



Global Innovation Forum



5 February 2026

***Open Letter to World Trade Organization Members:
Supporting Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Business and Startup Growth and Job Creation
by Making the WTO Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions associated
Work Programme on Electronic Commerce Permanent***

The undersigned, representing a broad and diverse global community of micro, small, and medium-sized (MSME) business entrepreneurs and startup innovators collectively urge World Trade Organization (WTO) members to make the Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions and the associated Work Programme on Electronic Commerce permanent during the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

The communities around the world that we represent and support are the small businesses and startups that are the driving force behind the export of countless consumer and enterprise digital products and services, powering economic growth, competition, and innovation. Across developed and developing nations, the global digital economy, valued by the World Bank to be approximately US\$ 16 trillion, has become the primary channel for affordable and accessible digital products and services that have benefitted countless populations and other businesses, as well as providing an unparalleled means of empowerment.

The WTO's longstanding moratorium on tariffs and customs formalities on electronic transmissions, including content, has underpinned our growth and job creation across consumer and enterprise markets, and remains vital to supporting MSME and startup innovation as well as the digital transition writ large. The moratorium has enabled startups and MSMEs around the world to fairly and efficiently reach new markets, driving competition and innovation.

Allowing the moratorium to expire would subject MSMEs and startups to digital protectionism measures which are demonstrated to discourage entrepreneurship and competition, undermining WTO members' goal of supporting and promoting their country's growth as well as the relevance and credibility of the

WTO itself. The imposition of customs duties is already well known to raise costs for consumers, lower output, and reduce productivity. In addition, the moratorium's expiration would lead to a new range of customs administrative requirements that MSMEs will need to navigate and comply with. As organizations that are already resource-constrained and unable to distribute risk across numerous product lines in comparison to large businesses, the impact on MSMEs and startups will be far more pronounced and burdensome in comparison to larger companies. Unleashing this negative dynamic on MSMEs and startups must be avoided as powering digital economy growth is vital to attaining economic growth across developing and developed economies.

Our communities call on each WTO member to support participation in digital trade for each and every startup and MSME. It is vital that each WTO member support in making the Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions and the associated Work Programme on Electronic Commerce permanent during MC14.

Sincerely,

ABStartups - Associação Brasileira de Startups

ACT | The App Association

Africa ICT Alliance - AfICTA

Engine

Federation of Finnish Enterprises

Global Innovation Forum

InnovUp (Italy)

Japan Association of New Economy

Small Business & Entrepreneurship Council