



The Trade Agenda in 2022: WTO and Beyond

2022 promises to be an eventful year for the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The WTO should convene the postponed 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) in the next few months, and take forward all ongoing trade negotiations. It also needs to push ahead with institutional reforms to make the organisation fit for the future.

As the WTO resumed operations in the new year, the immediate focus was on taking stock of the state of negotiations and the way forward. Members assessed the state of negotiations on fisheries subsidies, dispute settlement, agricultural trade, and trade-related dimensions of the pandemic response, among others. Delivering on an intellectual property (IP) response to the COVID-19 pandemic remains an urgent priority area for the WTO.

In the new year, the WTO once again saw progress on the plurilateral front. The negotiating groups on e-commerce and investment facilitation for development have reaffirmed their desire to see substantial progress on these negotiations in 2022.

Beyond the multilateral context at the WTO, there has been a significant churn in the regional trading context, which promises to continue this year. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) came into force on 1 January 2022, while the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) completed one year of existence since its entry into force on 1 January 2021. India has commenced/resumed a spate of negotiations for preferential trade agreements with its trading partners. Countries like the U.K., China, Taiwan, and South Korea are at different stages of negotiating accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

It remains to be seen whether the new generation of preferential trade agreements will act as a catalyst and spur multilateral progress at the WTO, or further fragment the global trade architecture.

This edition of CUTS Occasional News Wrap (ONW) captures news and developments at the WTO and trade-related issues in the new year. This ONW is categorised into two sections:

- News & developments at the WTO
- Perspectives on trade issues

News & developments at the WTO

1.	<p><i>DDG González: Agricultural trade reform can deliver gains for people, planet and economy</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation February 2, 2022</p>	<p>Speaking at a seminar organized by the World Bank and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) on 2 February, WTO Deputy Director-General Anabel González welcomed the findings of a new report that calls for a fundamental change in agricultural support to make agriculture and food systems more productive and more sustainable.</p>
2.	<p><i>High shipping rates and digital services sustain services trade recovery in Q3 of 2021</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation February 1, 2022</p>	<p>Global services trade posted a 25% year-on-year increase in the third quarter of 2021. Digitally deliverable services such as computer, financial, and business services were the main drivers of trade growth as well as transport, which was boosted by surging shipping rates.</p>
3.	<p><i>WHO, WIPO, WTO heads chart future cooperation on pandemic response</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation February 1, 2022</p>	<p>The Directors-General of the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), and the WTO met on 1 February to chart future directions for trilateral cooperation in support of an effective global response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
4.	<p><i>DDG González: “Trade facilitation and economic resilience are two sides of the same coin”</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation February 1, 2022</p>	<p>Throughout the pandemic, trade facilitation has played a life-saving role in keeping trade in food and other essential supplies flowing, Deputy Director-General Anabel González said in a keynote speech on 1 February.</p>
5.	<p><i>DDG Ellard highlights state of play in current negotiations and WTO reform agenda</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation January 31, 2022</p>	<p>Deputy Director-General Angela Ellard participated on 31 January in an armchair discussion with Ambassador Rufus Yerxa, former WTO Deputy Director-General, at the 2022 Washington International Trade Conference, where she discussed current WTO negotiations and the future reform agenda.</p>

6.	<p><i>E-commerce negotiations resume with call for intensified efforts in 2022</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 28, 2022</p>	<p>At their first meeting of the year, on 28 January, the co-convenors of the negotiations on e-commerce, Australia, Japan and Singapore, urged members to intensify their efforts in 2022 to secure convergence on the majority of issues in the negotiations, including the more difficult areas.</p>
7.	<p><i>DG Okonjo-Iweala tells sustainability conference “trade is part of the solution to challenges we face”</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 28, 2022</p>	<p>Trade and trade policy can help achieve global sustainability goals more effectively and efficiently, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said in a keynote speech to the 28 January conference titled “For a more sustainable and responsible trade”.</p>
8.	<p><i>DDG Paugam underscores important role of trade for food security, sustainable land use</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 28, 2022</p>	<p>In a video message delivered on 28 January 2022 at the 14th Global Forum for Food and Agriculture, Deputy Director-General Jean-Marie Paugam said degradation of farmland is posing severe challenges to global food security.</p>
9.	<p><i>Investment facilitation negotiators resume work, aim at conclusion by end of 2022</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 27, 2022</p>	<p>WTO members taking part in the negotiations for an agreement on investment facilitation for development (IFD) resumed their work on 26-27 January, reaffirming their objective to conclude the text negotiations by the end of 2022.</p>
10.	<p><i>DDG Ellard: “Deeds not words” as the WTO becomes more gender-responsive</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 27, 2022</p>	<p>In her keynote speech at the 27 January launch of a new study on mainstreaming gender in free trade agreements, Deputy Director-General Angela Ellard highlighted the progress the WTO has made in supporting the participation of women in international trade.</p>
11.	<p><i>Members discuss way forward in dedicated meeting on WTO pandemic response</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 26, 2022</p>	<p>WTO members met on 27 January to discuss the WTO response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The informal meeting looked at issues related to cross-border trade flows and the proposal to waive certain intellectual property protections related to COVID-19 countermeasures.</p>

12.	<p><i>Arbitrator issues decision in US-China dispute over subsidy duties</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 26, 2022</p>	<p>On 26 January, a WTO arbitrator issued a decision on the level of countermeasures China may request in its dispute with the United States regarding US countervailing duties on certain products from China (DS437).</p>
13.	<p><i>DDG Ellard outlines state of play in the WTO negotiations</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 25, 2022</p>	<p>Speaking at BusinessEurope’s Morning Talks on 25 January, Deputy Director-General Angela Ellard outlined the state of negotiations in the WTO after the postponement of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12).</p>
14.	<p><i>General Council discusses convening of Ministerial Conference, advancing work agenda</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 25, 2022</p>	<p>General Council Chair Ambassador Dacio Castillo (Honduras) convened a meeting of members on 25 January to report on his recent consultations regarding the convening of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12), how to proceed on substantive issues, and the WTO response to the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
15.	<p><i>Farm talks forge ahead despite MC12 uncertainty</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 24, 2022</p>	<p>WTO negotiators started off the new year by seeking a way forward for the agricultural talks after the postponement of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) late last year.</p>
16.	<p><i>New study explores role of trade in strengthening developing countries’ economic resilience</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 24, 2022</p>	<p>A new joint study by the World Bank and the WTO highlights the major role played by trade in reducing poverty but notes that further measures are needed to support developing countries’ use of trade as a tool for growth.</p>
17.	<p><i>DG Okonjo-Iweala calls on ministers to step up negotiating efforts, harvest outcomes</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>January 21, 2022</p>	<p>Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala on 21 January called on ministers from a cross-section of WTO members to push ahead in all ongoing negotiations, and work with “pragmatism, creativity, and flexibility” to harvest agreements as and when they are within reach.</p>

<p>18.</p>	<p><i>DDG González: Now is the time to think big on customs reform</i> World Trade Organisation January 20, 2022</p>	<p>DDG González said customs reform needs to focus on better coordination with other agencies, expanded use and analysis of data and modern technologies, closer partnerships with supply chain participants and greater cooperation with third countries.</p>
<p>19.</p>	<p><i>WTO report looks into steps taken to boost LDCs' participation in international trade</i> World Trade Organisation January 19, 2022</p>	<p>A new WTO publication launched on 19 January highlights that further support will be needed from the international community in the next decade to strengthen least-developed countries' (LDC) participation in world trade.</p>
<p>20.</p>	<p><i>India appeals panel reports in disputes targeting Indian sugar subsidies</i> World Trade Organisation January 11, 2022</p>	<p>India has notified the Dispute Settlement Body of its decision to appeal the panel reports in the cases brought by Brazil, Australia and Guatemala in “India - Measures Concerning Sugar and Sugarcane” (DS579, DS580, DS581).</p>
<p>21.</p>	<p><i>General Council discusses India's call for virtual ministerial meeting on pandemic response</i> World Trade Organisation January 10, 2022</p>	<p>General Council Chair Ambassador Dacio Castillo (Honduras) convened the 10 January meeting in response to India's recent proposal to hold a virtual Ministerial Conference on the WTO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, including a proposed waiver of relevant intellectual property protections.</p>
<p>22.</p>	<p><i>Trade thoughts, from Geneva, by DDG Anabel Gonzalez</i> World Trade Organisation January 10, 2022</p>	<p>WTO discussions are complex and take time. They must deal with and accommodate the needs and interests of many countries, with different priorities and levels of development. But it is also the case that global solutions are needed to address the global trade challenges the world faces. Not all 164 WTO members may need to take part in crafting all of these responses, but they all must commit to making the WTO work and letting it work.</p>

Perspectives on trade issues

1.	<p><i>India risks being edged out of patent waiver plan at WTO</i> Jacob Koshy and Suhasini Haidar The Hindu February 6, 2022</p>	<p>India runs the risk of being excluded from a proposal it co-authored at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiations in 2020, to “temporarily waive” intellectual property rights (IPR) held, by primarily Western countries, on vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics for covid-19.</p>
2.	<p><i>The fairness in ‘fair’ trade today</i> Ajay Dua Sunday Guardian Live February 5, 2022</p>	<p>Adopted in 2001, the Doha Development Agenda of WTO had placed development concerns at the heart of the Organisation’s working. However, achieving these has remained a challenge. There is an almost unbridgeable chasm in the interpretation of what constitutes “free and fair” trade between the rich and powerful OECD nations and the more numerous, heavily populated, and often helpless lot of developing countries.</p>
3.	<p><i>India calling with quite a lot of trade in mind</i> Harsh V Pant The Hindu February 5, 2022</p>	<p>India seeks balanced trade pacts at a time when new trade blocs in the Indo-Pacific such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) are gaining traction. Strategic partnerships without strong economic content would have no meaning in the Indo-Pacific, where China’s economic clout is growing by the day.</p>
4.	<p><i>Out of the starting blocks: One year of the AfCFTA</i> Jack Dutton African Business February 4, 2022</p>	<p>In terms of the number of participating states, the AfCFTA is the largest single market since the creation of the World Trade Organisation. Over several decades, policymakers hope that the AfCFTA will deepen the economic integration of Africa by forging a trading region with a combined gross domestic product of around \$3.4 trillion.</p>

5.	<p><i>Adapting to the “new normal”: building back better with digital and sustainable trade facilitation</i></p> <p>UN Global Survey on Digital and Sustainable Trade Facilitation February 2, 2022</p>	<p>Countries across the globe have made progress on digitalising international trade formalities during the COVID-19 pandemic, but stronger efforts are needed to facilitate trade for small and medium-sized enterprises and other groups and sectors with special needs, according to a report launched today by the United Nations regional commissions.</p>
6.	<p><i>WTO chief warns of continued bottlenecks in global supply chains</i></p> <p>Alan Beattie Financial Times February 1, 2022</p>	<p>The crunch in global supply chains will continue longer than originally thought and may persistently marginalise developing countries, said the head of the World Trade Organization. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the former World Bank second-in-command who took over as WTO director-general last March, told an audience in Paris that higher transaction costs risked squeezing poorer countries even after some supply chain problems were resolved.</p>
7.	<p><i>US-China trade relations in ‘difficult’ stage: Katherine Tai</i></p> <p>Deccan Herald February 1, 2022</p>	<p>Calling the relationship "one of the defining issues we work on," Tai said she has started the "step one" discussions with China on the trade deal but they have not yielded results as yet. The administration's broader aim is to "defend the American economy, our workers and our businesses from the negative impacts" of China's nonmarket policies, she said in a fireside chat with the National Asian Pacific American Bar Association.</p>
8.	<p><i>TBT, SPS and technical regulations: Time for Nepal to meet the requirements</i></p> <p>Suman Kumar Regmi The Himalayan Times January 31, 2022</p>	<p>During the WTO accession negotiations, Nepal had offered to introduce legislative and institutional measures by 2006, but these have not fully happened till now. The major objective of WTO SPS agreement is to minimise the negative effects of SPS measures on international trade.</p>

9.	<p><i>India's FTAs: What Hasn't Worked? What's The Change In Strategy?</i> Payaswini Upadhyay BloombergQuint January 29, 2022</p>	<p>India has preferential access, economic cooperation, and FTAs with about 54 individual countries. Yet, “given the size of the Indian economy, its share of global trade isn’t commensurate”. India must look at what hasn’t worked for it under the existing FTAs and how’s the strategy ought to change for the ongoing negotiations.</p>
10.	<p><i>Priorities for global trade in 2022</i> Amitendu Palit Financial Express January 27, 2022</p>	<p>Managing the pandemic will remain a global priority. It will not be any different for the WTO. Within this priority, the most important goal for the WTO will be to ensure effective distribution of vaccines to various parts of the world.</p>
11.	<p><i>India, the EU and the Future of Multilateralism</i> Steven Blockmans Observer Research Foundation January 26, 2022</p>	<p>India and the EU must explore new avenues for greater political and security cooperation to protect the world’s public goods. Stronger India–Europe bonds will not only serve mutual interests, but also allow Delhi and Brussels to combine efforts in tackling global challenges, such as climate change, digitalisation, and the malfunctioning of international organisations.</p>
12.	<p><i>Reviving the WTO and rules-based trading: The EU's role</i> Malorie Schaus Centre for European Policy Studies January 24, 2022</p>	<p>The challenges facing the WTO are daunting but hold opportunities. The EU, based on its extensive experience with trade and cooperation, has a global leadership role to play in creating momentum for sensible and effective WTO reform.</p>
13.	<p><i>Revisiting RCEP, world's largest trade pact</i> Ajay Dua Sunday Guardian Live January 15, 2022</p>	<p>The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) officially came into effect on the first day of the New Year. Even without India, which virtually at the last moment developed cold feet and refused to join the 15-nation trade pact, it is the world’s largest free trade agreement. It covers a market of 2.3 bn persons or 30% of global population, with an annual output of US \$26 trillion and 25% of world’s exports.</p>

<p>14.</p>	<p><i>On trade, need for bold, imaginative thinking</i> Mohan Kumar India Today January 13, 2022</p>	<p>India’s decision to opt out of the RCEP in 2019 generated much controversy, but there is enough ex post facto justification for it doing so. Further, even though India opted out of RCEP, FTAs will be the way forward; MFN-based, WTO-regulated multilateral trade is passe.</p>
<p>15.</p>	<p><i>Enough of the old ‘level playing field’ argument. Reduce trade barriers to make India grow</i> Shishir Gupta, Abhishek Kumar & Divya Srinivasan The Economic Times January 12, 2022</p>	<p>Since faster exports are a time-tested strategy for accelerated growth, it becomes imperative to understand if the recent export performance indicates a structural change for the Indian economy, which bodes well for long-term growth, or merely a rebound in the global trade and, hence, representing a continuation of the past trend.</p>