

Gender in the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement: Third-Generation Trade Agreement as a Gateway to Policy Coordination?

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Abstract

This article considers the place of trade and gender in EU-Canada relations, with a particular focus on CETA and its functioning in a broader sense. More specifically, the authors seek to understand the process of defining the trade and gender agenda under the CETA framework and the practical ways the EU and Canada have sought to respond to them. The authors examine the challenges and opportunities related to women's participation in the EU-Canada trade flows, what the instruments developed to support them were, what tools were at their disposal, whether CETA had had a real impact on their business activities, as well as the dynamics of the policy exchange and learning. The authors find that CETA delivers solid structures to design and implement concrete actions, leading to more policy coordination between the EU and Canada on trade and gender issues. However, there are still several gaps that need to be addressed, with the lack of disaggregated data being the most important.

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1. Introduction

The Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic Trade Agreement (CETA), signed in 2016, was a groundbreaking agreement in many ways. It has been touted by some (Rioux, Deblock, and Wells 2020; Leblond and Viju-Miljusevic 2022) as a third-generation trade agreement, i.e., including provisions that build and deepen the multilateral trade commitments far beyond the agreement on tariffs.³ Besides the unprecedented fact that it removed 98 percent of all tariffs between the two parties a year after being signed, CETA included a broad range of solutions that facilitated business exchanges between Canada and the European Union (EU), such as standards, procurement rules, or even policy alignments.⁴ Still, CETA does not have a specific chapter on gender like the more recent trade agreements signed by Canada. However, in a rather extraordinary show of mutual understanding and value alignment, leaders from EU and Canada agreed to push for an increased uptake of entrepreneur roles among women and support women-led businesses in the context of CETA (Statistics Canada 2018).⁵

Since the core CETA text does not have a clear reference to gender and trade, the EU and Canada agreed to Recommendation 002/2018 on Trade and Gender.⁶ Most importantly, it was among the first decisions of the CETA Joint Committee taken after the provisional implementation had been agreed, which testifies to the political importance of the issue. This political direction was justified by data showing that women-led businesses are significantly less numerous, smaller, and less internationally minded than those led by men. Both parties agreed that the challenges women face when engaging in business are mainly related to logistical, border, and administrative obstacles as well as wide-ranging gender discrimination, which can limit opportunities (Government of Canada 2020). The statistics provided by the Global Affairs Canada report “Trade and gender” outline that “two-way Canadian merchandise trade with the EU averaged \$94.7 billion CAD annually during 2018 and 2019...up by 25.5% compared to 2016 – the last full-year before preferential tariff treatment under CETA was applicable” (Government of Canada 2021). Women-owned and equally owned Canadian businesses make up a larger portion of importers as compared to exporters, but a smaller portion of imports compared to exports by value. In 2017, women-owned and equally owned businesses comprised 18 percent of export value, 17.5 percent of import value, 21.4 percent of exporters, and 26.2 percent of importers. The number of jobs directly or indirectly supported by goods exports occupied by women is 36,032. This number includes Canada’s 11 largest EU export partners: Germany, Netherlands, France, Italy, Belgium, Spain, Ireland, Finland, Latvia, Poland, and Sweden, which accounted for about 92 percent of exports to the EU in 2019. The information is aggregated without providing details about age, immigrant status, degree, or country. The information was presented only for the year 2017, thus not allowing for an assessment of the impact of CETA.

³ For a description of third-generation trade agreements see Leblond and Viju-Miljusevic 2022.

⁴ European Commission. n.d. *EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)*. Accessed August 2, 2024. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/canada/eu-canada-agreement_en.

⁵ Initiatives to promote women’s business ownership have been promoted by different countries, including Canada and the EU member states, as the literature has shown that business ownership is an important trigger for growth, innovation and employment (Adema et al. 2014; Coleman and Robb 2012).

⁶ CETA Joint Committee issued Recommendation 002/2018 on Trade and Gender: CETA Joint Committee. *Recommendation 002/2018 of 26 September 2018 of the CETA Joint Committee on Trade and Gender*. 2018. Accessed July 10, 2024. <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/ceta-aecg/rec-002.aspx?lang=eng>.

Since 2018, the EU and Canada have engaged in a series of activities and initiatives focusing, on the one hand, on supporting women entrepreneurs to take advantage of CETA and, on the other, to stir the debate on women and trade in international fora, leading by example. In fact, the authors can argue that the very fact of giving CETA open-ended, deliberative structures, typical for third-generation trade agreements, has made such policy cooperation possible.

Using trade leverage as a tool for policy change is not new. In fact, European integration is a prime example of such dynamics, as are the trade agreements signed by the EU with many other countries around the world.⁷ What is, however, unusual in the case of CETA is that the EU has not been the coordination proponent. Canada, as its partner, has used CETA as a gateway to develop a new direction of EU-Canada cooperation, leveraging a trade agreement with a powerful partner to boost its policy profile on gender equality promotion on the international scene. Quite uncharacteristically, the EU followed suit.

Six years on, and with COVID in the rearview mirror, how much has this dynamic achieved? What are the prospects of the trade and gender policy coordination to make a lasting impression on the Canada-EU trade? This article considers the place of trade and gender in the EU-Canada relations, with a particular focus on CETA. More specifically, the article analyzes the process of defining the trade and gender policy coordination agenda under the CETA framework and the practical ways the EU and Canada have sought to respond to the requirements of Recommendation 002/2018.

The article is structured as follows. It begins with a brief review of CETA as a third-generation trade agreement and a discussion of the analytical framework and research methodology employed by the authors. The next section analyzes the policy developments, which is followed by the conclusion. The article aims to present a broad-brush picture of EU-Canada policy coordination on gender and trade under CETA, a first attempt to map this issue.

2. Canada and EU approaches to trade and gender in preferential trade agreements (PTAs)

2.1 Canada and EU approaches to gender and trade

Canada sought to consider gender mainstreaming in its Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) by introducing gender equality chapters and other gender-related provisions into trade agreements early on during Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's first mandate. Canada-Chile (2017) and Canada-Israel (2018) were the first examples of that policy trend. In addition to a specific chapter, gender-related provisions are found in chapters on investment, labour, and cooperation, as well as the preamble (Government of Canada 2023). Other trade agreements with no specific chapter on trade and gender, such as the Canada-US-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA) signed in 2019, include comprehensive gender provisions in chapters on labour, investment, and small and medium-sized enterprises.⁸ Additionally, in 2020, Canada, Chile, and New Zealand signed the Global Trade and Gender Arrangement (GTGA)—the first cooperation agreement on trade and gender, which includes more detailed gender-related provisions.

⁷ See among others, Vogel 1995, Meunier and Nicolaidis 2006, Young and Peterson 2006, Drezner 2008, Bach and Newman 2007, Dür and Zimmermann 2007, Bartels 2007, Antoniadis 2008, Newman and Posner 2015, Poletti and Sicurelli 2018, Ferraris 2020, Velluti 2020, Lenz 2021, Pelkmans 2021.

⁸ Government of Canada. 2019a. *Canada-United States-Mexico Agreement (CUSMA). Trade and gender provisions summary*. Accessed July 10, 2024. https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/cusma-aceum/gender_equality-egalite_sexes.aspx?lang=eng.

The EU has committed to gender mainstreaming in its external policy since 2020 with the EU's Gender Action Plan III and the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025.⁹ In December 2022, Chile and the EU concluded negotiations on a modernized Association Agreement, which includes a dedicated chapter on trade and gender.¹⁰ The gender chapters in these trade agreements focus on women's participation, women's rights, and gender mainstreaming.¹¹ Despite being considered progressive, as they acknowledge the intersection between trade and gender, gender chapters in trade agreements are criticized for their inability to result in meaningful changes. Some of the reasons for such limited impacts are related to exclusion from dispute settlement mechanisms, being stand-alone chapters which do not apply to other areas of the trade agreements, and lack of resources for NGOs that should lobby for policy development (Hannah, Roberts, and Trommer 2022).

2.2. CETA as a third-generation trade agreement and its (lack of) focus on gender

CETA was hailed by the European External Action Service as a “landmark” agreement, “the best, the most ambitious and the most progressive form of trade agreement...that the EU has ever concluded,” a novel agreement, as well as the template for future agreements, such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (Delegation of the European Union to Canada 2021). One of the main goals of CETA is to minimize non-tariff barriers between the two parties involved. The EU and Canada have adopted aspects of the drive for “good regulatory practices (GRPs) through the Regulatory Cooperation Forum.”¹² CETA's Regulatory Cooperation Forum (RCF) is unique, as there are very different institutional realities in transatlantic economic and political systems. CETA is considered by some a third-generation trade agreement. Despite not being a widely used category of trade agreements, the authors agree with the scholarship (Leblond and Viju-Miljusevic 2022; Rioux, Deblock, and Wells 2020) that considers the innovations of CETA pointing to a third generation of trade agreements. CETA is deeper than first- and second-generation trade agreements, it includes the liberalization of different policy areas such as investment, government procurement, sustainability, and intellectual property rights. It addresses non-trade objectives such as human rights, environment, and labour rights, and it includes an extensive institutional framework that facilitates cooperation after the agreement has started to be implemented (Leblond and Viju-Miljusevic 2022). For a complete description see Table 1 in Annex. Although it is still too early to say

⁹ European Commission. 2020a. *Gender Action Plan – Putting Women and Girls' Rights at the Heart of the Global Recovery for a Gender-Equal World*. Accessed March 15, 2024.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184 ; European Commission. 2020b. *Gender Equality Strategy. Achievements and Key Areas for Action*. Accessed March 15, 2024.

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/gender-equality/gender-equality-strategy_en.

¹⁰ Other trade agreements that included a gender chapter: Chile-Argentina (entered into force 2018), UK-Japan (entered into force 2021), UK-Australia (entered into force 2023), UK-New Zealand (signed in 2022).

¹¹ Gender mainstreaming ensures that gender perspectives are taken into account at every level and in all areas of cooperation (Hannah, Roberts, and Trommer 2022).

¹² Directorate-General for Trade (European Commission). 2020. *EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)*. Article 21.6. Accessed on March 14, 2024. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/canada/eu-canada-agreement_en.

definitively how effective such cooperation mechanisms are, the case of trade and gender can shed light on the pathways to achieve policy coordination and implement policy outcomes.¹³

Despite being considered one of the most advanced trade agreements negotiated up to date, CETA does not include a separate chapter on gender issues. However, it includes a sub-paragraph related to gender and trade in the investment chapter. Article 8.10 2(d) states that “a measure or series of measures constitute ‘targeted discrimination on manifestly wrongful grounds’ if...a differential treatment based on gender, race or religious belief cannot be justified on the basis of objective and legitimate grounds, such as measures that are designed or applied to protect legitimate public welfare objectives, including health, the promotion of gender equality, environment (including climate protection) or safety.”¹⁴ This is considered a milestone as it is the first appearance of the word “gender” instead of “women” or “sex” in a trade agreement between G20 economies. Additionally, it is the first time when such a provision is justiciable under a dispute settlement (still in need of ratification by the EU member states at the current time) (Fabian 2021). Additionally, CETA has created the opportunity for the two parties to have regular meetings and propose common initiatives that would support women-led businesses to take advantage of CETA.

3. Methodological approaches and data collection

The analysis is based primarily on three types of sources.

- a) Policy documents produced post-2018 by the European Commission and Government of Canada on the trade and gender agenda as well as relevant policy reports and Action Plans. The documents reviewed considered the level of implementation of Recommendation 002/2018.
- b) Supporting expert interviews with representatives of women-led business organizations. The specific inquiry on CETA-related training and mentoring schemes was addressed to 23 organizations in Canada supporting women entrepreneurship. The choice was driven by an online search, starting with the Global Affairs Canada information system, Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub database and Export Development Canada’s website. Reaching out to these organizations yielded a low response rate, with seven responses in total and only three having CETA-relevant trade promotion programs. Experts from these three organizations were asked to participate in the study. In the European Union, the authors identified Europe Enterprise Network (EEN) and WEGate as relevant organizations and conducted an interview with representatives of each organization. The

¹³ The current assessments of the CETA temporary implementation are mainly focused on the quantitative achievements related to bilateral trade increases due to tariff reduction and tariff utilization rates as well as the number of SMEs involved in Canada-EU trade (Government of Canada (Office of the Chief Economist) 2020; European Union 2022). Government of Canada (Office of the Chief Economist). 2022. *CETA@5 Delivering Trade Benefits during Unprecedented Times*. https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/assets/pdfs/economist-economiste/analyse-analyse/benefits-ceta5-avantages_eng.pdf; GOPA Com. 2022. *Five Years of CETA: Sustainable and Reliable Trade in Uncertain Times*. September 19, 2022. Accessed July 10, 2024. <https://ceta-5-years-anniversary-event.b2match.io/page-861>.

¹⁴ Directorate-General for Trade (European Commission). 2020. *EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA)*. Article 8.10 2(d). Accessed on July 10, 2024. https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/canada/eu-canada-agreement_en.

questionnaire focused on trade promotion instruments implemented by the organizations that were interviewed, with the interviews being conducted using Zoom.

- c) Supporting expert interviews with trade representatives from the EU member states and Canada (Trade Commissioner Service representatives—TCSs). Potential candidates for interviews were contacted by email, using the email addresses available publicly on the relevant websites. The authors contacted 23 member state trade representatives (EU Chambers of Commerce in Canada and trade councillors in EU embassies in Canada). There were six responses: Spain, Austria, Ireland, Poland, Italy, and Germany. Moreover, the authors contacted 18 trade commissioners, but only six replied, and three contributed to the research with detailed data (Italy/Malta, Poland, and Finland). The interviews were conducted using Zoom and followed a pre-approved questionnaire.¹⁵ The interviews were not recorded, and the answers were anonymous. In several instances, the experts were not available for an interview, but they shared general information in writing about their country's trade promotion instruments focused on women in the context of CETA or beyond. The relevant list is available in Annex 1.

The authors encountered several impediments to data collection that have impacted the size of their final datasets. For qualitative data, an important obstacle was a lack of openness of women's business organizations to participate in this project. The level of engagement was very low, resulting in a less than 20 percent response rate from the population contacted. This behaviour might be explained by the extreme fragmentation of the business associations working with women entrepreneurs in Canada and by the fact that there are no networks that work as a government-supported service rather than those based on membership fees. In fact, the most accessible organizations were those supported by local governments (municipal or provincial). Moreover, the response rate by the EU member states and TCS representatives can be explained by the limited resources of the public services—in fact, the authors have received responses stating that there is no capacity in the public service to reply to research inquiries.

In the process of searching and collecting statistical information, the main problem was a lack of necessary disaggregated data with detailed ownership characteristics such as nationality, age, and geography of doing business. This issue was caused by two main reasons: (i) the Privacy Act, which governs the federal government's collection, retention, use, and disclosure of personal information; (ii) the methodology behind data collection of statistical institutions in Canada and Europe does not involve the collection of detailed information.¹⁶ Based on this research, disaggregated data does not exist due to the nature of the methodology used to collect and protect personal data, and thus, the authors could not complete a statistical analysis of the impacts of CETA.

4. CETA's gender policy framework in action

Trade and gender commitments under CETA are based on the core values and policies developed by partners over the years. The EU has been actively involved in promoting gender equality and addressing gender-related issues through various policies. Gender equality is one of the

¹⁵ Ethics clearance 116437.

¹⁶ Government of Canada. 2024. *Privacy Act*. Accessed August 23, 2023. <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/P-21/page-1.html>.

fundamental values of the EU enshrined in its treaties. For example, the Treaty of Rome of 1957 establishing the European Economic Community requires each member state to apply the principle of equal pay for women and men. The 1992 Maastricht Treaty on the European Union includes the protection of women in the Agreement on Social Policy, while the Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997 places gender equality as one of the EU's goals and defines the principle of non-discrimination based on gender among other characteristics. For the EU, “[g]ender equality is at the core of European values and enshrined within the European Union (EU) legal and political framework. The EU and its Member States are at the forefront of the protection, fulfilment and the enjoyment of human rights by women and girls and strongly promote them in all external relations, also beyond development cooperation.”¹⁷ Thus, the EU has portrayed itself as a frontrunner in promoting gender equality through its external policies. The literature analyzing the adoption and implementation of gender equality principles in EU external relations, including through its trade policy and, thus, trade agreements, has developed quickly.¹⁸ Canada, on the other hand, was portrayed as a champion on gender equality only since the election of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. However, Fabian (2021) and Hannah, Roberts, and Trommer (2022) show that Canada has a long history of policymaking in the field of gender and trade that crosses partisan lines.¹⁹ Canada has also been recognized as an international agenda-setting leader for trade and gender. For example, it is a key architect of the World Trade Organization (WTO) Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment and other WTO initiatives.

4.1 CETA Trade and Gender Action Plan

The gender-related policy ambition of CETA was first introduced in September 2018 during the inaugural Women Ministers Meeting, a pivotal event attended by prominent figures such as Chrystia Freeland, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Canada, and Federica Mogherini, then High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Vice President of the Commission. This gathering set the stage for subsequent discussions on the integration of gender considerations into trade policies.²⁰ On September 26, 2018, the CETA Joint Committee issued Recommendation 002/2018 on Trade and Gender. It was developed and adopted within the legal context of Article 26.1.5(t) of CETA, which empowers the CETA Joint Committee to make recommendations “suitable for promoting the expansion of trade and investment.”²¹ The following recommendations were made:

1. “The CETA Joint Committee recommends that the Parties cooperate to improve the capacity and conditions for women, including workers, businesswomen and entrepreneurs, to access and fully benefit from the opportunities created by CETA.”

¹⁷ Council of the EU. 2015. *Council Conclusion on the Gender Action Plan 2016-2020 (GAP II) 13201/15*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/24467/st13201-en15.pdf>.

¹⁸ Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000; Bretherton 2001; Lister and Carbone 2006; Hoskyns 2008; True 2009a/b; Ulmer 2007; Van der Vleuten et al. 2014; Debusscher and Manners 2020.

¹⁹ Please see Fabian (2021) for a detailed description of the key milestones of the Canadian gender and trade governance.

²⁰ IISD SDG Knowledge Hub. Women Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Montreal, Quebec, September 21–22, 2018. Accessed June 5, 2023. <http://sdg.iisd.org/events/women-foreign-ministers-meeting/>.

²¹ Government of Canada. 2017. *Text of the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement – Chapter Twenty-Six: Administrative and Institutional Provisions*. Accessed July 10, 2024. <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/ceta-aecg/text-texte/26.aspx?lang=eng>.

2. “Recognising the need to better understand the impact of trade on gender equality and women’s participation in the economy, the CETA Joint Committee recommends that the Parties start their cooperation activities by:
 - a) Sharing methods and procedures for the collection of gender-disaggregated data, the use of indicators, monitoring and evaluation methodologies, and the analysis of gender-focused statistics related to trade;
 - b) Exchanging experience and best practices for conducting gender-based analysis of trade policies; and
 - c) Exploring the implication for the design and implementation of trade agreements, including CETA.”²²

It is interesting that the first recommendation focuses in general terms on CETA cooperation, while the second one, with three sub-recommendations, has a clear international dimension. This focus reflects a broader international trend that seeks to bridge the gender gap in trade, aligning with global initiatives such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG 5 on gender equality. The accent on the international aspect can be interpreted as going beyond EU-Canada bilateral trade under CETA. That approach creates some confusion as to what “gender and trade” means in bilateral cooperation, what the real scope of the Recommendation is, and what the parties really want to achieve.

Progress achieved on these points was to be reported periodically. The Joint Activity Report from September 21, 2020 has been the only such document available publicly to date.²³ The Report shed light on nine activities, which had been implemented for 18 months, between 2018 and 2020. Three distinct types of initiatives have been implemented: exchanges on policy, stakeholder engagement, and collaboration in multilateral fora.

Exchanges on policy: Canada and the EU engaged in videoconferences and discussions aimed at enhancing the understanding of gender-related issues in trade policies. This exchange of knowledge covered topics such as gender equality laws, policies, programs, and the impact assessment of trade agreements on gender. These activities focused on policymakers and decision-makers in both economies, fostering a deeper appreciation for gender-inclusive trade policies.

Stakeholder engagement: Several initiatives were launched to engage stakeholders and women-owned businesses. Roundtable discussions, workshops, and webinars were organized to gather input and insights from women entrepreneurs. The activities provided platforms for women to share their challenges and opportunities in accessing the benefits of trade under CETA. Notable events included the Trade and Gender Roundtable, co-hosted by EU Commissioner Cecilia Malmström and Canada’s Minister of International Trade Diversification, Jim Carr, and a CETA Trade and Gender workshop in Brussels, which included over 80 participants from civil society.

Collaboration in multilateral fora: Canada and the EU actively participated in international fora focused on promoting gender-responsive trade agreements. They contributed to a World Trade Organization (WTO) workshop exploring the role of trade agreements in advancing gender

²² CETA Joint Committee issued a Recommendation 002/2018 on Trade and Gender. Accessed June 5, 2023. <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/ceta-aecg/rec-002.aspx?lang=eng>.

²³ OAS Foreign Trade Information System. 2020. “Joint Activity Report to the CETA Joint Committee.” Accessed May 28, 2024. http://www.sice.oas.org/TPD/CAN_EU/Committees/CETA_Gender_Joint_Activity_Report_09_2020_e.pdf.

equality. These collaborative efforts underlined their leadership in shaping global discussions on gender-inclusive trade policies. Key partners and stakeholders included various government bodies, civil society organizations, women entrepreneurs, and international institutions such as the WTO and UN Women. The involvement of both Canadian and EU officials, along with contributions from women entrepreneurs, facilitated cross-border knowledge sharing and insights.

The CETA Trade and Gender Recommendation Work Plan 2020–2021, published also in September 2020, did build partially on the previous work plan.²⁴ However, it drifted even more away from the core CETA mandate focused on bilateral relations towards a multilateral approach and involvement on an international level. Out of the six initiatives, only one focused strictly on the business of supporting women under CETA: an exchange of the ex-post assessment of the impact of CETA on gender equality. The rest included sharing data methods, developing gender-responsive trade agreements, applying a gender lens to WTO work, and hosting webinars on financing and standards, all involving multilateral relations and not focusing on CETA.²⁵

The closer analysis of these documents allows for two main conclusions. First, “gender” in “trade and gender” specifically means women. This referred to women as a social construct, hence the talk about the barriers to entrepreneurship and trade, but also women as a biological entity, hence the event on standards in industrial production, such as protective gear. Second, there has been a marked change of focus from the political narratives launched in 2018 to the most recent documents (2020). The goal of a tangible strengthening of CETA and improving women entrepreneurship in bilateral trade has slowly disappeared from bilateral exchanges for the benefit of a general debate on trade issues and discussion focused on the recommendations of international organizations.²⁶ The bilateral approach has visibly lost steam. From this perspective, the fate of the Recommendation is uncertain. Moreover, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, often referred to as a “she-cession,” has brought into sharp focus the formidable challenges faced by women in business, particularly those operating SMEs, on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁷ Regrettably, the post-pandemic CETA activities between the EU and Canada have not substantively addressed this pressing concern.

4.2 Between Policy and Implementation

The official bilateral efforts aimed at implementing the gender and trade priorities within the framework of CETA have yielded limited progress. The emphasis on gender, trade, and entrepreneurship has predominantly remained within the sphere of Canadian interest. However, despite the decline in bilateral interactions, the institutions and organizations on both sides of the Atlantic have independently pursued the development of initiatives and assistance for women’s entrepreneurship. Below the authors present the initiatives undertaken in the EU and in Canada

²⁴ Government of Canada. 2020. *CETA Trade and Gender Recommendation: EU-Canada Work Plan 2020-2021*. Accessed August 2, 2024. https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/ceta-aecg/CETA_work_plan-AECG_plan_travail-2020-2021.aspx?lang=eng.

²⁵ Unfortunately, there has been no official report on implementation of the work plan at the time of writing.

²⁶ See, for example, the *2023 Report on Gender Equality in the EU*. Accessed June 5, 2024. https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-04/annual_report_GE_2023_web_EN.pdf.

²⁷ “She-cession” refers to the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on the employment of women. See e.g. Bluedorn et al. 2021. “Gender and Employment in the COVID-19 Recession: Evidence on ‘She-Cessions.’” *International Monetary Fund*. Accessed August 2, 2024. <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2021/03/31/Gender-and-Employment-in-the-COVID-19-Recession-Evidence-on-She-cessions-50316>.

domestically to support the gender and trade agenda. The authors have identified activities that could support the implementation of the first recommendation—promoting women’s engagement in transatlantic trade.

4.2.1 European Union Initiatives Supporting Women Entrepreneurship

At the EU level, the European Commission undertook many initiatives, events, and funding programs to support women in business, especially in the post-pandemic period. There are five main pan-European networks listed on the Commission’s website.²⁸ Among them, the flagship initiative WEGate (2020–2023)—a dedicated online platform aimed at women entrepreneurs.²⁹ This platform provided a wealth of resources, networking opportunities, and practical information tailored to the needs of women-led businesses. It offered guidance on various aspects, from business development to funding opportunities, thereby facilitating the growth and sustainability of women-owned enterprises.

Other EU-level initiatives are rather scarce, however, one initiative that can be mentioned is Women TechEU—a program that seeks to address the gender gap in the technology sector by supporting women-led tech startups.³⁰ Through grants, mentoring, and training, Women TechEU aims to boost the representation of women in the tech entrepreneurship ecosystem, thereby fostering innovation and diversification within the industry.

Information concerning activities aimed at promoting investment and trade under CETA, with a specific focus on women, remains challenging to access from the European side. Neither WEGate nor the Europe Enterprise Network (EEN) women entrepreneur groups have documented any activities specific to Canada. Despite the European Women Association's (EWA) international engagements, it does not have a presence in Canada. Clearly, there is ample room for the EU to facilitate networking and establish connections between European women entrepreneurs and Canadian buyers and that room is, to some extent, taken by the EU Member States.

As regards data infrastructure, in 2018, the EU supported a specific project with UNWOMEN on gender, trade, and CETA. The final report on Gender and Trade concluded that monitoring and assessment of factors driving women's and men's participation in trade and their benefits under CETA can guide robust trade policy tools.³¹ It also determined that improving data availability, quality, and accessibility is crucial for gender and trade analysis, especially since, despite substantial research, studies using microdata directly related to trade participants are limited. Yet enhancing such research with better data can establish causal relationships, improving policy design. The report proposed three approaches for compiling trade-related statistics: a macrodata approach utilizing sectoral statistics, a microdata approach linking detailed data on individuals and firms participating in trade, and an in-depth approach involving surveys or interviews. However, acting on the recommendations was, in the end, delegated to international organizations and away from the EU-Canada bilateral relations on CETA: the data improvements were to be attained

²⁸ European Commission. n.d. *Support Tools and Networks for Women*. Accessed August 2, 2024. https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/smes/supporting-entrepreneurship/women-entrepreneurs/support-tools-and-networks-women_en.

²⁹ WEGate. 2024. Accessed August 2, 2024. <https://www.wegate.eu/>.

³⁰ European Commission. n.d. *Women TechEU*. Accessed August 2, 2024. https://eisma.ec.europa.eu/programmes/european-innovation-ecosystems/women-techeu_en.

³¹ UN Women. 2020. *Gender and Trade - Assessing the Impact of Trade Agreements on Gender Equality: Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement*. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/UNWomen_2020d1_en.pdf.

through a collaboration between United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the WE-Empower Program, UN Women, the International Labour Organization (ILO), statisticians, and trade policymakers aiming to identify key indicators for more comparable global insights.³²

4.2.2 The Member States and CETA-Focused Women Entrepreneurship

In the pursuit of information about mentorship activities for women entrepreneurs focusing on CETA from various EU chambers of commerce and trade representatives, the authors came across only a handful of countries and their respective activities, namely Italy, which has led a range of women-focused initiatives related to CETA in Vancouver, and France, with its numerous activities through the French Chamber of Commerce in Toronto as well as its ABEONA Network. Other member states' representatives who shared information, specifically Spain, Austria, and Ireland, discussed their general policies supporting women entrepreneurship, but they did not focus specifically on CETA. Germany indicated an isolated transatlantic endeavour facilitated by national women associations, such as Verband deutscher Unternehmerinnen e.V. in collaboration with the Women in Business New Brunswick that have introduced mentoring programs that could potentially enhance women's involvement in CETA-related trade. However, such efforts remain scarce.

Simultaneously, some chambers of commerce of select EU member states have displayed active support for women in business. For instance, the French Chamber of Commerce in Ontario has established the Women in Leadership Forum Annual Awards, while the Irish Chamber of Commerce acknowledges exceptional Irish Canadian women in business. However, these initiatives primarily honour diaspora women in Canada, who may not necessarily be engaged in trade activities under CETA.

The authors are unable to authoritatively state why the EU member states put so little emphasis on inclusive trade under CETA. Based on the interviews, the authors may suggest that the trade promotion instruments supporting women are overall a very new policy phenomenon in the EU. It is quite understandable that a specific focus on CETA would not be the primary concern at this early stage.

Canadian Approaches

In the Canadian context, trade promotion instruments targeting women-led businesses are implemented in two ways. First, women's business associations are the only direct contact with women-owned businesses in Canada. They implement training and mentoring schemes and support trade missions for their members. The governmental bodies support these organizations and work with them to reach out to women-led businesses with additional support.

On this level, the efforts to support women entrepreneurs in reaping benefits from the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) have been limited to the activities of several actors: Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC), Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) and the Trade Commissioners' Service (TCS) of Global Affairs Canada.

The information gathered highlights trade-promoting instruments such as virtual missions, training sessions, and trade missions that support women-owned businesses' internationalization efforts.

³² UN Women. 2020. *Gender and Trade - Assessing the Impact of Trade Agreements on Gender Equality: Canada-EU Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement*. https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/UNWomen_2020d1_en.pdf.

- Minister-Led Virtual Trade Mission to France, March 2021: The mission aimed to support Canadian businesses' access to export opportunities in France's green economy and leverage CETA. The mission had both Exploratory and Exporter streams, with 257 participating companies. It resulted in business deals for several companies, including women-owned ones.
- Francophone Businesswomen's Trade Mission to France and Belgium, January 2020: Organized by the TCS, this mission was the first of its kind and focused on connecting women entrepreneurs with buyers in France and Belgium. Eighteen women entrepreneurs participated, and the mission resulted in multiple business deals and contracts.
- Second Annual Canadian Women in Tech Virtual Mission to the EU, 2021: TCS offices in Warsaw, Brussels, and The Hague organized this virtual mission to target opportunities in fintech, healthtech, and cleantech in the EU. The mission included B2B meetings and opportunities for Canadian women-owned tech companies to pitch their solutions.

These trade missions aimed to promote Canadian businesses' internationalization efforts, specifically targeting European markets. The COVID-19 pandemic could explain the limited number of missions, and the authors could expect a larger number going forward. However, it seems that virtual missions garnered more interest than in-person missions. The pandemic can only partially explain this. A bigger factor is the fact that European markets are not popular among Canadians in general and among Canadian women in particular (I.11, I.12). In fact, despite TCS' endeavours, associations representing women entrepreneurs have not actively taken up the CETA agenda. Instead, the associations' efforts have been channeled towards strengthening business connections with Mexico and the United States (I.10, I.12). For example, OWIT-Toronto (Organization of Women in International Trade) conducted trade missions, including three to Mexico and hosted webinars on trade between Canada and the EU, leveraging CETA. Their activities occur annually, with 100 women participating in their webinars, 75 in a webinar with Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and 10 in the Mexican trade mission. Invest Ottawa leads international trade missions but mostly to the US and Mexico, not the EU. Their training program features training on exporting to Europe under CETA. Réseau Femmes d'Affaires du Québec (RFAQ) has had a number of training courses on CETA, but it has focused on francophone markets, which obviously has limited the impact of its outreach. It was the main co-organizer of the francophone TCS mission in 2021.

All in all, Canadian government's dedication to the trade and gender policy agenda has resulted in increased support for women-led business organizations that implement trade promotion strategies and instruments. However, that effort has not translated into a significant increase for the activities under CETA.

5. Conclusion

At the beginning of the article, the authors asked: what are the prospects of the trade and gender policy agenda to make a lasting impression on Canada-EU trade? There are no easy answers to that question, especially in such early stages of cooperation, which is solely based on the goodwill of partners focused on their respective political agendas. The authors can say that CETA indeed delivers solid structures to design and implement concrete actions, leading to more policy

coordination between the EU and Canada on trade and gender issues. The regulation allows for action plans that push partners' bureaucracies to set measurable goals and deliverables in this area. There are still several issues the partners could address in their work in this area in order to leave a lasting impression and serve as a model for other agreements to come. The most prominent have been those related to data collection and closing the knowledge gap. At the moment, the Canadian side is more advanced in this respect in general terms but still unable to gather reliable data on women in trade under CETA in particular. The lack of gender-disaggregated data was discussed earlier, in 2019, during the second and third Canada-EU CETA meetings on Trade and Gender.³³ The representatives highlighted that due to the gap in relevant data, it is challenging to assess the impact of trade agreements on women entrepreneurs and to implement an official strategy.³⁴

As regards data infrastructure, efforts since 2018 have seen the Women Entrepreneurs Knowledge Hub in Canada monitoring data adjustments. Some progress has been made, including incorporating gender as a category in entrepreneurship databases. However, several recommendations from 2018 remain partially unresolved. The absence of clear data definitions impedes the measurement and evaluation of gender aspects of CETA. While data on women entrepreneurship exists broadly, it remains a challenge to precisely gauge gender-specific trade flows, investment stocks, and flows pertaining to the EU, both on the Canadian side and in the opposite direction.

Other issues relate to encouraging more women in trade under CETA, which has been missing from bilateral work. If CETA is to serve as a model, it must cater to women in trade first and foremost. Without setting an example of cooperation, Canada will find it more and more difficult to leave a mark internationally in the area of trade and gender.

³³ Government of Canada. 2019. *Report: 2nd Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) Meeting on Trade and Gender by Videoconference, Ottawa and Brussels, June 14th, 2019*. Accessed August 2, 2024. <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/ceta-aecg/2019-06-14-trade-gender-commerce-genre.aspx?lang=eng>.

³⁴ Government of Canada. 2019b. *Report: 3rd Canada-European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) Joint Committee Recommendation on Trade and Gender by Videoconference, Ottawa and Brussels, October 24th, 2019*. Accessed August 2, 2024. https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/ceta-aecg/2019-10-24-trade_gender-commerce_genre.aspx?lang=eng.

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Annex

Table 1: Three generations of trade agreements³⁵

	1 st Generation	2 nd Generation	3 rd Generation
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of regionalism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rise of trade in services • Emergence of global value chains (GVCs) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digitization of the economy: increasing deterritorialization of trade • Growing dematerialized world trade • Interconnected world economy
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on tariff barriers • Easy to implement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on non-tariff barriers • Internationalization of firms • A regulation and integration model based on contractual approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempt to liberalize other policy issues that affect trade in goods and services (e.g., investment, people, ideas, sustainability, data) • Non-trade objectives (e.g., human rights, gender equality, climate change) • Necessity of wider and deeper cooperation • A renewal of economic regulation
Examples	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EEC • EU-Switzerland • EU-Mexico 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NAFTA • EU-Switzerland • EU-Colombia-Peru-Ecuador 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CETA • Updated EU-Mexico

³⁵ Table from Leblond and Viju-Miljusevic (2022), pp. 108.

Innovations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FTAs • Custom unions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inclusion of social clause • Protection of intellectual property rights • Dispute settlement mechanism • Institutions to assist implementation • Government procurement provisions • Provisions on labour and the environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mixed agreements • Precautionary principle • New “Regulatory Cooperation Forum” • Deepening and widening of regulatory cooperation (issue-specific committees) • Investment court system • Enhanced protection of intellectual property rights • Adoption of negative list approach • Updated public procurement processes
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List of interviewsExperts from embassies and chambers of commerce, responsible for trade:

- I.1. Austria, embassy (June 20, 2022)
- I.2. Germany, embassy (August 12, 2022)
- I.3. Ireland, Chamber of Commerce (August 12, 2022)
- I.4. Italy, Chamber of Commerce (June 1, 2022)
- I.5. Poland, embassy (September 15, 2022)
- I.6. Spain, embassy (August 20, 2022)

Experts from pan-European bodies supporting women in business

- I.7. WEGate/European Enterprise Network (October 10, 2022)

Interviews with the Trade Commissioner Service

- I.8. Trade Commissioners' Service in Helsinki (July 26, 2022)
- I.9. Trade Commissioners' Service in Poland (August 24, 2022)
- I.10. Trade Commissioners' Service in Italy/Malta (June 15, 2022, in writing)

Interviews with business-support organizations in Canada

- I.11. Invest Ottawa (June 21, 2022)
- I.12. Organization of Women in Trade Toronto (August 2, 2022)
- I.13. Réseau Femmes d'Affaires du Québec (October 3, 2022)

Published by the Centre for European Studies at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

Available online at: <https://ojs.library.carleton.ca/index.php/CJERS/index>

The *Canadian Journal of European and Russian Studies* (CJERS – formerly *Review of European and Russian Affairs*) is an open-access electronic academic peer-reviewed journal: articles are subject to double-blind peer-review. Topics relate to the European Union, its Member States, the former Soviet Union, and Central and Eastern Europe. The journal is published by the Centre for European Studies, an associated unit of the Institute of European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at Carleton University.

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ISSN: 2562-8429

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