



Foreword

Making trade work for women goes to the core of the WTO's purpose because women's economic empowerment is central to achieving the WTO's founding objectives of raising living standards, creating jobs and promoting sustainable development.

Recent analysis by the World Bank estimates that closing gender gaps in employment would raise per capita GDP by almost 20 per cent on average across countries – and by as much as 40 to 80 per cent in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Trade is a critical source of economic opportunities for women and the businesses they operate. However, the data show women are not reaping the benefits of trade as much as men. Male entrepreneurs are nearly twice as likely to have internationalized businesses than their female counterparts, and women entrepreneurs are likelier than men to focus on local markets than national or international ones. To narrow these gaps, more gender-responsive trade policies are part of the solution. Such policies in turn require research and data so that policymakers can make more informed choices.

WTO members have been increasingly integrating gender issues into their trade policies and negotiations. To support this trend, the WTO Secretariat created the Gender Research Hub in 2021 to foster an international network of trade and gender researchers working in academia and international organizations. In just two years, the Hub has become a key contributor to research on women's economic empowerment. Its experts are driving research globally, making it more visible and accessible as well as exploring new topics.

In December 2022, the WTO and the Hub organized the first international research conference to focus on trade and gender – the World Trade Congress on Gender. This event brought together eminent trade and gender experts to present cutting-edge research in the field. It also provided a platform for researchers and policymakers to exchange views and build partnerships for further work.

This book builds on the research presented at this conference. It opens the door to new thinking about trade and gender and offers interesting perspectives on a variety of research topics, from gender provisions in trade agreements to ways in which women entrepreneurs have come together to support each other's efforts to engage in international trade. The book demonstrates that major gaps still persist in gender equality, even as the WTO has taken important steps forward on how it tackles issues of trade and gender.

The world is grappling with simultaneous, mutually reinforcing crises – none of which is gender neutral. Climate change, pandemics, natural disasters, financial crises and conflicts all impact women disproportionately. Women too often find themselves on the margins of economic activity, lacking the capacity to bounce back quickly. This is why investment in women is so important to strengthen their economic capacity. The stronger women are, the more resilient our societies will be in the face of the polycrisis.



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