



Council for Trade in Goods

**REPORT ON THE WTO RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
AND PREPAREDNESS FOR FUTURE PANDEMICS¹**

REPORT BY THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN GOODS AND ITS SUBSIDIARY BODIES

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report has been prepared by the Council for Trade in Goods (Council or CTG) pursuant to paragraph 24 of the "Ministerial Declaration on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparedness for Future Pandemics" ([WT/MIN\(22\)/31](#)), which was adopted as part of the MC12 package. This paragraph provides as follows:

24. Relevant WTO bodies² will, within their fields of competence, and on the basis of proposals by Members, continue or initiate work as soon as possible, to analyze lessons that have been learned and challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. A stocktaking exercise will be taken of the work by WTO bodies under this declaration yearly at the General Council until the end of 2024, based on the reports of those relevant bodies.

¹ Report adopted at the formal meeting of the Council for Trade in Goods of 30 November 2023.

² Footnote 1 (original): Relevant WTO bodies include the Council for Trade in Goods or its subsidiary bodies (including the Committee on Trade Facilitation, the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade, the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, the Committee on Market Access, and the Committee on Agriculture), Trade Policy Review Body, Council for Trade in Services or its relevant subsidiary bodies, Council

1.2. On 22 June 2022, the Secretariat issued a report on the "WTO Secretariat's Work in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic" ([WT/MIN\(22\)/34](#)).

1.3. In September and early October 2022, following MC12, the Chairperson of the CTG consulted bilaterally with Members on how they wished to implement the different outcomes of MC12, including on the WTO response to the Pandemic. At an informal meeting of the Council that took place on 14 October 2022, the Chairperson reported on his consultations ([JOB/CTG/16](#)) and, on this issue, noted that, while some Members had considered that it would be useful to engage in technical discussions of a horizontal nature, in particular because the CTG oversaw the work of the five Committees mentioned in the footnote to paragraph 24, other Members had found it premature to engage in such discussions.

1.4. Since Members had expressed an interest at that meeting to better understand the work that had been undertaken in the aforementioned bodies³, on 25 October 2022, the Chairperson of the CTG requested the 14 Chairpersons of the CTG's subsidiary bodies to prepare reports, under their own responsibility and with the assistance of the Secretariat, on the WTO response to the Pandemic and the current functioning of their Committees.⁴ In addition, the Chairperson of the CTG also prepared his own reports on this issue. The reports listed in Annex 1 were discussed by Members at the informal meeting of the Council that took place on 31 January 2023.

1.5. This report compiles information on the work undertaken by the CTG and its 14 subsidiary bodies⁵ between the years 2020 and 2023 concerning their response to the COVID-19 pandemic and preparedness for future pandemics. It is largely based on the reports that were prepared by the Chairpersons of the CTG's subsidiary bodies, but also includes new developments in those bodies up until July 2023.

2 STOCKTAKING IN THE GOODS AREA

2.1 Transparency / Notifications / Voluntary Communications

2.1. This report covers the bodies which deal with trade in goods, in which several Members sought to provide transparency on the measures that they had adopted in response to, or in connection with, the COVID-19 pandemic in different ways, including through the regular notification obligations under the relevant Agreements and Decisions.

2.2. More specifically, 10 of the 15 bodies covered by this report received notifications from Members concerning measures introduced in response to, or in connection with, the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, three bodies (the CTG, the COA, and the CMA) received *ad hoc* communications with information on COVID-19-related measures that were submitted voluntarily by Members in the interest of transparency, above and beyond the minimum WTO notification requirements.

Body	Notifications and voluntary communications relating to the COVID-19 pandemic
Council for Trade in Goods (CTG)	<p><u>Notifications</u>: None.</p> <p><u>Ad hoc communications</u>: Three communications were submitted to the Council by two Members at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, which described a series of actions adopted with respect to tariffs, export restrictions, non-tariff barriers, and trade facilitation, and which included a list of products considered to be essential.</p>

for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, Committee on Trade and Development, Working Group on Trade and Technology Transfer and Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance.

³ See document [JOB/CTG/17](#).

⁴ See document [JOB/CTG/18](#).

⁵ The CTG's 14 subsidiary bodies are the Committee on Agriculture (COA), the Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices (ADP), the Committee on Customs Valuation (CCV), the Committee on Import Licensing (IL), the Committee on Market Access (CMA), the Committee on Rules of Origin (ROO), the Committee on Safeguards (SG), the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS), the Committee on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM), the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), the Committee on Trade Facilitation (CTF), the Committee on Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMs), the Working Party on State Trading Enterprises (WPSTE), and the Committee of Participants on the Expansion of Trade in Information Technology Products (ITA).

Body	Notifications and voluntary communications relating to the COVID-19 pandemic
Committee on Agriculture (COA)	<p>Notifications: From 2021, COVID-19 agricultural measures formed part of Members' annual notifications.</p> <p>Ad hoc communications: Since the majority of regular agricultural notifications are submitted annually, in June 2020 the Chairperson of the Committee encouraged Members to share <i>ad hoc</i> reports on their agricultural measures taken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Eleven Members submitted 22 <i>ad hoc</i> reports and updates on their COVID-19 agricultural measures, which were compiled and updated by the Secretariat in G/AG/W/209/Rev.1.</p> <p>Other: At the request of Members, the Secretariat developed a webpage on COVID-19 agricultural measures as part of the WTO's overall trade monitoring exercise.⁶</p>
Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices (ADP)	<p>Notifications: In accordance with Article 18.5 of the Anti-Dumping Agreement, four Members submitted legislative notifications illustrating the procedural adaptations they had undertaken in their trade remedies investigations as a result of COVID-19. As of 14 October 2022, four Members had notified anti-dumping actions referring to the COVID-19 pandemic. These pertained to the suspension of anti-dumping measures on syringes and parenteral solutions; syringes and vacuum plastic tubes for blood collection; textured polyester filament; and on aluminium-zinc coated steel.</p>
Committee on Import Licensing (IL)	<p>Notifications: A few Members submitted import licensing notifications on COVID-19-related goods, which were reviewed by the Committee. These notifications generally covered import licensing procedures on disinfectants and medical and diagnostic kits with the purpose of ensuring that imported products met adequate standards and did not pose a threat to animal, plant, and human life and/or health.</p>
Committee on Market Access (CMA)	<p>Notifications: The CMA has examined approximately 105 QR notifications containing 68 export prohibitions and restrictions by 39 Members. Since May 2020, the Secretariat has prepared a report listing the notifications relating to COVID-19, which has been regularly updated and circulated under the G/MA/W/157 document series. Export restrictions and prohibitions were most frequently used in the early phases of the pandemic, predominantly in the first and second quarter of 2020. These restrictions covered different categories of products following the evolution of the pandemic. Personal protective equipment, sanitizers and disinfectants, but also foodstuffs, were among the most restricted categories at the outset of the pandemic. At a later stage, COVID-19 vaccines, test kits and other medical devices and equipment were also subject to these measures.</p> <p>Ad hoc communications: The CMA considered approximately 30 communications by 17 Members containing 41 unilateral trade-easing measures on imports of COVID-19 goods. These were also listed in a report that was regularly updated by the Secretariat. These communications referred to trade-easing measures adopted by Members in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which sought to facilitate access to those goods considered essential to combat the pandemic. The trade-easing measures included: (i) tax-related measures, such as the reduction/suspension/elimination of import tariffs, internal taxes and other duties and charges to minimize costs to importers, businesses and consumers; as well as (ii) simplified customs procedures, expedited clearance, and paperless trade, to accelerate the import process and ensure resilient supply chains.</p>

⁶ [WTO | COVID-19: Agricultural Measures](#)

Body	Notifications and voluntary communications relating to the COVID-19 pandemic
Committee on Market Access (CMA) (cont'd)	<p><u>Other</u>: At the formal meeting of 12 and 16 November 2020, Members further tasked the Secretariat with preparing a more detailed report summarizing the content of these notifications and voluntary communications. The report was regularly circulated under the G/MA/W/168 document series and discussed at the formal CMA meetings. At the request of Members⁷, this report was modified in October 2021 to compile and analyse, in addition to the measures submitted to the CMA, information on trade and trade-related measures collected as part of the WTO's Trade Monitoring Exercise, as listed on the webpage COVID-19: Measures affecting trade in goods.</p>
Committee on Rules of Origin (ROO)	<p><u>Notifications</u>: None. However, some of the notifications to the Committee on Trade Facilitation described measures taken in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and which related to rules of origin and origin requirements.</p> <p><u>Other</u>: In May 2023, the Secretariat circulated a report on the "Origin Related Measures Taken During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Compilation of Measures Affecting Certificates of Origin and Proofs of Origin" (G/RO/W/219). This document consolidated information based on different sources, including the compendium of measures prepared for the Committee on Trade Facilitation (see below), the document with lessons learned in the Committee on Market Access, and the measures compiled in the context of the Trade Monitoring Exercise.</p>
Committee on Safeguards (SG)	<p><u>Notifications</u>: In accordance with Article 12.6 of the Agreement, one Member submitted several legislative notifications illustrating the procedural adaptations it had undertaken in its trade remedies investigations as a result of COVID-19.</p>
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)	<p><u>Notifications</u>: As of 1 July 2023, 31 Members had submitted a total of 133 SPS COVID-19-related documents, including notifications of new or changed SPS regulations and other communications. Initially, the notified measures mainly related to restrictions on imports of animals or animal products and/or transit from affected areas and increased certification requirements, many of which were subsequently lifted. While a few new restrictions were imposed at a later stage, most notifications and communications submitted since the beginning of April 2020 relate to measures taken to facilitate trade, representing about two-thirds of all notified measures. The last COVID-19-related SPS notifications were received on 16 January 2023.</p>
Committee on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM)	<p><u>Legislative Notifications</u>: In accordance with Article 32.6 of the Agreement, four Members submitted legislative notifications illustrating the procedural adaptations they had undertaken in their trade remedies investigations as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p><u>Subsidy Notifications</u>: In accordance with Article 25.1 of the Agreement and Article XVI of the GATT 1994, all Members were required to submit new and full notifications of subsidies by 30 June 2023. As of 21 July 2023, a total of nine Members have submitted subsidy notifications containing references to pandemic-related measures. The number of measures directly linked to the COVID-19 pandemic reached 142. In the broader context, there are 18 Members who have notified subsidy measures, while five Members have explicitly stated that they do not maintain any notifiable subsidies (the European Union is counted as one Member).</p>
Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)	<p><u>Notifications</u>: 34 Members submitted 225 COVID-19-related notifications to the TBT Committee.⁸ The notified measures mostly deal with extraordinary and temporary streamlining of certification and related procedures, and the introduction of new regulatory requirements for medical goods, in response to the pandemic.</p>

⁷ [G/MA/M/74](#), paragraphs 5.31 and 5.32.

⁸ The figures are current as of 26 October 2022.

Body	Notifications and voluntary communications relating to the COVID-19 pandemic
Committee on Trade Facilitation (CTF)	<p>Notifications: Under Section I of the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), Members are required to submit several transparency notifications under Articles 1.4 (import, export, and transit procedures); 10.4.3 (single window); 10.6.2 (customs brokers); and 12.2.2 (exchange of customs information). Eight Members submitted transparency notifications to update the sources of information for measures undertaken to face the pandemic in the period 2020-2022.⁹</p> <p>Other: On 25 March 2021, Members agreed, through written procedures, to request the Secretariat to prepare a compilation of trade facilitation measures implemented by WTO Members and observers in response to COVID-19. Since then, the Secretariat has updated the compendium which has been circulated under the G/TFA/W/40/Rev document series.</p>

2.2 Trade Concerns

2.3. Four of the 15 bodies covered by this report considered trade concerns raised against measures introduced in response to, or in connection with, the COVID-19 pandemic. These included the Council for Trade in Goods¹⁰ and the Committee on Market Access¹¹, both of which considered the same trade concern relating to an export licensing requirement on COVID-19 vaccines. In the context of the SPS Committee, two specific trade concerns were raised against measures that made a link to COVID-19.¹² Finally, in the TBT Committee, WTO Members made references to the COVID-19 pandemic in 54 specific trade concerns (STCs). The vast majority of these STCs were not linked to COVID-19-related notifications or medical goods. Rather, they addressed the significant impact of the pandemic on Members' economies, in particular: (i) the difficulties to comply with regulatory requirements; (ii) the difficulties to perform conformity assessment procedures; and (iii) the overall impact on Members' work in the areas of standards and regulations.

2.3 Dedicated/Experience-Sharing Sessions

2.4. Between 2021 and 2023, 10 of the 15 bodies covered by this report had at least one dedicated discussion relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the measures covered by their terms of reference. While most bodies addressed these issues in the context of formal or informal meetings, some of these bodies organized dedicated sessions or experience-sharing sessions on the issues.

Body	Dedicated sessions/experience-sharing sessions
Council for Trade in Goods (CTG)	At its meeting of 10 June 2020, the Council considered a proposal (G/C/W/780) for the CTG to have increased monitoring and transparency of trade-related measures introduced in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, and to include a dedicated item on the CTG's agenda to discuss them (G/C/M/137). The proposal was discussed again at the formal meeting of 25 November 2020, but there was no consensus on it (G/C/M/138).
Committee on Agriculture (COA)	On 18 June 2020, a special meeting of the Committee was convened pursuant to paragraph 6 of the Committee's working procedures (G/AG/1), which focused on COVID-19 and agricultural trade policies within the framework of the Agreement. ¹³ At this meeting, Members emphasized the importance of transparency and of the monitoring of COVID-19 agricultural measures, and agreed to include "COVID-19 and Agriculture" as a standing item on the agenda of future Committee meetings. On 28 July 2020, the Secretariat organized an Information Session with a number of international organizations (see below).

⁹ Canada, China, Dominican Republic, European Union, Indonesia, Switzerland, Chinese Taipei, United States.

¹⁰ See [G/C/M/139](#).

¹¹ See [G/MA/M/74](#).

¹² See [SPS STC 487](#) and [SPS STC 488](#).

¹³ The summary report of this meeting is contained in documents [G/AG/R/94](#) and [G/AG/R/94/Add.1](#).

Body	Dedicated sessions/experience-sharing sessions
Committee on Agriculture (COA) (cont'd)	The discussions under the standing agenda item have been organized based on Members' submissions, as well as contributions by observer international organizations. ¹⁴ Since the September 2022 meeting of the Committee, the discussions on COVID-19 and agriculture have taken place within the overall guidance of the MC12 Declaration on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparedness for Future Pandemics, specifically in light of paragraph 24 of the Declaration. The Committee also addresses COVID-19-related matters, as relevant, in the context of the implementation of the Ministerial Decision on World Food Programme Food Purchases Exemption from Export Prohibition or Restrictions ¹⁵ , and the Ministerial Declaration on the Emergency Response to Food Insecurity. ¹⁶
Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices (ADP)	Two Members requested to place an item on the agenda of the October 2020 meeting pertaining to Members' anti-dumping investigation procedures during the pandemic, including the temporary suspension of international onsite verifications. At this meeting, Members explored, in an informal mode, whether competent authorities had made any adjustments to their laws, practices, or procedures as they continued to operate during the pandemic period, and the different approaches followed by Members in this respect. ¹⁷
Committee on Customs Valuation (CCV)	At its meeting of 24 May 2023, Members were invited to share information on customs valuation experiences and practices since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Conducted in informal mode, this discussion included presentations by three Members.
Committee on Import Licensing (IL)	At its meeting of 7 March 2022, the Chairperson informed Members of a series of experience-sharing sessions on trade in COVID-19-related goods being organized by the Committee on Market Access and sought delegations' views on the Committee holding a similar experience-sharing session in respect of import licensing procedures. There was no consensus.
Committee on Market Access (CMA)	<p>The CMA has discussed measures relating to the COVID-19 pandemic both in its regular work and, since 2022, in the context of experience-sharing sessions. The first discussion took place on 20 May 2020, in the context of an informal meeting, which had COVID-19 as the main substantive topic on the agenda. In addition to presentations by the Secretariat on two information notes which had been prepared¹⁸, the Committee also shared experiences and discussed notifications concerning export restrictions and prohibitions which had been notified under the QR Decision¹⁹, as well as <i>ad hoc</i> communications with unilateral trade measures aimed at easing the importation of COVID-19 essential goods. Since June 2020, and until April 2023, the item "Trade-Related Measures Relating to the COVID-19 Pandemic" was included on the agenda of the Committee's formal meetings.</p> <p>On 28 January 2022, the CMA held an Information session on trade in COVID-19-related goods where the WTO Secretariat presented five reports and information notes that were relevant to the work of the Committee, as well as the WTO-IMF COVID-19 Vaccine Tracker. Based on inputs received from Members, the CMA agreed to organize five experience-sharing sessions to discuss the topics which had been identified by Members, which took place on 4 March 2022, 26 April 2022, 18 July 2022, 16 September 2022, and 21 November 2022. These sessions were held based on a flexible and bottom-up approach. At each session, Members volunteered to share information and data on their national experiences in relation to the relevant topics. In light of the close relationship between some of these topics with the application of the Harmonized System (HS), the World Customs Organization (WCO) was invited to participate in the first two sessions on classification and monitoring of trade in COVID-19 goods. The Secretariat summarized the discussions of each experience-sharing session in document JOB/MA/152 and its addenda. A sixth session focusing on the experiences of the Least Developed Members took place on 24 March 2023.</p>

¹⁴ Please refer to attachment 2 of [WTO/AIR/AG/64](#) for a comprehensive list of COVID-19 written submissions considered by the Committee starting from the June 2020 special meeting.

¹⁵ [WT/MIN\(22\)/29](#).

¹⁶ [WT/MIN\(22\)/28](#).

¹⁷ [G/ADP/M/58](#).

¹⁸ "[Trade in Medical Goods](#)" and "[Export Prohibitions and Restrictions](#)".

¹⁹ 2012 Decision on the notification of Quantitative Restrictions, [G/L/59/Rev.1](#).

Body	Dedicated sessions/experience-sharing sessions
Committee on Rules of Origin (ROO)	There were no COVID-19-related activities in the context of the CRO. However, during the CRO meeting held on 13 November 2020, the Secretariat drew the Committee's attention to the fact that a number of Members had implemented trade-facilitating measures in relation to origin requirements (RD/RO/90). Some delegations also took the floor to report on the measures that they had introduced (G/RO/M/75 , agenda item 6).
Committee on Safeguards (SG)	Two Members requested to place an item on the agenda of the 26 October 2020 meeting pertaining to Members' safeguards investigation procedures during the pandemic. ²⁰ Members explored, in an informal mode, whether competent authorities had made any adjustments to their laws, practices, or procedures as they continued to operate during the pandemic period, and the different approaches followed by Members in this respect.
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)	In June 2020, the SPS Committee held an informal information-sharing session on COVID-19 . The programme was circulated in document G/SPS/GEN/1795 . The WTO Secretariat presented an overview of documents submitted by Members in relation to COVID-19. The STDF presented on its COVID-19 response, underscoring the importance of building food safety and animal and plant health capacity to enable the public and private sectors, especially in developing countries, to respond to crises. Members also provided information on their activities undertaken since the beginning of the pandemic and stressed the importance of providing a coordinated response to ensure that trade in agricultural and food products was not unduly disrupted. In addition, several external stakeholders participated in this session (see Section 2.4, below). The report of the session is contained in document G/SPS/R/98 .
Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)	<p>Members discussed and exchanged experiences on COVID-19-related matters in the TBT Committee, including at an informal meeting of the TBT Committee held on 8 December 2020²¹; at the thematic session on technical assistance held on 27 October 2020²²; during 2021 in the context of the Ninth Triennial Review of the TBT Agreement²³; and at the thematic session on conformity assessment procedures held on 8 March 2022.²⁴ These discussions related to trade-facilitating measures and regulatory flexibilities introduced in the context of the pandemic, technical assistance, and capacity-building projects, development of and access to standards, and the role of accreditation.</p> <p>At the 10 February 2022 informal meeting of the TBT Committee, Members shared views on how the Committee could initiate its Ninth Triennial Review mandated work on COVID-19 and future pandemic preparedness. At the 9-11 March 2022 meeting of the TBT Committee, and in this connection, Members requested the Secretariat to prepare a background document on the COVID-19-related work of the TBT Committee since the start of the pandemic as a reference point for further work.²⁵</p>
Committee on Trade Facilitation (CTF)	<p>On 30 September 2020, the CTF held an informal meeting to discuss the trade facilitation measures that Members had implemented in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Twenty Members informed the Committee of the measures that they had implemented, and several external stakeholders also presented their views (see Section 2.4, below). Following this meeting, Members continued the practice of sharing their experiences in responding to the pandemic under the regular sessions of the Committee.</p> <p>In 2023, the CTF has thus far held two informal panel discussions, organized by the United States on "Disaster Preparedness: A View from the Border". The objective of the panel discussions was to share experiences and highlight the challenges WTO Members, aid agencies, and non-governmental organizations face in moving humanitarian aid and relief supplies across international borders during times of disaster, whatever form it may take. The intent of the panel discussions is to identify future work the Committee on Trade Facilitation could undertake to streamline procedures and expedite humanitarian shipments.</p>

²⁰ [G/SG/M/57](#), paragraphs 17.1-17.4; see also [G/SG/M/57/Corr.1](#).

²¹ [JOB/TBT/395](#); [RD/TBT/333](#); [RD/TBT/336](#); [RD/TBT/337](#); [RD/TBT/338](#); [RD/TBT/339](#).

²² [G/TBT/GEN/306](#).

²³ [G/TBT/46](#); [G/TBT/W/736](#).

²⁴ [JOB/TBT/447](#).

²⁵ [G/TBT/M/86](#), paragraph 2.478.

2.4 Input from External Stakeholders

2.5. Five of the 15 bodies covered by this report invited different types of external stakeholders to provide inputs to their discussions, including other international organizations and representatives of the private sector.

Body	Input from external stakeholders
Committee on Agriculture (COA)	<p>At the Committee's special meeting of 18 June 2020, Members agreed to invite the observer international organizations to contribute to the discussions under a standing item entitled "COVID-19 and Agriculture", and benefit from their work on the monitoring and analysis of COVID-19 agricultural measures.</p> <p>On 28 July 2020, the Secretariat organized an Information Session where the following organizations were invited: Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFRPI); the International Grains Council (IGC); and the International Trade Centre (ITC) to present their COVID-19-related work.</p>
Committee on Market Access (CMA)	<p>At the request of Members, the fifth experience-sharing session of the CMA, which took place on 21 November 2022, focused mainly on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, and involved representatives from the private sector (DHL and Western Union of Dominica, CEPI, and Medtronic) and other international organizations (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)).</p>
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)	<p>At a dedicated session that took place in June 2020, the three relevant international standard-setting bodies (Codex Alimentarius, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH), and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC)), WHO, and other observer organizations provided information on their activities undertaken since the beginning of the pandemic. The WHO explained the role of the International Health Regulations in facilitating information exchange on public health responses, ensuring that responses are commensurate to the risk and avoiding unnecessary interference with international trade and transportation. The WHO also referred to its COVID-19-related guidance, produced with FAO, for food businesses and food safety control systems. See G/SPS/R/98.</p> <p>In June 2022, the SPS Committee held a Thematic Session on the Use of Remote (Virtual) Audit and Verification in Regulatory Frameworks.²⁶ The purpose of the thematic session was to provide an opportunity to share experiences on the use of remote assessment methods, discuss how such approaches may assist Members with their obligations under Annex C of the SPS Agreement, and take a closer look at the relevance and scope for future use. It also sought to provide insight on ongoing initiatives, including guidance being developed by Codex under its Committee on Food Import and Export Inspection and Certification Systems (CCFICS), and allow Members and industry representatives to discuss the benefits and challenges of remote audit, drawing from their experiences.</p>
Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)	<p>A range of external stakeholders participated in experience-sharing sessions described in Section 2.3 (above), including the Advanced Medical Technology Association (AdvaMed), the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand (JAS-ANZ), and Phillips.</p>
Committee on Trade Facilitation (CTF)	<p>At the invitation of the Chairperson of the CTF, several organizations participated at the informal meeting of 30 September 2020: the International Trade Centre, the World Bank, the World Customs Organization, and the United Nations Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD) (all Annex D trade facilitation partners); and the Global Alliance updated the Membership on their COVID-19 trade facilitation work.</p>

²⁶ The dedicated webpage for the Thematic Session can be accessed here: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/sps_e/thematic_session_21jun22_e.htm.

Body	Input from external stakeholders
Committee on Trade Facilitation (CTF) (cont'd)	In the March and June 2023 informal panel discussions organized by the United States on "Disaster Preparedness: A View from the Border" (see section 2.3, above), the following external stakeholders participated: the IMPACCT (IMPortation and Customs Clearance Together!) Working Group, International Medical Corps, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), Medair, Médecins sans Frontières, the UN International Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA).

2.5 Secretariat Information Notes

2.6. Annex 1 to the report on the "WTO Secretariat's Work in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic" ([WT/MIN\(22\)/34](#)) provides a full list of all Information Notes, Databases, Staff Working Papers, and Joint Publications with other International Organizations concerning COVID-19, including those produced in the goods area.

2.7. In addition, the Secretariat has continued updating the dedicated WTO [COVID-19 and world trade](#) section of the WTO website, which contains all COVID-19-related news as well as information on COVID-19-related WTO work, reports, and events. The subsection "[COVID-19: Measures affecting trade in goods](#)", compiles two sets of measures: the first set contains information and measures identified from official sources, including notifications, and government and ministry websites and communications; while the second set contains information and measures obtained from other public sources, for example, media reports. This list is only available on the Members' website. Neither section is exhaustive.

2.6 Relevant Outcomes

2.8. For the moment, the Committee on Market Access is the only body of the 15 covered by this report which has agreed to concrete outcomes, which relate to the following two areas:

- Proposals to the Harmonized System Committee:** As a result of the discussions that took place during the first two experience-sharing sessions, the CMA Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, submitted a letter to the Harmonized System Committee (HSC) of the WCO ([G/MA/406](#)) to raise awareness among WCO delegates of some of the key issues that had been faced by WTO Members with respect to the classification of COVID-19 essential goods, and to propose practical suggestions to improve the HS classification of certain essential medical goods in the next version of the nomenclature (HS2027). The CMA letter was included on the agenda of the 70th Session of the HSC, which took place in September 2022, and the CMA Chairperson and the WTO Secretariat were invited to attend the meeting. The statement by the CMA Chairperson to the HSC was circulated in document [JOB/MA/155](#). To date, the WCO has been discussing two possible amendments to the HS2027 nomenclature stemming from the CMA process with respect to the classification of (i) facemasks and respirators; and (ii) ambulances and mobile clinics;
- Document on lessons learned from the experience-sharing sessions:** At the fifth experience-sharing session of 21 November 2022, Members requested the Secretariat to prepare a report compiling the main lessons learned by Members from the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁷ Based on a draft prepared by the Secretariat, and following informal consultations that took place on 9 February 2023, on 20 April 2023 the CMA agreed to a document entitled "Lessons Learned from the Experience-Sharing Sessions on Trade in COVID-19-Related Goods" ([G/MA/409](#)). A request for additional lessons learned was submitted afterwards and is currently being discussed in the Committee.

²⁷ Document [JOB/MA/152/Add.4](#).

3 LESSONS LEARNED AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED IN THE GOODS AREA

3.1. Paragraph 23 of the Ministerial Declaration on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparedness for Future Pandemics underscores the importance of understanding how WTO rules have supported Members during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their role in future pandemics, and affirms the need to review and build on all the lessons learned and the challenges experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, to build effective solutions in case of future pandemics.

3.2. The Council welcomes the experiences shared and analysis developed by its subsidiary bodies. It would underline the detailed contents of CMA Report Lessons Learned from the Experience-Sharing Sessions on Trade in COVID-19 Related Good ([G/MA/409](#)), within the area of its competence.

3.3. The Council highlights the following elements in particular:

3.1 Improving coordination and cooperation at different levels

3.4. Many Members established or reinforced interagency coordination mechanisms, as well as improved dialogue with non-state actors to inform the policymaking response at each step. Timely coordination among relevant government agencies and other stakeholders was a critical component to keep under control the spread of the virus.

3.5. International organizations played a key role in supporting Members' responses to the pandemic. The need for greater collaboration among International Organizations, and for more flexibility in the way in which they provide support to their membership, was considered.

3.2 Understanding trade-related measures during crises

3.6. Members recognized that trade played a key role in the fight against COVID-19. Facilitating the access to and affordability of COVID-19 essential goods, and sharing information about their trade-related measures through regular notifications to the WTO, were highlighted.

3.7. Some Members touched upon export restrictions, highlighting that they may be used as "last resort" measures to manage domestic supply issues in emergency situations. When introduced, they should be transparent, temporary, necessary and proportionate. LDCs suggested that WTO should facilitate conversation among Members on the use of restrictions during times of crisis which may adversely impact economies. Some Members noted that export restrictions should include a review mechanism, and exemptions and exceptions should be made available and be based on, *inter alia*, the principle of international solidarity.

3.8. In case important elements are not covered by a notification obligation, providing additional information, on a voluntary basis, should be considered. For example with respect to: the type of measures; the rationale underpinning the introduction of such measures, their extension or termination; and information about their effectiveness.

3.9. Bilateral and regional cooperation played a crucial role in addressing the impact of the pandemic on LDCs, particularly landlocked LDCs. Some Members, including LDCs, highlighted the importance of facilitating trade flows, ensuring transit of essential goods, and restoring supply chain connectivity, by reducing or eliminating tariff and non-tariff measures on COVID-19 essential goods.

3.3 Enhancing transparency and experience-sharing at the WTO

3.10. Transparency is one of the main pillars of the WTO and Members recognized that this is even more important during crises. To better understand the impact and implications of COVID-19 pandemic on international trade, several Members stressed the importance of sharing information and experiences amongst themselves with a view to identifying common issues and solutions to respond to this and future emergencies.

3.4 Improving data collection and sharing information

3.11. Having access to timely and detailed trade data is an essential element for the adoption of informed trade policy measures. It is also key to understanding the impact of the pandemic on global supply chains of essential goods and the effects that COVID-19 had on industries, particularly on micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

3.5 The role of digitalization

3.12. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digital transformation in many Members and sectors of their economies. At the same time, it also accentuated the importance of bridging the digital divide for a better response to pandemics. The international community plays a key role in facilitating a dialogue and collaboration among Members for the design and implementation of global rules for more inclusive digitalization.

3.6 Identify "essential" goods and their tariff classification

3.13. The identification of essential goods varied from one Member to the other and included health-related items as well as foodstuffs, particularly in the case of LDCs. The guidance of International Organizations proved useful in informing the approach taken by Members in the identification of their list of essential goods and their tariff classification. Some Members and external stakeholders discussed sharing information about their national lists of essential products and classification decisions, with a view to pooling information and facilitating the establishment of common reference lists and their regular update.

**ANNEX 1:
REPORTS BY THE CTG AND SUBSIDIARY BODIES
CONCERNING THE WTO RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC**

WTO Body	Report (Document Symbol)
Council for Trade in Goods (CTG)	G/L/1464
Committee on Agriculture (COA)	G/L/1469
Committee on Anti-Dumping Practices (ADP)	G/L/1448
Committee on Import Licensing (IL)	G/L/1478
Committee on Market Access (CMA)	G/L/1459
Committee on Rules of Origin (ROO)	G/L/1466
Committee on Safeguards (SG)	G/L/1451
Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)	G/L/1477
Committee on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM)	G/L/1450
Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT)	G/L/1457
Committee on Trade Facilitation (CTF)	G/L/1475
Committee on Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMs)	G/L/1453
Working Party on State Trading Enterprises (STEs)	G/L/1455