

Women and international trade

European Parliament resolution on perspectives of women in international trade (2006/2009(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Council Regulation (EC) No 2836/98 of 22 December 1998 on integrating of gender issues in development cooperation¹,
- having regard to Council Decision 2001/51/EC of 20 December 2000 establishing a Programme relating to the Community framework strategy on gender equality (2001–2005)² and its respective work programme,
- having regard to the UN Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW) of 1979 and its Optional Protocol,
- having regard to the "Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action" adopted on 15 September 1995 by the UN Fourth World Conference on Women,
- having regard the UN Resolution of 10 June 2000 on the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action and Review and Appraisal of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Outcome Document of the Twenty-third Special Session of the General Assembly ,
- having regard to the Commission green paper of 18 July 2001 "Promoting a European framework for Corporate Social Responsibility" (COM(2001)0366),
- having regard to the Communication from the Commission of 22 March 2006 "Implementing the Partnership for Growth and Jobs: Making Europe a Pole of Excellence on Corporate Social Responsibility" (COM(2006)0136),
- having regard to the UN Norms on the Responsibilities of Transnational Corporations and other Business Enterprises with regard to Human Rights, approved 13 August 2003, by the UN Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights,
- having regard to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy of November 1977 and the current OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises ,
- having regard to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work of 18 June 1998, ILO Recommendation R 100 on the Protection of Migrant Workers in Underdeveloped Countries and Territories, ILO Recommendation R 111 on the Discrimination in Respect of Employment and Occupation, ILO Recommendation R 156 on the Protection of Workers against Occupational Hazards in the Working Environment

¹ OJ L 354, 30.12.1998, p. 5.

² OJ L 17, 19.1.2001, p. 22.

Due to Air Pollution, Noise and Vibration and ILO Recommendation R 191 on the revision of the Maternity Protection Recommendation,

- having regard to the United Nations Millennium Declaration of 8 September 2000 and the review and update thereof at the 2005 World Summit of 14 –16 September 2005,
 - having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 16 –17 December 2004, confirming the full commitment of the European Union to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and policy coherence,
 - having regard to the 'Spirit of São Paulo Declaration' of the UN Conference on Trade and Development of 18 June 2004,
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 November 2005 on the social dimension of globalisation¹,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedures,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (A6-0254/2006),
- A. whereas international trade has the potential to contribute to gender equality and promote women's economic, social, and political empowerment in both the productive and reproductive spheres; whereas, however, the trade globalisation process has contributed to making labour relations less formal, increasing precarious work and feminising unemployment in several sectors of the economy,
- B. whereas 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty in the world are women; whereas women generally experience more difficulties in gaining access to education, property, credit, other resources and factors of production, and political decision-making bodies,
- C. whereas in the long term, gender inequality, which entails women's having less access to the means of production and to the market, hampers growth because women spend a relatively larger proportion of the income which they earn themselves on education, health care and food, and because the economic potential of the whole population is not fully exploited,
- D. whereas trade agreements must fully comply with existing international law on human, social and labour rights, and must respect existing international conventions calling for sustainable development,
- E. whereas reproductive and domestic responsibilities as well as responsibilities for maintaining the family and providing social care are generally perceived to be the essential function of women in almost all societies but are largely unrecognised and unremunerated,
- F. whereas unless market liberalisation takes account of gender-specific factors, it will promote processes such as the feminisation of precarious employment, the intensification of women's exploitation, and the undermining of the livelihood strategies of poor women

¹ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2005)0427.

throughout the world, including migrant women,

- G. whereas trade liberalisation has strongly contributed to the expansion of women's participation in the informal economy,
 - H. whereas the ILO defines the informal economy as being based on employment without a contract, worker benefits or social protection that occurs both inside and outside informal enterprises,
 - I. whereas the feminisation of international migration is not receiving enough attention; whereas migrant workers are often inhibited from demanding fair labour conditions,
 - J. whereas the inclusion of an Agreement on Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) within the WTO in 1995 restricted access to generic medicines in such a way that in December 2005 in Hong Kong it was agreed that TRIPS should be amended,
1. Stresses that trade liberalisation has a differential impact on women and men; points out the need for coherence between the objectives of the European policy for gender equality and the objectives of trade, development and aid policy, with the aim of promoting equality between women and men in these policy areas; stresses that economic participation is key to empowering women and to their overcoming structural discrimination, leading to improved living conditions for women and their families and contributing to the more active involvement of women in politics and the enhancement of social cohesion, one goal being the fair distribution of property, equal rights and economic independence;
 2. Notes that, while many women have also benefited from trade liberalisation and foreign direct investment owing to the resulting employment opportunities, liberalisation has contributed to the informalisation of labour relations, the decline in working conditions and the feminisation of employment in several sectors of the economy;
 3. Calls on the Council and the Commission to prioritise the lifting of all reservations to the CEDAW and ratification of its Optional Protocol by all partner states;
 4. Calls on the Commission to submit to Parliament's committees responsible for women's rights and for international trade a report co-signed by the administrators of the donor organisation and beneficiary of financial aid for women in order to prove that the aid has reached its destination and has not been used for purposes other than those initially intended;
 5. Stresses the need for studies on the way in which women could benefit from trade liberalisation and for systematic collection of gender disaggregated data in order to remedy the gender blindness of current trade policies and policies of global economic institutions; invites the Commission to submit to the Parliament an annual progress report on this subject; recalls that gender analysis must be part and parcel of the sustainability impact assessments of trade agreements presently carried out by the Commission;
 6. Asks the Commission to operate a gender impact assessment before concluding any trade agreements with third countries and to introduce effective conditionality clauses with those countries in which violation of human rights, particularly women's rights, are widespread;

7. Asks the Commission for the formal establishment of a trade and gender desk within its DG Trade, the role of which would include monitoring whether countries with which the EU enjoys trade relations respect human rights, in particular women's rights, and actively to respond to cases of human rights violations;
8. Asks the Commission to analyse production and process methods (PPM, as defined by WTO) from a gender perspective in order to identify the PPM subject to specific gender discrimination, according to CEDAW and the human rights pacts, and to design strategies to provide an incentive for compliance with international standards in exporting countries;
9. Calls on the Commission to ensure that companies profiting from EU market access programmes in the framework of EU cooperation policy do not contribute to the spread of practices such as the inhuman exploitation of employees, in particular women;
10. Stresses that the benefits of employment in the formal and the informal economy depend on a variety of factors, including wages, working conditions and the security of the workplace and women remain discriminated against as regards reaping these benefits; calls, therefore, on the Commission in the context of its development cooperation policy to create a specific fund as part of the future trade and cooperation agreements with third countries to support women in the countries concerned by encouraging their access to credit, education and vocational training with a view to reducing the share/proportion of informal employment; calls on the Commission to submit to Parliament a report co-signed by the donors and beneficiaries of aid, in order to prove that specific funding has not been used for purposes other than those initially intended;
11. Calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to introduce swiftly the principles of non discrimination and gender equality in the practices of the European Globalisation adjustment Fund (EGF) and to ensure that support deriving from the fund does not replace social security payments;
12. Stresses that the high number of job losses in Europe confirms the trend of increasing industrial restructuring; notes that the worst-hit sectors are manufacturing, transport, telecommunications and financial services; calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to take non-discrimination and equality between women and men seriously in regard to the EGF;
13. Calls on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to guarantee gender mainstreaming and equal opportunities objectives in all European funds; stresses the need for indications of the progress achieved in promoting equality between men and women and in the fight against all forms of discrimination;
14. Notes that jobs, employment and decent work should be the content of a ninth MDG to be adopted as soon as possible and calls for the inclusion of core labour standards into multilateral and bilateral trade agreements and the inclusion of the principle of gender equality in all MDGs;
15. Points out that universal and affordable access to essential services, such as water, education, health, and energy, is a prerequisite for the empowerment of women; stresses, however, that the liberalisation of services in the frame of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) can have a positive impact on this goal only if the GATS

principles of national flexibility and policy space are thoroughly upheld in the current bilateral and multilateral negotiations;

16. Stresses that there is provision for TRIPS to be revised two years after its being implemented, which revision has not yet been done; calls urgently therefore for that to take place on the basis of an impact assessment of the costs of its implementation for developing countries;
17. Calls on the Commission to assess whether the implementation of the agreement reached at the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Hong Kong, December 2005, with regard to compulsory licensing of HIV/AIDS antiviral drugs is genuinely resulting in greater access to medicines, and to include a gender perspective in the assessment;
18. Calls for the development of national policy measures that would promote gender equality, protection and promotion of employment, social welfare, improve health and working conditions of women and men and would contribute to sustainable development; points out the importance of respecting national flexibility and policy space in all trade and development policy negotiations; calls for developing countries and vulnerable economies to have the right to choose whether to open service sectors up to, or exempt them from, market liberalisation, and if so, which ones;
19. Calls on the Commission, in its dialogue and cooperation with third countries, to devote special attention to the legal restrictions on women's access to means of production such as credit, land rights and capital;
20. Stresses that, given the important role of women in family agricultural activities, the right of developing countries to develop and implement agricultural policies guaranteeing them food sovereignty, in particular in WTO negotiations, must be respected and strengthened, especially in regard to the WTO Agreement on Agriculture; underlines the importance of 'micro-credits' as a tool in alleviating poverty; calls on the Commission to submit, twice a year, a report co-signed by the donor authorities and the organisations receiving funds in order to prove that financial aid has reached its destination;
21. Calls on the Commission and the Council to assist developing countries in building up their capacities in formulation, negotiation, and implementation of the trade policies in a way that is tailored to each country's needs and promotes a sustainable, gender-balanced economic development; demands that all assistance provided be gender-balanced;
22. Considers that gender impact assessments should be conducted at an early stage of the planning and budgeting of assistance to developing countries; considers that this would enable policy makers to evaluate the effect of a given policy on women and men more accurately and to compare and assess the current situation and trends with the expected results of the proposed policy; believes that the annual report should contain a section on the follow-up to gender impact assessments;
23. Welcomes the Norwegian government's decision to impose by law a 40 % quota for female representation on the boards of joint-stock companies;
24. Calls for the "aid-for-trade" programmes to be designed to promote gender equality and sustainable development, and to be financed through additional funds; stresses that "aid-for-trade" funding should contribute to the build-up of the supply-side capacity needed to

engage in trade, and must not be made conditional upon policies of receiving governments to liberalise agriculture, industry or services markets;

25. Points out the importance of gender budgeting in European trade policy as a strategy for contributing to gender equality; calls on the Commission, the Council and the Member States urgently to implement gender budgeting as a standard tool in budgetary policies at all levels;
26. Stresses that economic participation is essential to building women's confidence and capability and improving their status in the community; also stresses that access to resources gives women the ability to build income and assets, which makes it possible to create an environment in which low-income and poor women may build businesses, improve living conditions, keep families well-fed and healthy, educate children, develop respect at home and in the community and become involved in politics; underlines the vast potential of 'micro-credits' as an invaluable tool in alleviating poverty, promoting self-sufficiency and stimulating economic activity in some of the world's most destitute and disadvantaged countries;
27. Calls on Member States to do their utmost to ensure that a gender perspective is taken into account in world trade negotiations; also calls on the Member States to encourage women to put themselves forward as candidates for positions in international organisations such as the WTO, the World Bank, the IMF and the ILO and to support women that do so;
28. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the governments and national and regional parliaments of the Member States and the accession countries, and to the Council of Europe.