

The WTO Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions

Global factsheet

What is the WTO Moratorium?

For over 25 years, members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) have agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions. That means no tariffs on digital trade, a critical safeguard for the digital economy.

The WTO Moratorium on Customs Duties on Electronic Transmissions (the Moratorium) makes it possible for people and businesses around the world to access, share and deliver digital content and services electronically, without added costs at the border.

The Moratorium protects things like:

- Cloud-based tools and software platforms that help micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) manage inventory and communicate with clients
- Digital services such as remote education, telemedicine, online marketing and freelance work (e.g., programming, translation, graphic design)
- E-books, scientific research and training materials vital for learning and professional development
- Streaming platforms, apps, and digital content that support local creators, entertainers and consumers (e.g., mobile games, creative design files)
- Software updates and security patches that keep devices running safely and affordably

Digital services now make up over half of all global exports.

According to the WTO, export growth of digitally enabled services in least developed countries outpaced that of other services between 2007 and 2019 and was faster than in the rest of the world. This means that companies in developing countries, including low-income and least developed countries, would be harmed by the imposition of customs duties elsewhere on their digital transmissions, harming growth.

What's at stake?

Unless the Moratorium is renewed at the 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14) in March 2026, it will automatically lapse, opening the door for countries to impose digital tariffs for the first time in history. A few countries are already moving in this direction, pushing to end the Moratorium and impose tariffs on cross-border data flows. But the implications go well beyond tariff schedules. The Moratorium is not just a technical rule – it's a foundation for digital inclusion, economic growth, and investment certainty.

Why does it matter to everyone?

Losing the Moratorium would mean:



A fragmented digital economy, with a patchwork of national rules that limit access to global tools and markets



Higher prices for digital tools and services for businesses of all sizes, especially hitting MSMEs and consumers in developing countries



Slower digital growth and reduced competitiveness especially in countries where affordable access matters most



More red tape, more compliance costs with little real gain in government revenue



Disrupted digital trade and innovation closing doors to global markets



Legal and technical chaos since there's no clear way to tax "data at the border"

Who would be hit hardest by the failure to renew the Moratorium?

This isn't about big tech. It's about keeping the digital economy open and affordable for everyone.

Millions of small businesses, entrepreneurs and independent creators across the world rely on open digital channels to reach customers, earn a living and grow. Digital tariffs would make it harder for businesses to stay visible, competitive and connected. More trade restrictions are not the answer.

It would also hurt the growing number of digital service providers and start-ups in developing countries who are just beginning to scale their businesses and reach global markets. Customs duties would add cost, complexity, and uncertainty at exactly the wrong time.

Real impact

Indonesia's women entrepreneurs

In Indonesia, Rina and Yuni lead a women-owned logistics and biodiesel distribution company that supports mining, maritime, infrastructure and development projects across the archipelago. Rina works with thousands of women entrepreneurs to expand market access, embrace digital innovation and lead in emerging sectors.

"From e-commerce platforms and logistics software to digital payments and training tools, women-led MSMEs rely on affordable digital services to survive and scale. The WTO E-Commerce Moratorium helps keep those tools within reach. If it lapses, the rising cost of digital technologies could widen the gender gap in trade and hold back the full potential of women-led MSMEs. For us, this isn't just about data or tariffs — it's about ensuring that women and MSMEs are not left behind in the future of global trade, and that their inclusion remains central to achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals."

Rinawati Prihatiningsih, Vice Chair of IWAPI, Co-Chair of G20 EMPOWER Indonesia, and Global Chair of G100 Women-Led Businesses

What business is asking

WTO members must renew the Moratorium as a signal of confidence in the global trading system at MC14 and to safeguard certainty for the digital economy

Beyond renewal, the call is for the Moratorium to be made permanent, providing long-term certainty for the digital economy and ensuring uninterrupted access to digital tools and cross-border data flows—key to fostering innovation, trade and inclusive growth in the digital age. By making it permanent, WTO members can secure a future where businesses thrive in a connected, digital world.

Digital trade must remain predictable, open and fair.

What can your organisation do?

- Urge your government to support a renewed Moratorium at MC14
- Share this factsheet with your networks
- Send us your story: we're spotlighting real voices in our global campaign
- Host or join a dialogue on what the Moratorium means for your business
- Speak out on social media using #TradeMatters to share why the Moratorium matters

Keeping the Moratorium means preserving an open digital economy, ensuring access and inclusion for all.

The Internet is a storefront, a customer base, a livelihood – and even a lifeline. Behind every digital transaction is a person: a small business owner building an online shop, a freelance designer working across borders, a student accessing learning materials, a customer buying services they couldn't find locally.

Letting the Moratorium lapse would raise costs, create new barriers, and shut people out – just when the world needs more digital opportunity, not less.

Discover

related reports and policy briefs at iccwbo.org/WTO-Moratorium.

About the International Chamber of Commerce

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC) is the institutional representative of more than 45 million companies in over 170 countries. ICC's core mission is to make business work for everyone, every day, everywhere. Through a unique mix of advocacy, solutions and standard setting, we promote international trade, responsible business conduct and a global approach to regulation, in addition to providing market-leading dispute resolution services. Our members include many of the world's leading companies, SMEs, business associations and local chambers of commerce.



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