

# The WTO trade monitoring database

## Enhancing transparency and accountability

The Trade Monitoring Update series is a WTO Secretariat initiative to provide regular and concise insights into issues of interest in the context of the WTO Trade Monitoring Exercise. The Updates are produced under the WTO Secretariat's own responsibility and do not reflect the views or positions of any WTO Member.

The WTO Trade Monitoring Exercise is a factual, non-legal exercise that provides transparency regarding new trade and trade policy related measures. Two Trade Monitoring Reports are circulated every year, in July and December, allowing WTO Members to undertake an interactive peer review at the WTO Headquarters in Geneva. The Reports are developed in close cooperation with WTO Members and cover trade measures implemented in the areas of goods, services and intellectual property. They also provide up-to-date accounts on other issues, including trade remedies, SPS, TBT and agriculture.

The Trade Monitoring Exercise was launched in early 2009 following the outbreak of the Global Financial Crisis<sup>1</sup> with the objective of providing WTO Members and Observers with regular updates on all trade and trade-related measures implemented in the context of the crisis. It is the only cross-cutting transparency tool within the framework of the WTO.

The exercise has subsequently become a regular function of the WTO, further strengthening the transparency objectives of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM). It sheds light on the latest trends in the implementation of a broad range of policy measures that impact the flow of trade. The Trade Monitoring Exercise is overseen by the Trade Policy Review Body (TPRB) and derives its mandate from the TPRM. The exercise is intended to be purely factual and has no legal effect on the rights and obligations of WTO Members.

The objective of this update is to provide a brief introduction to the [Trade Monitoring Database \(TMDB\)](#) as a key tool of the Trade Monitoring Exercise. It provides a snapshot of the information available in the TMDB and shares examples of some of the overall findings since 2008. Finally, the TMDB gained further impetus from the recent conclusion of the 7<sup>th</sup> Appraisal of the TPRM with WTO Members recognizing the importance of the platform in facilitating the submission and verification of trade measures.

## Background

The WTO Secretariat releases four Trade Monitoring Reports annually, two covering all WTO Members and two covering the G20 economies. The reports cover trade measures in goods, services, intellectual property, general economic support programmes and provide substantive overviews on a range of other issues such as trade remedies, Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) measures, and agriculture-related measures. In addition, the reports capture important developments related to the outcomes of ministerial conferences.

The reports are based on information on trade and trade-related measures implemented by WTO Members and Observers. The G20 reports and the WTO mid-year report cover six-month periods while the WTO year-end report (Annual Overview) covers 12 months. The G20 reports on Trade and Investment Measures are prepared in coordination with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

The data collection process upon which the reports are built begins with a communication from the Director-General to all WTO Members and Observers requesting them to inform the WTO Secretariat of any measures taken during the review period and submit them through the dedicated online platform or via email. The monitoring exercise also utilizes information gathered from various non-official sources, such as news articles, press releases and other public media sources. This information is collected throughout the year and submitted for verification by Members.

<sup>1</sup> In London, in April 2009, G20 Leaders called on the WTO, together with other international bodies, within their respective mandates, to monitor and report publicly on G20 adherence to resisting protectionism and promoting global trade and investment. This call became the mandate under which the WTO, UNCTAD and the OECD have submitted regular reports to the G20 ever since.  
Pedersen P. and Diakantoni A., "Lessons Learnt and Challenges Ahead for the WTO Trade Monitoring Exercise", 24 February 2020. Viewed at: [ersd202003\\_e.pdf \(wto.org\)](#).

The communication from the Director-General indicates the deadline for Members' inputs and invites delegations to verify any new trade and trade-related information which relates to their respective economy as well as to update any trade measure previously identified.

The verification process is a cornerstone of the WTO Monitoring Exercise and is fundamental for the stakeholder relationship which exists between the Secretariat and Members to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the Exercise. Since January 2023, the verification process takes also place through an online platform which is part of TMDB.<sup>2</sup> If a measure is not verified, it is recorded as such.

Each Report provides an overview of trade measures implemented during the review period. Goods measures are listed in Annexes 1, 2, and 3 of the Reports. Annex 1 contains measures that are clearly facilitating trade, e.g., tariff reductions or elimination of customs procedures. Annex 2 contains trade remedy measures initiated or terminated during the review period. Annex 3 contains measures that may be considered to have a trade-restrictive effect and are described as "Other trade and trade-related measures". Annex 4 covers measures on services. Intellectual Property measures are listed in the specific section on this issue.

In addition, the Reports provide estimates on the trade coverage of the measures implemented during the review period. These calculations cover only the goods' measures (Annex 1-3) and are conducted based on available 6-digit HS codes. Measures outlined in individual sections of the reports on services, agriculture, intellectual property, SPS or TBT are not included in the total counting of measures.

## Counting of Goods' Measures in the TMDB

As of end September 2023, the TMDB contains 12,245 measures adopted by WTO Members and Observers since 2008. However, when extracting the information users will get some 6,815 entries, and here is why. In TMDB, the measures on goods are counted as follows:

- i. The counting of anti-dumping or countervailing measures reflects the number of Members targeted by the specific trade remedy action. For instance, an anti-dumping measure initiated by the Member X on imports of a certain product originating in Member Y and Member Z will be counted as two measures. The same methodology applies to terminations of anti-dumping or countervailing actions. There are about 3,000 trade remedy terminations counting towards the 12,245 total measures.
- ii. with the exception of anti-dumping and countervailing:
  - measures recorded for the EU are counted as one. Measures recorded for other Customs Unions are counted to reflect the number of members of the group. For instance, a measure adopted by SACU is counted as 5 measures (because it is adopted, respectively, by Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa).
  - MFN, regional or bilateral measures are each counted as one measure, despite the number of products covered or the number of trading partners participating.

The WTO-wide monitoring reports are discussed by WTO Members in meetings of the TPRB in July and December, respectively. The G20 Reports are submitted to the G20 Presidency and G20 sherpas.

The TMDB underpins the reports by cataloguing information on goods, intellectual property, and services-related trade measures. For the preparation of the reports and the assessment of trends, trade measures are categorised as trade-facilitating or trade-restricting. The TMDB does, however, neither include nor categorise TBT and SPS measures as those agreements allow Members to legally take measures which may restrict trade. In addition, the TMDB does not include any measures which have been implemented with reference to national security or as a sanction. The TMDB does, however, include comprehensive coverage of trade-remedy measures taken by the membership, but without any categorization. What is and what is not categorized or included in the TMDB takes into account discussions among Members as well as consultations between Members and the Secretariat.

The TMDB allows users to access detailed information through various search and filter options and is continuously updated by the Trade Monitoring Section of the WTO.

<sup>2</sup> Delegations that are unable to use the online platform can continue submitting or verifying their trade measures by using the e-mail-based method.

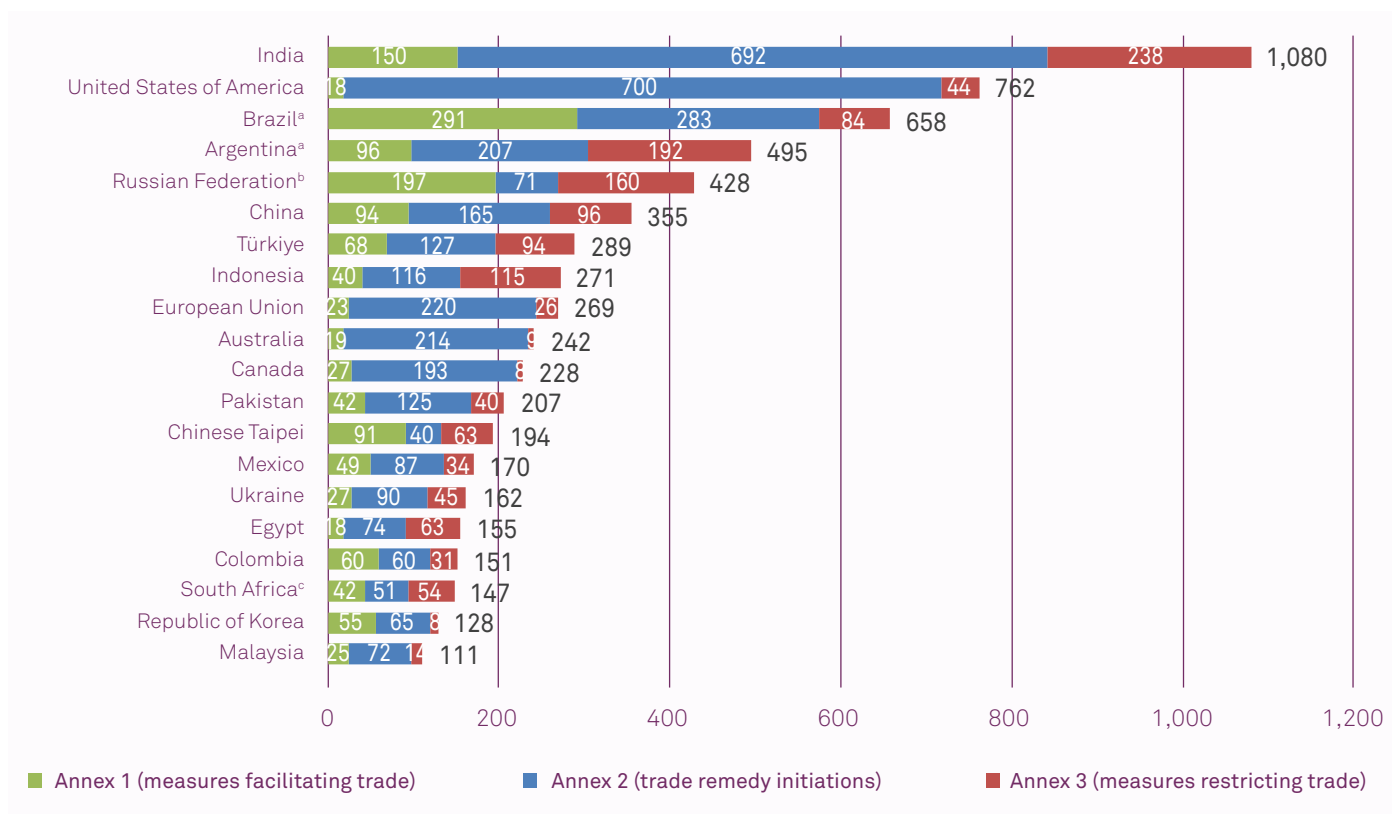
## Some Goods' Measures recorded in the TMDB

The TMDB contains 12'245 goods measures recorded between mid-October 2008 and mid-May 2023. Some 58% of recorded measures are trade remedies (initiations and terminations), 22% are measures facilitating trade and 20% are trade restrictive.

Chart 1 below illustrates the top 20 Members with the most trade and trade-related measures recorded in the TMDB from mid-October 2008 until mid-May 2023.

The measures shown in the chart below make up more than half (53%) of all records in the TMDB. Among these, 56% are initiations of trade remedies classified under Annex 2, 22% under Annex 1, and the remaining 22% are recorded in Annex 3.

**Chart 1) Top twenty Members by number of measures on goods recorded in the TMDB (mid-October 2008 to mid-May 2023)**



a) Includes 11 MERCOSUR measures.

b) Includes 260 EAEU measures.

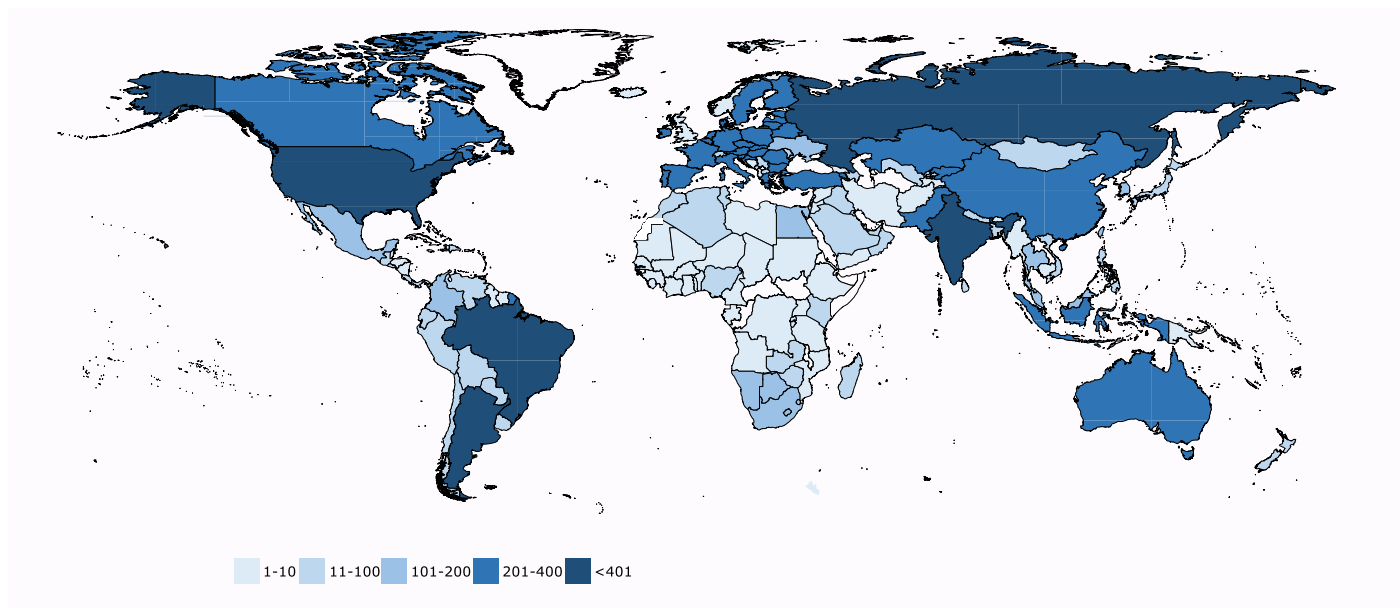
c) Includes 141 SACU measures.

Note: The chart does not include trade remedy terminations.

Source: WTO – TMDB.

Chart 2 below shows the geographic distribution of Members and Observers that implemented measures from mid-October 2008 until mid-May 2023. There are 133 (EU counted as one) Members and Observers recorded in the TMDB, of which 78% have taken between 1 and 100 measures, followed by 10% that implemented between 101-200 measures during that period. Overall, some 12% of Members implemented more than 200 measures, most of which are G20 economies. Five Members (India, United States, Brazil, Argentina, and Russian Federation) each have more than 400 measures recorded in the TMDB.

Chart 2) Geographic overview of measures in the TMDB (mid-October 2008 to mid-May 2023)



Note: The Chart does not include trade remedy terminations.

Source: WTO – TMDB.

As can be seen from the above chart some regions remain underrepresented in the TMDB. This is the case for many countries on the African continent, several countries in Latin America, the Caribbean and some in Southeast Asia. Approximately 12% of all WTO Members and 40% of Observers have no measures recorded in TMDB. The need to increase participation in the Trade Monitoring Exercise is an issue which featured prominently in discussions among Members at the 7<sup>th</sup> Appraisal of the TPRM. There was recognition of the role of capacity restraints in this context and Members called on the Secretariat to continue its training and outreach efforts to increase participation.

## Challenges and Opportunities of the trade monitoring exercise

Established almost fifteen years ago, the WTO Trade Monitoring Exercise remains the only cross-cutting transparency exercise in the multilateral trading system. By not relying exclusively on notifications, and allowing for independent Secretariat research, the exercise is able to provide regular updates on policy trends and developments in the global trading system. Over the years, an important stakeholder relationship has developed between Members and the Secretariat, not least in the pursuit of factually accurate reports based on the comprehensive verification of trade measures.

The TMDB in many ways provides the anchor to which the Trade Monitoring Reports remain tethered. It offers WTO Members, as well as to the public at large, a platform to access thousands of trade measures through various search and filter options. This, in turn, allows for better understanding and analysis of trends and developments of one trading partner or across a wider set of partners.

At the same time, many countries continue to face challenges in terms of effectively participating in and taking advantage of the transparency offered by the Trade Monitoring Exercise. To address these challenges, the WTO Secretariat actively pursues greater participation through initiatives like online tools, capacity-building sessions, and outreach efforts. These endeavours aim to mitigate these challenges and encourage Members' involvement, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and coverage of this transparency mechanism.

Discussions during the 7<sup>th</sup> Appraisal of the TPRM, which concluded on 25 July 2023, demonstrated that Members realize the value and potential of the Trade Monitoring Exercise and through it the TMDB to, on the one hand, continue to enhance transparency and allow for factual reporting and, on the other hand, become the platform for increasing participation in the monitoring exercise. The outcome on trade monitoring of the 7<sup>th</sup> Appraisal provides for further development and deepening of the important stakeholder relationship between delegations and the Secretariat and represents an important transparency reference in the wider context of WTO reform.