



Who is benefiting from trade liberalization in Uruguay?

A GENDER PERSPECTIVE





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CONTENTS

| | |
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| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | V |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | VI |
| INTRODUCTION | IX |
| 1. COUNTRY PROFILE | 1 |
| 1.1. OVERVIEW | 2 |
| 1.2. ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ISSUES | 4 |
| 1.2.1. <i>Economic growth</i> | 4 |
| 1.2.2. <i>Investment</i> | 6 |
| 1.2.3. <i>Structural transformation</i> | 8 |
| 1.2.4. <i>Labour market, income, and wages</i> | 10 |
| 1.2.5. <i>Poverty and overall income distribution</i> | 12 |
| 2. GENDER SITUATION | 15 |
| 2.1. OVERVIEW | 16 |
| 2.2. GENDER-RELATED “OUTCOMES” | 16 |
| 2.2.1. <i>Health and survival</i> | 16 |
| 2.2.2. <i>Educational attainment</i> | 17 |
| 2.2.3. <i>Women’s political empowerment</i> | 17 |
| 2.2.4. <i>Women in the economy and employment</i> | 19 |
| 2.2.4.1. <i>Female labour force participation</i> | 19 |
| 2.2.4.2. <i>Women’s employment profile</i> | 20 |
| 2.2.4.3. <i>Women’s wages and income</i> | 21 |
| 2.2.4.4. <i>Informality</i> | 23 |
| 2.3 GENDER-RELATED “INPUT” (RELEVANT POLICIES AND SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS)..... | 23 |
| 2.3.1. <i>International and National Legal Framework for Gender Equality</i> | 23 |
| 2.3.2. <i>Institutions and programmes for gender equality</i> | 26 |
| 2.3.2.1. <i>The Quality Management with Gender Equity Model</i> | 27 |
| 3. TRADE POLICY AND TRADE PERFORMANCE | 31 |
| 3.1. EVOLUTION OF TRADE POLICY | 32 |
| 3.1.1. <i>Reducing barriers to trade</i> | 32 |
| 3.1.2. <i>Sectoral policies</i> | 34 |
| 3.2. TRADE DEVELOPMENTS..... | 35 |
| 3.2.1. <i>Trade in goods</i> | 35 |
| 3.2.1.1. <i>Exports</i> | 36 |
| 3.2.1.2. <i>Direction of exports</i> | 38 |
| 3.2.1.3. <i>Imports</i> | 39 |
| 3.2.1.4. <i>Direction of imports</i> | 41 |
| 3.2.2. <i>Trade in services</i> | 42 |
| 4. TRADE LIBERALIZATION AND THE FEMALE WORKFORCE | 47 |
| 4.1. AGRICULTURE AND LIVESTOCK..... | 49 |
| 4.2. MANUFACTURING SECTOR | 51 |
| 4.3. SERVICES | 52 |
| 5. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS | 57 |
| 5.1. GENDER AND THE EXPORT SECTORS..... | 59 |
| 5.1.1. <i>Agriculture and agri-business</i> | 59 |
| 5.1.2. <i>Services</i> | 62 |
| 5.1.3. <i>Gender and the manufacturing sector</i> | 63 |
| 5.2. ADDITIONAL ISSUES | 63 |
| ANNEX 1 | 67 |

ANNEX 2..... 70

REFERENCES..... 73

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UNCTAD aims to contribute to the analysis of the linkages between trade policy and gender equality, and to the related international debate, by looking at specific country experiences. This study is one in a series of case studies that are being conducted by UNCTAD in seven developing and least-developed countries: Angola, Bhutan, Cape Verde, the Gambia, Lesotho, Rwanda, and Uruguay.

This study was prepared by an UNCTAD team led by Simonetta Zarrilli, Chief of the Trade, Gender and Development Section, and including Irene Musselli, Luis Abugattas Majluf, Mariangela Linoci, Sheba Tejani, and Elizabeth Jane Casabianca. Insightful comments and suggestions provided by Murray Gibbs, Diego Pieri, Soledad Salvador, Daniela Tellechea, Manuela Tortora, and Marcel Vaillant are gratefully acknowledged. The overall work was coordinated by Simonetta Zarrilli.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Uruguay is a small upper-middle-income country whose demographic, economic, and social welfare profile is closer to developed rather than developing nations. Similar to other Latin America countries, the Uruguayan economy has moved from an inward-looking strategy to an outward-looking one that prioritizes the market as the resource allocation mechanism and exports as the engine of growth. This study examines how trade liberalization and related shifts in the productive structure in Uruguay have affected women's access to employment. The study presents an economic profile of the country and an overview of its gender situation, the process of trade integration, and the current trading scenario, before assessing the impact of trade on gender-related outcomes.

Uruguay has a low level of poverty and high life expectancy and literacy levels, and is a very urbanized country with a high level of human development. It has significantly less income inequality than the average developing country and has the most equal income distribution among the Latin American countries. Trade reforms, launched first in 1974, occurred at a much more gradual pace than in many other countries in the region, though in the context of recurring economic crises and long-term high inflationary pressures. During the reform period, growth of the Uruguayan economy was quite volatile, with periods of relatively high growth rates, modest growth, and severe contractions.

The Uruguayan economy has grown steadily since the 1999-2002 crisis, with average real GDP growth of 5.4 per cent per annum during 2003-2010. The services sector traditionally has been the leading sector in terms

reform period from 1974 to 2011 was also associated with a sharp depression of the income of the population, although the gender wage gap improved. However, contrary to most Latin American countries – where employment has been created mainly in the informal sector – the bulk of jobs created in Uruguay have offered wage employment in the private sector, with a moderate and a relative stable component of informal, non-registered workers.

Uruguay has stood out in the region as a strong example of high human development and progressive thinking, and its approach to gender equality mostly reflects this. Uruguay is an exemplar in terms of gender equality in the areas of education and health, and the country also fares well in the economic participation of men and women, although progress is needed to ensure greater political empowerment of women. Gender equality has been achieved in basic education (literacy and primary education), and there is even a gender gap in favour of girls and women in secondary and tertiary education. Despite the high level of education achieved by Uruguayan women and girls, educational segregation remains a problem: science and technology remain male-dominated fields, while social and art studies are female-dominated. This phenomenon is then reflected in labour market segregation. Uruguayan women continue to face a “glass ceiling.” Afro-Uruguayan women live in particularly adverse conditions that reflect gender- and race-based discrimination.

In recognition of the need to level the playing field between men and women, legislation was passed in 2005 on equality of opportunities, and more recently on maternity leave, sexual harassment in the workplace,

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