

TRADE IN SERVICES FOR DEVELOPMENT IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

28 – 29 September 2026, Manila, Philippines

The role of services in global trade and global value chains (GVCs) has expanded rapidly over the past two decades. Commercial services have been the most dynamic segment of global trade, expanding at a faster pace than merchandise trade as a result of digitalization, the falling cost of communications, and the expansion of regional and international production networks. In value-added terms, services account for over 50% of world trade, highlighting their increasing importance as critical inputs for other economic sectors.

Asia and the Pacific have been at the forefront of this trend, with the region's commercial services exports expanding faster than the global average, and now accounting for nearly 25% of world commercial services exports. While services bring significant opportunities, many economies in Asia are still to tap the full development potential associated with services trade, including its contribution to diversification, digital connectivity, inclusiveness, and MSME internationalization. The Trade in Services for Development (TS4D) Initiative, launched in September 2024 by the World Trade Organization and the World Bank, offers a platform for knowledge, technical assistance and capacity building to help economies better leverage trade in services for development.

Building on the inaugural conference held in Geneva in December 2025, this regional conference aims to bring the TS4D initiative to the Asia Pacific region. It will provide a space to discuss the role of services trade in inclusive development, exchange views on the use of the analytical tools developed under the TS4D initiative and engage in discussions with selected Asian economies on their strategies for the modernization of the services sector.

The conference will bring together government officials, representatives of international organizations, the private sector, and other stakeholders to share knowledge on advances and emerging best practices in the area of services trade. The objective is threefold:

- To explore recent developments in services trade in Asia and the Pacific;
- To share best country practices and policy approaches for supporting services trade in the region; and
- To support policies that can help shape an enabling environment for services trade in Asia.

CONFERENCE PROGRAM

Monday | 28 September 2026

09:00 – 10:00	Session I. High Level Opening Session
10:00 – 10:20	Coffee break
10:20 – 11:30	Session II. Building Competitive Services Sectors What evidence, institutions and policy reforms are needed to turn services potential into tangible outcomes? This session will bring together policymakers, international organizations and private-sector representatives to discuss practical pathways for strengthening services competitiveness. Using examples drawn from country experiences and new analytical tools, including the WTO–World Bank Services Trade Competitiveness Diagnostic Dashboard, the discussion will examine how developing countries can identify reform priorities, attract investment and expand services exports.
11:30 – 12:30	Session III. Trade Restrictions in Services Trade: Scenarios for Asia and the Pacific This session will discuss the role of regulatory practices pertinent to services trade, assessing Asia’s progress on services liberalization, as well as transparency and predictability of policies. The session will feature findings from the World Bank-WTO Services Trade Policy Database (STPD) and its accompanying Services Trade Restrictions Index (STRI). It will also discuss how these tools can support services trade discussions and policy reform.
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 15:15	Session IV. Best Practices in the Export Promotion of Services in Asia and the Pacific This session will explore successful practices and lessons on export promotion strategies for services trade in the region. On the basis of case studies from developing member economies, panelists will discuss how export promotion strategies for services differ from goods and explore how such initiatives can support internationalization and regional strategies, and how they can be adapted to different national contexts.

15:15 – 15:30	Coffee break
15:30 – 16:45	Session V. Good Regulatory Practices in Asia-Pacific This session will discuss the role of Good Regulatory Practices (GRPs) in services trade, and their potential to lower compliance costs, reduce uncertainty, and support market entry and contestability. This session will explore how the new WB-WTO Diagnostic & Reform Planning Tool can help developing countries to benchmark domestic regulatory frameworks against GRPs and identify reform priorities.
16:45 – 17:00	Wrap-up

Tuesday | 29 September 2026

09:00 – 10:15	Session VI. Unlocking Digital Services as an Engine for Growth in Asia-Pacific This session will present recent trends in digital services trade in the region. It will take stock of successful policies that have boosted digital services trade, and the barriers and challenges that limit its expansion.
10:15 – 10:30	Coffee break
10:30 – 11:30	Session VII. Tapping the Potential of MSMEs for Services Trade and Inclusiveness This session will underscore the vital role that MSMEs play in the services industry. The presenter shall discuss recent trends in the contribution of MSMEs for developing economies in Asia, and explore policies that support MSME contribution such as trade finance and trade facilitation measures.
11:30 – 12:30	Session VIII: Regional Initiatives for Services Trade This session will feature recent developments on the subregional programs for the development of services trade, describing their main priorities and regional strategies and discuss how different workstreams under the TS4D initiative could assist.
12:30 – 13:00	Closing
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch

Regional Course on Trade in Services for Development for Selected Economies from Asia and the Pacific

Hosted by the Asian Development Bank

Organized with the WTO and World Bank Group

Manila, 29 September - 1 October 2026

Preliminary Program

Day 1 – Tuesday, 29 September

Time	Session	Speaker
14:00 – 14:30	Opening Session Welcome and introductory remarks Overview of the Trade in Services for Development Initiative	ADB, WTO, WBG
14:30 – 16:00	Global Trends on Trade in Services: The Changing Contribution of Services Trade to Development This session will explore recent developments and emerging patterns in global and regional trade in services with particular attention to trends affecting developing countries. It will also examine the evolving contribution of services trade policies to development strategies. • Discussion with participants • Exercise, with use of the WTO Global Services Trade Data Hub	WTO & WBG
16:00 – 17:30	Review of the GATS This session will review key aspects of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), covering its scope, key obligations, and schedules of specific commitments.	WTO
17:30 – 17:45	Wrap up	

Day 2 – Wednesday, 30 September

Time	Session	Speaker
9:00 – 10:00	GATS Scheduling Quiz and Exercise	WTO
10:00 – 12:30	Services Regulatory Data and Quantification of Services Trade Policies • I-TIP Services joint World Bank-WTO project • Survey on Impediments to Services Trade • The Services Trade Policy Database (STPD) • The STRI to quantify services trade policies: purpose, rationale and interpretation • Use of the STRI: trade cost modelling and simulations • Interactive exercise on the use of the STPD and STRI dashboard	WTO & WBG
12:30 – 14:00	Lunch	
14:00 – 15:30	Good Regulatory Practices: Using the WTO-World Bank Handbook to Support Internal Benchmarking and Identification of Priority Areas for Regulatory Reform • Presentation of selected good regulatory practices for services markets, including economic rationale and main features, relationship with the GATS and the WTO Disciplines on Services Domestic Regulation, and prevalence in preferential trade agreements; • Insights from case studies; • Introduction to the new Diagnostic and Reform Planning Tool (scope, modalities, and visualisation board).	WTO & WBG
15:30 – 15:45	Coffee Break	
15:45 – 17:30	WB-WTO Trade in Services Competitiveness Dashboard Presentation of the WTO-WB dashboard, which is a set of tools and analytical metrics, both quantitative and qualitative, that is intended to help assess the performance and potential of the services sector and services trade. It is designed to help map an economy's readiness to leverage trade in services for inclusive growth. Participants will use the dashboard to reflect on their economy's strengths and weaknesses, as well as priority areas and key objectives on services trade and related policies.	WTO & WBG

Day 3 – Thursday, 1 October

Time	Session	Speaker
9:00 – 12:00	Preliminary Application of the Competitiveness Dashboard by Participants	
12:00 – 13:30	Lunch	
13:30 – 16:00	Regional Break-out Groups – Discussion of Next Steps in the TS4D Initiative Discussion of key findings from preliminary applications of Competitiveness Dashboard and, in this light, of possible needs, priorities and next steps in the context of possible assistance from the ADB, WBG and WTO and regional priorities.	WTO, WBG, ADB
16:00 – 16:30	Evaluation and Closing	

The Trade in Services for Development (TS4D) Initiative

The WTO and the World Bank Group have joined forces in a new capacity-building programme designed to help developing economies harness trade in services for growth and diversification.

The WTO–World Bank Trade in Services for Development (TS4D) initiative was launched at the WTO Public Forum in September 2024. The initiative builds on the 2023 WTO–WBG co-publication [Trade in Services for Development](#), which highlighted the dynamism and expanding role of services in global trade, as well as the structural shift toward services across economies at different levels of development. The study underscored the opportunities that services trade offers developing countries and its growing contribution to national development strategies, while also identifying key challenges and calling for more coherent international support.

In response, the TS4D initiative introduced six main capacity-building workstreams:

- [Services Trade Competitiveness Dashboard](#) – a data-driven tool enabling developing countries to assess services trade performance, identify strengths and gaps, and set priorities for policy reform and technical assistance. The dashboard can help developing economies establish priorities and strategic orientations for their services trade policies and their contribution to broader government objectives. It can also help developing economies define and prioritize their technical assistance needs to which Aid for Trade and project lending could respond.
- [Handbook on Good Regulatory Practices](#) – practical guidance to support the assessment and improvement of services-related regulations. Under the TS4D initiative, the WTO and the World Bank have jointly developed a handbook on "Good Regulatory Practices to Facilitate Trade in Services". The handbook provides practical guidance for policymakers and regulators on advancing domestic regulatory reforms that facilitate services trade while preserving and promoting legitimate public policy objectives.
- Guidance on [Services Export Promotion Strategies](#) – analytical work and country case studies identifying good practices in services export strategies. To help developing economies take advantage of export opportunities offered by services trade, the WTO and the World Bank, in partnership with the UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) and other regional partners, are preparing a report on best practices on services export promotion strategies. The African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank are also supporting this joint effort to publish a series of country [case studies](#).
- Strengthening the quality and coverage of [services trade statistics](#) – targeted training for statisticians and support to expand data collection in developing economies. The workstream on services trade statistics supports developing economies in participating more effectively in services trade by strengthening the coverage and quality of services trade statistics. This will be achieved through targeted training for statisticians on the Manual on Statistics of International Trade in Services (MSITS 2026) and on the IMF-OECD-UNCTAD-WTO Handbook on Measuring Digital Trade (2023), and by scaling up data collection efforts.
- Enhanced policy analysis capacity – use of the Services Trade Policy Database and Services Trade Restrictions Index to deepen [analysis of services trade policies](#). The World Bank and the WTO aim to respond to the need for comprehensive and comparable data on governments' applied measures through the Services Trade Policy Database (STPD) and the Services Trade Policy Restrictions Index (STRI). The [STPD and the STRI](#) are part of the I-TIP Services Database, which also contains information on commitments undertaken in the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and in regional trade agreements (RTAs).
- [Transparency](#) – assistance in compiling and maintaining lists of core services trade measures across sectors and modes of supply to strengthen transparency and policy dialogue. Limited information on national policies that may be affected by core trade obligations in various sectors and modes of supply restricts the ability of developing economies and least-developed countries to engage meaningfully in formulating services trade policy and participating in negotiations at the bilateral, regional and global levels.

Information on the workstreams, tools, and resources of the TS4D initiative is available on the [TS4D platform](#).