



# PROSPECTUS

INTERNATIONAL SERVICES TRADE INFORMATION AGENCY (ISTIA) • CASE POSTALE 3547 • CH-1211 GENEVA 3 • [HTTP://WWW.SERVICESTRADE.ORG](http://www.servicestrade.org)

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**ISTIA**, the **International Services Trade Information Agency** is a new international organization, based in Geneva, with the mandate of providing training and technical assistance on the topic of services trade information, to developing countries, LCD, economies-in-transition, being WTO Members, or acceding WTO Members.

The mandate of **ISTIA** comprises:

- Services Trade Information Capacity Building at the national level for Developing Country WTO Members and Acceding Members to the WTO. This comprises the provision of training to national agencies empowered by their respective governments to collect information, usually national accounts based statistics, on services related trade. The objective of this training is to allow statistical agencies to collect information that is more rich in character, that provides greater depth and allows for deeper interpretation by trade negotiators, government officials and the private sector.
- WTO Negotiator Training in the use of Services Trade Information, especially for developing economies, least-developed economies (LDCs) and economies in transition.
- Services Trade Information Co-ordination and Information-Sharing at the International Level – This will comprise, *inter alia*, cooperation with national statistical agencies, inter-governmental agencies, national trade negotiation agencies and outside experts will be sought, with a view towards providing a world-class solution to the need for services trade information enhancement vis-à-vis technical assistance and capacity building.

The principle means of improving services trade information is the employment of Enterprise surveys (ES) to collect services trade information from private sector actors. This is the means of data collection employed by developed countries, the majority of which presently have far better information to give services trade negotiators than do their developing country counterparts. Enterprise surveys are one of the two modalities recommended by the IMF, in the *IMF Balance of Payments Compilation Guide* for gathering services trade information as a part of national accounts data collection. The other modality, principally used by developing countries, is called International Transaction Reporting Systems (ITRS); it does not provide the same higher-level of data collection as does ES.

The employment of ES by national governments will require a great deal of commitment by developing countries; it will require the commitment of resources, of attention from the highest levels of government, as well as the willingness to work towards building trust on the part of business reporters, the entities that will complete and submit Enterprise Surveys (ES) to the national government. Governance issues will be important, i.e. governments will be in a position to decide the statutory level of reporting, and the legal treatment of information gathered through enterprise surveys will have, in the experience of developed countries, a direct bearing on the quality of data reported.

The level of work **ISTIA** undertakes is daunting, but has been long awaited by developing countries; this having been stated in over 75 official meetings held under the auspices of the WTO and during the Uruguay Round<sup>1</sup> during the late 1980s. Developed countries also have an interest in the improvement of services trade information; it is a well-known fact that developing countries have been less than full participants in services trade negotiations. As of the present, negotiators do not have clear information regarding services-related trade flowing in and out of their economies, nor are they well informed as per services-related FDI-related enterprise economic activity, or even provided information as to the etiology of such information. This is a *lacunae* that **ISTIA** seeks to address.

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<sup>1</sup> A complete listing of, and linkage to, these over 75 official meetings can be found online at the ISTIA website: <http://www.servicestrade.org>



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For almost five years, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has chaired an Inter-Agency Task Force, which has drafted a new set of international standards on services trade statistics; these have been enshrined in a new Manual, published by the UN. The OECD group does not include capacity building for developing country to implement these new concepts; this too is a *lacunae* that **ISTIA** work will address.

Given the importance in the present moment of the services negotiations to developed countries, given the interest of that such work should be undertaken in the developing country interest, the commencement of **ISTIA** work could be best described as a true “win-win” situation.

**ISTIA** will firstly consist of a small team of persons, operating out of Geneva. Developing country governments seeking **ISTIA** assistance will be expected to make some level of commitment to work with **ISTIA**, and to focus on providing sufficient resources and attention such that a reasonable return on **ISTIA** investment can be reasonably anticipated. Priority will be given to countries with governments interested in making commitments of this nature. It is anticipated that such commitment will not be difficult to find; usually the need for services trade information, or rather, a frustration at the lack of it, is felt at the highest levels of the government, as well as at the negotiation table.

The modality for operation will be not unlike that employed by the WTO in its early days, i.e. an **ISTIA** professional will be designated as point-person, for a group of countries, recipients of **ISTIA** capacity building. The speed of which training can be provided to countries will be utterly dependant on the amount of resources available to **ISTIA**; quality will not be sacrificed for speed.

Cooperation with inter-governmental organizations performing related work, including UNCTAD, the WTO, the OECD, the World Bank, and the IMF is encouraged, as is collaborative efforts with national statistical offices and national trade agencies. One agreed Member of the Board of Governors is the President of a developing country statistical agency. Other Board Members are officials of the WTO and UNCTAD. Others are high-level officials of national governments, or eminent professors specialized in related disciplines.

Administrative costs will be kept to a minimum. With a sufficient level of resources, a secretary and office manager will be hired. Bookkeeping duties will be outsourced, as will website work. An auditor will be appointed, in accordance with Swiss Government legal requirements for NGOs; most likely candidates for auditing partners will be one of the internationally-known blue-chip “Big Four/Five” firms.

Given that the clientele of **ISTIA** is comprised almost entirely of governments, it is hoped that the organization could come to achieve international personality; this would be appropriate, and in accordance with the inter-governmental nature of the work performed by the new organization.

More information on the mandate, objectives and current events relating to **ISTIA** can be found on the website: <http://www.servicetrade.org>