

Joint Advisory Group (UNCTAD/WTO) on the ITC
Fifty-fifth session, Geneva, 2 November 2021

Statement by Switzerland

Excellences,

Dear Delegates,

First of all, let me thank Ms. Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director of ITC, H.E. Xiangchen Zhang, Deputy Director-General of the WTO, and Mr. Moreno, Director of the Office of the Secretary General of UNCTAD, for their introductory statements.

Thank you also to H.E. Ms. Athaliah Lesiba Molokomme, for chairing the 54th session of the Joint Advisory Group and a warm welcome to H.E. Mr. Paul Bekkers, who will be chairing the current session.

We would also like to stress that our statement is fully aligned with the statement issued by the Netherlands on behalf of the donors.

The upheavals we have gone through since the beginning of the pandemic have had unprecedented impact on global trade. On one hand, efforts were dedicated to secure resources for an adequate sanitary response to the global crisis. On the other hand, measures taken by some governments led to obstacles in trade and business. The unpredictability of this context affected companies throughout the world in many negative ways, especially in LDC's. The most agile of them have been able to make use of digitalization to establish new business platforms. However, for many MSME's notably, the challenge has been huge in facing this crisis with adequate tools. As the 2020 report by ITC states, one fifth of SMEs

were at risk of permanently closing within three months. Further, the pandemic hit firms in the services sector hardest, including companies led by women and young entrepreneurs.

This is where ITC plays a key role. The center has been prompt in adapting its market analysis tools to create tailor-made solutions for firms, policymakers and business support institutions. We believe that supporting MSME's, youth and women, especially in LDC's, is a major driver for a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery. We welcome the free of cost access to the tools designed by ITC, which led to a significant increase in the number of registered users, passing the one million mark for the first time.

ITC remains a valued partner for Switzerland. The current challenges also present opportunities. Allow me to mention one particular example.

ITC's Global Textiles and Clothing Programme (GTEX), supported by Switzerland, has been particularly quick to offer trainings and coaching to adapt to the new economic situation. Impact analysis and numerous recommendations have been provided for regional recovery plans (e.g. MENA region, with the Technical Unit of Agadir). SMEs have been advised in diversifying their production and make use of digitalization, as well as online marketing. Further, a relevant reflection on the notion of near-shoring has been triggered as a way to better manage the disruptions to global supply chains of everyday goods and services.

We welcome the efforts made by ITC to create synergies between different organizations in some beneficiary countries, for example between ITC and ILO, but also with large multinational associations. Collective action is a must. In this sense let me encourage each organization and actor to contribute its own share in reaching together towards economic recovery for all.

In this respect, we would also like to encourage all participants and actors involved in ITC's engagement to pay a closer look at the relevance of circular economy for sustainable solutions for trade. Pivoting towards sustainability, the ambition stated in ITC's report, has to be more than a priority, it has to be a major objective for all countries and sectors.

Today, Switzerland sets its global trade partnership with ITC on a new footing by contributing through a new modality. No later than last week, Switzerland has committed to supporting the Window 1 Trust Fund, while continuing its bilateral engagement in target countries. This partnership revolves around three topics: providing global public goods, strengthening business support organizations, and mainstreaming gender, climate topics and digitalization. The contribution to the Window 1 Trust Fund provides resources that are essential for ITC to develop and expand its offer of global public goods, conduct research and development and pilot projects with a priority to LDCs, finance new business development, and make investments in innovation for corporate efficiency, among others.

Let me conclude: ITC is a key actor supporting export-oriented SMEs in developing countries, and has been a longstanding, likeminded and reliable partner of Swiss development cooperation. Over the past two decades, Switzerland has supported a series of bilateral projects and initiatives implemented by ITC. We are now looking to pivot towards a more strategic and long-term partnership with ITC. Switzerland's contribution to the Window 1 Trust Fund is anchoring an enhanced institutional collaboration. We very much look forward to pursuing this fruitful cooperation and wish ITC a lot of success.

Thank you for your attention.