

# From Europe to the World: Understanding Challenges for European Businesswomen



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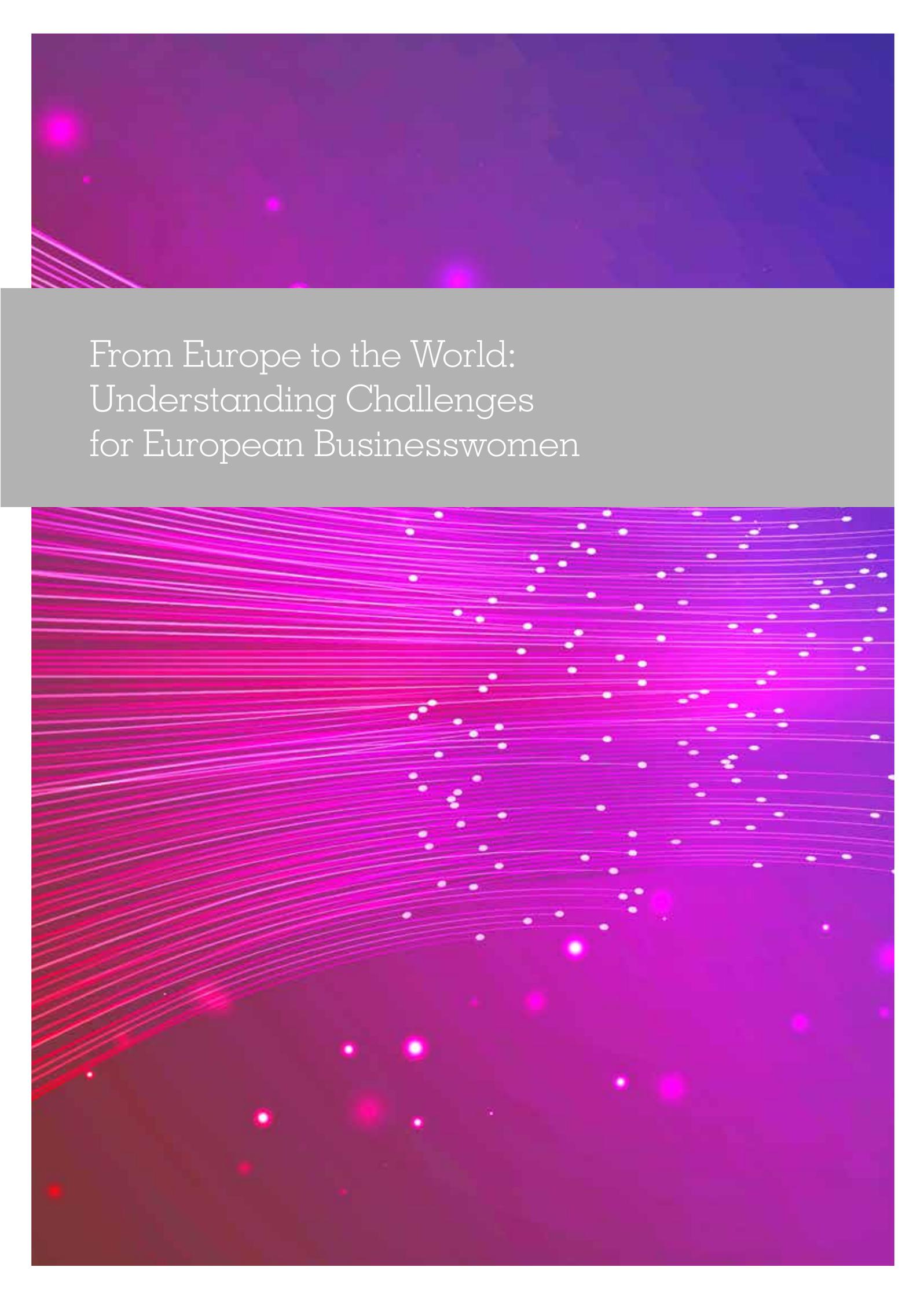
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The background of the slide is an abstract digital composition. It features a gradient of purple and pink colors. In the upper portion, there are several bright, out-of-focus light spots. The middle section is dominated by numerous thin, wavy lines that create a sense of motion and depth. Interspersed among these lines are many small, glowing white and pink dots, some of which appear to be connected by faint lines, suggesting a network or data flow. The overall aesthetic is modern and tech-oriented.

From Europe to the World:  
Understanding Challenges  
for European Businesswomen

## ABOUT THE REPORT

Getting more women to trade beyond the European Union will require policies that go beyond trade. Policies are needed to get women to set up and grow their businesses in high-growth potential industries, enter export markets, and enjoy equal rights and opportunities in the labour market. Trade policymakers can be part of the solution, by leveraging the platform provided by free trade agreements.

This report captures the links between women, companies they lead or work for, and trade outside the EU. Among the 1,118 firms surveyed in 12 EU countries, women are under-represented at all levels, and face various challenges.

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For more information on ITC's SheTrades Initiative, see <https://www.shetrades.com/> and ITC's Non-Tariff Measures Programme, see <http://www.ntmsurvey.com>

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# Foreword

International Trade Centre



Women's full economic participation is key for the future of good trade and inclusive growth. And the majority of World Trade Organization (WTO) Members recognize this, as seen by the number of WTO Members and observers that supported the 2017 Buenos Aires Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment and that continue to participate in the discussions on women and trade at the WTO.

There is growing consensus that trade rules and regulations can affect women differently. After all, trade rules are not gender neutral. Therefore the time is right to focus on how to incorporate inclusive policies in trade rules and procedures. An important element to achieve this is to ensure that there is gender-disaggregated data to properly inform these policies.

This unique study of the International Trade Centre (ITC), commissioned by the European Commission Directorate-General for Trade, helps address this gap. It explores how women – company owners, managers and employees – participate in trade in goods outside the European Union (EU). It looks at the characteristics of women-led companies and what, where and how they export. It sheds light on the challenges they face and how these differ from those faced by men-led companies. A survey of more than 1,000 firms across 12 EU member states seeks to contribute to these issues.

The survey is complemented by interviews with European businesswomen, as well as a review of gender provisions in trade agreements. This combination helps pinpoint context-specific challenges for women in the EU, and priority issues that policy instruments can address.

The results confirm that women are under-represented at all levels, lead smaller firms than men, and are less represented in high export potential industries. These drive broader patterns of inequality.

Irrespective of size and industry, businesswomen looking to export beyond the EU are at a disadvantage in accessing finance, skills, and business networks. This correlates with other ITC research conducted in other regions.

For policymakers, the message is clear: there are many opportunities for European businesswomen to benefit from extra-European trade. To seize these opportunities, there is need for greater intervention in trade policy *and* beyond trade policy. Existing free trade agreements can be leveraged to strengthen political commitment, share knowledge, support women's rights in the workplace, and better focus technical cooperation activities. And the results can be almost immediate as targeted export and investment promotion for women will yield significant benefits.

Our hope is that these research findings contribute to a more complete picture of European businesswomen's participation in trade, and lead to new policy actions to support them further.

I would like to thank the European Commission Directorate-General for Trade for its on-going commitment to inclusive, sustainable trade. The European Union is at the forefront of promoting gender equality through trade, entering into forward-looking free trade agreements that incorporate a gender perspective, recognizing trade as an engine for development and testing approaches that become best practices to emulate.

ITC's work on analysing sex-disaggregated data and field experience in connecting three million women entrepreneurs to international markets by 2021 through its SheTrades initiative has placed us in a unique position to collaborate with the European Union on this report.

We support the trade community's efforts towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling one of the key areas of commitment under the Buenos Aires Declaration. As we prepare to celebrate 25 years since the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in 2020, we hope this report will help the trade community to step up its efforts to achieve gender equality.

**Arancha González**

Executive Director  
International Trade Centre

# Foreword

European Commission



'The activity of buying, selling, or exchanging goods or services between people, firms, or countries.' This or something similar is the definition of 'trade' in any dictionary you look up.

Trade policy governs trade. It has done so for centuries, and it continues to create economic growth, generate more welfare and lift people out of poverty.

Today, however, trade must also be a force for achieving a higher good. It has to be able to respond to major challenges, such as climate change or diminishing biodiversity, and to protect human rights or labour rights.

These are critical issues, and addressing them has been a guiding principle under my mandate as European Union (EU) commissioner for trade. We have come a long way. We now have trade and sustainable development chapters in all of our trade agreements. Protecting the climate, the environment and labour rights is also an integral part of our trade policy. The EU has become the most transparent actor in the world when it comes to trade policy.

However, there is one important area which has remained relatively unexploited and under-researched, namely how trade policy contributes to women's economic empowerment. How can policymakers create a level-playing field for women and men in international trade?

The problem is clear. While jobs in trade usually pay better than jobs elsewhere (12% better on average), women only hold 38% of those jobs. Moreover, only 15% of exporting firms globally are women-led. These problems require solutions – and solutions require a sound and detailed analysis of the problem.

The present report by the International Trade Centre fills a major gap and adds an important value in analysing these issues. It provides us with a number of important findings and useful recommendations.

While the leadership of the European Union institutions is changing, the importance of a values-based EU trade policy remains – and keeps on growing. I am convinced that this report will be a valuable tool for EU and national policymakers. It will help develop new solutions to ensure that women benefit more from the opportunities provided by international trade.

**Cecilia Malmström**

European Commissioner for  
Trade 2014–2019

# Acknowledgements

This report is based on the data from the International Trade Centre (ITC) business survey on women in extra-EU trade in 12 European Union (EU) countries. The survey was conducted at the request of, and with support from, the European Commission, Directorate-General for Trade (DG Trade) in 2019.

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