutions and private sector entities to address complex development challenges.