

Gender equality in EU trade agreements

2017/2015(INI) - 13/03/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 512 votes to 107 with 68 abstentions a resolution on gender equality in EU trade agreements. Members argued that EU trade and investment agreements and policy are not gender-neutral, meaning that they have different impact on women and men due to structural inequalities.

Gender equality is a universal goal enshrined in many international instruments, such as the UN Charter. The Union is firmly committed to promoting and ensuring gender equality in the framework of its fundamental treaties, including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

Parliament insisted that the new generation of trade agreements should promote relevant international standards and legal instruments, including on gender equality, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Beijing Platform for Action, the core ILO Conventions and the sustainable development goals (SDGs).

Members argued that binding and enforceable provisions in EU trade agreements are necessary to ensure respect for human rights standards, including gender equality.

The Commission, the European Union and its Member States were invited, *inter alia*, to:

- ensure that the objectives of the SDGs, in particular Goal 5 on gender equality, and the Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019 are fully reflected in EU trade policies;
- take into account the gender dimension in its mid-term review of the Trade for All strategy, and ensure that gender equality is mainstreamed into trade and investment policy;
- promote multilateral agreements to extend the protection afforded by EU legislative acts that take into account gender equality issues such as the Conflict Minerals Regulation;
- include a reference to CEDAW in trade agreements and take steps towards the EU's accession and ratification of the Convention;
- continue the work of the ILO in implementing the Decent Work for Domestic Workers Convention and Convention No. 156 on Workers with Family Responsibilities and reinforce international labour standards for decent work on global value chains, with particular focus on women;
- find ways to improve the GSP and GSP + systems by means such as reinforcing their conditionality to the removal of legal discrimination against women;
- ensure, in negotiations at WTO level, that due consideration is given to gender equality when preparing new rules and agreements, and implementing and reviewing existing agreements, included in the WTO Trade Policy Review Mechanism;
- promote, in trade agreements, the commitment to ensure an improved participation of women in decision-making bodies, both in the public and in the private sector;
- ensure that the gender equality objective is given special attention in development cooperation, and that it is part of all aid programmes, including programmes related to the Aid for Trade strategy;
- explore how EU trade policies and agreements can promote women's economic empowerment and participation in areas such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Recommendations by sector: Parliament also made concrete recommendations as to what the Union can and should do to strengthen its commitment to the issue of gender inequalities in various sectors with a gender-specific cause and effect such as services, manufacture, agriculture, clothing, and intellectual property rights.

It called for binding measures to combat the exploitation of women in more export-oriented industries, particularly in the textile and agricultural sectors. Parliament recommended giving greater priority to women working in the informal sector of the economy, recognising the need to strengthen decent work standards for women in this sector.

Lastly, Members called on the Commission to extend its support measures for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, with a focus on measures for women-owned enterprises of this type. The Commission should help to establish partnerships between women entrepreneurs in the Union and their counterparts in developing countries.