

## World Trade Organization (WTO/OMC)

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### Key feature

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**Type of organisation:** Inter-governmental organisation

**Charter/Constitution:** Marrakesh Agreement,  
[www.wto.org/english/docs\\_e/legal\\_e/04-wto\\_e.htm](http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/04-wto_e.htm)

**Membership:**

- Nature: Representatives from governments (States or customs territories)
- Number: 164 members

**Year of establishment:** 1995

**Headquarters:** Geneva, Switzerland

**Secretariat staff:** 647 (2016)

**Total budget:** CHF 197 million (2016)

**Type of activity:** Trade negotiations, development of legal instruments, dispute settlement, implementation and monitoring, policy dialogue, data collection and analysis

**Sectors of activity:** International trade

**Webpage:** [www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org)

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### Members

Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Bahrain (Kingdom of), Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, China, Colombia, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, European Union, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, The Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hong Kong (China), Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Korea (Republic of), Kuwait (the State of), Kyrgyz Republic, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lesotho, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macau (China), Madagascar, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Moldova (Republic of), Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Saudi Arabia (Kingdom of), Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Chinese Taipei, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Thailand, The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States of America, Uruguay, Vanuatu, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

### Relationship with non-members

Any state or customs territory having full autonomy in the conduct of its trade policies may become a member ("accede to") the WTO/OMC, but all WTO/OMC members must agree on the terms. This is done through the establishment of a working party of WTO/OMC members and through a process of negotiations.

### Observers

The WTO/OMC has currently 21 Observers: Algeria, Andorra, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Belarus, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Lebanese Republic, Libya, Sao Tomé and Principe, Serbia, Somalia, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan.

The WTO/OMC has multiple relations with other IOs and institutions. In particular, eight organisations are Observers of the WTO/OMC General Council: IMF, World Bank, FAO, OECD, United Nations, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Trade Centre (ITC) and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO).

### Mandate

WTO/OMC is the only global international organisation dealing with the rules of trade between nations. Its main function is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible. It does this by: administering trade agreements; acting as a forum for trade negotiations; settling trade disputes; reviewing national trade policies; assisting developing countries in trade policy issues, through technical assistance and training programmes; and, co-operating with other international organisations.

## IRC processes taking place within the World Trade Organization

Exchange of information and experiences	Systematically
Data Collection	Systematically
Research and policy analysis	Systematically
Discussion of good regulatory practices	Systematically
Development of rules, standards or good practices	Systematically
Negotiation of international agreements	Systematically
Enforcement: imposition of sanctions	Systematically
Dispute settlement	Systematically
Crisis management	Never

## Categories of legal and policy instruments\*

	Is it taking place within the IO?	Approximate number
Treaties for ratification by States (excluding the funding one)	√	
Legally binding decisions	√	
Recommendations	√	
Political declarations	√	
Model treaties or law		
Production of technical standards		
Non-binding guidance/best practices document	√	

## Interactions with other international organisations active in the field\*

Mechanisms of interaction	Approximate number of IOs involved	Examples
Develop joint instruments	√	
MoU or other agreements	√	
Participate in co-ordinating institution	√	IMF, World Bank, OECD, United Nations, FAO, WHO, WIPO, UNCTAD, ITC.
Joint meetings that provide forum for co-ordination	√	
Observe relevant actions of other bodies	√	
Exchange information	√	

\* The information contained in the figures and tables pertains exclusively to work of the WTO/OMC in respect of the Agreements on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS), with specific emphasis on the TBT and SPS Committees.

### WTO history

The WTO/OMC entered into force on 1 January 1995, but its trading system is half a century older. Since 1948, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) had provided the rules for the system. It did not take long for the General Agreement to lead to the creation of a provisional international organization, also known informally as GATT. Over the years GATT evolved through several rounds of negotiations. The last and largest GATT round, was the Uruguay Round which lasted from 1986 to 1994 and led to the WTO/OMC's creation. Whereas GATT had mainly dealt with trade in goods, the WTO/OMC and its agreements now cover trade in services and intellectual property.

Source: Updated from OECD (2016), *International Regulatory Co-operation: The Role of International Organisations in Fostering Better Rules of Globalisation*, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264244047-en>