



WTO OMC

Secretariat Strategy



This strategy has been prepared by the WTO Secretariat, for the Secretariat. The Strategy 2030 is intended to be a living document, subject to adjustment as circumstances change. While input from members has been gathered and considered, this is not a strategy for the WTO as an Organization or for WTO members, does not reflect the positions or opinions of WTO members, and is without prejudice to members' rights and obligations under the WTO agreements. Any errors are attributable to the WTO Secretariat.



Secretariat Strategy





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Foreword

I came to Geneva because I believe deeply in the WTO mission and see the Secretariat as a key instrument to help members achieve it. Today's changing world and trade ecosystem require flexibility and a fresh look into how the Secretariat can build on the legacy of the GATT and the important work done within the WTO since 1995 to ensure that we are even stronger in the future. This Secretariat Strategy 2030 sets out how we aim to make our contributions more impactful, more efficient, and more responsive to the needs of our members and evolving global realities.

At its heart, the WTO is about people. The goals set out in the preamble to the Marrakesh Agreement show how a rules-based multilateral trading system can work for the benefit of all. These goals are more relevant today than ever, in an interconnected world where complex global problems call for coordinated global solutions. Our Secretariat vision is to build a better world for people through global cooperation and rules-based international trade. The Secretariat Strategy 2030 is an essential tool to help move us towards this vision.

This Strategy will guide us across our activities for the coming years as we support WTO members to address existing and new challenges and opportunities. We aim to be up-to-date and forward-looking. We are committed to preserving our deep subject matter expertise and seek to remain at the forefront of global trade topics and emerging issues. We strive to collaborate effectively and flexibly and embrace new ways of working including through new technologies. We will continue to serve members conscientiously and responsibly, delivering maximum value for money. Given the unpredictable nature of the future, this Strategy provides clear directions yet remains flexible. It is a living document, to be periodically revisited and adapted as appropriate.

The work of the Strategy was led by Willy Alfaro and Victoria Donaldson and I wish to thank them for their hard work. The oversight of the Transformation Steering Committee comprising the Deputy Directors-General and Chief of Staff was instrumental in getting to a quality product. I also wish to thank the many volunteers and stakeholders who contributed to the elaboration of the Strategy. Input and ideas received from Secretariat staff at all levels, WTO members, including Facilitator H.E. Ambassador Dacio Castillo, the Director-General's Business and Civil Society Advisory Groups, external experts and commentators, especially former Deputy Director-General Alan Wolff and Professor Richard Baldwin, have been invaluable. We welcome ongoing feedback and suggestions and will continue to engage regularly across the Secretariat and with our members.

This first-ever Secretariat Strategy will energize us to enhance our service to WTO members and strengthen our support of the rules-based multilateral trading system. I see it as a roadmap for success, a path that can help us navigate through complexity, uncertainty, and change and towards a future that looks increasingly green, digital, inclusive, and services-oriented. I hope that this Strategy 2030 will inspire and motivate each one of our talented Secretariat staff.



Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala
Director-General

Overview of the Secretariat Strategy 2030

The WTO Secretariat developed this Strategy in pursuit of its vision of building a better world for people through global cooperation and rules-based international trade. This is the first ever strategy for the Secretariat – and it is for the Secretariat rather than for the member-driven World Trade Organization. For 30 years, the multilateral trading system, with the WTO at its core, has provided a broadly open and predictable environment for traders around the world. The open global economy contributed mightily to accelerating growth and development. Since the WTO succeeded the GATT in 1995, international trade has nearly quintupled in value, reaching more than US\$ 30 trillion in 2023, and more than 1.5 billion people have been lifted out of extreme poverty.

Today, WTO members confront rapid change, amid growing uncertainty, technological transformation, and complex global challenges that require collective action despite rising geopolitical tensions. While trade is viewed positively as a means to improve standards of living in some places, it has become a political scapegoat for public dissatisfaction in others. Yet trade remains a vital part of the solutions to the challenges we face, and an essential tool in building a brighter future for people around the world. As members themselves recognize, the WTO is uniquely positioned at the centre of the world trading system and should look to reinforce its focus and impact going forward.

This Strategy charts a course for the WTO Secretariat through 2030 and beyond. It sets out how the Secretariat will ensure we are and remain well prepared to help members reinforce and reinvigorate the multilateral trading system and the work done across all WTO bodies, address new and existing challenges, and seize emerging opportunities in global trade.

The Strategy spells out how the Secretariat will build on its unique expertise and reposition itself to accomplish its mission and advance towards its vision, notably by fulfilling members' needs, taking account of emerging global developments, and considering available resources. Implementation will involve organizational and cultural change. Once translated into action plans, the Strategy will serve as a road map for the coordination, alignment, and rationalization of Secretariat activities.

This in turn will facilitate greater transparency, accountability, and understanding around the Secretariat's use of resources and help it to prioritize effectively. The Secretariat expects to deliver this Strategy within the budget provided by members. Members will be engaged through the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration should exceptional circumstances arise in the implementation of strategic action plans that suggest budgetary changes may be needed.

Three Enablers will drive our progress towards these goals: our staff, technology, and measurement. Our greatest asset is our staff, and we will ensure an inclusive and diverse workplace that nurtures talent, adds new skills and capabilities, and offers meaningful career development opportunities. We will develop our capacity to leverage technology, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and other emerging disruptive technologies, to help us achieve our objectives. Finally, we will develop and deploy appropriate tools to measure progress, ensure delivery of results, and facilitate optimal resource allocation. Our vision and mission statements, strategic goals, and three Enablers are set out in the Secretariat Strategy House in the Annex to this Strategy.



overarching goals lie at the heart of this Secretariat Strategy:

- 1 **provide excellent service to all members, using resources responsibly;**
- 2 **be a knowledge hub on trade and trade policy;**
- 3 **serve as a global platform for dialogue and cooperation on trade, including its nexus with development;**
- 4 **enhance external engagement and build strategic partnerships; and**
- 5 **transform into a stronger, flexible, and more agile Secretariat.**



Trade and the WTO at 30 in a changing world

On 1 January 1995, the WTO succeeded the GATT. For the 76 WTO members on that day, and the many more that followed, the WTO became the institutional home for an expanded multilateral trade rulebook covering goods, services, agriculture, intellectual property, and subsidies – all areas backed by binding dispute settlement. The foundational principles of the GATT, including non-discrimination, transparency, predictability, fair competition, progressive liberalization, and encouraging development, were carried over and reflected throughout this new package of agreements. In the preamble to the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the WTO, members also reaffirmed and expanded the goals first set out in the GATT 1947, committing themselves to a shared purpose of expanding the production of goods and services and using trade to raise people's living standards, create jobs, and promote sustainable development. The world has made considerable progress towards these goals.

Trade and the open, predictable, and stable policy environment fostered by the WTO have helped accelerate growth and development. Since 1995, the average MFN tariff that WTO members apply to imports of each other's goods has fallen by nearly half, from 7.1% to 3.8% on a trade-weighted basis, as of 2023. Overall goods trade has risen nearly five times in value, to US\$ 22.9 trillion in 2023. Services trade has grown even faster, expanding more than sixfold to reach US\$ 7.5 trillion in 2023. Trade in agricultural products almost quadrupled in value over this period, growing from US\$ 605 billion to US\$ 2.3 trillion, accounting for 10% of merchandise trade in 2023.

Not only did trade rebound strongly from major shocks like the 2008-2009 global financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was also a critical enabler of wider economic resilience and recovery. The ratio of global trade to GDP has increased from 19.9% in 1995 to 29.1%

in 2023, showing the growing inter-connectedness of economies through trade.

Global value chains have deepened and expanded to more countries, helping boost growth, raise productivity, and create jobs, while lowering costs and expanding consumer choice.

Importantly, greater openness and certainty in the global trade policy environment have gone hand in hand with greater integration by developing countries into international markets – and with unprecedented poverty reduction.

Between 1995 and 2022, low- and middle-income economies increased their share in global exports from 17% to 32%.

Over that period, the share of their populations living in extreme poverty dropped from 40% to 10%. This amounts to more than 1.5 billion people having been lifted out of extreme poverty. In the quarter-century before the COVID-19 pandemic, poor countries narrowed the income gap with rich ones for the first time since the Industrial Revolution 200 years ago – albeit some less so than others.

Global trade has been a key driver of prosperity and poverty reduction over the past three decades. The WTO, supported by its Secretariat, has been at the heart of this trend. Yet, as the Organization reaches its 30th anniversary, uncertainty and risks are growing, and the pace of change is accelerating. The WTO cannot afford to sit still. To keep delivering on its founding vision – especially for the countries and communities that did not share adequately in the gains of the past 30 years – the multilateral trading system needs to evolve, and so does the WTO Secretariat.



The world is changing

Cross-border trade and trade policy are being reshaped by developments in technology, policy, politics, and the environment. New global challenges, such as climate change, and longstanding ones, such as poverty reduction, cannot be resolved without tackling the trade dimensions. Key drivers within the new global landscape include:

- **Sustainability concerns:** From climate change to water scarcity and biodiversity loss, environmental sustainability increasingly impacts all economies and people's lives. The effects of climate change are already being felt in many countries, at all development levels, with the poorest least able to cope. Climate change is affecting patterns of food production and beginning to alter comparative advantages and impact food security. Trade policy and trade patterns are increasingly influenced by sustainability imperatives, and this looks likely to accelerate.
- **Geopolitical risks:** Geopolitical tensions and regional conflict are increasing uncertainty, eroding trust, and hampering multilateral cooperation. Deepening political and ideological fault lines are adding to the pressures favouring economic fragmentation and protectionism and, in some cases, already disrupting global trade and supply chains. National security concerns are motivating targeted shifts in trading relationships for certain goods, and spurring moves to secure access to energy and key natural resources.
- **Technological advances:** Digitization and new digital technologies, such as generative AI, are transforming societies, economies, and workplaces in an increasingly interconnected world. Innovation rooted in new technology is opening new opportunities for trade but also presenting significant challenges around the digital divide, privacy, governance, and social dislocation. Policies affecting cross-border data flows and cybersecurity are becoming ever more important.
- **Economic and financial uncertainties:** Rising debt distress in low- and middle-income countries and the return of inflationary pressures as a serious policy problem in advanced economies are impacting financial and monetary stability around the world. Even as open global trade remains a powerful force for reducing macroeconomic volatility and earning the foreign exchange developing countries often need to service debt, unpredictable macroeconomic conditions are affecting business and investment decisions, as well as global trade and financial flows.
- **Development and inclusion issues:** Development progress continues to be unevenly spread. Concerns about the unequal distribution of the gains from trade, including within some countries, have fuelled scepticism about the benefits of globalization and the multilateral trading system. Socioeconomic inclusion is increasingly bound up with trade.



Trade is changing

These global dynamics are affecting trade and trade policy. Trade is growing in different ways.

Trade in services accounts for an increasingly high proportion of overall global trade – from 19% in 1995 to 25% as of 2023.

Cross-border services delivered digitally have registered particularly strong growth, accelerated by the shift to online transactions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such services, encompassing everything from streaming video to remote learning and management services, have quadrupled in value since 2005 to reach US\$ 4.25 trillion in 2023 – roughly one seventh of all trade in goods and services. Global merchandise trade has shown resilience in the face of shocks in recent years. Despite suffering a 1.2% year-on-year decline in 2023, the volume of world merchandise trade was 6% higher than its pre-pandemic level of 2019, and 17% higher than in 2015. Within this overall picture, there have also been pockets of dynamic growth, e.g. trade in “green” goods like solar panels and electric vehicles. The value of world trade in electric and hybrid vehicles is estimated to have tripled since 2019, with an annual increase of 40% in 2023. The value of world trade in solar panels also increased by 12% in 2023 and was up by around 70% since 2019.

As the pursuit of the green economic transition and efforts to achieve net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 pick up pace, more intersections with trade are emerging, from the targeted use of subsidies, prospective carbon-related border measures, and the logistics of how goods are transported across borders.

Patterns of trade are evolving. South-South trade – trade between developing economies – has exhibited particularly robust growth, expanding at an average of 9.7% per year and surging from less than one tenth of global trade in 1995 to nearly 25% by 2022, with a total value of US\$ 6.1 trillion. In contrast, the share of North-North trade – trade between developed economies – declined from more than half of global trade in 1995 to 38% in 2022. North-South trade – trade between developed and developing economies – was relatively stagnant over the same period, remaining at roughly 36% of global trade. Participation in global value chains has grown steadily, reaching an all-time high of 48.7% in 2022, despite drops during the financial crisis in 2008-2009 and again during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The evolving global context brings new opportunities for cross-border trade. With global cooperation on trade necessary to address global challenges, multilateral dialogue, negotiations, and transparency can help prevent or minimize recourse to protectionism. Trade in green goods and

services can lower the cost of reducing emissions, can help diffuse technology, and is necessary to get to net zero GHG emissions. Green comparative advantage makes trade a force multiplier for environmental policy action. Cooperation on digital trade is necessary to harness the full potential of the digital economy to drive economic growth, trade, and job creation while mitigating cybersecurity risks and addressing the digital divide. Technology and growing trade in services and digital trade can foster the inclusion of small businesses, women, and others in trade and help cushion against shocks.

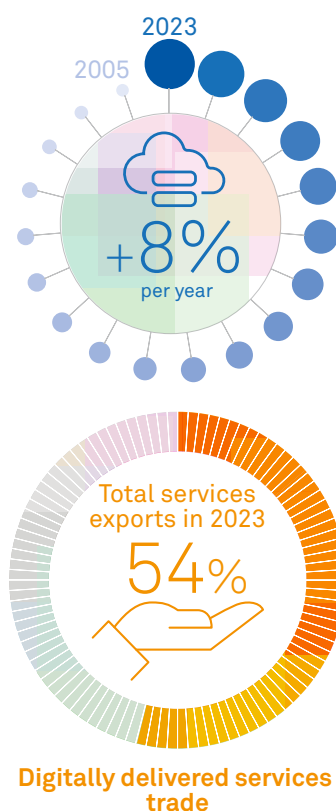
Even heightened risks of political and economic fragmentation can offer new prospects. So-called “re-shoring” and “friend-shoring” come with supply risks of their own in an increasingly shock-prone world. Deeper, more diversified, and less concentrated international markets and supply chains – what we have dubbed “re-globalization” – offer a more promising path to supply chain resilience and reducing problems of overdependence while retaining the advantages of interdependence. Such re-globalization offers opportunities to diversify global supply chains to marginalized regions within rich countries and to poor countries at the margins of global trade to build resilience and inclusion.

Trade is inherently interdisciplinary and increasingly central to people’s lives. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic showed that trade can and must be part of the solution to complex global challenges. The fight against climate change is another area where international organizations, countries, and regions must cooperate and deploy trade as a key tool in the arsenal of concerted action. Cooperation and dialogue can help both to craft effective collective action and to better understand the boundaries between legitimate measures and disguised restrictions on trade.

Fair, open, rules-based, and predictable multilateral trade can enable decarbonization to go hand-in-hand with economic growth and the dissemination of critical technology and expertise.

The global landscape is being transformed by the rapid adoption of new disruptive technologies (such as AI), the drive for sustainability, and heightened geopolitical tensions. Looking ahead, trade in goods will remain important in volume and value terms. Trade in agricultural products will continue to be critical for farmers and consumers, and for ensuring food security in vulnerable regions.

Trade in services is growing ever faster, creating higher paying jobs, and accounting for a quarter of all trade in 2023.



The WTO’s April 2024 Global Trade Outlook and Statistics estimated that digitally delivered services trade has grown even faster, at more than 8% per year over the 2005-2023 period, and accounting for over 54% of total services exports and 13.8% of total exports of goods and services in 2023. Trade among developing countries will likely continue to grow, and global supply chains should continue to expand amid geopolitical pressures to reorganize and reorient production. As it has been since before the creation of the WTO, trade can and must be a unifier, a source of stability, and a catalyst for progress for people everywhere.



The WTO is changing

Since 1995, the comprehensive package of rights and obligations enshrined in the WTO agreements (the Marrakesh package) has supplied a secure and predictable environment for traders. This, in turn, has fuelled the trade growth that has been a key source of economic development and poverty reduction over this period. The implementation of WTO rules has been subject to regular monitoring and transparency through member notifications and trade policy reviews, enforced through dispute settlement, and elucidated through regular dialogue.

WTO membership has grown from 76 at its inception on 1 January 1995 to 166, with the recent accessions of Comoros and Timor-Leste.

More than 20 other applications for accession are in progress. Two new multilateral agreements, on trade facilitation and fisheries subsidies, have been added to the Marrakesh package, with additional and updated plurilateral agreements on government procurement and information technology, and others being negotiated between groups of WTO members.

Regular WTO committee work has increased steadily, from agriculture and anti-dumping, through development and dispute settlement, intellectual property

and import licensing, services and subsidies, to technical barriers to trade (TBT) and trade-related investment measures, and everything in between. So too have activities conducted in Sub-Committees, Working Parties, and new initiatives such as the Trade for Peace Programme and the Director-General's Consultative Framework Mechanism on Cotton. Work on development issues, capacity-building, and the integration of least-developed countries (LDCs) into the multilateral trading system remains a cross-cutting priority. Member demand for additional services in areas such as research and data, technical assistance, and tools to support transparency continues to grow, and has led to expanded trade monitoring and the ePing platforms for sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) and TBT measures, among others.

Subjects such as government procurement command more attention and effort, and many members have participated in negotiations on investment facilitation for development, services domestic regulation, and digital trade. New issues such as trade and gender, and the participation of small business in trade now figure in discussions within the multilateral trading system. Exchanges within the WTO have also intensified in areas such as trade and environment, plastics pollution, trade and climate change, industrial policy, and policy space for industrialization.

The WTO dispute settlement system is continuing to operate notwithstanding the freezing of the Appellate Body. Interesting dispute resolution approaches are being used, such as the Multi-Party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA), arbitration, mediation, and bilateral dialogues.

Despite alternative dispute resolution avenues being foreseen in the Dispute Settlement Understanding, they have been seldom used until now. The dispute settlement system put in place under the Marrakesh Agreement is the only one of its kind in the world. Members continue to work to reform this system, including appellate review, recognizing that dispute settlement remains one of the most important functions of the WTO.

The WTO and the multilateral trading system have shown resilience and delivered results, even in recent years against an economic and geopolitical landscape fraught with uncertainty and subject to exogenous shocks. For example, the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies reached at the 12th Ministerial Conference in 2022 demonstrated that members can work together to deliver on global public goods such as the sustainability of our oceans. Ministerial Decisions on intellectual property to facilitate the production and supply of COVID-19 vaccines and exempting humanitarian food purchases from export restrictions showed the WTO could respond to global emergencies. At the 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi in 2024, more than ten years of effort culminated in a Ministerial Decision establishing measures to smooth the transition for members graduating from least developed country status – a key priority for the WTO's most vulnerable

members. The plurilateral agreement on services domestic regulation, added to the WTO rulebook at MC13, will lower trading costs associated with services trade, one of the fastest-growing areas of trade in the 21st century.

Over three quarters of global trade takes place under most-favoured nation (MFN) rules, and multilateral rules still serve as a guardrail against fragmentation and economic upheaval. The WTO is already a key forum for advancing discussions on a broad range of trade and trade-related issues. At the same time, rising geopolitical tensions risk producing actions and measures that could be at odds with WTO rights and obligations and undermine WTO rules. Clear and visible demonstrations of the value of the multilateral trading system to members and their citizens will be needed to counteract such developments. The WTO's expanding field of activities and growing membership, alongside the possible growing use of protectionist measures and increasingly interconnected global challenges, point to a need for focus, prioritization, and new methods and tools for collaboration and dialogue.

Members have consistently reiterated their support for the principles and objectives of the Marrakesh Agreement and their resolve to strengthen the multilateral trading system with the WTO at its core. Members are already working towards reform of the WTO and improvements to all of its functions. The Secretariat must be ready.



The Secretariat through 2030 and beyond

In the face of these profound changes and the potential for serious challenges to the multi-lateral trading system, the WTO Secretariat must adapt and be prepared for the future.

Our vision is to be a stronger Secretariat, supporting members to thrive in an increasingly green, digital, services-oriented, and inclusive multilateral trading system.

While continuing to provide excellent service to members across current core WTO subjects and functions, we are determined to keep pace with developments, anticipate future challenges and opportunities, understand risks, and help members to do the same.

As members engage at the WTO across all trade-related subject matter areas, and pursue institutional reform, the Secretariat must ensure that they receive the best possible services, analysis, and advice. Members should be able to look to the Secretariat as a source for the ideas and tools they need to realize the objectives of the Marrakesh Agreement. The Secretariat should be clear-eyed and ready to redouble its efforts in support of the membership no matter what lies ahead.

The Secretariat already has a cadre of dedicated professionals who are committed to the multilateral trading system and our mission of supporting WTO members with integrity, impartiality, independence, and expertise. We must preserve and build upon our deep subject matter expertise. The Secretariat also needs to acquire new skills and knowledge to enable us to anticipate

and be on top of relevant emerging issues. This means developing our expertise in areas such as environmental economics, women and trade, digital trade, data science, and AI, and embracing technology and agile ways of working. The increasingly interdisciplinary nature of trade and the Secretariat's comparatively small size relative to other international organizations mean that the Secretariat should look to increase its impact by striking strategic partnerships with relevant thematic multilateral organizations, and enhancing collaboration and the use of global platforms and dialogue to raise awareness of the benefits of trade and the multilateral trading system.

Change is already happening in the Secretariat. The information technology landscape has evolved, with changes accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Services have been digitized and virtual platforms are used to enable hybrid meetings and expand technical assistance. An AI task force is at work to enable internal adoption, and a new unit to tackle digital trade, AI, and disruptive technologies will be created. In addition to flagship publications like the World Trade Report and the Global Trade Outlook and Statistics, the Secretariat has published a variety of subject-specific analyses and policy concepts, such as on carbon pricing and a toolkit for potential policy action on climate change, and collaborated with other international organizations on various studies, such as on trade in services for development and on industrial subsidies. On top of the annual Public Forum, a Trade House and Trade Day helped include trade in the dialogue at COP28. A transformation programme launched in 2022 has yielded new policies and improved processes on rewards



and recognition for staff, promotions, recruitment, mobility, and procurement. Having secured member approval for the 2024-2025 budget, including a new 3.6% increase after 12 years of zero nominal budget growth, the Secretariat can work to maximize efficiencies and enhance accountability within a defined envelope.

With this Strategy, the Secretariat seeks to articulate overarching future directions, the considerations to guide priority-setting, and indicators on how to best and most impactfully serve members and people around the world. To enable us to deliver for the rules-based multilateral trading system today and in the future, our Strategy is

structured around five key goals: (i) provide excellent service to all members, using resources responsibly; (ii) be a knowledge hub on trade and trade policy, (iii) serve as a global platform for dialogue and cooperation on trade; (iv) enhance external engagement and build strategic partnerships; and (v) transform into a stronger, flexible, and more agile Secretariat. The goals are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. Collectively, these goals, inspired by our vision and mission and fuelled by three Enablers (see Annex), chart a course of action across all Secretariat activities through 2030.



Goal 1: Serve all members effectively to deliver results in an evolving international context, using resources responsibly

Service to members has always been our central mission. The Secretariat responds to member requests on substantive, administrative, and procedural matters; supports the work of WTO bodies and their Chairpersons; generates and disseminates trade-related information, analysis, and data; provides legal advice and process support for dispute settlement; builds members' trade-related capacity; assists the accession process and recently acceded members; and provides a diverse range of operational services relating to WTO facilities, technology infrastructure, languages, and documentation. The Secretariat is also charged with using member-provided contributions to fund its activities and service delivery in a responsible manner and within budget.

New challenges and emerging opportunities affect how members engage with each other across all WTO bodies. Climate change mitigation measures may take many forms and impact trade in different ways, from green subsidies to agricultural policy to transportation. Blockchain technology can expand access to trade finance and improve trade facilitation. From negotiations to regular work, from group initiatives to informal debates, challenges are made more acute by geopolitical tensions and differing views on the trade dimensions of new and complex issues such as climate change and disruptive new technologies. Initiatives to facilitate dialogue (based on sound factual analysis) may help to increase transparency, assist in distinguishing between legitimate policy and disguised protectionism, and rebuild trust among members and faith in multilateral cooperation through trade. Members may choose to intensify work across Committees to address existing and new issues, engage in enhanced multilateral dialogue, negotiate new agreements or arrangements, and pursue action in different configurations and smaller groups. The Secretariat must be prepared to provide top-quality support whatever the choices made.

Secretariat services are already evolving. In recent years, changes to service delivery have been driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, new issues, new technologies, members' ongoing work to improve the functioning of the WTO, and bottom-up Secretariat initiatives such as the establishment of an informal network of Committee Secretaries. Some of these changes relate to the format and conduct of meetings; others have focused on leveraging digital tools to increase efficiency and improve access to information and data. Examples include the introduction of safe spaces for frank discussions and ongoing efforts to respond to member demand for reform. New technologies, such as generative AI, hold the promise that with the same resources we can deliver more and better services. The Secretariat's digital transformation has aligned with member-driven reform and delivered new digital tools including eAgenda, E-Delegate, and the Online Meeting Reservation Tool. More are in the pipeline.

Members generally comment that they find the support and services provided by the Secretariat to be of a high quality, but objective and modern methods for assessing member satisfaction have not been extensively deployed. We will develop mechanisms to systematically collect feedback from members and adapt appropriately. Member awareness of the full range of services available to them could be increased, for example by expanding engagement through events such as the High-Level Information Session with the Chief Economist to brief delegations on the Global Trade Outlook and Statistics, and the Informal Sessions on the Digital Tools Used in the Council for Trade in Goods and its Subsidiary Bodies. Improved communication will provide a solid foundation for adapting the services provided and safeguarding the trust of members.

Continuing to provide excellent service to members and acquiring new skills to complement the current capabilities and deep expertise of our staff are key to our Strategy.

We aim to provide an enabling environment for negotiations, deliberations, accessions, and WTO reform, and improve monitoring and transparency services. The aim is to increase our effectiveness and productivity. The Secretariat must be ready to support members in ongoing and new negotiations, and to help them implement agreed outcomes. Helping members reach agreement on key aspects of agricultural trade reform, achieving the entry into force of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies and completing the second wave of negotiations, are examples. We will also support the member-driven work to reform dispute

settlement and adapt as needed to provide high-quality support in a renewed and revitalized system.

Further coordination and harmonization of our service delivery across different divisions, functions, and WTO bodies will also enhance the Secretariat's contribution. Looking ahead, the Secretariat, together with members, must give closer consideration to which services should be maintained; which can be consolidated; which are outmoded, should be deprioritized, or could be left to other organizations; and where new services and new means of delivery, automation, or improved efficiencies can be introduced. This will also help ensure maximum value for money regarding the services we provide.

Enhancing our service to members

Specific initiatives will include the following:

- Bolster our engagement and communication with members, including by raising awareness of services provided, conducting regular member briefings, and systematically seeking feedback on our services through member surveys and other tools.
- Develop and extend metrics around our deliverables such as on efficiency-enhancing tools delivered; research outputs and reports; use of databases, documents, and publications; technical assistance and capacity-building activities; regional workshops; number of multilateral and plurilateral agreements supported; and meetings of regular Committees and working groups held.
- Offer simple and easy-to-use digital solutions available 24 hours a day anywhere in the world for delegates to facilitate their participation in the regular work of the WTO.
- Consolidate and enhance the services we provide, including by improving internal coordination and harmonizing approaches across different subject areas wherever possible.



Goal 2: Improve the creation and dissemination of, and access to, knowledge, data and insight on trade and trade policy to support the global trade ecosystem

With this strategic goal, the Secretariat seeks to position itself as a “one-stop shop” for expert trade knowledge, high-quality research, trade-related information, reliable data and path-breaking analysis.

We aim to be ahead of the curve in generating distinctive expert knowledge on emerging global issues that impact trade, and to leverage the WTO’s natural position as the go-to source for information on all issues around world trade within a broader global knowledge architecture.

The increasing complexity of the trade landscape and new technologies and ways of working require innovative, multifaceted, and strengthened expert knowledge and statistics, coordinated and coherent approaches to generating knowledge on trade and other global challenges, and user-friendly dissemination systems to make the most pertinent information accessible and to keep the WTO relevant to stakeholders. The Secretariat must be analytically strong and produce top-quality data and analysis that will enable members to engage in evidence-based dialogue and negotiations. The Secretariat must also respond to the growing demand for real-time trade data and data on trade in services in a fast-moving and increasingly services-oriented world. The Secretariat currently focuses most data collection efforts on trade in goods.

Data collection on services trade must be improved to augment the comprehensiveness of our outlook on trade.

The WTO Secretariat is already recognized as a knowledge centre and repository of institutional memory on trade-related matters, including trade flows, trade policy information, trade monitoring, trade disputes, trade negotiations, multilateral trade deliberations, and trade-related

capacity-building. Leading knowledge outputs include the annual World Trade Report, regular Trade Monitoring Reports, and publications on topical and cross-cutting issues, such as the notes on the trade impact of the war in Ukraine and on illicit trade in medical and food products. The Secretariat is the custodian of a huge quantity of trade-related data, including from members’ notifications, much of which is collected and managed at a divisional level. Joint work, information sharing, and data exchanges are regularly undertaken with other international organizations such as the World Bank, the IMF, the OECD, the ITC, and others.

To develop as a knowledge hub, the Secretariat must further enhance internal coordination of databases and other trade-related information to help mine data sources more efficiently, avoid inaccuracies and inconsistencies, and be better able to analyse the trade impact of WTO agreements under continuously evolving circumstances. Closer coordination of research and analysis across divisions, and more exploitation of knowledge synergies, will enhance our impact. Developing a forward-looking, Secretariat-wide comprehensive research strategy will be one key way to do so, and will help to identify and prioritize research topics where we can add the most value and respond most effectively to member needs and evolving global circumstances.

The Secretariat’s role as a knowledge hub for the global trade community will be strengthened, including through the development of a strategic approach to managing the generation of data, analysis and research. We will further enrich the creation, collection, dissemination, and preservation of knowledge while scrupulously respecting our duties of neutrality and impartiality. We will pursue analytical work and research on issues relevant to trade (e.g. building on path-

breaking work that is already being done on re-globalization, fragmentation, subsidies, and new forms of industrial policies, carbon pricing frameworks, green comparative advantage, virtual water trade, and disruptive technologies), and the preservation of data sources and analytical expertise (trade intelligence) in support of a well-functioning multilateral trade ecosystem. We will explore avenues to deepen our understanding of the nexus between trade and development, and trade-related developments at the regional level. Knowledge creation will encompass promising areas for trade such as services, digital trade, and green trade. Options that members could use to reshape supply chains and enhance their resilience will be explored. Our work will highlight how trade is an engine of sustainable growth and inclusive economic development by providing detailed technical analysis and research.

We will streamline the process of acquiring, generating, sharing, updating, and preserving trade-related knowledge by focusing on adding distinct “WTO-value” by leveraging “insider” expertise in research, and upgrading data obtained from various

sources (including member notifications and strategic partnerships) through our own analysis. We will strengthen our engagement and communication with members around knowledge, and explore new vehicles and methods to disseminate outputs more quickly and widely, for example using blogs and issuing flash responses to significant global developments. Achieving our goals will require state-of-the-art IT infrastructure and services, and increased integration and searchability across existing web-presences and databases. Work is already advanced on an intelligent search engine that will significantly boost our capabilities in this regard. Further modernization of our digital foundations is needed. In parallel, we will upskill Secretariat staff – not only their technological proficiency, but also their technical expertise, analytical skills, and judgment to fill knowledge gaps and learn from and apply knowledge in practice. We will build our capacity in data science, AI, economic modelling, digital change, and communications. Through targeted policies and procedures, the Secretariat will promote best practices and tools for knowledge creation, dissemination, and preservation.

Be a knowledge hub

Specific initiatives will include the following:

- Improve data collection on services trade and develop our capability for forecasting services trade.
- Develop a comprehensive research strategy and programme, strengthen our capabilities and skills for modern research and data analysis, broaden outreach to better understand stakeholder needs and regional developments, including with and through the WTO Chairs Programme, and help members respond to evolving global challenges and opportunities.
- Increase accessibility to our data, including by improving interoperability and connections across our many databases.
- Enrich our analysis, research, and generation of knowledge with Big Data, alternative data, AI, and contributions from strategic partners to generate timely, deep, and distinctive forward-looking research and analysis.
- Establish cross-divisional subject-matter hubs and centres of excellence to foster consistency and facilitate internal knowledge creation, preservation, and dissemination, for example, on data.
- Extend our use of new technologies, including powerful and user-friendly intelligent search tools and revamp our official document systems.



Goal 3: Bring the global community together, providing a reinforced platform for dialogue and cooperation on trade

Current and emerging issues are cross-cutting, extend beyond traditional trade areas, and require global solutions.

The Secretariat seeks to provide a unique global platform to facilitate international cooperation and broaden stakeholder participation in issues relevant to trade.

The WTO's convening power will be leveraged to bring the global community together, in Geneva and beyond, to facilitate open dialogue on the most pressing trade-related global issues.

The WTO is an increasingly useful and practical venue for dialogue and exchange among members and with external stakeholders. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic we brought pharmaceutical vaccine manufacturing CEOs together along with other heads of international organizations such as the World Bank and the IMF to find solutions to more equitable vaccine distribution.

We also provided a platform for debate on carbon standards on steel, as well as opportunities for open dialogue on the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, and on deforestation and trade.

In a challenging global environment, the Secretariat's role as a convener and facilitator of dialogue on issues of trade relevance has the potential to add significant value in future trade-related discussions.

This is pertinent given the multitude of ways in which the trade ecosystem interacts with broader global policy areas.

The Secretariat already provides several platforms to bring the global community together for dialogue and cooperation. A variety of partner and theme-driven initiatives have been developed in collaboration with external stakeholders, such as the WTO's Public Forum, the Aid for Trade Global Reviews, and the Director-General's effective use of convening power on pandemic-related issues. Such initiatives have been steadily increasing in number, reach and complexity, aiming to foster collaboration, better understanding and dialogue among different stakeholders, and contribute to more informed policymaking and identification of best practices.

The Secretariat's involvement in complex modern debates – including, but not limited to, topics such as climate change, food security, public health, inclusivity, and digital trade and AI governance – has contributed to enhancing dialogue and deeper understanding of these issues.

A more strategic and systematic approach could increase the impact of our platforms. Such an approach should include better connecting the work done across divisions, and sharpening the focus of our platforms on the subjects and areas where we can add the most value: where the WTO and the Secretariat have the strongest comparative advantage. This means leveraging our distinctive trade expertise and avoiding duplicating

the efforts of other institutions in their respective areas of expertise. Moreover, emerging technologies such as AI and digital processes can be further integrated into our initiatives. Creating new opportunities for dialogue and idea generation will lead to efficiency gains and help us reach new audiences.

To advance towards our goal of being a sought-after global platform accessible to all stakeholders who want to engage in trade and trade policy-related dialogue,

we will concentrate our efforts on providing multiple platforms for our members to engage with each other and with relevant external stakeholders on key emerging issues. We will also seek to reinforce our global platform through activities taking place beyond the WTO, explore ways to strengthen our existing capacity as a global platform using new communications technologies, and seek opportunities to enhance internal coordination and cooperation in areas of global importance.

Serve as a global platform

Specific initiatives will include the following:

- Foster global dialogue on key emerging issues, such as trade and climate change, supply chain resilience, digital trade, virtual water trade, gender and MSMEs. Serve as a forum for dialogue on the trade-related aspects of carbon policies and pricing frameworks, and respond to member-driven demand for stakeholder events around specific themes.
- Reinforce our communication and outreach strategy, encompassing traditional and social media, with supporting modern toolkits and dedicated training programmes, and enhance thematic coherence across key activities, such as the Public Forum and the Aid for Trade Global Review.
- Develop relevant skills and capabilities and incorporate new technologies to enhance the visibility and accessibility of, and promote innovation on our platforms, for example by increasing virtual/hybrid events and interactive online activities and utilizing new communication methods and generative AI.



Goal 4: Enhance external engagement, building strategic partnerships and promoting wider understanding of the benefits of the multilateral trading system

WTO members recognized from the outset that interlinkages among different aspects of economic policy require cooperation among international organizations. To this end, they included in the Marrakesh package a Ministerial Declaration calling for cooperation with other institutions responsible for monetary and financial matters and inviting the Director-General to work with the leaders of the World Bank and the IMF towards greater coherence in economic policymaking. Such cooperation among the Bretton Woods institutions remains a strong imperative.

In addition, it is clear that complex issues such as the worsening climate crisis, pandemics, geopolitical tensions, rapid technological changes, widening inequality, and economic vulnerabilities require multi-dimensional collaboration.

The Secretariat can offer deep expertise in specific trade-related areas but must rely on outside sources in others. The Secretariat also does not have unlimited resources or an on-the-ground presence outside Geneva. The WTO and the Secretariat therefore need to engage in targeted collaboration with multilateral and other institutions in the global economic ecosystem and forge new partnerships to enhance the Secretariat's service to members, deal effectively with emerging issues and to raise awareness and promote a better understanding of the benefits of the multilateral trading system,

including the nexus between trade and development, and of global dynamics that impact trade.

The Secretariat already operates within an extensive collaborative network. For example, the Aid for Trade initiative and partnerships such as the Enhanced Integrated Framework and the Standards and Trade Development Facility help match donors with identified needs and build trade-related capacity in developing countries, especially LDCs. Recent collaborations involving the Secretariat include (among many others) partnerships such as: a trilateral cooperation with WIPO and the WHO on global health and intellectual property issues; a joint study with the World Bank, the IMF, and the OECD on strengthening international cooperation on subsidies; and cooperation with the IMF, the World Bank, UNCTAD, the OECD, and the UNFCCC on carbon pricing. At the UNFCCC COP28, the Secretariat partnered with the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the United Arab Emirates Government, UNCTAD, and the World Economic Forum to organize a Trade Day and collaborated with UNCTAD, the ICC and the ITC to host a Trade House Pavilion. An MOU was also signed with FIFA to develop access to the US\$ 260 billion global sports apparel market for the Cotton-4 plus (African cotton-producing countries) through the development and creation of a cotton textiles value chain in these countries. The MOU also envisages studies of sports (football) services trade and women. Another important collaboration is the pilot programme with

the World Bank to bridge the digital divide in eight African countries through analysis and support to improve hard and soft digital infrastructure.

We will review our existing cooperation arrangements and evaluate new opportunities with a view to prioritizing targeted partnerships, with specific deliverables, that leverage our strengths and allow our partners to contribute their resources, expertise, and infrastructure for maximum impact and minimum duplication of effort.

Looking ahead, we aim to strike new partnerships around emerging issues. Collaboration in new areas will advance interdisciplinary expertise, particularly in

areas with broader societal impact such as sustainability, climate change, public health, the global economy, and issues of development and inclusivity. We will seek strategic partnerships in delivering trade finance; support for digital trade and AI, especially women-led digital trade; trade intelligence; accessions; and in implementing the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. We will continue to pursue engagement in different formats with stakeholders and relevant partners that can contribute to generating knowledge, bring relevant subject matter expertise, facilitate global discussions, and promote wider understanding of the benefits of the multilateral trading system.

Build strategic partnerships

Specific initiatives will include the following:

- Review existing partnerships and other informal arrangements to assess their importance to and current relevance for our work.
- Seek new strategic partnerships around emerging areas with broader societal impact such as sustainability, climate change, public health, the global economy, and issues of development and inclusivity.
- Strengthen collaboration under existing mechanisms with academic institutions and other international organizations on joint research and reports, particularly in new and emerging trade-related areas and cross-cutting issues.



Goal 5: Transform into a stronger, flexible, and agile Secretariat, ready to meet current and future challenges

This strategic goal is about ensuring that the Secretariat has in place a forward-looking and innovative culture and flexible operating model, guided by clear strategic direction and more agile budget planning. The Secretariat must develop foresight and strategic capabilities to better understand the context within which we operate, and what this means for trade, the WTO, and our work. Secretariat-wide coordination is also critical to ensure targeted and flexible resource allocation in accordance with clear priorities, and to avoid duplication and inefficiencies.

The Secretariat's deep expertise is highly valued and must be preserved. At the same time, further deepening and broadening that expertise will reduce the risk of loss and enhance interdisciplinary synergies.

Building a skills-based organization and expanding functional collaboration and cross-fertilization among teams and individual experts would help strengthen and diffuse expertise and facilitate flexible resource allocation.

The Secretariat needs to establish the right balance between encouraging staff mobility, increasing diversity, and establishing mechanisms to attract and retain highly specialized talent.

Looking to the future, the Secretariat's expertise should be enriched with new skills, reflecting emerging issues, the increasingly multi-faceted nature of trade and trade policy, the availability of new technological tools, and modern, agile ways of working. Digital proficiency will enable staff to use technology to expedite routine tasks, save costs, enhance productivity, and focus on more creative, value-added tasks. For example, skills such as data analytics and data visualization can increase the scope and impact of our work. We are already engaged in efforts to identify the skills needed now and in the future, map staff competencies against those skills, and identify gaps and put in place mechanisms to address them, including upskilling curricula and recruitment outreach.

Increased and multifaceted cross-Secretariat collaboration and greater space for innovation will make the Secretariat stronger, more dynamic, and more resilient. This means re-dynamizing our organizational structure where necessary; reviewing our processes for decision-making, planning, and coordination; enhancing internal communications and information-sharing; and developing our mindset around innovation and risk. The recent arrival of a new Chief Ethics, Risk, and Compliance Officer will help build Secretariat-wide capability around the anticipation and management of risk. Developing our ability to distinguish among different risks and manage

them appropriately will be a key part of establishing a culture where innovation can flourish, and lessons can be learned quickly from unsuccessful initiatives. We will design ways to embed mechanisms that foster innovation across the Secretariat, for example by identifying pilot projects that can be scaled up once proven.

Emerging issues are increasingly interdisciplinary, thus the Secretariat cannot be siloed. More cross-divisional collaboration around issues and tasks is critical. The establishment of thematic hubs or centres of excellence for significant cross-cutting issues can spread knowledge

and best practices and increase efficiency. This Strategy and recent organizational changes will ensure a shared sense of purpose, monitoring of progress towards our strategic goals, and ongoing change management.

A key means of safeguarding members' trust is by demonstrating that their diverse needs are understood and that their taxpayer-funded budget contributions are well spent. To this end, we will improve our budget process and budget reporting, including by developing key performance indicators around our spending priorities.

A forward-looking Secretariat

Specific initiatives will include the following:

- Establish a strategy, planning, and knowledge division to plan the implementation of the strategic initiatives and build our capacity to exercise foresight; anticipate emerging trends, opportunities, and risks; and manage change. Develop key performance metrics to measure implementation progress.
- Create a senior level Strategic Priorities Committee to ensure the flexible and agile allocation of resources. Establish a system for periodic divisional needs forecasting, with forecasts assessed by the Committee when deciding on the allocation of resources.
- Re-dynamize our divisional structure where needed so it remains fit-for-purpose, including creating new units as necessary, all within budget.

Supporting foundations: Nurturing People Culture; Technology, Digital, and Data; Measuring and Delivering

The five goals established above, and the implementation of the strategic initiatives will be supported by three Enablers that aim to provide the right resources (human, financial and technological), work environment, and culture to empower us to achieve our strategic goals by 2030.

These Enablers will reinforce work towards our goals and enhance our efficiency. We aim to be a Secretariat characterized by a nurturing culture that promotes excellence and distinctive expertise in an inclusive environment where all staff can thrive and grow, including through continuous learning and skills development. Our work will also benefit from leveraging technology to best serve members, reinforce the Secretariat as a centre of excellence, and further improve its operational efficiency. Measuring our progress will help us achieve our objectives and deliver results.

We aim to anticipate future needs and ensure that the Secretariat maximizes the potential of a talented, resilient workforce, working in a safe and supportive environment.

The Secretariat's essential strength is its highly qualified staff.

Drawing on our new People Strategy (embracing a nurturing people culture that promotes excellence and distinctive expertise), the Secretariat will improve its people management culture by (i) establishing effective and efficient talent acquisition and deployment practices across the Secretariat, and promoting staff members' development, including by transitioning to a skills-based organization anchored in a new competency framework, and aligning learning and development programmes to the directions arising from the five strategic goals; (ii) leveraging data-driven decision-making and process optimization (automatization of certain administrative procedures to accelerate processes and reduce costs); (iii) positioning the Secretariat as an organization committed

to diversity, equity, and inclusion; and (iv) promoting a harmonious workplace culture that values well-being and self-care and has a zero-tolerance approach to misconduct, as well as strengthening the Secretariat's performance management culture. The Secretariat also aims to leverage technology and digital and data tools in pursuit of its 2030 strategic goals. Technology, digital, and data underpin all of our activities and exemplify continuous improvement and adaptation to emerging trends and evolving circumstances. From hybrid meetings and online communications, to compiling, searching, and disseminating our huge repositories of data and knowledge, to deploying tools such as cloud-based computing and AI, technology is an important tool for enhancing cross-Secretariat collaboration, efficiency, agility, and the service provided to members. Further modernization of our digital foundations will contribute to achieving our strategic goals.

Drawing on the ongoing digital transformation and responding to members' request for digital innovation, we strive to: (i) become the trusted one-stop online gateway for accessing high-quality trade data, analysis, and research, on which members and other stakeholders will rely (e.g. by delivering a new intelligent search platform with AI and LLM capabilities); (ii) become an accessible, trusted, and secure hybrid forum (digital and in-person) where members and stakeholders worldwide can confidently and securely discuss, consult, and negotiate trade-related topics; (iii) provide comprehensive e-service to members and stakeholders, including by developing a user-friendly delegate portal; and (iv) leverage easy-to-use IT tools to enable our staff to be more effective, highly connected, and professionally fulfilled.

We will develop and apply key performance indicators to monitor progress in implementation, measure performance, and ensure delivery. Metrics will align with and support the successful implementation of this Strategy.





Implementing the Strategy

As the WTO embarks on reform to its functioning and members position themselves to address emerging global challenges and the 21st century needs of people across the globe, the Secretariat must look ahead and be ready for a future that is green, digital, and inclusive, with trade that is increasingly anchored in services.

This Strategy is ambitious in line with the five strategic goals presented above. To achieve them, the Secretariat will build on its expertise and knowledge, develop new skills and capabilities, and deploy new technologies. The Secretariat must also focus its efforts and use its resources judiciously, including by relying on strategic partnerships, reinforcing internal coordination and increasing flexibility and innovation in its ways of working. Executing this Strategy will ensure that the Secretariat is prepared to help members and the global community recognize the implications of emerging global trends for trade and the WTO, and seize the opportunities and meet the challenges that the future will bring.

To help implement this Strategy, a new strategy, planning, and knowledge division is being created. This division will absorb part of the Knowledge Management Division, which has been disbanded, as well as the Transformation Office – so no new resources are required. The first step in executing this Strategy will be to draw up specific action plans. These will elaborate target outputs, processes, and, if necessary, structural changes; develop performance indicators and timelines, as well as project costs; and ensure alignment with budget planning and processes. Implementation of the Strategy will be overseen by the Transformation Steering Committee chaired by the Director-General. Members will be kept regularly informed and their input sought. This Strategy is a living document that will be updated as necessary. Work on the next five-year Secretariat Strategy should begin in 2029, following an evaluation of the usefulness and efficacy of this first Strategy.



Annex: WTO Secretariat Strategy House

VISION

Build a better world for people through global cooperation and rules-based international trade

MISSION

Support the WTO Membership with integrity, impartiality, independence, and expertise, in line with the WTO agreements



Excellent Service

Serve all Members effectively to deliver results in an evolving international context, using resources responsibly



Knowledge Hub

Improve the creation and dissemination of, and access to, knowledge, data, and insight on trade and trade policy to support the global trade ecosystem



Global Platform

Bring the global community together, providing a reinforced platform for dialogue and cooperation on trade



Engaged Partner

Enhance external engagement, building strategic partnerships and promoting wider understanding of the benefits of the multilateral trading system



Forward-looking Organization

Transform into a stronger, flexible, and agile Secretariat ready to meet current and future challenges

Nurturing People Culture

Embrace a nurturing people culture that promotes excellence and distinctive expertise in an inclusive environment where all staff can thrive and grow, including through continuous learning and skill development

Technology, Digital, Data

Leverage technology to best serve Members, reinforce the Secretariat as a centre of excellence, and improve operational efficiency and user experience

Measuring and Delivering

Develop and apply key performance indicators to monitor progress, measure performance, and ensure delivery

2030



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