

ITC Webinar on Investment Facilitation for Development: Why it Matters for Central Asia?

**25 July 2024 (Thursday), 11:00-12:00 CET
(14:00-15:00 Astana time)**

The WTO Joint Initiative on Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) was initiated by 70 WTO Members during the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference in December 2017.¹ It emerged from the necessity to tackle procedural barriers that hinder and constrain investment across economies. On 25 February 2024, a Joint Ministerial Declaration was issued by 123 WTO members, marking the finalization of the textual negotiation. To date, 90 developing economies and 26 least-developed countries have endorsed the initiative, which include Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

In the post-pandemic era, Central Asia has demonstrated notable resilience in the face of recent economic and geopolitical challenges. Investment is important for Central Asian countries to increase value-added in the exports of raw materials from the region. Nonetheless, investment remains crucial to the region to advance economic diversification and enhance value chain resilience to future shocks. Significant efforts are being made in advancing national investment climate and frameworks. For instance, Uzbekistan has digitalized 50% of government services and eliminated redundant licensing procedures, while Kyrgyzstan has established the first one-stop shop to ease business registration and license application.² These measures have proven

effective in attracting foreign investors and align with the objectives set by the WTO IFD initiative.

However, inadequate information transparency, opaque procedures, and frequent changes of regulations without sufficient notice remain key obstacles for investors and SMEs during the implementation process. Further enhancement through regulatory assessments and technical implementation of investment-related procedures and policies, as guided by the WTO IFD provisions, can serve as a blueprint for Central Asia countries to progress and create synergies between their national reform priorities and international engagement.

This webinar aims to provide a platform for strategic exchange on the WTO IFD initiative for stakeholders in Central Asia, including investors and SMEs. Through the exchange of best practices and exploration of regional priorities, the webinar seeks to support policymakers and investors in the region to effectively engage in and advance the implementation of investment measures they deem most necessary. The webinar also aims to unfold the key provisions and explore the needs and support that Central Asian stakeholders require for domestic alignment.

The webinar will be conducted in English and Russian. Link to registration is [here](#).

The webinar will have the following speakers:

Opening Remarks

Representative from ITC

Moderator

Daria Karman, Associate Programme Officer, Trade Policy and Investment Facilitation, ITC

Panellists

- **Quan Zhao**, Senior Officer, Trade Policy and Investment Facilitation, ITC – *“How can developing countries benefit from the WTO IFD agreements?”*
 - **Matthew Stephenson**, Head, Investment and Services, World Economic Forum – *“What can governments do to facilitate investment in Central Asia?”*
 - **Nurlan Kulbatyrov**, Deputy General Director, QazTrade – *“Why the WTO Investment Facilitation for Development negotiations matter for Central Asia”*
 - **Zhanna Baidasheva**, Director of Kazakhstan Foreign Investors’ Council Association – *“An investor’s perspective on the importance of investment facilitation”*
 - **Tengiz Asanov**, Deputy Head of Investment Climate Department, Ministry of Investment, Industry and Trade of Uzbekistan – *“Which investment facilitation measures are most important and what kind of support is needed”*
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