



Tajikistan



Gender Dimensions of Cross-Border Trade in Tajikistan

Summary of findings and recommendations



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Research has shown that the expansion of international trade is essential for poverty reduction, and it provides better job opportunities and increased returns particularly for women working in export-oriented sectors.¹ Oftentimes, however, women may face more or different challenges than men that prevent them from fully participating in trade. While globally there is a growing body of research on why women participate less in cross-border trade than men, there is still a lack of data and research that quantifies the exact nature of the trade facilitation challenges that women traders face at the firm level.

Generally, trade facilitation measures are assumed to be non-discriminatory in their design; however, implementation and delivery of these measures may not necessarily impact all traders in similar ways. Studies by the World Bank, for example, found that men and women traders often face different trade facilitation challenges, including in areas such as access to information, usage of electronic payments, submission of electronic documents, pre-declaration of goods, consultations with the government, and participation in trade or industry specific associations.²

The **WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (WTO TFA)** contains provisions for expediting the movement, release, and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. The TFA sets out measures for customs compliance issues and for effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation. Trade facilitation measures can help to reduce transaction costs to import and export with simplified, transparent trade procedures. The TFA is particularly important for countries striving to increase exports and overall trade and to strengthen domestic economic activity.

There is a dearth of research that quantifies the exact nature of challenges women cross-border traders face at the firm-level in Tajikistan. To help fill this gap, the World Bank Group undertook a survey of 401 cross-border trade firms and 31 customs brokers between March and November 2022.³ The study also included four focus group discussions with traders, six key informant interviews, and technical visits of three border crossing points and one airport to supplement the quantitative part of the research. The survey largely focused on areas related to the WTO TFA, while also researching the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflicts in the region, transport issues, and safety and security at the borders. This summary presents the findings and recommendations of the study undertaken in Tajikistan.

Profile of trade firms:

- A large majority of firms trading across borders are led by men (87 percent compared to 13 percent women-led firms).⁴
- Around eighty percent of traders are importers, and the majority of trade firms import goods beyond Central Asia (51 percent of men-led and 61 percent of women-led).
- There are considerably fewer married women (78 percent) than married men-led firms (98 percent).
- Fewer women (26 percent) than men (31 percent) are members of industry/trade associations. The likelihood of membership in a trade/industry association correlates with the size of the firm: 61 percent of large firms are members of a trade/industry association compared to only 15 percent of micro firms.
- Fewer women traders (80 percent) work full time (40 or more hours per week) compared to their men counterparts (87 percent of men).

¹ World Bank, "The Role of Trade in Ending Poverty", 2015; and "Women and Trade: The Role of Trade in Promoting Women's Equality", 2020

² See World Bank, "Trade Facilitation Challenges for Women Traders and Freight Forwarders in the Pacific Region", 2021.

³ Trade firms are legally registered firms that are engaged in import, export and/or transit of goods from/to different countries, excluding state-owned enterprises. Customs brokers are formally registered professionals who provide cross-border trade services and can operate as representatives of trade firms.

⁴ The target respondents for this study were either owners or top managers of trade firms. Depending on the gender identification of the respondent (woman/man), the firm is defined as women or men-led firm. "Owner" refers to 51% or more of the shareholding in the business, and "top manager" refers to the highest position in the business with the decision-making authority, e.g., CEO, manager, director. Since most of the men and women respondents interviewed are managers of firms, and there were just a handful of women owners, the study is reporting both owners and managers in an aggregated form.

Select Findings

The challenges identified through the survey responses can be categorized into two main categories: A) challenges that are common to both women and men traders and customs brokers, and B) gender-specific challenges.⁵ This summary highlights select findings:⁶



Thirty-eight percent of trade firms, regardless of gender, reported their businesses' ability to trade was impacted by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Forty-five percent of customs brokers also named the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a major factor affecting their ability to undertake cross-border trade.

The majority of men- and women-led firms and customs brokers reported that their businesses were impacted by the pandemic (74 percent of men-led firms, 71 percent of women-led firms, and 71 percent of customs brokers).

Although Tajikistan has implemented a Single Window system, more than half of trade firms and 42 percent of customs brokers reported that they still have to submit both paper and electronic forms and documents to Customs.

Most trade firms do not pre-declare their shipments to Customs prior to arrival – 89 percent of women-led firms and 85 percent of men-led firms. The larger the firm, the more likely it would pre-declare its shipments – with 14 percent of large firms pre-declaring compared to only six percent of micro firms. Among customs brokers, 29 percent pre-declare prior to arrival of shipments.

⁵ Due to the low number of customs brokers that participated in the survey, gender-disaggregated analysis for customs brokers was not feasible.

⁶ A comprehensive list will be published with the full report.



Gender-specific challenges for trade-firms

Significantly more women traders are unsatisfied with the amenities provided at the land border post or airports. Lack of access to internet (43 percent of women traders vs 30 percent of men), unhygienic toilet facilities (36 percent of women vs 18 percent of men), and lack of adequate resting rooms and private space for mothers (36 percent of women vs 10 percent of men) were cited as reasons for this lack of satisfaction.

More women than men reported that caretaking responsibilities affect their ability to trade (12 percent of women compared to four percent of men).

The majority of trade firms are not familiar with Authorized Economic Operator program (88 percent of women-led and 95 percent of men-led firms).

Less than 15 percent of traders use government enquiry points for trade-related questions, and fewer women than men have used them (10 percent vs 15 percent, respectively).

A larger share of women traders (69 percent) relies on personal/company savings to finance their business compared to their men counterparts (53 percent). More men traders (26 percent) compared to women traders (20 percent) use official bank loans.

The majority of traders find that border processes are consistently implemented by border officials, though fewer women-led firms have this perception (85 percent of women-led vs 91 percent of men-led firms).

Fewer women-led firms (34 percent) than men-led firms (51 percent) reported that guidance and explanations on penalties and official appeal processes are clear and easy to access across government entities.

Awareness of the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC), known as the Coordinating Committee on Facilitation of Trade Procedures (CCFTP), is very low in Tajikistan – only seven percent of women-led firms and 14 percent of men-led firms know that such an entity exists. The larger the size of the firm, the greater the chance that they are aware of the NTFC.

Significantly fewer women traders (26 percent) compared to men traders (42 percent) stated that their business is consulted regularly or has the opportunity to comment on public consultations regarding changes to official trade processes and procedures.

Among traders that face difficulties finding information, more women than men stated that official websites are not user-friendly (75 percent of women traders vs to 41 percent of men) and that the information is not centralized (62 percent of women traders vs 44 percent of men).

No women traders reported experiencing inappropriate behavior at land border posts or airport they visit most frequently borders, while nine percent of men reported it to be an issue.⁷ The most typical transgressions reported by the men that have experienced harassment are verbal abuse and threats (six percent), intimidation (two percent), and physical violence (one percent).

Most traders do not use public transport for travel to the border post or airport (71 percent of men and 79 percent of women). Most of those who still use public transport think it is too expensive.

⁷ This study treats the findings on sexual and other types of harassment with caution since the telephone format of interviews does not usually allow interviewers to establish a rapport with the respondents to discuss issues of this sensitive nature; therefore, significant underreporting is expected.



Summary of Key Recommendations

Initial findings demonstrate an opportunity to improve the design of trade interventions to better address the needs of all traders and customs brokers, and women in particular, for example, by:



Expediting the full and effective implementation of the WTO TFA, considering specific challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and regional conflicts



Strengthening and promoting electronic declaration systems and establishing suitable infrastructure at Customs and other border agencies



Strengthening and promoting the National Trade Facilitation Committee



Improving infrastructure and facility services at border crossings



Improving access to official border regulations and procedures



Recruiting more women staff and improving staff working conditions at Customs and other border agencies and border posts



Enhancing formal and regular consultations between the government and the private sector, especially women-led businesses



Increasing access to trade finance



Reviewing and publicizing official grievance procedures in a clear and easy-to-access manner

This study was financed by the Government of Japan through the Quality Infrastructure Investment Partnership.

The survey is a collaboration effort between World Bank Group Transport and Trade teams.

