



United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: General
5 March 2026

English only

Sixteenth session

Geneva

20–23 October 2025

Inclusive trade in a changing global landscape: Making trade policy work for women

Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. In her opening remarks, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD emphasized that trade needed to actively create opportunities for women rather than reinforce existing inequalities. She noted the importance of trade policy in driving change for women in the workforce, including, for example through the integration of gender-related provisions into trade agreements. Finally, she emphasized the need to scale up related work, including with regard to data collection, the use of digital tools and seizing opportunities with regard to innovation and green trade.
2. The parallel event, following opening remarks by the Secretary-General, featured six panellists: Executive Vice-President for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition, European Commission; Minister of Trade, Industry and Business Development, Lesotho; Secretary of State, Ministry of Commerce, Cambodia; Secretary of State for Trade, Ministry of Economy, Trade and Enterprise, Spain; Ambassador, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Chile to the World Trade Organization; and Trudi Hartzenberg, Executive Director, Trade Law Centre, South Africa.
3. The event, focused on how to advance gender equality and inclusivity in trade and what might be learned from provisions related to women in trade agreements, amid evolving trade dynamics, was moderated by the Ambassador, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of El Salvador to the World Trade Organization.
4. One panellist noted that the European Union had incorporated gender and equality provisions into trade agreements since 2011. She stated that recent agreements included dedicated trade and gender chapters referencing international conventions, such as the standards of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the International Labour Organization.
5. Another panellist described national initiatives in Lesotho aimed at ensuring that women were central to trade-driven growth. He noted that the textile sector employed 50,000 workers, 80 per cent of whom were women. Following the expiry of the African Growth and Opportunity Act, the sector had experienced a sharp contraction and, in response, the Government had prioritized the diversification of export markets in the Southern African Customs Union and the promotion of women-led enterprises through industrial development and targeted skills programmes. Further, national procurement reforms, including a requirement for a greater share of local sourcing, were being implemented, to restore employment, strengthen value chains and ensure that women remained key actors in the economic recovery of Lesotho.



6. One panellist detailed national initiatives in Cambodia designed to ensure that women were central to trade-driven growth. He highlighted the importance of the diversification of export sectors for women's integration into the economy through policy frameworks, which focused on inclusiveness, human capital development and social protection, with maternity and child-care benefits. Further, in preparation for graduation from the least developed country category in 2029, Cambodia was diversifying export sectors and promoting women's participation in leadership and policymaking positions, to enhance competitiveness in future trade regimes.

7. Another panellist shared the experience of Spain in the establishment of a working group on women and internationalization. She stated that the working group was aimed at enhancing women's participation in export activities, through training, the promotion of role models, data-sharing and the provision of support networks in order to foster peer-learning and mentorship.

8. One panellist stated that the Government of Chile had developed a comprehensive approach to inclusive trade through the creation of specialized institutional mechanisms. She noted that these efforts had led to a substantial increase in the number of women-led exporting firms, from 3 per cent to nearly 30 per cent over the past decade. Finally, she underlined the importance of gender-related chapters in trade agreements, noting that Chile had eight active agreements with gender-related chapters.

9. Another panellist highlighted the potential of the Protocol on Women and Youth in Trade under the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. She stressed the importance of ensuring the effective implementation of the protocol, including by strengthening women's participation in policymaking; addressing non-tariff barriers and border obstacles; promoting the formalization of informal cross-border trade; and ensuring accountability through transparency and reporting.

10. During the ensuing discussion, one participant noted that trade liberalization alone did not guarantee empowerment for women, stating that many remained concentrated in low-paid and insecure jobs. Another participant emphasized that women's economic empowerment needed to be accompanied by greater political representation and stressed the need to strengthen networks between UNCTAD and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.

11. The discussions served to underline that inclusive trade policies not only strengthened economic resilience but also fostered sustainable development, innovation and social stability; draw attention to national strategies that combined public, private and academic collaboration; emphasize the role of institutional innovation and data-driven policymaking in achieving sustainable progress; stress the importance of integrating gender considerations into all trade instruments through concrete measures such as gender-responsive trade agreements, the collection of sex-disaggregated data, simplified customs procedures and the expanded use of digital platforms to improve women's access to markets and financial services; underscore the need for coordinated global action; stress that advancing gender equality in trade required high-level political commitment, coherent national and regional policies, adequate financing and sustained collaboration among Governments, international organizations and other stakeholders; and note that UNCTAD could revive its structural analysis of trade impacts and help strengthen the participation of women's organizations in policymaking processes.

12. In her closing remarks, the moderator stated that the discussions had served to show both the progress made and the challenges that remained in achieving inclusive trade. Progress depended on high-level commitment to comprehensive financial and policy frameworks that supported women's integration into trade, and this required close collaboration among Governments, international organizations, the private sector, academia and individual women, to fully understand the challenges and design effective solutions.
