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**Council for Trade in Services**

**REPORT TO THE GENERAL COUNCIL ON IMPROVEMENTS IN THE  
FUNCTIONING OF THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN SERVICES**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

1.1. This report has been prepared by the Council for Trade in Services (CTS) pursuant to the mandate on WTO Reform set out in paragraph 3 of the "MC12 Outcome Document"<sup>1</sup>, which instructs the General Council and its subsidiary bodies to "conduct the work, review progress, and consider decisions, as appropriate, to be submitted to the next Ministerial Conference".

1.2. This report provides information on the ongoing efforts to improve the functioning of the CTS by highlighting the improvements realised since the conclusion of MC12. Section 2 describes the process followed by the CTS in implementing this mandate. Section 3 takes stock of the main outcomes the discussion has yielded to date.

**2 PROCESS**

2.1. The CTS addressed the Ministerial mandate related to WTO reform at all its meetings following MC12.

2.2. In the lead-up to the CTS meeting in October 2022, the first formal meeting following MC12, the then-Chairperson held bilateral consultations to gather Members' views on the implementation matters relevant to the CTS as per the MC12 Decisions and Declarations.

2.3. At the formal CTS meeting in October 2022, the then-Chairperson reported on the views he had heard from delegations relevant to WTO reform.<sup>2</sup> He conveyed that several delegations had emphasised the need for transparent, open, inclusive, pragmatic, and Member-driven discussions. Regarding potential reform elements in the CTS, many delegations referred to its monitoring and deliberative function, while others mentioned its working practices. Learning from the experience of other WTO bodies was also deemed valuable by certain Members.

2.4. At the formal CTS meeting in December 2022, some Members reiterated the suggestion that the CTS could draw inspiration from the practices of other WTO bodies. Specific requests for organising meetings of the CTS and its subsidiary bodies back-to-back, to facilitate Capital-based participation, and that the Chairperson issue an annotated agenda for future meetings of the CTS were met with support.

2.5. Following further consultations organised by the then-Chairperson<sup>3</sup>, at its March meeting, the Council agreed to task the Secretariat with mapping the practices of the CTS and its most active subsidiary body, the Committee on Specific Commitments (CSC), in a similar manner to what had been done for the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG) and its subsidiary bodies but taking due account of the specificities of the services context. Additionally, Members also welcomed the readiness of the Secretariat to resume its practice of organising training sessions for new delegates, and specifically requested that the session also address GATS notifications.

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<sup>1</sup> [WT/MIN\(22\)/24](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Chairperson's report was subsequently circulated in document [JOB/SERV/CTS/6](#) and [JOB/SERV/CTS/6/Add.1](#).

<sup>3</sup> The Chairperson's report was circulated in document [JOB/SERV/CTS/9](#).

2.6. The Secretariat Note mapping the CTS and CSC practices was considered at the formal CTS meeting in June.<sup>4</sup> Delegations put forward a number of suggestions for improving the functioning of the CTS, and the CTS agreed that the Secretariat would compile and circulate a list of these suggestions for further consideration.

2.7. At the formal CTS meeting in October, Members addressed the Secretariat compilation<sup>5</sup> and considered a communication from the United Kingdom<sup>6</sup> outlining proposals to improve the functioning of the CTS and its subsidiary bodies. Delegations also shared additional suggestions for possible improvements at the meeting. It was agreed that the Chairperson would prepare, under her own responsibility, a report summarising the reactions to the various proposals Members had put forward and that an informal CTS meeting will be convened around mid-November to discuss next steps on the way forward.

2.8. At the informal CTS meeting in November, Members shared their views on the Chairperson's report<sup>7</sup> and deliberated on the way forward. While a handful of reform elements saw general convergence among Members, there was acknowledgement that further discussion was needed concerning other reform proposals summarised in the Chairperson's report.

2.9. In addition, the Secretariat gave a presentation on the use of eAgenda in the TBT Committee, which was well-received by Members, offering valuable insights for considering the use of eAgenda in the CTS. Members conveyed overall support for the CTS to produce a report on reform efforts to the General Council.

2.10. At the formal CTS meeting in December, Members agreed to implement a number of further improvements, as detailed in Section 3.

### **3 IMPROVEMENTS IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE CTS**

3.1. As a result of the above-mentioned process, the following improvements to the CTS functioning have been introduced or implemented, including changes which have been formally adopted and changes where the Secretariat has taken action following discussions in the CTS.

3.2. The improvements can be categorized into three broad areas: assistance to delegations to participate in the work of the CTS; planning, organization and conduct of CTS meetings; use of digital tools. This Section lists the improvements in these areas. It should not be interpreted as an inventory of the practices currently applied, but rather as a list of the changes that have been agreed or implemented since MC12.

3.3. With a view to assisting delegates to better participate in the work of the CTS:

- a. In September 2023, the Secretariat resumed its practice of organising training sessions for new delegates, covering the state of play of services discussions, other areas of work the Trade in Services and Investment Division is involved in, and GATS notifications. The presentations and a recording of the session were made available on a dedicated WTO website for Members to consult.<sup>8</sup>

3.4. With a view to improving the planning, organization and conduct of meetings:

- a. The Secretariat will maintain its practice of circulating the schedule of services meetings for the year ahead and communicates, at least three weeks in advance of each cluster, the schedule of the upcoming meetings with the indication of the date of the closure of the respective agendas.

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<sup>4</sup> [S/C/W/433](#)

<sup>5</sup> [JOB/SERV/CTS/14/Rev.1](#)

<sup>6</sup> [S/C/W/452](#)

<sup>7</sup> [JOB/SERV/CTS/19](#)

<sup>8</sup> [WTO | Briefing session for new delegates on the state of play of Services work and GATS notifications](#)

- b. The Secretariat makes its utmost efforts to organise meetings of the CTS and its subsidiary bodies back-to-back to facilitate Capital-based participation.
- c. Since the beginning of 2023, the CTS Chairperson circulates a communication containing an annotated agenda for the formal meetings of the CTS. It was stressed that the annotated agenda needed to be factual and should be circulated at the same time as the airgram.
- d. The minutes of the CTS should be circulated in a timely manner, subject to delegations promptly sharing their statements with the Secretariat. The current approach for the CTS minutes, which are drafted in reported style and reflect all discussions, should be maintained.
- e. The CTS decided that its airgram will be circulated 15 days prior to the formal meetings of the CTS, instead of the current ten days, on a trial basis until the end of 2024.

3.5. With a view to improving work by making use of digital tools:

- a. The CTS will introduce eAgenda on a trial basis until the end of 2024.
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