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#### Regulatory and procedural barriers to trade: A gender perspective

## Regulatory and procedural barriers to trade: A gender perspective

Submitted by the Secretariat

### *Summary*

As part of the ECE's contribution to the implementation of the Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) United Nations System-Wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN-SWAP), ECE has been incorporating a gender perspective into all its work areas. This mainstreaming is guided by the ECE policy on gender equality and the empowerment of women and associated action plan.

Delegates are invited to discuss avenues for incorporating a gender perspective into ECE studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade, drawing on experience gained to date.



1. An all-important pre-requisite for achieving sustainable development, incorporating gender into development efforts is becoming increasingly elusive under the weight of the complex relations of economic inter-dependence permeating today's globalized world, whereby welfare gains can be reversed by the very forces that created them. These relations find their strongest expression in the 2008 global economic crisis, which unfolded in a domino-like reaction, as trade, investment and remittances, the driving forces of economic growth, transmitted recessionary pressures from developed to developing and least developed countries all the way amplifying the impact by aggravating structural weaknesses and sources of vulnerability.
2. In most of these countries, women were the hardest hit by virtue of populating labour-intensive activities such as light industries and agriculture; all of which were effectively crippled by dwindling demand. Moreover, female-headed households were the most affected by the drastic cuts in public spending on social protection, so that they exhibited higher incidence of poverty.\*
3. If anything, the challenge facing governments is no longer about providing women with economic independence and enhanced standing in their communities, but how to gear the complex relations of inter-dependence towards ensuring women empowerment and gender equality. These complex relations should be analysed in their totality, with a view to ensuring that they put women in an advantageous position to attain better livelihoods.
4. This is the premise from which any attempt to mainstream women into trade policy should proceed. The ECE studies on regulatory and procedural barriers to trade lend further evidence to the necessity of grounding the analysis in such a broad framework. To date, the secretariat has conducted six national studies on the Republics of Albania, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova and Tajikistan. The studies involved extensive face-to-face interviews with key supply chain actors (including traders, public institutions, market support institutions and service providers) using an extensive methodology geared to capture behind and at-the-border regulatory and procedural trade barriers.
5. In each of these countries, interviewed female traders reported barriers that were common to those identified by their male counterparts. They also resorted to the same adapting strategies and highlighted the same growth obstacles listed by their male counterparts, including the lack funds to invest in new equipment, the lack of information on trade regulations and opportunities and increased competition from imports.
6. Nonetheless, it would be difficult to conclude that regulatory and procedural measures do not affect men and women differently without expanding the research scope. This is so because all of the interviewed female traders had well-established presence in the market, suggesting that they have already overcome any gender specific challenges. More importantly, the studies point to the necessity of exploring obstacles to increased female participation in trade activities. It was difficult to find a representative sample of women-owned enterprises that could be included in the surveying process.
7. This suggests the need to complement the ECE evaluation methodology with a gender-focused analysis in order to arrive at evidence-based conclusions and recommendations. The analysis should be grounded in a multi-faceted framework, which allows for establishing the manner in which regulatory and procedural trade measures

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\* See for example, UN-Women (2014) Global Economic Crisis and Gender Equality; UNAIDS (2012) Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Women, Girls and Gender Equality; and, Swedish International Development Agency (2010) The Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Women's Well-Being and Empowerment.

combine with other policy measures to set the limits to the prospects of women's empowerment and gender equality.

8. Drawing on the sustainable livelihood approach, these prospects should be conceptualized as a function of the female entrepreneurs' asset base, which is broadly defined to include financial capital, natural capital (e.g. land), physical capital (i.e. infrastructure), human capital (i.e. skills) and social capital (social networks, including the horizontal and vertical inter-firm collaboration influencing the sectors where female enterprises are concentrated). The focus should be on establishing how trade measures affect the women's ability to reap maximum benefits from emerging trade opportunities to expand their asset base, and the manner in which they draw on existing assets to intensify their trade activities and/or withstand external shocks.

9. The Steering Committee could invite member States to support such a broad analysis as part of the ECE studies, with a view to informing broader discussions on increasing the contribution of trade to women's empowerment and gender equality. In this regard, member States could request the ECE to integrate the findings and recommendations emerging from the analysis into the UN-SWAP and the UN-wide results-based management national programmes under the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF).

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