

Leveraging Trade in Services to Develop Telehealth

Regional workshop on strengthening
telemedicine
7—9 February 2023, New Delhi, India

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Trade and health services ??

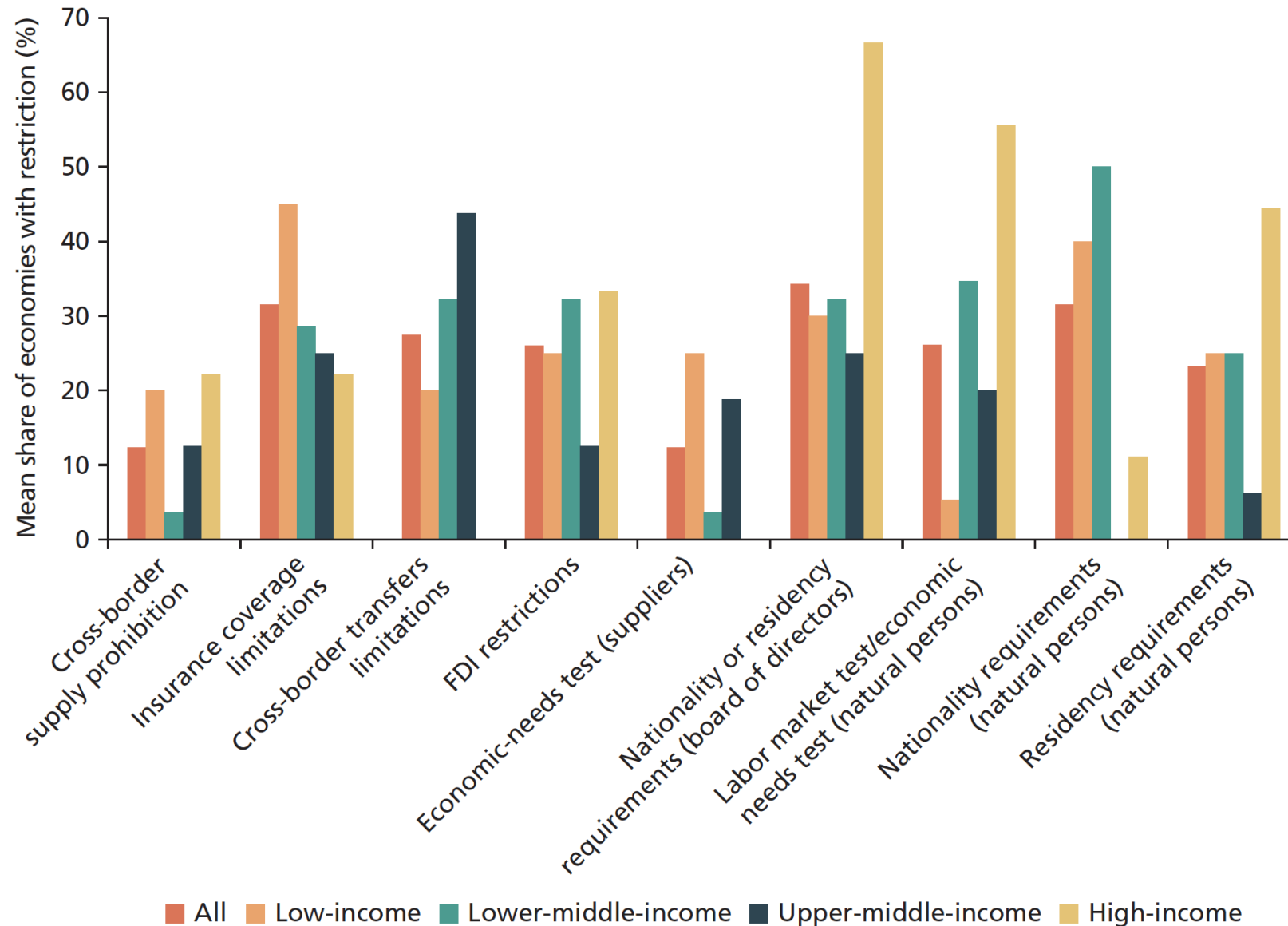


Trade agreements cover trade in health services (incl. General Agreement on Trade in Services – GATS)

- Objectives: Growth and development
- Main obligations:
 - Transparency
 - Most Favoured Nation treatment (MFN) } All sectors covered by agreement
 - Non-discrimination national vs. foreign suppliers } Only for sectors committed (but with flexibilities)
 - Removal of quantitative restrictions } No obligation to open markets!

Services guaranteed by the government to each citizen, and not provided on commercial basis or in competition excluded

What are the main barriers or restrictions to trade in telehealth services?



Source: World Trade Organization and World Bank, Services Trade Policy Database Note: The study, using 2020-21 data, covers 73 economies.

How can GATS and other trade agreements increase access to telehealth services?



WORLD TRADE
ORGANIZATION

- Identify and call for reduction of discriminatory practices and barriers to market entry
- Reduce costs of international trade in services
- Increase transparency and predictability
- Support fulfilment of health public policy objectives while not constraining government's right to regulate: quality, security, equity

- **Encourage development of telehealth (locally and cross-border):** Attract FDI in telehealth, develop frameworks and flexibilities for (cross-border) P-to-P telehealth, remove nationality and prior residency requirements
- **Liberalize telecom and computer services** for benefit of underserved, more open trade in necessary material and devices
- **Good regulatory practices** improve transparency and facilitate administrative procedures
- **Adopt sound digital regulatory environment:** support cross-border data flows, ensure personal health data and privacy frameworks not unduly restricting trade
- **Implement complementary policies** to ensure gains from telehealth services increase equality and do not exacerbate existing inequalities

How can governments use trade policy to improve access to telehealth services domestically?

- **Bind existing policies for medical services trade**

Make specific commitments for the cross-border supply of less-sensitive telehealth services (P-to-P, teleradiology, telemedicine platforms), bind investment policies

- **Use regional trade agreements to advance telehealth services trade liberalization initiatives**

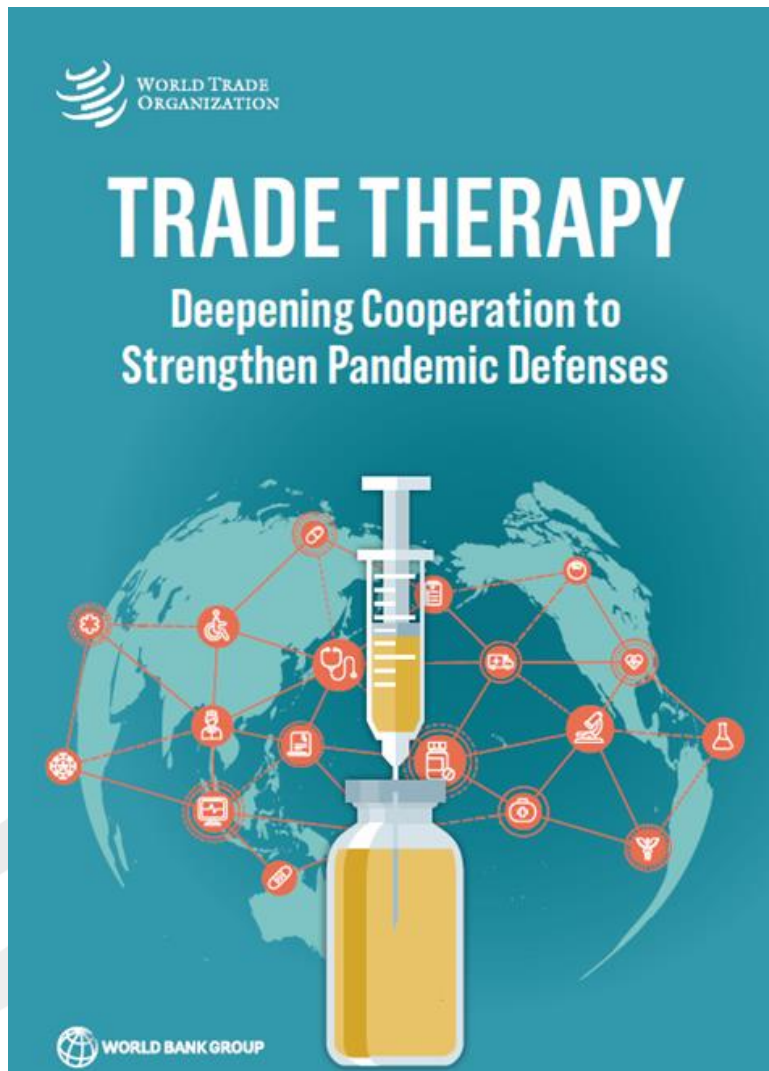
Ease portability of insurance and reduce other barriers

- **Promote standardization and interoperability**

recognition of foreign qualifications and programs for accreditation of foreign suppliers

- **Foster cooperation for cross-border liability**

How can governments use trade to improve access to telehealth services via international cooperation?



Further Information

- Joint WTO and World Bank publication on utilizing trade to strengthen responses to future pandemics
- Upcoming Joint WTO and WHO working paper and guide on using services trade policy to increase access to telehealth services