

# TRADING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC: THE WTO'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had devastating health and economic consequences, causing unprecedented disruption to people's lives and the global economy. The multilateral trading system was severely impacted by the pandemic, yet trade policy settings were also integral to the evolving global response. The WTO undertook a wide range of initiatives, integrated with broader international efforts, to deal with the health, societal and economic impacts of COVID-19 – the main elements of the WTO's response to inform ongoing dialogue and practical initiatives on pandemic readiness and global resilience against future health crises.

## Clarifying: enhancing transparency and the flow of information



of goods. Just over half these goods measures facilitated trade (e.g. for agricultural products). Easing trade-restrictive measures included 10% of total trade.

To chart the dramatic impact of the pandemic on trade, the WTO developed new tools such as the Trade Tracker to follow critical trends in the trade in vaccines – a major public health concern at the

## Convening: providing a platform for dialogue for WTO members and other stakeholders



The stark reality of mutual interdependence in a global crisis meant that focused, timely dialogue and sharing information were essential to the pandemic response. The WTO's multilateral framework immediately provided the necessary forums for information sharing and collective review of the full array of pandemic response measures. Members considered the pandemic response impact in ten distinct bodies under the Council for Trade in Goods, the Council for Trade in Services and the Council for Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights. Issues addressed at Council sessions included: unilateral trade easing and trade facilitation; streamlining regulatory procedures; measures easing or restricting trade; and the IP system. The 2022 Ministerial Declaration on the WTO Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and Preparedness for Future Pandemics established a forward-looking perspective to continue work on pandemic readiness. A wide range of experts provided essential insights, and the WTO used its convening power to draw upon the expertise of many international partners and initiatives from civil society, academia and the private sector.

At the peak of the pandemic, the WTO worked to build networks and initiatives to analyse and address obstacles to the supply of critical goods, in particular vaccines. These included the Multilateral Leaders Task Force, led by the heads of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Health Organization (WHO), the WTO and the World Bank; and the WTO Director-General's high-level network of CEOs of vaccine manufacturers that addressed critical disruptions and obstacles to distribution. Established trilateral cooperation between the WHO, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the WTO enabled prompt organization of specialist programme

