



**Council for Trade in Goods
Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade**

**CURRENT FUNCTIONING OF THE
COMMITTEE ON TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE**

**REPORT TO THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN GOODS
BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE TBT COMMITTEE**

The following report is being submitted by the Chairperson of the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT Committee), Mr Anwar Hussain Shaik, at the request of the Chairperson of the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG). It was prepared with the assistance of the Secretariat.¹

1 CURRENT STATUS OF COMMITTEE PRACTICES

1.1. This report describes the practices that the TBT Committee has adopted over the past years to improve its work (the data in the tables refer to the years 2019-2021). These practices build on discussions among Members – they are bottom-up in nature, continuous, and incremental. All decisions and recommendations taken by the TBT Committee are documented in the G/TBT/1-series (the latest revision is contained in G/TBT/1/Rev.15). Normally, the practices are agreed upon in the context of the Committee's [Triennial Reviews](#).

1.1 Assistance to delegates

1.2. There is no systematic training programme for Geneva-based delegates. Geneva-based delegates who assume responsibility for the Committee usually have bilateral meetings with Secretariat staff regarding, for example, procedures and documentation. On occasion, the Secretariat has organized briefing sessions for capital and Geneva-based officials to explain processes and the conduct of work. These may be general or focus on a particular aspect of the Committee's agenda. For example, the Secretariat has briefed delegations on the evolution and use of eAgenda and ePing on a regular basis, and the Secretariat has provided briefings on the triennial review process. Almost all TBT technical assistance activities dedicate a module to the operation of the Committee, including digital tools.

1.2 Organization of Committee work

1.2.1 Digital tools used for Committee work

1.3. Digital tools are central to the work of the TBT Committee, given the significant volume of notifications and specific trade concerns that it manages (more than 250 specific trade concerns and 3,900 notifications per year). The [eAgenda](#) system, pioneered by the TBT Committee, is used to submit specific trade concerns for inclusion in the agenda. Following a transition period since the first meeting of 2021, 100% of STCs are currently entered by Members using eAgenda. The [Trade Concerns Database](#) was developed in cooperation with other Committees to provide greater transparency and a cross-cutting overview of trade concerns raised.

¹ See document [JOB/CTG/18](#).

1.4. The [ePing](#) platform was developed and has evolved in response to recommendations from Members in the TBT triennial review process.² Members use ePing to consult TBT and SPS notifications, specific trade concerns and other documents, as well as the contact information of enquiry points. They can also receive email alerts on notifications of interest and reach out to notification authorities and enquiry point officials of other Members through the platform. Officials with additional rights can use ePing to submit notifications to the WTO and, on a voluntary basis, disseminate their comments/replies on notifications through the platform. More than 99% of notifications are submitted through ePing. A single sign-on system allows seamless access from ePing to eAgenda for those with the necessary credentials. The Secretariat continuously improves these tools in response to the needs of Members.

1.5. Regular briefings on these tools are provided during – and on the margins of – Committee meetings. For example, the Secretariat is organizing an [ePing information session](#) on the margins of the November 2022 TBT Committee meeting.

1.6. These tools complement the horizontal tools available to Members such as eRegistration and Documents Online.

1.2.2 Planning and organization of meetings

1.7. The Committee's work is organized around three annual regular meetings with back-to-back informal and/or thematic sessions. These "committee weeks" normally take place in March, June and November. Preparatory informal meetings are normally held one month in advance; they may also be held on an ad hoc basis to advance on specific work streams (e.g., guidelines on conformity assessment procedures).

1.8. Other types of events are typically organized in conjunction with the regular meetings, such as workshops, side events and/or information sessions (organized by Members or the Secretariat). The TBT Committee holds a Special Meeting for Enquiry Points and Notification Authorities every two to three years. On occasion, the Secretariat may organize one-off events such as the [Symposium](#) on Easing Regulatory Bottlenecks; these may be open to the public.

1.9. Dates for meetings are coordinated well in advance with relevant Committees, especially the SPS Committee, to prevent scheduling clashes as there might be delegates covering both. Planning of meetings is communicated to delegates through a JOB document with more than one year's advance notice.³ The Chairperson also reminds delegations of the subsequent meetings at the end of each meeting. The dates of formal meetings are available on the [TBT Gateway](#).

1.2.3 Formal meetings

1.2.3.1 Communication before meetings

1.10. The Secretariat and the Chairperson keep delegations abreast with developments mainly through communications (ICN/TBT/xx), annotated draft agendas (JOB/TBT-series) and airgrams (WTO/AIR/TBT-series).

1.2.3.2 Number of meetings

1.11. Since the beginning of 2019, 12 formal and 23 informal meetings have taken place (including the November 2022 meeting). In addition, there have been 28 other Committee-related events, workshops, and side events. Since 2021, due to the increasing number of specific trade concerns placed on the agenda, the duration of formal meetings has been extended by half a day. At a normal committee week, the first day is reserved for bilateral and informal meetings as well as consultations as necessary (Monday), the second day is taken up by thematic sessions (Tuesday) and remaining three days (Wednesday through Friday) are taken up by the regular meeting.

² Given the similarities between the SPS and TBT Committee practices, the Secretariat has merged a series of SPS and TBT online tools (SPS NSS, TBT NSS, SPS IMS, TBT IMS, and ePing alert) into a consolidated ePing SPS&TBT Platform, launched in July 2022.

³ See [JOB/TBT/467](#) circulated in June 2022 for the year 2023.

Table 1: Number of formal and informal meetings

Year	Formal meetings (number and duration)	Informal meetings (number and duration)	Other (e.g., workshops, symposia, etc.)
2019	6-7 March 2019 (2 days) 20-21 June 2019 (2 days) 13-14 November 2019 (2 days)	Informal: 8 February 2019 (0.5 days) 29 April 2019 (0.5 days) 18 June 2019 (0.5 days) 26 September 2019 (0.5 days) Thematic Sessions: 5 March 2019 (1 day) 18 June 2019 (0.5 days) 19 June 2019 (1 day) 12 November 2019 (1 day) 13 November 2019 (0.5 days)	Workshops: 17 June 2019 (Workshop on TBT agreement's transparency provisions and tools) Side Events: 7 March 2019 (TBT-UNCTAD side event) 20 June 2019 (Side event on improving TBT technical assistance coordination) 3 July 2019 (Book Launch of joint WTO/OECD publication) 4 July 2019 (Side event: Moving beyond SPS and TBT) Information Sessions: 13 November 2019 (ePing walk-in session)
2020	26-27 February 2020 (2 days) 13-14 May 2020 (2 days) 28-30 October 2020 (3 days)	Informal: 30 January 2020 (0.5 days) 25 February 2020 (1 day) 12 June 2020 (0.5 days) 24 September 2020 (0.5 days) 27 October 2020 (1 day) Thematic Sessions: 25 February 2020 (1 day)	Workshops: 26 February 2020 (ePing walk-in session) April-May 2020 (ePing refresher courses, focusing on Covid, held 5 times to accommodate regions, languages) 19 June 2020 (TBT@40 session on transparency) 2 September 2020 (TBT@40 session on STCs) 14 October 2020 (TBT@40 session on international standards) 8 December 2020 (Workshop on role of gender in standards development)
2021	24-26 February 2021 (2.5 days) 2-4 June 2021 (3 days) 10-12 November 2021 (3 days)	Informal: 4 February 2021 (1 day) 23 February 2021 (1 day) 11 May 2021 (0.5 days) 1 June 2021 (0.5 days)	Information Sessions: <i>Friends of eTools:</i> 4 July 2021 21 September 2021 18 October 2021

Year	Formal meetings (number and duration)	Informal meetings (number and duration)	Other (e.g., workshops, symposia, etc.)
		1 July 2021 (0.5 days) 21 September 2021 (0.5 days) 15 October 2021 (0.5 days) 8 November 2021 (0.5 days) 9 November 2021 (0.5 days) Thematic Sessions: 4 February 2021 (1 day)	Ninth Triennial Review information session: 16 February 2021
2022	9-11 March 2022 (3 days) 13-15 July 2022 (3 days) 16-18 November 2022 (3 days)	Informal: 10 February 2022 (0.5 days) 1 March 2022 (0.5 days) 6 April 2022 (0.5 days) 27 April 2022 (0.5 days) 29 June 2022 (0.5 days) 13 October 2022 (1 day) Thematic Sessions: 8 March 2022 (1 day) 12 July 2022 (1 day) 15 November 2022 (1 day)	Symposium: 14 October 2022 (Easing Regulatory Bottlenecks) Information Sessions: 14 November 2022 (ePing information session)

1.2.3.3 Preparation of Airgram and Annotated draft Agenda

1.12. Airgrams are prepared by the WTO Secretariat one month in advance of the regular meeting. Members may propose specific trade concerns no less than 20 calendar days prior to the committee meeting. An annotated draft agenda is prepared by the Secretariat that includes all specific trade concerns as well as other information for each agenda item. An *advanced copy* of the annotated draft agenda is circulated to give Members an opportunity to check it, and the final annotated draft agenda is issued 15 calendar days before the meeting.⁴ Delegations use eAgenda for submission and tracking of STCs on the agenda.⁵

Table 2: Preparation of Airgrams and Agendas

Year	Date of formal meeting	Date of circulation of Airgram	No. of days before the meeting
2019	6-7 March 2019	6 February 2019 (final)	28
	20-21 June 2019	20 May 2019 (final)	31
	13-15 November 2019	14 October 2019 (final)	30

⁴ The timelines are contained in [G/TBT/43](#) and in the [G/TBT/1/-series](#).

⁵ As part of the continuous improvement of the TBT Committee's practices, Members adopted a decision on "Procedures for inclusion of specific trade concerns in the annotated draft agenda of the Committee" in September 2019 ([G/TBT/43](#)).

Year	Date of formal meeting	Date of circulation of Airgram	No. of days before the meeting
2020	26-27 February 2020	27 January 2020 (final)	30
	13-14 May 2020	15 April 2020 (final)	28
	28-29 October 2020	28 September 2020 (final)	30
2021	24-26 February 2021	22 January 2021 (final)	33
	2-4 June 2021	3 May 2021 (final)	30
	10-12 November 2021	11 October 2021 (final)	30
2022	9-11 March 2022	7 February 2022 (final)	30
	13-15 July 2022	13 June 2022 (final)	30
	16-18 November 2022	17 October 2022 (final)	30

1.2.3.4 Distribution of documents prior to meetings

1.13. All documents relevant to a meeting are added to the "Documents for Meetings" WTO webpage. Presentations (received in advance) are posted on dedicated pages on the TBT Gateway (see, for example, the thematic session [here](#)).⁶

1.2.3.5 Communication after meetings

1.14. The Chairperson normally sends a follow-up communication *after* each formal and informal meeting to underline any key points, recall deadlines, and indicate dates for subsequent meetings (using the format [ICN/TBT/-series](#)). The news item of the regular meetings that are posted on the WTO website provides a summary of key issues discussed, as well as a list of all STCs raised (all news items are listed [here](#) on the TBT Gateway).

1.2.3.6 Preparation of the minutes

1.15. The Committee prepares minutes after its meetings which are circulated in the [G/TBT/M-series](#). The draft minutes are sent to Members for checking before circulation. On average, the minutes take around 2 months to prepare.

Table 3: Preparation of the Minutes/Summary Reports

Year	Last date of the formal meeting	Date of circulation of the minutes	No. of pages	No. of days between meeting and circulation
2019	6-7 March 2019	15 May 2019	46	70
	20-21 June 2019	23 September 2019	54	95
	13-15 November 2019	30 January 2020	63	78
2020	26-27 February 2020	24 April 2020	68	58
	13-14 May 2020	26 June 2020	123	44
	28-29 October 2020	5 January 2021	123	69

⁶ For a recent example, see the July 2022 Thematic Session on Transparency https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tbt_e/tbts120722_e.htm.

Year	Last date of the formal meeting	Date of circulation of the minutes	No. of pages	No. of days between meeting and circulation
2021	24-26 February 2021	21 April 2021	125	56
	2-4 June 2021	24 August 2021	128	83
	10-12 November 2021	2 February 2022	116	84
2022	9-11 March 2022	24 May 2022	120	77
	13-15 July 2022	30 September 2022	128	79
	16-18 November 2022	-	-	-

1.2.4 Informal meetings

1.16. Informal meetings are convened using the format [ICN/TBT/-series](#).

Table 4: Convening of informal meetings

Year	Date of informal meeting	Date of communication convening the informal meeting	No. of days between communication and meeting
2019	8 February 2019	22 January 2019	17
	29 April 2019	21 March 2019	39
	18 June 2019 (am)	4 June 2019	14
	26 September 2019	16 July 2019	72
2020	30 January 2020	10 January 2020	20
2021	23 February 2021	22 January 2021	32
	11 May 2021	9 April 2021	32
	1 June 2021	18 May 2021	13
	1 July 2021	14 June 2021	17
	21 September	1 September 2021	20
	15-18 October 2021	22 September + 7 October 2021	23
	8-9 November 2021	19 October 2021 + 1 November 2021	20
2022	10 February 2022	9 December 2021 + 3 January 2022	63
	27 April 2022	22 April 2022	5
	29 June 2022	15 June 2022	14
	13 October 2022	19 July 2022 + 7 Oct 2022	86

1.3 Substantive work

1.3.1 Thematic sessions

1.17. During the Triennial Review process, the preliminary dates are set for thematic sessions. For example, during the Ninth Triennial Review (2021), Members agreed on a series of thematic sessions to take place from 2022 to 2024.⁷ For each thematic session, Members submit proposals for topics and speakers; ahead of the session, updates to the programme can be followed on the TBT [webpage](#). Thematic sessions are held in conjunction with regular meetings, normally directly prior to them.

1.3.2 Notifications

1.18. The TBT Committee manages a significant volume of TBT related notifications (more than 3,900 per year). This accounts for 45% of all notifications submitted by WTO Members. In order to efficiently handle this workload, the Committee regularly reviews, and updates procedures related to transparency and notifications. This is usually done during the triennial review process. For example, in June 2014, the Committee adopted a recommendation to enhance the coherent use of notification formats and provide guidance on when to use which format (new, addendum, corrigenda, revision, supplement).⁸ More recently, in the context of the Ninth Triennial Review (2021), Members agreed on 19 transparency-related recommendations, some of which relate to the revision of notification formats and guidelines.⁹ This work is now ongoing.

1.19. With a view to advancing with recommendations on transparency, a Transparency Working Group was established in March 2022. The Working Group is open to all Members and conducts its meetings in a hybrid mode to facilitate the participation of capital-based officials. Two meetings have been held so far.

1.20. Over the years, the Committee has also mandated the Secretariat to develop online tools to facilitate the submission and tracking of notifications. For example, in 2013, Members requested the creation of an online platform for the submission of notifications, which led to the launch of the Notification Submission System (NSS) in 2013. The Seventh Triennial Review (2015) mandated the Secretariat to develop an alert system for notifications in response to which the Secretariat launched the ePing alert system in 2016, in partnership with the ITC and UNDESA. The Eighth Triennial Review (2021) mandated the Secretariat to consolidate the various online tools; this process led to the replacement of TBT NSS, TBT IMS and ePing with a new [ePing SPS&TBT Platform in 2022](#).¹⁰

1.21. During regular meetings of the TBT Committee, an agenda item on transparency provides an opportunity to share information and experiences. In addition, since 2021, a "Friends of Online Tools" group meets where Members can receive updates from the Secretariat and provide feedback. This group has met three times. In addition, the Secretariat has conducted two comprehensive surveys on ePing to collect feedback from users, one in 2017 and another in 2022.¹¹

1.22. The Committee has discussed good practices as well as challenges faced in the implementation of transparency provisions and preparation of notifications through thematic sessions. These were held on:

- 12 July 2022 [WTO | Thematic Session on Transparency](#)
- 4 February 2020 [WTO | TBT Committee Thematic Session on Transparency](#)
- 18-19 June 2019: [WTO | Technical Barriers to Trade - Thematic session on Transparency](#)

1.23. The TBT Committee's Annual Review report contains information on the level of implementation of notification obligations. It lists, by Member, the number of ad hoc notifications

⁷ [G/TBT/46](#), para. 9.5.

⁸ [G/TBT/35](#).

⁹ [G/TBT/46](#), para. 6.29.

¹⁰ [G/TBT/GEN/336](#) / [G/SPS/GEN/2058](#).

¹¹ [G/TBT/GEN/317](#) / [G/SPS/GEN/1933](#) in 2021 and [G/TBT/GEN/227/Rev.1](#) / [G/SPS/GEN/1569](#) in 2017.

submitted as well as those Members which have fulfilled their one-off notification obligation under Article 15.2 (on measures they are undertaking to implement the TBT Agreement).

1.24. In response to requests from Members, the Secretariat provides a significant number of technical assistance activities on transparency and ePing. 30 activities were conducted in 2020-2021.¹² In 2022, the Secretariat launched the TBT [Transparency Champions programme](#) to further assist Members in implementing and benefitting from the TBT transparency framework.

1.3.3 Reports by the Secretariat

1.25. In accordance with Article 15.3 of the TBT Agreement, the Committee undertakes an annual review of the implementation and operation of the TBT Agreement. The Secretariat prepares an annual report to facilitate this review, containing information and statistics related to notifications circulated, specific trade concerns raised, technical assistance activities conducted, key topics discussed as well as relevant disputes.¹³ Following the increased use of digital tools, the Secretariat has been able to include more statistics and graphs in these reports. The latest Annual Review report is contained in document [G/TBT/47](#).

1.26. In accordance with Article 15.4 of the TBT Agreement, the Committee conducts a "triennial review" of the operation and implementation of the Agreement every three years. The Triennial Review contains decisions and recommendations agreed upon by the Committee, which are negotiated based on proposals from Members. The latest Ninth Triennial Review (2021) concluded with 37 recommendations, contained in document [G/TBT/46](#).

1.3.4 Participation by external stakeholders

1.27. 24 organizations have observer status in the TBT Committee. Some provide regular updates to the Committee under the dedicated agenda item for Observers. Representatives of non-governmental entities (e.g. sectoral associations, enterprises, certification bodies, academia, etc.) are sometimes invited to participate in the TBT Committee's thematic sessions.

1.3.5 Work with other Committees or WTO bodies

1.28. In June 2019, the TBT Committee organized a thematic session in coordination with the SPS Committee in light of a specific Eighth Triennial Review recommendation to exchange information on practices to determine whether a measure falls under the SPS and/or TBT Agreement.¹⁴

1.29. The Secretariat sometimes provides updates and information in other Committees. For example, representatives of the Secretariat TBT Team have presented at SPS committee events on the topics of equivalence and transparency. In addition, presentations on eAgenda and the Trade Concerns Database have been delivered to CTG, CMA and TF committee.

2 PAST EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

2.1. The Committee's practices evolve continuously.

¹² [G/TBT/GEN/317](#) - [G/SPS/GEN/1933](#), Annex B.

¹³ See latest Annual Review Report in [G/TBT/47](#).

¹⁴ [G/TBT/41](#), para. 6.19.d.

https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tbt_e/thematicsession1819_06_29_e.htm.