



# Trade Basics

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## Members of the World Trade Organization

By Megan J. Provost

As of July 29, 2016, there are 164 member-countries in the World Trade Organization (WTO). According to the WTO, any state or customs territory having “full autonomy in the conduct of its trade policies” is eligible to join (or, more accurately, “accede to”) the WTO. However, before countries are granted full membership, WTO members must agree on their accession terms.

### ***Becoming a Member***

The WTO generally breaks the accession process down into four states. The applicant countries must:

1. *Tell us about yourself.* The government applying for membership into the WTO is asked to describe all aspects of its “trade and economic policies” that might have a bearing on WTO agreements. This information is submitted to the WTO in a memorandum, which is then examined by the “working party” dealing with the country’s membership application.  
*Note:* These “working parties” oversee the accession process and are open to all WTO member-countries.
2. *Work with individual members on trade commitments.* When the working party has made sufficient progress on principles and policies, parallel bilateral talks begin between

the prospective new member and individual WTO member-countries. Because different member-countries have different trading interests, bilateral negotiations work best. These talks cover tariff rates, specific market access commitments, and other trade policies in goods and services. The new member’s commitments that are negotiated through these bilateral discussions must apply equally to all WTO member-countries, under normal nondiscrimination rules. These negotiations and commitments can be highly complicated.

3. *Draft membership terms.* Once the working party has completed its examination of the applicant’s trade regime, and the parallel bilateral market access negotiations are complete, the working party finalizes the terms of accession. These appear in a report, a draft membership treaty (called a “protocol of accession”), and schedules of the soon-to-be-member’s commitments.
4. *Make a decision.* The final package, consisting of the report, protocol, and schedules, is presented to the WTO General Council or the Ministerial Conference. Two-thirds of WTO member-countries must vote in favor of the application. Once approved, the applicant is free to sign the protocol and to accede to the WTO, however, many

countries' own parliament or legislature must also ratify the agreement before membership is complete.

### *Alliances and Groups of Countries*

While WTO membership is open to state and custom territories, there are some membership groups, as well as coalitions of nations that regularly work together. This is especially true in the agricultural negotiations, where we have seen well over 20 coalitions and alliances submit proposals or negotiate with a common position. In addition, developing countries are utilizing alliances more frequently, likely due to the improved bargaining power of a larger group.

The best known, as well as largest and most comprehensive, group at the WTO is the European Union (EU). The EU is a customs union with a single external trade policy and tariff system. The EU is a WTO member in its own right, as are each of its 28 member-states, making a total of 29 WTO members. While the member states coordinate their position in Brussels and Geneva, the European Commission alone speaks for the EU at almost all WTO meetings. However, sometimes references are made to specific

member states, particularly where their national laws differ. This is the case in some disputes when an EU member's law or measure is cited, or in notifications of EU member countries' laws, such as in intellectual property (TRIPS).

A number of other nations have accomplished a lesser degree of economic integration, but still have important trade alliances. For example, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN, which includes WTO members Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Viet Nam) have many common trade interests and are frequently able to coordinate positions and to speak with a single voice. MERCOSUR,

the Southern Common Market (which includes Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Venezuela, with Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru as associate members), has a similar set-up. Other groups that occasionally present unified statements at the WTO are the African Group; the least-developed countries (LDCs); the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group (ACP); and the Latin American Economic System (SELA).

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#### *The Quad, the Quint, the Six and 'not'*

*Some of the most difficult negotiations in the WTO have resulted from "breakthrough" talks from four to six of the major WTO members-countries. Originally, the "Quad" consisted of Canada, the European Union, Japan, and the United States.*

*However, since the launch of the Doha Development Round, developing countries' voices have increased considerably, bringing in Brazil and India. And, Australia was added as a representative of the Cairns Group. So, since 2005, four, five or six of the following have got together to try to break deadlocks, particularly in agriculture: Australia, Brazil, the European Union, India, Japan, and the United States.*

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## Appendix A: The Member Countries

The following is a list of WTO member countries (and their date of accession), as of July 29, 2016.

Afghanistan – July 29, 2016	Dominican Republic – March 9, 1995
Albania – September 8, 2000	Ecuador – January 21, 1996
Angola – November 23, 1996	Egypt – June 30, 1995
Antigua and Barbuda – January 1, 1995	El Salvador – May 7, 1995
Argentina – January 1, 1995	Estonia – November 13, 1999
Armenia – February 5, 2003	European Union – January 1, 1995
Australia – January 1, 1995	Fiji – January 14, 1996
Austria – January 1, 1995	Finland – January 1, 1995
Bahrain – January 1, 1995	France – January 1, 1995
Bangladesh – January 1, 1995	Gabon – January 1, 1995
Barbados – January 1, 1995	Gambia – October 23, 1996
Belgium – January 1, 1995	Georgia – June 14, 2000
Belize – January 1, 1995	Germany – January 1, 1995
Benin – February 22, 1996	Ghana – January 1, 1995
Bolivia – September 12, 1995	Greece – January 1, 1995
Botswana – May 31, 1995	Grenada – February 22, 1996
Brazil – January 1, 1995	Guatemala – July 21, 1995
Brunei – January 1, 1995	Guinea – October 25, 1995
Bulgaria – December 1, 1996	Guinea-Bissau – May 31, 1995
Burkina Faso – June 3, 1995	Guyana – January 1, 1995
Burundi – July 23, 1995	Haiti – January 30, 1996
Cambodia – October 13, 2004	Honduras – January 1, 1995
Cameroon – December 13, 1995	Hong Kong, China – January 1, 1995
Canada – January 1, 1995	Hungary – January 1, 1995
Cape Verde – July 23, 2008	Iceland – January 1, 1995
Central African Republic – May 31, 1995	India – January 1, 1995
Chad – October 19, 1996	Indonesia – January 1, 1995
Chile – January 1, 1995	Ireland – January 1, 1995
China – December 11, 2001	Israel – April 21, 1995
Colombia – April 30, 1995	Italy – January 1, 1995
Congo – March 27, 1997	Jamaica – March 9, 1995
Costa Rica – January 1, 1995	Japan – January 1, 1995
Côte d'Ivoire – January 1, 1995	Jordan – April 11, 2000
Croatia – November 30, 2000	Kazakhstan – November 30, 2015
Cuba – April 20, 1995	Kenya – January 1, 1995
Cyprus – July 30, 1995	Korea, Republic of – January 1, 1995
Czech Republic – January 1, 1995	Kuwait – January 1, 1995
Democratic Republic of Congo – January 1, 1997	Kyrgyz Republic – December 20, 1998
Denmark – January 1, 1995	Laos – February 2, 2013
Djibouti – May 31, 1995	Latvia – February 10, 1999
Dominica – January 1, 1995	Lesotho – May 31, 1995

Liberia – July 14, 2016  
Liechtenstein – September 1, 1995  
Lithuania – May 31, 2001  
Luxembourg – January 1, 1995  
Macao, China – January 1, 1995  
Macedonia, FYR – April 4, 2003  
Madagascar – November 17, 1995  
Malawi – May 31, 1995  
Malaysia – January 1, 1995  
Maldives – May 31, 1995  
Mali – May 31, 1995  
Malta – January 1, 1995  
Mauritania – 31 May 1995  
Mauritius – 1 January 1995  
Mexico – 1 January 1995  
Moldova – July 26, 2001  
Mongolia – January 29, 1997  
Montenegro – April 29, 2012  
Morocco – January 1, 1995  
Mozambique – August 26, 1995  
Myanmar – January 1, 1995  
Namibia – January 1, 1995  
Nepal – April 23, 2004  
Netherlands – January 1, 1995  
New Zealand – January 1, 1995  
Nicaragua – September 3, 1995  
Niger – December 13, 1996  
Nigeria – January 1, 1995  
Norway – January 1, 1995  
Oman – November 9, 2000  
Pakistan – January 1, 1995  
Panama – September 6, 1997  
Papua New Guinea – June 9, 1996  
Paraguay – January 1, 1995  
Peru – January 1, 1995  
Philippines – January 1, 1995  
Poland – July 1, 1995  
Portugal – January 1, 1995  
Qatar – January 13, 1996  
Romania – January 1, 1995  
Russia – August 22, 2012  
Rwanda – May 22, 1996  
Saint Kitts and Nevis – February 21, 1996  
Saint Lucia – January 1, 1995  
Saint Vincent & Grenadines – January 1, 1995  
Samoa – May 10, 2012  
Saudi Arabia – December 11, 2005  
Senegal – January 1, 1995  
Seychelles – April 26, 2015  
Sierra Leone – July 23, 1995  
Singapore – January 1, 1995  
Slovak Republic – January 1, 1995  
Slovenia – July 30, 1995  
Solomon Islands – July 26, 1996  
South Africa – January 1, 1995  
Spain – January 1, 1995  
Sri Lanka – January 1, 1995  
Suriname – January 1, 1995  
Swaziland – January 1, 1995  
Sweden – January 1, 1995  
Switzerland – July 1, 1995  
Taiwan – January 1, 2002  
Tajikistan – March 2, 2013  
Tanzania – January 1, 1995  
Thailand – January 1, 1995  
Togo – May 31, 1995  
Tonga – July 27, 2007  
Trinidad and Tobago – March 1, 1995  
Tunisia – March 29, 1995  
Turkey – March 26, 1995  
Uganda – January 1, 1995  
Ukraine – May 16, 2008  
United Arab Emirates – April 10, 1996  
United Kingdom – January 1, 1995  
United States – January 1, 1995  
Uruguay – January 1, 1995  
Vanuatu – August 24, 2012  
Venezuela – January 1, 1995  
Viet Nam – January 11, 2007  
Yemen – June 26, 2014  
Zambia – January 1, 1995  
Zimbabwe – March 5, 1995

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## Appendix B: Memberships in Progress

The following countries' accessions are in progress:

Algeria  
Andorra  
Azerbaijan  
Bahamas  
Belarus  
Bhutan  
Bosnia and Herzegovina  
Comoros  
Equatorial Guinea  
Ethiopia  
Iran  
Iraq  
Lebanon  
Libya  
Sao Tomé and Príncipe  
Serbia  
Somalia  
South Sudan  
Sudan  
Syria  
Timor-Leste  
Uzbekistan