

BACKGROUND PAPER



# WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

## REVITALISING INTERNATIONAL TRADE RECOVERY IN A POST-COVID-19 WORLD



## Welcome Letter

Distinguished Delegates,

Welcome to the World Trade Organization Committee at The European International MUN 2022! We are delighted to announce that, during this year's conference, WTO will focus on discussing the sustainability of trade – specifically on the effect of trade on greenhouse gas emissions and concerns of revitalizing international trade post-COVID-19 pandemic.

The World Trade Organization is the only international organization that deals with the global rules of trade – ensuring that trade flows as smoothly, predictably, and freely as possible.<sup>1</sup> The WTO has over 160 members representing 98% of world trade and has its main role set to operate a global system of trade rules, acting as a forum to negotiate trade agreements. With WTO's primary goal to create open trade for the benefit of all, WTO has a mandate of having all major decisions made by WTO's member governments – either by ministries, ambassadors, or delegates – and the Ministerial Conference as the top decision-making body. In TEIMUN 2022, the WTO Committee will be following the procedure and structure of The General Council, which is the top day-to-day decision-making body.<sup>2</sup>

Your days at TEIMUN 2022 will consist of long discussions and negotiations, aimed at reaching an agreement with the other Member States, and passing a resolution that offers concrete proposals regarding the actions your delegation believes should be taken. You will find that reaching a compromise is often not easy, since all countries' interests differ and each hopes to promote their individual goals. As a consequence, in order for you to be a successful delegate, you must put yourself in the position of the other States, without losing sight of your own objectives. TEIMUN 2022 offers you the perfect opportunity to broaden your knowledge on this topic, to understand its complexity and to propose and address multiple possible solutions. To best prepare, we recommend that you read this background paper carefully, as it contains important information on the topic. In addition, we strongly encourage you to rigorously research your country's position on this issue before the start of the conference. Finally, it is important that you read the Rules of Procedure with great care, so we can have a fruitful and productive debate.

We hope that you are as excited about TEIMUN 2022 as we are. We are very much looking forward to meeting you all; we are certain that it will be a great experience for everyone!

Sincerely,

Chairs of the World Trade Organization at TEIMUN 2022

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<sup>1</sup> WTO.org. *WTO | The WTO In Brief*. [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/inbrief\\_e/inbr\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/inbrief_e/inbr_e.htm).

<sup>2</sup> WTO.org. *What Is The WTO?* [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/thewto\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/thewto_e.htm).

## **Introduction to The Committee**

The World Trade Organization (“WTO”) was established on January 1, 1995, which has the objective to create an open and strong international trading system that can contribute to the economic growth of countries and give benefits to their people, and more specifically one that can raise the living standards of the citizens of the world and open up more jobs through the open trade. Currently, WTO has 164 members that include both high-income and lower- and lower-middle income nations, and an annual budget of approximately \$180 million. WTO has three official languages namely, English, Spanish, and French.<sup>3</sup> Agreements made in the WTO are usually lengthy and consist of complex clauses as they encompass legal texts that constitute various operations and activities within global trade.

WTO is run by the governments of its members and most decisions are made by the administration as a whole, which includes their ministers who have regular meetings once every two years, their ambassadors, or their delegates who usually have their meetings conducted directly in Geneva, Switzerland which is the place for the Secretariat of WTO. All activities in the Secretariat are assisted by around 700 staff members and are led by the WTO Director-General. WTO’s main focus areas include the operation of the global system of trade rules and helping lower- and lower-middle income nations advance their trade capacity in general, with a view to raising living standards, providing job employment opportunities and improving the quality of people’s lives.

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<sup>3</sup> WTO.org. *Overview*. [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/wto\\_dg\\_stat\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/wto_dg_stat_e.htm).

## **Problem Specification**

Due to social and physical distancing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, people's movement was limited in all manner; this affected international trade. Without goods and services mobilization, international trade could not run according to its operational schedule. As a result, global trade disruption occurred. It was estimated that the global trade fell by 8.9%, which was a larger decrease than that during the 2008 financial crisis. The pandemic also affected the services sector more than the good sector, by a margin of a 20% decrease in 2020.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the recovery process in trade is a must for the countries to avoid economic disaster. One of the trade recovery solutions which has been discussed is boosting economic activity by allowing for open trade and case trade-related barriers. It is statistically known that open trade has positive correlation with economic boost. Other than open trade, the Delegates can find more relevant solutions to formulate the right-track trade recovery based on its country's actions.

To understand more about the status of substantial trade recovery in each country, here are three main problems which Delegates may look at and which can be discussed later in the Committee Sessions:

1. Sustainability of industries and the recovery practice;
2. Trade restrictions; and
3. Trade-related policy harmonization.

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<sup>4</sup> Bank of England. (2021). *How Has Covid Affected Global Trade?*  
<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/bank-overground/2021/how-has-covid-affected-global-trade>

## **Questions a Resolution Must Answer (QARMAs)**

We hope that the QARMA sections for the TEIMUN 2022 debate of the WTO Council provide you with interesting new facts and helpful insights. Please note that the following questions are issues that the resolution must address in order to be considered for discussion. As such, you must investigate where your respective countries stand on these subject matters. However, if you would like to address additional concerns in your resolution, that is, of course, permitted.

1. How does the COVID-19 pandemic influence sustainability and vary, in terms of operation and function, within industries? Are current international and national efforts effective in supporting the most-affected industries by COVID-19, and how could they be improved – taking into consideration the different types of support needed for different industries?
2. How can the WTO face the issues of trade restrictions in a way that can manage international trade while maintaining the COVID-19 situation simultaneously?
3. How can trade-related policy harmonization help bolster the recovery of international trade post-COVID-19 while at the same time taking into account each country's needs?

# **Explanatory Section per QARMAs**

## **Sustainability of Industries and Their Recovery**

**Question:** How does the COVID-19 pandemic influence sustainability and vary, in terms of operation and function, within industries? Are current international and national efforts effective in supporting the most-affected industries by COVID-19, and how could they be improved – taking into consideration the different types of support needed for different industries?

### **History/Background of the Problem**

Although there are many distinct factors such as economic context and transmission channels of the pandemic to previous crises, the WTO estimated that international merchandise trade volumes fell by 9.2% in 2020. This was reflective of the situation during the global financial crisis of 2008-2009.<sup>5</sup> This evidence points to the fact that the COVID-19 financial repercussions – especially in the collapse of international trade – were driven by the voluntary and mandatory confinement measures imposed on world trade.

When discussing the ability of an industry or business to maintain performance, sales, and operation of trade at a certain level after the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative to consider if there were economic roots contingent on financially related issues. The pandemic's lingering effects on multiple industries and labor markets allow us to examine how recovery of international trade will take place. COVID-19 impacts on trade stem from an indirect measure of cost, confinement measures, and the evolution of forecasts of bilateral trade. This can be seen from the varying impacts the COVID-19 pandemic had on industries. For instance, retail, arts and entertainment, personal services, food services, and hospitality had declines of employment exceeding 50%, while finance, professional services, and real estate faced less disruption.<sup>6</sup> Such different impacts across industries is due to an industry's ability to move to remote production.

Additionally, an industry's adaptability shows its place in innovation. For example, the auto industry has been down with a \$100 billion wipe out of profits from the pandemic, the healthcare industry has seen accelerated growth with a 30% increase in use of telehealth (a type of distribution of health-related services and information via electronic information), and the education industry sees an estimated \$1.6 trillion of annual losses in the global economy

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<sup>5</sup> Friedt FL, Zhang K. (2020). *The triple effect of Covid-19 on Chinese exports: First evidence of the export supply, import demand and GVC contagion effects*. Covid Economics 53.

<sup>6</sup> Masterson, V. (2020). *6 ways the pandemic has changed businesses*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/11/covid-19-innovation-business-healthcare-restaurants/>

from unfinished learning.<sup>7</sup> All of these industries had varying levels of innovation available to accommodate the transition into remote operation.

Overall, the transition ability of an industry highlights the financial fragility of many businesses. From a research conducted in 2020 with 5,800 small businesses in the US, there was a considerable heterogeneity in how sensitive businesses are to the crisis. In-person industries like personal services or retail reported worse prospects for riding out the pandemic than professional services or other sectors with minimal need for face-to-face contact.<sup>8</sup>

## **Recent Developments**

Global trade's transmission mechanism of the shock (demand, supply and global supply chains) had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with demand factors playing an important role in impacting the shock.<sup>9</sup> This highlights the role of global value chains in the transmission of shocks. However, a collapse in trade can also be considered as a trade-induced effect caused by economic recessions.

Unfortunately, even with our current wave of globalization, little attention has been paid to the impacts of COVID-19 on trade for different countries' income levels. According to the World Trade Organization, the differences which are expected in trade between high-, low- and middle-income countries are from the composition of trade costs: information, transport, and transaction costs, all of which seem to be more important for trade between high-income countries, while trade policy and regulatory differences better explain trade between low- and middle-income countries.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the composition of products, given that average skills in making a product are more intensive in high-income countries, results in increasing complexity of the products traded compared to low- and middle-income countries. As such, countries' responses to trade shocks from COVID-19 – to a large extent – depends on their income levels. Although this area of focus remains unexplored in academia, the chairs recommend delegates to make reference to one nation's efforts (and its impact) to alleviate trade shocks and discuss them in conjunction with other nations'. Furthermore, the chairs also recommend delegates to explore how different countries' financial capabilities influence the degree of opportunities for women. A good example is how women in healthcare report feeling greater pressure to prioritize work over family, yet are underpaid in comparison to

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<sup>7</sup> McKinsey & Company. (2022). *COVID-19: Implications for business*.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/risk-and-resilience/our-insights/covid-19-implications-for-business>

<sup>8</sup> Bartik, A., Bertrand, M., Cullen, Z., Glaeser, E., Luca, M. and Stanton, C. (2020). *The impact of COVID-19 on small business outcomes and expectations*. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences 117(30).

<sup>9</sup> Meier M, Pinto E. (2020). *Covid-19 supply chain disruptions*. Covid Economics 48.

<sup>10</sup> WTO.org. (2021). *Trade Cost Index: Evolution, Incidence and Determinants: Background Note*.

their male coworkers.<sup>11</sup> This may impact their income and future opportunities, causing a domino effect which leads to the aforementioned problems when its effects are scaled to the number of women experiencing this. Not only does a type of industry influence a market's ability to recover and stay sustainable, but it is also its host country's extent of support and culture of work that contribute to the long-term standing of an industry.

## **International Approaches that have been undertaken**

*Table 1.1: International Approaches in mitigating the issue*

Organization	Description
The World Trade Organization	<p><b>Australia, 2021</b> – The ACT Business Support Package was established to support small and medium businesses impacted by the lockdown measures. The costs of the program are split 50/50 between the Commonwealth and ACT Government.</p> <p><b>Bahrain, 2020</b> – Bahrain established to pay 50% of salaries of Bahrainis who are employed in the sectors which are most negatively impacted by COVID-19 and who are registered with the Social Insurance Organization. The salary payment was funded through the Insurance Against Unemployment Fund.</p> <p><b>European Union, 2020</b> – The 8 State aid schemes (with a total estimated budget of €75.5 million) were made in the form of direct grants and payment advantages to provide liquidity to companies affected by the coronavirus outbreak.</p> <p><b>Hong Kong, China, 2020</b> – Hong Kong established rental and fee concessions, where 75% rental concessions were eligible for businesses/organizations operating in and hires/tenants of government premises; and 100% rental waiver for businesses which have completely ceased operation.<sup>12</sup></p>

<sup>11</sup> Berlin, G., Chen, J., Groh, R. and Sharma, M. (2022). *Women in healthcare and life sciences: The ongoing stress of COVID-19*. McKinsey & Company.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/healthcare-systems-and-services/our-insights/women-in-healthcare-and-life-sciences-the-ongoing-stress-of-covid-19>

<sup>12</sup> WTO.org. (2021). *COVID-19: Support Measures*.

[https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/covid19\\_e/trade\\_related\\_support\\_measures\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/trade_related_support_measures_e.htm)

	<p>This list only includes a few examples of The World Bank’s operational response in the economic sector. To check the complete list, visit here: <a href="#">WTO COVID-19 Support measures</a>.</p>
<p>The World Bank</p>	<p><b>Eswatini’s</b> <a href="#">Economic Recovery Development Policy Financing</a> aims to improve the country’s competitiveness and range in the digital economy.</p> <p><b>Nigeria’s</b> <a href="#">COVID-19 Action Recovery and Economy Stimulus Program</a> focuses on investing in human capital and job diversification, especially in the public sector.</p> <p><b>Georgia’s</b> <a href="#">Economic Management and Competitiveness Development Policy Operation COVID-19</a> promotes more competitive markets, diversifies the financial sector, and strengthens investment promotion.</p> <p><b>Uganda’s</b> <a href="#">COVID-19 Economic Crisis and Recovery Development Policy Financing</a> addresses the fiscal financial gap and provides immediate relief to individuals and businesses most affected by the pandemic.</p> <p>This list only includes a few examples of The World Bank’s operational response in the economic sector. To check the complete list, visit here: <a href="#">World Bank Group’s Operational Response to COVID-19 (coronavirus) – Projects List</a>.<sup>13</sup></p>

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<sup>13</sup> The World Bank. (2022). *World Bank Group’s Operational Response to COVID-19 (coronavirus) – Projects List*.  
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/what-we-do/brief/world-bank-group-operational-response-covid-19-coronavirus-projects-list>

## **Trade Restriction**

**Question:** How can the WTO face the issues of trade restrictions in a way that can manage international trade while maintaining the COVID-19 situation simultaneously?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Member States needed to ensure that the virus would not be scattered at a rapid pace, which would infect their population and affect all sectors including trade. To overcome such an obstacle, trade restrictions were imposed to curb the COVID-19 virus spreading, which restricted or even banned several products or services to be exported/imported globally. However, such trade restrictions have created severe impacts on international trade, such as lower domestic prices, supply chain disruption, incentive reduction, etc.<sup>14</sup> One of the examples can be seen in Switzerland, where between mid-March to July 2020, trade fell by 11% during the lockdown and negatively affected foreign trade.<sup>15</sup>

However, after the first wave of COVID-19 began in March 2020, some Member States tried to alleviate trade restrictions by re-stabilizing the supply-demand chain to the pre-pandemic levels. For example, G20 countries agreed that all emergency measures are to be proportionally targeted and that unnecessary disruptions to trade must be not created. As a result, in October 2020, around 60% of pandemic-related trade measures were facilitated and 30% of trade restrictions were terminated. In May 2020, 42 Member States of WTO pledged to lift the emergency restrictions on trade as soon as possible, except for the United States, European Union (EU), and China (due to the high level of COVID-19 cases).<sup>16</sup>

The Delegates can review the COVID-19 measures on trade of their own States through the following link:

[https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/covid19\\_e/trade\\_related\\_goods\\_measure\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/trade_related_goods_measure_e.htm).

However, most Member States have already discontinued their COVID-19 restriction measures to boost productivity in international trade. The trade restriction alleviation is aligned with the WTO rules in Article XI Paragraph (1) of the GATT 1994, which states that:

No prohibitions or restrictions other than duties, taxes, or other charges, whether made effective through quotas, import or export licenses, or other measures, shall be instituted or maintained by any contracting party on the importation of any product of the territory of any other contracting party or on the exportation or sale for export of any product destined for the territory of any other contracting party.

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<sup>14</sup> Congressional Research Service. (2021). *Export Restrictions in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. (2021, April 23). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11551>

<sup>15</sup> Barbero, J., Lucio, J. J., & Rodriguez-Crespo, E. (2021). *Effects of COVID-19 on Trade Flows: Measuring Their Impact through Government Policy Responses*. PLoS ONE 16(10).

<sup>16</sup> Congressional Research Service. (2021). *Export Restrictions in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*. (2021, April 23). <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11551>

However, an exception can be made under Article XI Paragraph (2) point (a) of GATT 1994 if the “export prohibitions or restrictions temporarily applied to prevent or relieve critical shortages of foodstuff or other products essential to the exporting contracting party”. Therefore, such trade restrictions can be implemented if Member States believe that the COVID-19 pandemic may hamper the supply-demand of essential products for the export-import process.<sup>17</sup>

To tackle the issues associated with such trade restrictions, several actions have been undertaken by the WTO and other stakeholders. For example, WTO has a Multilateral Leaders’ Task Force on COVID-19 which coordinated pandemic-relevant action to be managed under the trade precaution, such as vaccine and testing management. WTO has also coordinated with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) on the COVID-19 Vaccine Trade Tracker to overview vaccine supply. These efforts are health-oriented because they need to ensure that sustainable trade can be achieved with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>18</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has also initiated the National Trade Facilitation Committees (NTFC) Global Forum 2022 as a follow-up to the WTO Trade Facilitation, where the former gathered relevant stakeholders in discussing the appropriate implementation of trade facilitation reforms following the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>19</sup>

Accordingly, the tasks of the Delegates are to review current COVID-19 related measures that may constitute a trade restriction, with a follow-up on the solutions-oriented discussion to ensure the restriction will not hamper the supply-demand chain globally. The Delegates need to remember that understanding the current measures is important as some may have been terminated to return to pre-pandemic levels of trade. Nevertheless, COVID-19-related measures for health matters are still needed, since the Member States may be in different stages of the progression of the pandemic (e.g., consider the situation in China in April 2022, where they had another outbreak).

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<sup>17</sup> Khaldun, R. I., Fita, G. A., Utami, A. N., & Tahawa, T. H. (2021). *Global Trade Restriction during COVID-19 Pandemic*. International Journal of Educational Research & Social Sciences 2(1).

<sup>18</sup> WTO.org. *COVID-19 and World Trade*. [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/covid19\\_e/covid19\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/covid19_e.htm)

<sup>19</sup> United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2022). *Global Forum 2022 for National Trade Facilitation Committees*. <https://unctad.org/meeting/global-forum-2022-national-trade-facilitation-committees>

## **Trade-Related Policy Harmonization**

**Question:** How can trade-related policy harmonization help bolster the recovery of international trade post-COVID-19 while at the same time taking into account each country's needs?

To understand how trade-related policy harmonization works, it is important to note that there are several components to this concept, such as specification of products and their amounts. The purpose of policy harmonization is to coordinate trade policies between countries and in this way minimize the differences that exist between them. This is done with a view to help stakeholders within international trade to achieve consistent and comprehensive standards on the global market, such as the creation of uniform minimum regulatory and customary requirements. Such stakeholders originate both from the public and private sectors, and include government organizations and/or businesses which have an interest in the outcomes of trade policies.

An area which has been tackled through policy harmonization in the past is the reduction of barriers on trade, which has made it easier for people to enter into transactions on the global market, and has created a more free platform for products to be imported and exported. There are several steps which can be taken in order for the harmonization of trade-related policies to function smoothly. Firstly, mutual recognition between countries and their regulations allow for them to identify common procedures and qualifications. Secondly, creating equivalence means that countries can deepen their assessments to find common grounds with regard to what can be adjusted or changed. The last factor is the harmonization itself, including the process of harmonization, the establishment of monitoring systems to ensure that harmonized policies are well-implemented in the relevant field, and the assessment of the involvement of stakeholders within the harmonization process. Taking a look back at the progression of the pandemic, 36% of export-restrictive measures taken in response to COVID-19 between January and April 2020, took the form of full bans and prohibitions.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, Delegates must also come up with solutions to tackle problems that arise from the harmonization process and the adjustment of which will inevitably procure high costs, due to the fact that not all countries have the same level of economic capacity, and because consumers across them vary considerably. Therefore, finding new suitable standards will be challenging.

What are the trade-related policies that were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic? To answer this, we need to understand that their focus rests with imported and exported goods. For example, the demand for health equipment has risen so high that the supply in some of the countries became very limited, which is why personal protective equipment, hand sanitizers, disinfectants, masks, or other related health equipment to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are set to have less restrictions for exports in 2022 in comparison to previous years before the pandemic. However, although there are some products like pharmaceuticals,

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<sup>20</sup> WTO.org. (2022). *Members welcome COVID-19 trade-related measures report, agree on future experience sharing*. [https://www.wto.org/english/news\\_e/news22\\_e/mark\\_05apr22\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news22_e/mark_05apr22_e.htm).

medical devices and equipment, as well as other medical supplies, COVID-19 test kits and vaccines also urgently needed, they are still as restricted as they were during the first six months of 2020 because some countries which produce these products still suffer shortages.

The different levels of severity of the COVID-19 pandemic in each country, gave rise to various responses to trade-related policies. In March 2022, a total of 169 measures were recorded in regards to trade-easing measures. Although notifying such measures is not obligatory, 14 members have submitted a total of 26 communications to the Committee. The majority of these measures, which account for more than 70%, are tax-related policies that serve the purpose of reducing the price of critical imported products.

Delegates have the task of identifying to what extent the harmonization of policy can be done and how this impacts the current situation in every Member State.

## Sources for Further Research

1. [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/covid19\\_e/covid19\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/covid19_e.htm) (WTO)
2. **[Global Economy Faces a Tightrope Walk to Recovery](#)**: This article by OECD discusses how governments have been supporting businesses in the hardest-hit sectors.
3. <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/international-trade-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-big-shifts-and-uncertainty-d1131663/> (OECD Policy Responses to COVID-19)
4. [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/trade/oecd-trade-policy-working-papers\\_18166873](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/trade/oecd-trade-policy-working-papers_18166873) (The impact of COVID-19 on directions and structure of international trade)

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[https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/whatis\\_e/inbrief\\_e/inbr\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/inbrief_e/inbr_e.htm).