

The impact of trade agreements on women's economic empowerment

Response from WO=MEN to the OHCHR call for input

12th of June 2026

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has [requested input](#) on the impact of trade agreements on women's economic empowerment to inform the preparation of a report as requested by the Human Rights Council [resolution 59/18](#). In this submission, WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform briefly provides several observations on the Dutch context, based on public information and our engagement with the Dutch government.

About WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform

WO=MEN is the Dutch network of women's rights, diaspora and development cooperation organisations, (social) entrepreneurs, academics and activists who work for gender equality and women's rights worldwide. WO=MEN is the largest EU network with this focus. See for more information: www.wo-men.nl.

Please describe how women have participated in the design, preparation and implementation of trade-related laws, policies or strategies in your country.

In the Netherlands, there is no dedicated formal mechanism ensuring the structured participation of women and/or women's rights organisations in the design, preparation and implementation of trade-related laws, policies or strategies.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the [Breed Handelsberaad](#) (Broad Trade Deliberation) in 2017 as a consultation platform to inform Dutch positions on EU trade negotiations, dealing with both new and existing trade agreements. This forum brings together representatives of government, trade unions, employers' organisations, civil society, and local authorities. It provides an important space for stakeholder engagement, but publicly available information suggests that women's rights organisations are currently [not represented as members in this forum](#) and the impact of trade on gender equality and women's rights is [not a standard agenda item](#).

In 2022 the Dutch government announced its commitment to a Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP), which explicitly prioritized women's participation and representation in decision-making, including in trade and foreign economic policy. In December 2024 the government published its [guidance](#) for the Dutch Feminist Foreign Policy. The Dutch Feminist Foreign Policy was [discontinued in 2025](#) by the previous government and has not yet been reinstated. Its actual impact on trade policymaking structures therefore remains unknown and potentially limited.

However, in response to the Dutch FFP, more regular engagement between policy officers of the division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs focused on Trade and Investment agreements and Market Entry and the [Gender and Sustainable Economy Working Group](#) which is part of WO=MEN Dutch Gender Platform has taken place and has continued. This working group consists of various civil society organisations that focus on gender equality and trade, corporate accountability, climate and biodiversity. These exchanges have provided an opportunity to share evidence and perspectives on the gendered effects of trade and investment policies.

At the EU level, Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) provide a mechanism for civil society participation

for monitoring and advice on the implementation of Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapters. They consist of representatives of employers, trade unions and civil society. Feminist perspectives are represented in some of the DAGs through representatives of Women In Development Europe+ (WIDE+), but gender equality is not systematically prioritised across all DAGs and participation and effectiveness varies between agreements.

In conclusion, the absence of a formal participation mechanism for women's rights actors in trade policymaking constitutes a structural gap in ensuring compliance with gender equality and participation obligations under international human rights frameworks, including CEDAW.

Please indicate how your country monitors the impact of trade on human rights. How are the impact of women's human rights and gender equality captured in such monitoring?

The Netherlands monitors human rights impacts through a range of broader policy frameworks rather than through trade-specific monitoring mechanisms. The [National Action Plan Business and Human Rights](#) is based on the UNGPS and the Dutch government [reports yearly](#) on progress to Dutch parliament. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' International Research and Policy Evaluation Department has conducted an [evaluation](#) of the Dutch international human rights policy. The systematic integration of gender aspects in foreign policy, development cooperation policy and trade policy is mentioned as part of the government priority under equal rights for women and girls (p.27), yet the analysis of coherence between human rights and trade policies is genderblind.

The Netherlands monitors the potential impact of new legislation and policies with several quality tests, since 2018 including the test [Effects on gender equality](#). Recently this test has been used for the Dutch implementation of the Corporate Sustainability Directive (CSDDD) and the Forced Labour Regulation, but it seems it's not being used for trade and investment agreements. Based on available information, it seems there is no dedicated system for the monitoring of gender impacts of trade agreements and existing monitoring frameworks do not consistently assess how trade affects women in all their diversity.

Have human rights impact assessments been undertaken, before and/or after the conclusion of trade agreements?

The Netherlands doesn't systematically conduct standalone national human rights impact assessments for trade agreements but relies on the EU Sustainability Impact Assessments (SIAs) which are carried out in the context of EU trade negotiations. SIAs typically assess economic, environmental and social impacts, and may include some consideration of gender-related effects. However, the extent and depth of gender analysis varies between assessments. At the national level, the Dutch government provides information or analysis on specific trade agreements, sometimes also at the request of parliament. These materials do not consistently include gender-specific perspectives.

Has your country taken measures to prevent expected or actual negative impacts of trade and trade-related agreements on women's economic empowerment and human rights, including the right to development?

The Netherlands has adopted a range of policies that support gender equality both internally and externally. Recently, as part of Dutch Development Cooperation, they Netherlands launched [FemFocus](#) as part of the Focus policy framework strengthening civil society. One of the funding instruments focuses specifically on advancing women's economic participation as entrepreneurs. In the [Fair Focus on Trade instrument](#), which is part of the same framework, and which aims to make value chains more sustainable and fostering clean and fair trade, gender equality is a central policy principle. Furthermore, in several EU trade agreements gender chapters or gender provisions have been included. The Netherlands is also part of the [WTO Informal working group on Trade and Gender](#). Yet, based on the information available to us, we have not been able to identify specific measures implemented within Dutch Foreign Trade policy that explicitly aim to prevent or mitigate expected or actual negative impacts of trade agreements on women.

Please provide examples of negative and positive impacts of international trade agreements on conditions necessary for women's economic empowerment and full enjoyment of their human rights.

Available research shows consistently that the impact of trade agreements are not gender-neutral, as they are shaped by lack of fulfilment and protection of rights, existing inequalities in labour markets, access to resources and social norms and will reproduce or even exacerbate existing these structural inequalities.

Potential positive effects may include:

- the creation of employment opportunities in export-oriented sectors;
- the inclusion of sustainability, labour and gender provisions in EU trade agreements.

At the same time, negative impacts include:

- the concentration of women in lower-paid and more precarious segments of global value chains;
- unequal access to resources, finance and market opportunities for women entrepreneurs;
- exposure of women workers to economic volatility and trade-related shocks;
- fiscal impact on public services and care systems, which may disproportionately affect women as they face increased unpaid care responsibilities.

The extent of these impacts varies depending on sector, location and the specific design and implementation of trade agreements. Current monitoring systems do not always provide sufficient data to fully assess these effects. Gender provisions in trade agreements have limited impact as they lack enforcement and implementation mechanisms, which makes them more symbolic rather than transformative.

Please share references of any studies on the impact of macroeconomic policies, including trade agreements, on women's human rights, gender equality, women's economic empowerment, in particular on the situation of women and girls living in poverty in your country or in trading partners.

- Munoz Cabrera, P., Quist, M.L.A., Colombo, E.L. (forthcoming, 2026). Reality Check: the impact of the gender chapter in the EU–Chile agreement.
- WO=MEN (2024). Gender equality in supply chains", recommendations on the implementation of the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD). (in Dutch) See: <https://www.wo-men.nl/kb-bestanden/1728981730.pdf>
- WO=MEN et al. (2024). Fair, sustainable and effective. Gender equality as the basis for climate and biodiversity policies. See: https://www.wo-men.nl/bestanden/WO-MEN_Fair_Sustainable_and_Effective_Paper.pdf
- WO=MEN et al. (2019). Women in international trade, a bargain. (in Dutch) See: <https://www.wo-men.nl/kb-bestanden/1575987282.pdf>

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