

On the importance of introducing a gender dimension to trade agreements

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Opinion

Both the EU and its partners would benefit greatly from introducing a gender dimension to trade agreements, says Barbara Matera.



Barbara Matera | Photo credit: *European Parliament audiovisual*

Studies show that empowering women could increase global GDP by \$28 trillion by 2025, yet women are face hurdles to entering the global economy. Every day, most women suffer discrimination purely because of their gender.

Despite these barriers, women still have to fight to succeed in the modern workplace. Outside the developed workplace, women are being refused work due to their gender. The EU strives for equal human rights and gender equality in all of its endeavours, yet policies ensuring gender equality in

trade agreements are often neglected.

Gender equality is often tied with economic development. Prohibiting the potential of half of the entire population comes with obvious economical downfalls. Educating females is a requirement for a more advanced and global economy. Giving women and girls the chance to flourish increases available human capital, diversifies the employee pool, and creates a more productive work force.

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The gender gap in education, training and positions of power, means women often fail to benefit from the opportunities that trade agreements provide. The gap in resources such as wealth, land and technology contributes to a gendered difference in occupations.

Even although the amount of paid work for women has increased, it is often work that takes advantage of pre-existing gender stereotypes and systems that undermine women. This leaves them in working environments such as the garment sector, where they are vulnerable to dangerous and unfair working conditions. This type of work pays next to nothing and is unsafe.

There have been numerous occasions where hazardous work has resulted in deaths. In 2013, a blaze in a factory killed 1129 people.

By bearing these issues in mind when establishing trade agreements, policymakers can deploy methods to prevent these travesties.

To ensure trade deals are shaped to empower women and girls, a proportionate number of women in political power is needed. For the trade deals to work effectively, they need to be formulated with provisions that maximise opportunities for women to enter a more diversified field.

Second, the gender education, wealth and resources gap needs to be ended. Greater investment in women and girls' education and access to technology will empower them to progress to better-paying, safer and more stable jobs.

A third way to improve the working conditions of women is to instigate laws and trade agreements that are aware of gender bias and that promote international standards of gender equality.

Trade and investment agreements should be used as a tool to promote EU values and gender equality. Agreements should stress inclusive policies with clear outlines contributing to work opportunities and working conditions for women. This inclusion of women in the work force, brought about by EU trade agreements, can result in significant economic change.

The overwhelming benefits of letting more women work makes a great case for implementing a gendered perspective in all trade agreements.

The EU endeavours to ensure and promote human rights with every action; they should not forgo these values when it comes to trade. The creation of trade agreements with women's rights in mind

benefit not only the EU financially, but also the global community as a whole.

About the author

Barbara Matera (IT) is Parliament's EPP group shadow rapporteur on gender equality in EU trade agreements

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[Culture and Education](#) [4]

[Development](#) [5]

[Employment and Social Affairs](#) [6]

[European Commission](#) [7]

[Trade](#) [8]

[Foreign Affairs](#) [9]

[Justice and Rights](#) [10]

Categories

[Business and industry](#) [11]

[Gender equality](#) [12]

[Education and skills](#) [13]

[Employment](#) [14]

[International Relations](#) [15]

[Public order, justice and rights](#) [16]

[Society and welfare](#) [17]



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- [12] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/gender-equality>
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