

## INFORMAL WORKING GROUP ON MSMEs<sup>1</sup>

### 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. On 13 December 2017, at the 11<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC11), 88 WTO Members representing all major regions and levels of development established the Informal Working Group on Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) ([WT/MIN\(17\)/58/Rev.1](#)). In their Joint Ministerial Statement, the "Friends of MSMEs" committed to discussing and identifying "horizontal and non-discriminatory solutions" to improve the participation of MSMEs in international trade while considering the specific needs of developing economies.

1.2. The following Annual Report describes the activities of the Informal Working Group on MSMEs (MSME Group) in 2024. H.E. Mr Matthew Wilson, Ambassador of Barbados, continued to coordinate the MSME Group through the year. Five new Members joined the MSME Group during 2024: Cabo Verde, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Maldives, Mauritius, and Mozambique, bringing total MSME Group membership to 103.<sup>2</sup>

1.3. At the 13<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference (MC13) a Coordinator's Report ([WT/MIN\(24\)/9](#)) was issued summarizing the key activities undertaken and outcomes achieved by the MSME Group since its establishment in 2017. The MSME Group also held a joint event in advance of the Ministerial Conference with the Informal Working Group on Trade & Gender (WTO Group on Trade & Gender) and the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD). The three groups shared their work and presented plans to increase trade inclusivity and highlight the relationship between trade and sustainability. The MSME Group also issued its joint compendium with the World Customs Organization (WCO) on Special Provisions for MSMEs in Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) Programs ([INF/MSME/W/47/Rev.2](#)). A second event preceding MC13 was held as part of the WTO-ITC-High-Level Event on Women and Trade to issue the joint compendium on Access to Finance for Women-led MSMEs ([INF/MSME/W/46/Rev.3](#); [INF/TGE/W/7/Rev.3](#)) with the WTO Group on Trade & Gender and the International Trade Centre (ITC).

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<sup>1</sup> Previous Annual Reports include [JOB/GC/207](#) dated 3 December 2018; [INF/MSME/R/13/Rev.1](#) dated 9 December 2019; [INF/MSME/R/21](#) dated 15 December 2020; [INF/MSME/R/30](#) dated 11 February 2022; [INF/MSME/R/35](#) dated 15 March 2023 and [INF/MSME/R/42](#) dated 6 February 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Members of the Informal Working Group on MSMEs are: Afghanistan; Albania; Antigua and Barbuda; Argentina; Armenia; Australia; Bahrain, Kingdom of; Barbados; Belize; Brazil; Brunei Darussalam; Cabo Verde; Canada; Chile; China; Colombia; Costa Rica; Côte d'Ivoire; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Dominica; Dominican Republic; Ecuador; El Salvador; European Union and its 27 Member States; The Gambia; Georgia; Grenada; Guatemala; Guyana; Honduras; Hong Kong, China; Iceland; Israel; Japan; Kazakhstan; Kenya; Korea, Republic of; Kyrgyz Republic; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Liechtenstein; Macao, China; Malaysia; Maldives; Mauritius; Mexico; Moldova, Republic of; Mongolia; Montenegro; Mozambique; Myanmar; New Zealand; Nicaragua; Nigeria; North Macedonia; Norway; Pakistan; Paraguay; Peru; Philippines; Qatar; Russian Federation; Saint Kitts and Nevis; Saint Lucia; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines; Saudi Arabia, Kingdom of; Singapore; Switzerland; Chinese Taipei; Tajikistan; Türkiye; Ukraine; United Arab Emirates; United Kingdom; United States of America; Uruguay and Viet Nam.

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## 2 OPEN-ENDED MEETINGS HELD BY THE INFORMAL WORKING GROUP ON MSMES DURING 2024

2.1. The MSME Group held four open-ended meetings during 2024, on 19 March, 1 July, 18 October and 10 December.

2.2. On 19 March, the Group held its first open-ended meeting of 2024 to review the outcomes from MC13 and begin discussions on next steps ([INF/MSME/CN/25/Rev.1](#)). At the invitation of the Coordinator, Comoros and Timor-Leste briefed the Group on the role MSMEs played in their WTO accession process. The Coordinator then began the meeting with an overview of MSME events and deliverables at MC13, including the joint session with the WTO Group on Trade & Gender and TESSD titled "Paving the way to strengthening trade inclusiveness through WTO Members' initiatives" and the launch of the Compendium on Access to Finance by Women-Led MSMEs ([INF/MSME/W/46/Rev.1](#)) as part of the ITC High-Level Event on Women and Trade. MSMEs were also included in paragraph 17 of the Abu Dhabi Ministerial Declaration ([WT/MIN\(24\)/DEC](#)) and featured heavily during the 26 February Ministerial Conversation on Trade and Inclusion. Discussions by Members focused on the way forward for the MSME Group. Members expressed an interest in deep-dive experience sharing sessions related to the two compendia released at MC13 on Access to Finance by Women-led MSMEs and on AEO Programs with a view to developing policy guidance. Other areas of interest included trade digitalization, good regulatory practices, improved transparency on trade regulation, good practices for tourism and innovation ecosystems. Members also stressed the importance of continuing to engage directly with MSMEs at regular meetings, including through the Group's new MSME Spotlight initiative. Continued collaboration both internally at the WTO with other committees touching on MSME-related work and with other international organizations working towards the objectives of MSME trade-inclusivity was also welcomed and the need for ongoing support of the Trade4MSMEs website and platform was underscored. The MSME Group received presentations from the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the World Trade Centers Association (WTCA). The second "MSME Spotlight", EziDrops, was introduced to the MSME Group by the Institute of Export and International Trade (IOE&IT), the MSME Group's Strategic Partner on the Trade4MSMEs website. A panel discussion on MSMEs, sustainability and reporting requirements was held with Kate Kallot, the founder and CEO of the private company Amini, and Steve Capell, from UN/CEFACT, moderated by the ITC. Finally, the MSME Group approved regular observer participation in open-ended meetings of the group by the organizations in the Trade4MSMEs Network. In relation to the 2020 Package, Chinese Taipei updated the Group about their 5<sup>th</sup> trade policy review, which included MSME information as per Annex 1<sup>3</sup> and the ITC joined to present updates on the Global Trade Helpdesk in relation to Annex 2.<sup>4</sup> A full summary of the meeting and of presentations received is available in document [INF/MSME/R/43](#).

2.3. The MSME Group held its second open-ended meeting of the year on 1 July 2024 ([INF/MSME/CN/26/Rev.2](#)). Members updated the Group on their work to implement the 2020 December Package of Recommendations and Declarations: Canada updated the Group on the inclusion of MSMEs in its 12<sup>th</sup> Trade Policy Review; the ITC presented updates to the Global Trade Helpdesk (GTH) including the new Mandarin version of the website and work to implement the Jaipur Call for Action; and the EU noted the submission of its most recent data for the GTH. The Group discussed five new proposals for future work: 1) United States proposal ([INF/MSME/W/51](#)) to bridge the gap between International Organizations and MSMEs to raise awareness of publicly available trade information, especially through Business Support Organisations; 2) United Kingdom proposal ([INF/MSME/W/52](#)) with three parts, namely Good Regulatory Practices (GRP), continued work on supporting women-led MSMEs' access to finance, and trade digitalization to support paperless trading; 3) Mexico proposal ([INF/MSME/W/53](#)) on low-value shipments and e-commerce; 4) Mexico proposal ([INF/MSME/W/54](#)) on the issue of informality and UNCITRAL tools; and 5) Mexico proposal ([INF/MSME/W/55](#)) on MSMEs and regional trade agreements (RTAs). A first thematic session was held on Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) programs with a MSME dimension, with a presentation by Lazzat Daniyarova of preliminary findings from a recent World Customs Organization (WCO) survey of the SAFE Framework of standards. The MSME Group also received presentations from Pamela Ugaz from the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD) on the May 2024 Global Supply Forum in Barbados and from Marlynne Hopper of the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), who briefed the Group on the STDF's work to support MSMEs in developing

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<sup>3</sup> Annex 1: Recommendation on the Collection and Maintenance of MSME-related Information ([INF/MSME/4/Rev.2](#))

<sup>4</sup> Annex 2: Declaration on Access to Information ([INF/MSME/4/Rev.2](#))

economies and to streamline Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures to facilitate implementation. The 3<sup>rd</sup> "MSME Spotlight" featured Usha Subba, Director of La Mandala, a specialty tea business from Nepal, who joined the MSME Group at the recommendation of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) to discuss her export experience. Members viewed a short recording of the 2024 Small Business Champions winners, CLAC from El Salvador and O'KANATA from Canada. They also received an update from one of the 2023 Champions, Divasity from Nigeria, who launched their initiative to support small scale farmers in April. A full summary of the meeting and of presentations received is available in document [INF/MSME/R/44](#).

2.4. The third MSME Group meeting was held on 18 October 2024 ([INF/MSME/CN/27](#)). The meeting started with a presentation from H.E. Mr Nikolai Platonov from the Russian Federation who presented a joint proposal for the WTO Group on Trade & Gender and the MSME Group ([INF/MSME/W/58-INF/TGE/COM/11](#)) to compile a compendium of educational programmes for women entrepreneurs. The discussion then moved to implementation of the 2020 December Package of Recommendations and Declarations. In relation to Annex 1, China noted its inclusion of MSME information in its trade policy review. The International Trade Centre updated the MSME Group on progress with the Global Trade Helpdesk (GTH) including increased users and AI chatbot development. For MC14 preparations, the MSME Group Coordinator updated Members on the two completed compendia, Access to Finance by Women-led MSMEs ([INF/MSME/W/46/Rev.3-INF/TGE/W/7/Rev.3](#)) and Special Provisions for MSMEs in Authorized Economic Operator Programs ([INF/MSME/W/47/Rev.2](#)), which continued to be updated. A new joint study on the integration of MSMEs into AEO programmes was also proposed with the WCO and International Chamber of Commerce (ICC). The first in-person "MSME Spotlight", Aziz Ndiaye, joined the Group to present ANEP, a Swiss-based exotic fruit company exporting from West Africa with a social mission. The Group held a thematic session on how to bridge the gap between small businesses and policy developed by international organizations with the help of business support organizations (BSOs) as an intermediary, based on United States proposal ([INF/MSME/W/51](#)). Crispin Waymouth, the European Union's Deputy Head of Unit GROW D2 from the Enterprise Europe Network and Anne Chappaz from the ITC joined the MSME Group to explain how MSME trade is supported by BSOs through access to databases, networks and partnerships facilitated by their organizations. The two 2024 ICC-ITC-WIPO-WTO MSME Group 2024 Small Business Champions winners Justin Langan from O'KANATA and Carlos Zuastegui from CLAC joined to present their proposals. Justin Langan updated the Group on his work to create an online platform for indigenous artisans and Carlos Zuastegui informed the MSME Group of CLAC's work with indigenous producers to create informed webpages as well as to establish a business roundtable. Dr Ayman El Tarabishy from the International Council for Small Business (ICSB) joined to provide a briefing as part of the MSME Group's efforts to strengthen engagement with external organizations. Briefings on MSME-related discussions from other WTO bodies were provided by the Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) Committee on its new good practice guide ([G/TBT/GEN/386](#)) and the Government Procurement Committee on its best practice guide for promoting the participation of SMEs in government procurement ([GPA/CD/6](#)). Information on UNCITRAL's new guide on Access to Credit for MSMEs and McKinsey's 2024 report on Opportunities for Small Businesses to Boost Productivity were shared with the Group following the meeting. A full summary of the meeting and of presentations received is available in document [INF/MSME/R/45](#).

2.5. The Group held its last meeting of the year on 10 December 2024 ([INF/MSME/CN/28](#)). The meeting began with thematic discussions. Building on the previous meeting's presentations on the importance of BSOs to boost MSME internationalization stemming from U.S. proposal [INF/MSME/W/51](#), the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) joined to share their experience. The thematic discussion then moved to trade digitalization based on the United Kingdom's proposal ([INF/MSME/W/52](#)). The United Kingdom started with a presentation of the UK Electronic Trade Documents Act then moving to presentations on the Commonwealth Legal Reform Programme and the UK Southeast Asia Trade Digitalization Pilot Programme. Joining the trade digitalization experience sharing session, Pakistan delivered a presentation on their electronic Single Window and Georgia presented its transition to a paperless trade framework. In comments following the trade digitalization presentations, Members highlighted the need for capacity-building, awareness raising, interoperability and the opportunities stemming from the Trade Facilitation Agreement and regional trade agreements. Lucian Cernat, the European Union's Head of Global Regulatory Cooperation and International Procurement Negotiations at DG Trade E4, explained how the EU's organics market is crucial for small exporters and farmers, particularly in developing economies. He showcased the trade facilitation effects of TRACES, a European Commission online platform for animal and plant health certification. Notably, the share of organic exports from Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in the EU market is five times higher than their overall trade share and

is competitive. This meeting's "MSME Spotlight" featured Gabriela Wurcel, Co-founder of Spicy Girls Kitchen, a micro firm making specialty jams and chutneys based in Coppet, Switzerland. Briefings on MSME-related discussions from other WTO bodies were provided by Switzerland in a follow-up on the GPA report on SME Best Practices in government procurement ([GPA/CD/6](#)). Vanessa Erogbogbo, the Chief of Green and Inclusive Value Chains at ITC, presented on the ITC's recent participation in COP29 and the landmark MSME Declaration. In preparation for the 2025 Small Business Champion, it was decided that the theme would be "helping small businesses create the circular economy". Additionally, Members agreed to expand the Trade4MSMEs Network to include UNCTAD and the African Union Commission. Finally, a joint report with the WCO and the ICC on Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) Programmes with MSME considerations was approved by the WCO SAFE Working Group, to be drafted and shared. A full summary of the meeting and of presentations received is available in document [INF/MSME/R/46](#).

### **3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECEMBER 2020 MSME PACKAGE**

3.1. Members continued to implement the December 2020 MSME Package ([INF/MSME/4/Rev.2](#)).

#### **3.1 Annex 1**

3.2. Canada, China, Kazakhstan, Maldives, and Paraguay, MSME Group Members, and Jamaica, not part of the MSME Group, all included MSME information or dedicated sections in their Trade Policy Review (TPR) government reports. Additionally, the Secretariat updated its database of MSME references in TPRs through mid-year 2024.

#### **3.2 Annex 2**

3.3. The ITC presented to the MSME Group regularly throughout 2024 on updates made to the Global Trade Helpdesk. Over the year, the Global Trade Helpdesk worked to address the 2023 G20 Jaipur Call for Action to increase accessibility of the GTH through a chatbot, AI-assisted search and AI-powered tutorials. A robotic process automation-generated market summary has also been developed. Importantly, the platform was expanded to include Bahasa and Mandarin translations.

#### **3.3 Annex 4**

3.4. The United Kingdom submitted a proposal ([INF/MSME/W/52](#)) for a compendium and experience-sharing session on MSME Good Regulatory Practices (GRP).

#### **3.4 Annex 5**

3.5. Automatic data transmissions agreements based on the 2019 IDB Decision ([G/MA/357](#)) have been concluded with five members of the WTO MSME Group: Canada, Cote d'Ivoire, Mauritius, Norway and Uruguay.

#### **3.5 Annex 6**

3.6. The WTO MSME Group, together with the WTO Group on Trade & Gender and the ITC, compiled the Compendium of Access to Finance by Women-led MSMEs ([INF/MSME/W/46/Rev.3](#); [INF/TGE/W/7/Rev.3](#)) issued at MC13. This was later developed into an online searchable [database](#) by the WTO Group on Trade & Gender.

## **4 OTHER ACTIVITIES**

### **4.1 Other**

4.1. The Group met virtually with the private sector in July 2024. Three questions were posed to participants about 1) the use of AEO programs, 2) the importance of business support organizations and 3) any comments related to the MSME Coordinator's report for MC13 ([WT/MIN\(24\)/9](#)). Concerning AEOs, a participant noted that investment in AEO certification by MSMEs does not always automatically translate into business growth, nor does it always differentiate competence by smaller businesses especially if AEO regulations are diluted for MSMEs. Instead, it was noted that improving MSMEs' awareness, knowledge, and competence for AEO certification is important to ensure MSME

uptake of AEO programmes. The discussion also addressed the difficulty MSMEs, particularly women-owned businesses, face in raising capital. One new issue placed on the table by the private sector was the need for better intellectual property (IP) protection and monetization for small businesses. It was suggested that a program or course to help MSMEs monetize IP to obtain financing could be beneficial. The Chair highlighted the work of the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) in this area and some thought was given to a joint event with the WTO Group on Trade & Gender around IP for women owned MSMEs, which culminated in a second Joint Solutions Lab in November 2024.

4.2. The WTO MSME Group celebrated international MSME Day on 27 June 2024 with the announcement of the ICC-ITC-WTO MSME Group Small Business Champions, this year in partnership with WIPO. This fourth edition had the theme "Empowering Indigenous Peoples' Economic Development through International Trade", and two winners were announced by H.E. Mr Matthew Wilson, Ambassador of Barbados and MSME Group Coordinator during a session of the 9<sup>th</sup> Global Review of Aid for Trade. Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General, WTO; Ms Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director, ITC; Mr Daren Tang, Director-General of WIPO; and Mr John Denton, Secretary General, ICC all joined to provide remarks at the event. The winning proposals were titled "Apoyo para el Acceso a mercados internacionales, generación Oportunidades para emprendimiento y Encadenamientos productivos para pequeños productores(as) de los pueblos indígenas en Latinoamérica" (AOELA) submitted by CLAC, a network that represents 1,000 Fairtrade certified organizations in 24 economies in Latin America and the Caribbean, and "Indigenous Artisans Trade Gateway" submitted by O'KANATA, an organization that empowers indigenous youth in Canada.

4.3. The third annual meeting of the Trade4MSMEs Network was held on 1 October 2024. Seven international organizations<sup>5</sup> joined the WTO MSME Group Coordinator and Secretariat for a hybrid discussion. The discussion was centred around two questions. First, what are the priorities the respective organizations see for inclusive digitalization and the actions being undertaken to support MSME digitalization needs? And second, what work are the respective organizations considering to reduce business informality? In relation to the first question, interventions were made by the EIF, ITC, OECD, UNECA, UNECLAC, and UPU regarding their work to support MSME digitalization through MSME tools and programs, infrastructure and policy. Altogether these initiatives underscored a collective focus on using digital solutions not only to enhance market access but also to promote sustainability and inclusivity. Informality was addressed by UNECA and the EIF and is a priority particularly in certain developing regions. A full summary of the meeting is available in document [INF/MSME/W/59](#).

4.4. The MSME Group, together with the WTO Group on Trade & Gender organized a second Joint Solutions Lab on 18 November 2024. This WIPO-WTO event, titled "Empowering Women-led MSMEs: Unlocking Growth through Intellectual Property", was moderated by the MSME Group Coordinator, H.E. Ambassador Matthew Wilson (Barbados), and included introductory remarks from WTO Deputy Director-General Xiangchen Zhang and WIPO Assistant Director-General Marco Aleman and featured Rebecca Osewa, Founder and CEO of Yield Initiatives. Ms Osewa described the many different intellectual properties that support Yield Initiative's work, including patented cotton varieties for higher yield crops, copyrighted designs to protect textile and garment rights, and trademarks of the Yield Initiative name and logo. She underscored the need for more businesses to see that intellectual property is not a cost, but rather an asset. Josefita Pardo de Leon, Counsellor with the WTO and Mariana Velasco, Associate Program Officer from WIPO, also contributed to the conversation with information about each organization's work in this area.

4.5. As Coordinator of the MSME Group, H.E. Ambassador Matthew Wilson (Barbados) was invited to participate in various meetings and webinars organized by external stakeholders to raise awareness concerning the efforts of the Group. This included interventions for the launch of one of the 2023 Small Business Champions, Divasity's, project in April; the UNCTAD Global Supply Chain Forum in May; UN MSME Day at the International Labor Organization organized by the International Council for Small Business (ICSB) on 27 June; at the UPU's TradePost Forum in September on the sidelines of the Public Forum; and the China International Supply Chain Exposition in November. He

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<sup>5</sup> The Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF); the International Trade Centre (ITC); the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL); the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA); the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC); and the Universal Postal Union (UPU).



also served as one of the judges for the IOE&IT's International Trade Awards in 2024. The MSME Group Coordinator moderated the session on Promoting Inclusive Trade through Digital Tools at the 9<sup>th</sup> Global Review of Aid for Trade and sponsored a session at the WTO Public Forum titled the Changing Digital Landscape – MSME Cyber Readiness for Trade.

4.6. Trade4MSMEs continues to be maintained and updated, including new information for the regional and economy pages, as well as updated French and Spanish translations. Trade4MSMEs saw a steady increase of users over 2024 with 36,000 visits, or roughly 3,000 visitors a month. Visits were highest from users based in Mexico, India and the United States with the majority of visitors finding Trade4MSMEs through organic search. The pages that were most frequently viewed included "How do I determine my product's HS Code" and "Regional Trade Agreements" (in both English and Spanish). The Trade Game also saw continued use with more than 3,000 plays throughout 2024.

4.7. Additionally, the Coordinator issued two Newsletters over 2024 (2024-Summer and 2024-Fall). Newsletters covered updates from MC13, information of the way forward for the group and other summaries of MSME Group events.

## **5 CONCLUSION**

5.1. The Informal Working Group adopted the present Annual Report (2024) ad referendum at its 10 December 2024 open-ended meeting.

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