Feminist Trade Policy

Swedish has the first feminist government in the world. This means that gender equality is central to the Government’s priorities – in decision-making and resource allocation. Women and men must have the same power to shape society and their own lives; this is a human right and a matter of democracy and justice.

There is also overwhelming evidence that gender equality boosts economic growth. Despite this, trade policy today benefits men more than women. With this in mind, the Swedish government’s feminist trade policy includes six focus areas where we will step up efforts to ensure that trade policy and trade promotion activities benefit women and men equally. We must begin to see gender as a market access issue and give priority in trade negotiations to sectors, products and services that have positive implications for women. We will also take a range of measures and initiatives to improve the gender balance in Sweden’s promotion activities.

ANNA HALLBERG, Minister for Foreign Trade

1. Gender equality in trade agreements

1.1 Gender analysis of trade agreements

Trade agreements must benefit women and men equally. To this end, a gender analysis must be applied to all trade agreements. A gender analysis must also be part of impact assessments and sustainability impact assessments (SIAs) conducted in connection with trade negotiations. Greater use should be made of the UNCTAD Trade and Gender Toolbox, which is a method for identifying the effects of trade measures on women.

1.2 Gender and market access

Gender in trade policy is not a women’s issue; it is a market access issue. This means that men and women must benefit equally from, and have equal access to, global markets. It also means that sectors, products and services that have positive gender impacts must be given priority in trade negotiations.

1.3 Greater role for gender experts

Gender experts must be involved to ensure better results. For this reason, the Swedish Government will strive to promote a greater role for gender experts in trade negotiations, not least in the work on impact assessments and sustainability impact assessments, and in the implementation committees linked to sustainability chapters in free trade agreements.

Reports have showed that many of the goods consumed disproportionately by women face higher tariffs than goods disproportionately consumed by men. In some cases, the differences were very large. For example, tariffs on sportswear for women were three times higher than those for men.

2. Gender-responsive standards

2.1 Gender mainstreaming in standards development

Standards are becoming increasingly important, particularly to eliminate trade barriers facing companies in global markets. This is why standards must be a feminist trade policy priority. Standards cannot only be based on the ‘average man’. The Swedish Government will work for the integration of a gender perspective into international standards development.

3. Gender equality in the single market

3.1 Gender analysis of the single market

Sweden will request a gender analysis of all new legislative proposals presented by the European Commission. Measures are needed to improve the situation of women as entrepreneurs, consumers and employees. A gender perspective must be integrated into all policy areas to help maintain the global competitiveness of the single market.

3.2 Simplify trade in services

Women work and run businesses in the services sector more than in any other sector. Simplifying trade in services and removing unnecessary barriers will help create more jobs and export opportunities. This is why services exports will be a priority for the Swedish Government.

4. Gender-balanced representation in promotion activities

4.1 Business Sweden – more women trade commissioners

Less than thirty percent of Swedish trade commissioners today are women. Business Sweden (the Swedish Trade and Invest Council) is now set to take a range of measures to improve the gender balance and will work to increase awareness of challenges in the field, including the underlying factors that make recruiting women trade commissioners difficult.

4.2 Gender-balanced promotion delegations

The Swedish Government will work to achieve gender-balanced representation in its promotion activities. Business Sweden will report gender-disaggregated statistics on corporate representation in the business delegations that Sweden is involved in financing.

*A US study has found that women in the US were 47% more likely than men to suffer severe injuries in car crashes because safety features are designed for men. Source: Dipan Bose, Maria Segui-Gomez, ScD, Jeff R. Crandall, “Vulnerability of Female Drivers Involved in Motor Vehicle Crashes: An Analysis of US Population at Risk”, American Journal of Public Health 101, no. 12 (December 1, 2011): pp. 2368–2373.*
5. Gender equality, trade and work in developing countries

5.1 Gender mainstreaming in trade-related development cooperation

Sweden will continue to promote women’s economic empowerment as a priority for, and inherent part of, Aid for Trade.

5.2 Better working conditions and greater influence

It is often women who have the worst working conditions, especially in the textile industry. The Swedish Government is pushing for all EU deep and comprehensive free trade agreements to include the obligation to ratify all ILO fundamental conventions. Such an obligation would benefit women in particular. The Government is also pushing to promote the Global Deal’s efforts to harness social dialogue as a tool to improve working conditions and build influence in the workplace, especially for women.

6. Gender statistics

6.1 Systematic collection of gender-disaggregated data

The collection of gender-disaggregated data, and analysis based on such data, is crucial to understanding challenges and responding to them. The systematic collection of gender-disaggregated data is a prerequisite for reliable research. More gender-disaggregated data on consumption and entrepreneurship is needed. The Swedish Government will support the International Trade Centre and the Swedish Institute for Standards in their collaborative efforts to develop a proposal for an international standard for women-owned business. This standard will also help make available global statistics on women-owned businesses.