

UNCTAD, ITC and WTO roll out tool to help businesses trade better

The Geneva-based organizations launch a revamped Global Trade Helpdesk to support firms, especially smaller businesses, in a post-COVID-19 world

Businesses now have free access to a one-stop shop with the information they need to trade effectively as the global economy recovers from the effects of the coronavirus crisis.

Geneva-based trade agencies UNCTAD, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) rolled out a revamped [Global Trade Helpdesk](#) on 26 June ahead of the [international day](#) marking the importance of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), which make up over 90% of all firms and account for 70% of total employment and 50% of global GDP.

“As policymakers work to lay the groundwork for a strong and sustainable recovery from the crisis, the success or failure of MSMEs – which employ the majority of the labour force – will play a key role in determining whether or not this recovery is socially inclusive,” the heads of the three organizations said in a [joint statement](#).

Global Trade Helpdesk partner organizations

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to an unprecedented global economic slowdown, with [world merchandise trade set to plunge by 20%](#) and [foreign direct investment by 40%](#), according to UNCTAD forecasts.

The pandemic’s effects are proving particularly dramatic for smaller businesses. A recent [ITC survey](#) revealed that one in four MSMEs is at risk of shutting its doors permanently within the next three months.

Information is power

As businesses struggle with falling demand and supply chain disruptions, getting the information they need to reach new customers and markets will be paramount in the post-COVID-19 global economy.

The cost and complexity of accessing such information can be a substantial barrier to market entry for MSMEs.

“Ready access to trade and market information is a challenge for smaller firms at the best of times,” the organizations said, “since they have fewer resources to devote to analysing complex information dispersed across multiple sources.”

Thanks to the Global Trade Helpdesk, MSMEs can now easily access COVID-19-related trade information from various international agencies, including updates about temporary import and export restrictions.

The platform also allows businesses to quickly get updated trade statistics and compare export potential estimations across different prospective target markets.

Besides, it offers updated information on import, export and transit trade procedures, a new business directory, resources to help protect intellectual property rights and online tools from various agencies to help firms build their employees’ trade and market analysis skills.

Three years in the making

UNCTAD, ITC and the WTO first joined forces on the Global Trade Helpdesk in 2017, together with the African Development Bank, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Chamber of Commerce, the UN Industrial Development Organization, the World Bank Group, the World Customs Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization.

The platform has been updated to better respond to firms' needs following broad-based testing, with support from national chambers of the International Chamber of Commerce and the WTO informal working group on MSMEs.

In addition to expanding data coverage, the new version offers a more intuitive user experience through an improved design and new functionalities. Also, it's now available in Russian in addition to Arabic, English, French and Spanish.

“As the leaders of organizations concerned with global trade and inclusive growth, we commit to continue working closely together to ensure that firms have access to the timely and relevant trade and market information they need to make effective decisions in a rapidly changing global market,” the organizations said.