

How to make the EU trade policy gender-equal

I would like to thank the INTA and FEMM Committee for organizing this important hearing and for inviting our network to speak. This joint initiative by the FEMM and INTA committee is an excellent opportunity to make EU trade policy gender-sensitive; we very much welcome this initiative.

I am speaking here on behalf of the WIDE+ gender and trade working group that brings together experts and CSO representatives to monitor EU trade policy. WIDE+ is a European network based in 10 EU member states. WIDE+ members are gender and development NGOs and networks, as well as women's rights experts and activists. As part of our work to provide feminist economic literacy we have been analysing EU trade and development policies for close to twenty years. We will be publishing our recommendations to make EU trade policy gender sensitive soon.

Our experience in monitoring EU trade policy confirms the observation that EU trade policy is gender blind. Not only is EU trade policy gender-blind; it also follows what we perceive as a neoliberal ideology that promotes reducing transnational tariffs, combined with global deregulation of investment and services, strengthening investors' rights and, in some instances, protectionist policies for European producers, in particular agriculture and through promoting intellectual property rights.

We have so far seen that the neo-liberal strategy is actually damaging to sustainable development and human rights, including women's rights. We draw this conclusion from a wealth of substantiated empirical research on the effects of free trade agreements. We join the worries of growing number of civil society and experts at international institutions and academia are deeply concerned over the current EU trade policy.

The EU has firmly committed itself to promoting and ensuring gender equality. Among others it is an integral part of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. In 2006, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on women in international trade. Many of the recommendations made more than ten years ago are still not realised in EU's trade policy and remain on the agenda of women's rights associations to advocate for.

What has happened so far in terms of trade and women by DG trade and its commissioner, is that they have been involved in two events focusing on empowering women through trade policies in the past half year, of which one is upcoming in June. While we welcome these initiatives, we regret the fact that both have a strong focus on women entrepreneurs, thus leaving aside a majority of women who actually work as labourers, in agriculture, in the informal sector, as members of households doing mostly unpaid work, or as migrant seasonal workers picking fruit for export, to name but a few. These women workers, who are often invisible in trade policies, are the ones who get economies going, and, unfortunately, the ones that are worst hit by current trade and investment practices.

We strongly believe that there is a direct relation between the trade policy adopted by the EU, and the increase or decrease of gendered inequalities. Firstly, the feminization of export-

oriented light or low value-added manufacturing is one of the most visible aspects of how gender relates with trade liberalisation. There are many cases of countries in which export-led growth has gone hand in hand with a feminization of this labour, not only resulting in a majority of women doing these jobs, but also with extremely low salaries and even worse working conditions and exploitation.

While looking at the benefits of trade for women's employment, the main focus should not be on promoting female entrepreneurship or creating more jobs. While job creation is important, it is more pertinent to ask the question if a given trade agreement leads to more decent work, meaning enough pay as well as reasonable and protected working conditions? Growing employment in precarious jobs that do not provide enough for decent living standards is not a sign of improving women's empowerment. That is why labour standards in trade agreements that are binding are of utmost importance in our view. There are many good ILO standards that in particular impact women that could be included in trade agreements. For example, Convention No. 189 on Domestic Workers and No. 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities. Also the UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) and its Optional Protocol that is ratified by 188 states should be included in our view. It is very comprehensive in terms of women's human rights that are included. We strongly propose to engender trade and sustainability chapters in each EU trade agreement that are binding with an appropriate body appointed or an explicit mechanism to monitor compliance.

EU trade policy has moved from opening markets of goods for international trade through lowering tariffs to promoting a liberalisation of the market of services and investment, including opening up public procurement, and increasing the rights of investors and companies through an increasing number of dispute settlement mechanism. It is argued that opening up markets of services and public procurement will lead to more efficient and cheaper services and goods, however there is little proof to back this up. Instead, we have found many examples that illustrate the opposite.

Women are disproportionably affected by liberalization of services and opening up public procurement. Globally, women spend two and a half time more unpaid hours caring for their families and communities than men. A wealth of research confirms the fact that unpaid care work is mostly done by women. This is an often overlooked contribution that women make to economies, but it is a huge one on which other economic sectors depend. The opening up of markets of services and public procurement through deregulation and privatization will hamper access to basic social services and essential goods. This will mean firstly a greater burden on informal care work done mostly by women, which includes the care to provide for food, water and sanitation.

Furthermore, trade liberalisation is increasing women's care burden through taxes. The loss of income from trade taxes, including tariffs has resulted in significant reductions in government revenue in developing countries, leading governments to reducing social spending.

The EU can help to decrease women's care burden through halting to promote further liberalization and privatization of public services, public goods and opening up of public procurement. We recommend that EU Trade policy encourages and facilitates states to regulate and provide for social protection instead.

In our paper 'Promoting gender equality in and beyond EU trade policy' that we will soon publish we make eight key recommendations to allow for a trade policy that promotes gender equality instead of hindering it. I have mentioned here two, on binding clauses with gender equality in SD chapters and halting efforts to open up service and public goods markets. I will close with briefly stating our other key recommendations that we have developed as gender and trade working group.

We propose to:

1. Strengthen the protection of women's rights over the rights of companies and investors with a halt to investor-state dispute settlement and limiting Intellectual Property rights.
3. Adopt gender-sensitive binding human rights regulations on a international level to regulate Transnational Companies (TNCs) and other companies.
4. Women who are mostly responsible for food sovereignty and who are hugely affected by environmental disasters should be protected through pushing back agricultural liberalization in trade agreements.
6. Increase transparency, civil society involvement –including women's rights associations and movements- and democratic control in negotiation processes and ratification of agreements..
7. Sustainable Impact Assessments should have an encompassing gender human rights lens and DG trade should engage in continuous gender monitoring.

I hope this will provide a good starting point for further discussion and reflection.