

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

## Breaking Trade Barriers That Hinder Women-Led Businesses from Entering Global Markets

#inspireinclusion #IWD2024



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### Message from OWIT International President, Hulya Kurt

Today, we are recognizing the many ways women worldwide have pushed through barriers and continue to succeed. Our collaborators, partners, and members interweave innovation and positive change to bridge new horizons. On IWD24, I reaffirm my commitment and dedicate my leadership to constructing bridges and shattering trade barriers for the future of women. Happy International Women's Day.

# Breaking Trade Barriers That Hinder Women-Led Businesses from Entering Global Markets.

## Introduction

Trade is not gender-neutral, and policy measures, support programs, and strategic initiatives are all required to pave the way and eliminate obstacles for businesses led by women seeking to enter international markets. Such obstacles also include those based on gender bias or harmful social norms, which constitute a barrier to trade, for instance, by limiting women's access to economic and job opportunities created by trade and, in turn, limiting development and poverty reduction.

Nonetheless, there are proven cases that promote strategies which can assist women-led and women-owned businesses in surmounting barriers and promoting the globalization of unrestricted exchange of commodities.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has conducted various initiatives and dialogues to raise the issue and address gender inclusivity in international Trade. While the WTO itself does not directly set social policies, it plays a role in facilitating conversations and encouraging its member countries to consider gender-related issues in the trade policy domain.

## Need for Gender-Inclusive Trade Policies

It is vital to develop and implement trade policies that explicitly address the unique challenges women face in international Trade. Including gender-specific provisions in trade agreements ensures a more inclusive and equitable trading environment. For example, the prevention of land ownership by women in some countries leads to an increase in trade barriers, as illustrated in Figure 1. <sup>[1]</sup>

Figure 1. Chain of effects in property rights, access to finance and trade due to negative gender norms



## Gender in Trade Agreements

Recent years have seen an increase in the number of Regional and Bilateral Trade Agreements (RTAs) with gender equality provisions or chapters, as more countries and regions introduce gender mainstreaming tools in their trade policy processes.

The inclusion of gender issues in FTAs aims to further the objective of inclusive Trade and meet the targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs) on Gender Equality. However, although [gender-related provisions](#) have been included in international trade agreements for some time, most of the agreements are fairly general and lack firm commitments.

<sup>[1]</sup> Anoush Der Boghossian (2023) Chapter 23: Gender social norms: new trade barriers addressed by policy Integrating trade and decent work. ILO Geneva 2023, Volume 2. The potential of trade and investment policies to address labour market issues in supply chains, pp.249-285. (<https://researchrepository.ilo.org/esploro/outputs/bookChapter/Trade-and-gender-addressing-barriers-to/995340191902676>)

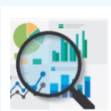
The WTO's database on gender provisions in RTAs highlights 300 provisions across about 100 agreements that focus on women's interests or gender equality (October 2023).<sup>[2]</sup> In these trade agreements, 78% of Europe's RTAs contain at least one gender-specific provision; this figure is 38% for North America, 20% for South America, 32% for Africa and 14% for RTAs in the Asia-Pacific region. As a continent, Europe is spearheading gender-inclusive policies. There has also been a significant improvement in gender-inclusive policies in Africa. The Aid for Trade initiative is among the main drivers for this improvement; under the Aid for Trade initiative for developing countries, women's economic empowerment is included in its strategies, and 96% of developing countries recognize the role it can play in addressing trade constraints faced by women. Now, the gaps exist in countries adopting, creating and implementing these policies.

## OWIT International Recommendations for Increasing Gender Inclusivity in Formulation and Reform of Trade Policies



### Government Advocacy

Advocate for supportive policies by encouraging governments to include gender-specific considerations in trade agreements.



### Market Insights and Intelligence

Gather relevant data and insights if and where possible, provide insights, research and intelligence specific to women-led businesses trading across borders.



### Inclusive Trade Missions

Assist in the organization of trade missions focused on women-led businesses trading internationally.



### Visibility Campaigns

Launch global visibility campaigns to showcase the success stories of women entrepreneurs and the opportunities ahead.

## OWIT's Statement of Intent to Address Gender Inclusivity in Trade

OWIT, led by the President and the Executive Board, is focusing its attention to position OWIT in a global strategic role, advocating for and contributing to the thought leadership, advisory, formulation, development and implementation of gender-inclusive trade policies. Some of the strategies in which OWIT desires to make a positive impact are:

**Representation and Participation** Representing women's needs is necessary to make trade policy inclusive.

**Invest** in building the capacity of OWIT members to engage in trade policy discussions.

**Collaborate** with trade Organizations, government agencies, industry, private enterprise and educational institutions to facilitate skills development and training programs for women in sectors impacted by international Trade.

<sup>[2]</sup> Database accessed online: [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/womenandtrade\\_e/gender\\_responsive\\_trade\\_agreement\\_db\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/womenandtrade_e/gender_responsive_trade_agreement_db_e.htm)