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December 2025

Assessing Human Rights Impacts of Trade Agreements

Why it matters – and how to do it



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Applying human rights for better trade rules: a guide

Trade and trade rules can affect human rights. Tariffs on goods, liberalisation of trade in services, government procurement regulations, e-commerce, international food safety standards and foreign investment are just some common features of trade agreements that can enhance or jeopardise the enjoyment of human rights, and thus support or undermine the expected outcomes of new trade agreements.

Anticipating and avoiding adverse human rights impacts before or during trade negotiations is useful to achieve trade agreements that are more robust, yield better outcomes and enjoy broader popular support. The human rights framework offers a tool with which countries may assess possible impacts of new trade rules. The human rights legal framework can usefully guide trade policy and support countries in their efforts to maintain domestic policy space and public interest regulations when faced with trading partners who seek to remove these through trade agreements.

In short, human rights impact assessment (HRIA) is a useful tool for trade policymaking.

This Guide explains how.

- For discussion of **why** trade policymaking can benefit from a human rights lens, turn to page 4.
- For a short introduction to **what** human rights rules and principles apply in the trade context, turn to page 7.
- To learn **how** to go about a human rights impact assessment, turn to page 11.

Trade can be an engine for sustainable development. This Guide offers a simple framework – human rights impact assessment – for designing trade agreements that are:



robust



inclusive



equitable

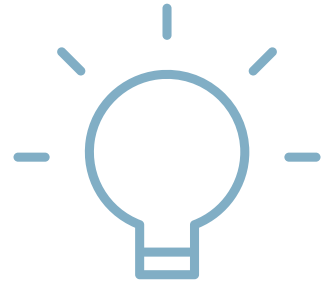


sustainable



consistent with
international law

Why?



Why pay attention to human rights?

International trade brings many benefits, but it is increasingly being recognised that losses following new trade agreements can be serious, concentrated and lasting, and may vary considerably within and between countries. Assessing impacts and potential impacts is necessary in order to understand the channels through which gains and losses may occur, so as to be able to guard against the latter. The human rights framework is a useful tool. Its benefits include:

Legitimacy: human rights require that trade policymaking take account of the needs of those most vulnerable to adverse effects of a proposed policy, and enable public participation in policy formulation. Broad involvement promotes political legitimacy and helps to reduce feelings of disenfranchisement that can give rise to social tensions and political instability.

Sharing benefits: human rights focus attention on longer term, broader societal impacts of a trade policy, looking in particular to achieve non-discriminatory outcomes and progress towards sustainable development for all. Allowing benefits to accrue disproportionately to the most privileged and to exacerbate disparities is contrary to basic human rights principles such as non-discrimination. Because inequality leads to less stable, less efficient economic systems, cultivating an awareness of the likely distributional impacts of a proposed trade rule may contribute to more robust policy.

Avoiding blind spots and managing risk: a human rights approach, in contrast to focusing solely on the economic actors directly involved in trade, directs attention to groups, regions or sectors within a country that are often overlooked in economic policymaking. This sheds light on possible unintended impacts and risks. It also helps negotiators seek trade commitments – or exceptions and safeguard clauses – with these groups, regions or sectors in mind, and to design flanking or compensatory measures where necessary.

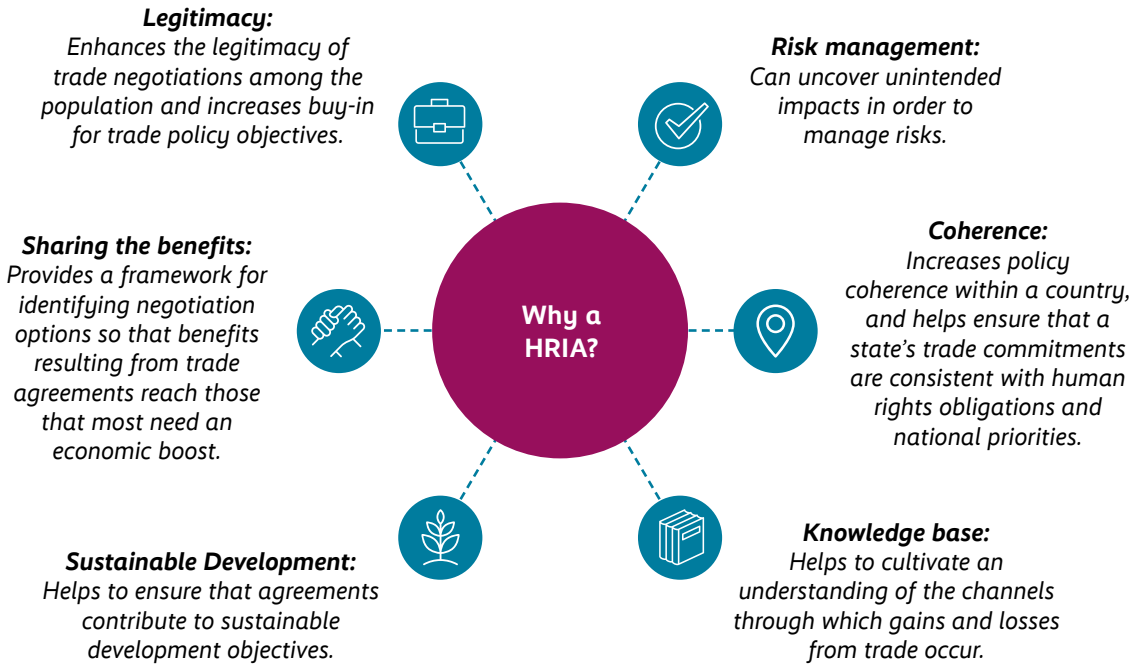
Coherence: applying the human rights framework helps to ensure coherence across government, between economic policies and other social, environmental and public policy objectives and supports states' compliance with their international human rights obligations.

In recent years there has been a backlash against economic globalisation as people around the world notice that the gains from trade are concentrated in some countries and regions and among specific groups of people. Some public perceptions of the unequal distribution of trade benefits are true. And even when unfounded, perceived adverse effects have contributed to a turn towards nationalistic policies, several of which present human rights concerns.

Support for domestic priorities: HRIAs contribute to the knowledge base – within and beyond the trade community – about how trade agreements impact different parts of the population. HRIA findings can inform policy and support trade positions and approaches to negotiations to help leverage favourable terms or resist the imposition of clauses that would undermine a state’s ability to fulfil its human rights obligations. Indeed, human rights law has served countries wishing to defend policy space, for instance to protect public health, from negotiating pressures from more economically powerful trading partners.

6 reasons why HRIA benefits trade negotiations

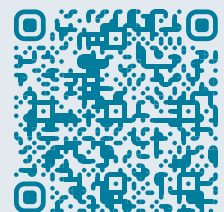
Figure 1



Box 1

Illustrative list of other trade impact assessment methodologies

- [Distributional Impacts of Trade](#) (World Bank)
- [GBA+ Gender Based Analysis of Trade Agreements](#) (Government of Canada)
- [Guiding principles on human rights impact assessments of trade and investment agreements](#) (UN Human Rights Council)
- [Methodology for assessing the impacts of trade agreements on biodiversity and ecosystems](#) (Institute for European Environmental Policy et al.)
- [Sustainability Impact Assessment](#) (European Commission)
- [Trade and Gender Tool Box](#) (UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD))



Why undertake a human rights impact assessment?

A range of methodologies and tools exist for assessing societal impacts of trade beyond aggregate economic impacts (see Box 1), of which HRIA is one. All provide a structured approach to gathering and analysing evidence for policymaking.

HRIA offers distinctive features and advantages in comparison with other types of impact assessment. It brings conceptual rigour and political weight, based on the normative and analytical framework that human rights law sets out. HRIA measures the potential impacts of a proposed intervention against human rights standards, rather than against the status quo. The HRIA approach focuses attention on important elements that other methodologies often miss. Whilst these often focus on the most important sectors in terms of value or volume, human rights-centred methodologies focus on those people who are most vulnerable to trade policy-related losses.

HRIA is a key way for countries to comply with their human rights obligations. Its usefulness goes beyond determining impacts of trade rules on human rights, to be a tool for ascertaining whether trade is fulfilling its intended societal and developmental functions, as the human rights framework is uniquely suited to determine, objectively and transparently, which groups, regions, sectors or sustainability-related effects assessment should focus on, directing attention to those people, regions or policies that trade policy often overlook. HRIA can usefully complement other impact assessments, or be undertaken as a standalone exercise.

Assessing the likely impacts of a planned trade agreement can seem daunting, given the wide range of topics that trade agreements typically cover. The human rights framework offers a globally accepted legal framework for narrowing down the scope of an assessment. Notably, its emphasis on non-discrimination directs attention to those groups most vulnerable to economic changes. In this way, a human rights-based approach demonstrates that the choice of areas for assessment is based on an accepted set of criteria, thus avoiding accusations of arbitrariness or capture by economic or other interests.

An ex ante HRIA shone the spotlight on likely labour, gender, food security and environmental aspects of the African Continental Free Trade Area, enabling the formulation of policy proposals and the insertion of text to safeguard those most vulnerable to trade liberalisation in Africa.

HRIA goes beyond determining impacts of trade rules on human rights, to be a tool for ascertaining whether trade is fulfilling its intended societal functions.

What?



Applicable human rights obligations

Human rights, in essence, are about recognising and protecting dignity, equality and freedom, and constraining abuses of power by states or other actors. All countries in the world have ratified at least one of the international human rights agreements, so binding human rights obligations apply across all governmental actions, including negotiating and concluding trade agreements. These include obligations of conduct (to take actions, such as enacting policies to realise rights) as much as obligations of result (achieving outcomes, such as reducing hunger levels).

Human rights bodies have over the years developed the legal content and guidance for policy application of human rights. These are, most notably, set out in treaty body General Comments, such as those of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights on the [Right to Food](#), the [Right to Health](#) or the [Right to Water](#).

States have a duty to respect, protect and fulfil all human rights, including the right to development, individually as well as through international cooperation (see Box 2).



Respecting, protecting and fulfilling human rights in international trade

Box 2

Trade negotiators have a **duty to respect** rights by refraining from interfering directly or indirectly with people's enjoyment of their rights. Negotiators should avoid agreeing to provisions that would require or result in reducing the enjoyment of human rights. More economically powerful countries must avoid seeking concessions that could weaken the enjoyment of human rights in less economically powerful countries.

Under the **duty to protect**, trade negotiators should take positive steps to ensure that non-state actors, such as corporations, do not violate

rights. Negotiators should include safeguards against abuses by third parties, such as investors or companies, including preserving states' right to regulate.

The **duty to fulfil** requires states to take positive steps towards the realisation of rights, for example, by ensuring delivery of public services and provision of infrastructure. This also implies that governments must identify vulnerable groups to ensure that proposed trade policies enhance and do not reduce their enjoyment of their human rights.

Human rights law recognises that it may not be possible for a state to realise all human rights immediately. But some obligations are immediate: these include **taking deliberate, concrete and targeted steps** towards the progressive realisation of human rights, ensuring respect for **minimum core** elements of human rights, and **preventing discrimination** in the enjoyment of human rights. States also have the obligation to **monitor** progress towards realisation: an essential first step towards improving enjoyment of human rights is knowledge and diagnosis of the existing situation.

Table 1

Human rights and trade – illustrative links

Some ways in which trade rules can have adverse human rights impacts¹

Trade provision	Area of impact	Human rights dimension
Stringent trade-related intellectual property standards	→ Can affect prices and availability of medicines	→ Right to health
Investor protection in trade agreements	→ Can undermine governmental public-interest measures, directly through legal awards, or through regulatory chill	→ Right to health → Right to a clean environment → Right to water, right to health
Services trade liberalisation	→ Can reduce provision of public services, and lead to underinvestment in public services	→ Right to education → Right to water → Right to health
Tariff reductions	→ Can affect the livelihoods of domestic producers (through import competition) → Can reduce domestic investment in production → Can reduce governmental income and expenditure on public services	→ Right to an adequate standard of living → Right to development → Women's rights
Tariff increases	→ Higher prices on goods can affect the cost of living, disproportionately affecting low-income consumers → Tariffs can protect domestic industries and save some jobs in the short term, but they can also distort resource allocation and favour politically connected industries, whilst harming vulnerable workers in export sectors in other countries	→ Right to an adequate standard of living → Right to be free from discrimination → Women's rights → Right to development
Market access provisions	→ Intensive export-oriented agriculture	→ Indigenous peoples' rights → Right to a clean environment

¹ Trade rules can have positive and adverse human rights impacts. This table presents negative impacts only, as the focus of this Guide is to minimise these.

States must comply with human rights not only in their domestic policies but also in their foreign policies, including trade policy. Human rights law does not take a position for or against any particular trade rule or policy, subject to two conditions. First, the rule or policy in question must enhance enjoyment of human rights, including for the most disadvantaged and vulnerable. Second, the process by which the rule or policy is formulated, implemented and monitored must be consistent with human rights.

Illustrations

- Court cases in a range of countries (e.g. Colombia, Kenya, Peru, South Africa, Thailand)
- Human Rights treaty body Concluding Observations, e.g. Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, Concluding Observations to Germany E/C.12/DEU/CO/6 (2018)
- Philip Morris brought a case against Uruguay's tobacco-related public health measures
- Lone Pine brought a case against Canada seeking compensation following enactment of new environmental laws
- Urbaser, a private water and sewerage services company, brought a case against Argentina, seeking compensation for having its license revoked due to underinvestment and the resulting undermining of the right to water
- Transnational Institute, Our Public Water Future
- UNCTAD, Challenging Conventional Wisdom
- Barnali Choudhury, Public Services and International Trade Liberalization: Human Rights and Gender Implications
- Special Rapporteur on adequate housing, Report of the Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living
- Ecumenical Advocacy Alliance, Trade Policies and Hunger
- Guillaume G erout and Ana s Cren-Larvor, Tariffs and Human Rights, A Pilot Analysis of the AfCFTA Tariff Schedules
- UNECA/FES, The Continental Free Trade Area (CFTA) in Africa – A Human Rights Perspective
- United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality (IANWGE), Gender Equality & Trade Policy
- The Budget Lab, The Effect of Tariffs on Poverty
- Human Rights Economics, On tariffs, women workers and how trade narratives invisibilize the most vulnerable
- Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development, Impacts of Trade Tariffs

- Alliance Sud, HRIA of the EFTA-Mercosur Trade Agreement



Some HRIAs of trade agreements

Assessing trade agreements through a HRIA has made it possible to identify a range of impacts beyond indicators of trade flows, volumes and subsequent impact on revenue. It is worth recalling some of the lessons learned from HRIAs undertaken so far.

→ **HRIA of the African Continental Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA)**

The [HRIA of the AfCFTA](#) was undertaken in parallel to the negotiations, in 2016–2017. Among other things, it identified specific impacts on women and, in particular, informal women cross-border traders. This served as a basis for other agencies to implement measures to improve these women's rights. Following the HRIA, other organisations undertook research on women's role in trade, resulting in specific measures in countries' national implementation plans. It also contributed to making decision-makers more aware of the need to include women and young people in discussions around AfCFTA to better incorporate measures that respond to the ways in which the trade agreement might affect them differently from other, more powerful, economic actors. The HRIA noted the inadequate consultation process throughout the negotiations. The importance of this finding was confirmed the following year when [Nigeria delayed AfCFTA ratification](#) in order to hold consultations with stakeholders.

→ **HRIA of the Trade in Services Agreement for Mauritius**

An assessment of impacts of the planned [Trade in Services Agreement](#) was undertaken in 2018 to obtain a better understanding of the social and human rights impacts, and to clarify whether perceived risks of the agreement were likely to occur. One of its main purposes was to allay concerns about private actors in strategic sectors such as water distribution. It revealed a lack of awareness within the country about the channels of impact of services trade liberalisation on public policy objectives, notably about how the deregulatory aspect of the agreement could close off policy space for the country in the future. Its analysis demonstrated that hopes and fears about impacts on the right to work were largely unfounded.



How?



A HRIA can be carried out for any type of trade agreement, whether multi-lateral, bilateral or narrow sectoral agreements, as well as for specific chapters or broader partnership and cooperation agreements. It can be done *ex post* to assess existing trade agreements, or *ex ante*, to shape negotiating positions and outcomes. An *ex ante* HRIA can take place at any stage during the negotiation process, but the earlier it is done, the more useful it will be as its findings are more likely to be reflected in the outcome of the negotiations.

A HRIA is not necessarily highly resource intensive or costly. Where time and resources permit, it can cover a range of topics and include in-depth analysis. Shorter, desk-based HRIAs can also yield useful insights.

In some cases, a HRIA may be integrated into another type of impact assessment, such as a sustainability or gender impact assessment. In this case, it is important to ensure that it is fully integrated. Rather than analysing human rights impacts separately from sustainability or gender equality impacts, an integrated human rights approach ensures, *inter alia*, that consideration of those who might be most vulnerable should be the starting point for identifying the possible sustainability impacts for assessment.

If you are considering undertaking a HRIA and would like guidance on approaches and HRIA expertise, please contact:

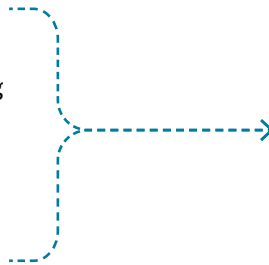
→ [OHCHR](#)

Step-by-step guide to HRIA

Overview of the standard methodology

The step-by-step guide set out below is based on standard HRIA methodology, which is similar to that of other trade impact assessments. Notwithstanding the order in which the steps are presented here, steps 2–7 may overlap and be undertaken in an iterative manner, as in practice the sequence of steps is not always clear-cut.

1. Preparation
2. Screening and scoping
3. Data collection and evidence gathering
4. Consultation and participation
5. Human rights analysis
6. Recommendations
7. Reporting
8. Monitoring



1. Preparation



The preparation stage elucidates the context of the assessment. It identifies the relevant legal, economic, social and regulatory context of the country, as well as current and projected trade flows. It is useful to identify who is involved in the negotiations and to establish contact with them. This is the stage at which to seek information or pose an initial hypothesis about which groups, regions or sectors are likely to be affected by the proposed agreement. It is also at the preparation stage that the objectives, scale and focus of the assessment are set out and decisions made about what expertise to draw on for the HRIA. Ideally, the HRIA team should be interdisciplinary, with economic expertise and human rights-related expertise.

2. Screening and scoping



This is the stage at which the HRIA will determine which human rights issues and which parts of the proposed agreement should be subject to analysis in the full assessment. Experience has shown that impact assessments that focus in depth on a clearly defined set of human rights yield more useful results than assessments that try to cover too broad a ground. The choice of human rights issues and trade topics should be based on human rights analysis to ensure an objective and transparent choice of focus for the assessment, and to forestall any criticism that the focus has been driven by a desire to show the agreement in a more – or less – positive light. Guidance from the ministry responsible for human rights (and related ministries, such as those responsible for women's affairs, health or labour) and recommendations from UN and regional human rights mechanisms (see Box 3) can help to define the choice of human rights for analysis, and point to what factors can enable or impair enjoyment of those human rights in the country in question.

Box 3

Some sources of information for identifying human rights risk areas within a country

- *Countries' Human Rights Action Plans*
- [*SDG country profiles*](#)
- [*Universal Human Rights Index*](#) containing all recommendations made by UN human rights mechanisms, which can be filtered according to country and thematic area.

A first round of stakeholder consultation may be undertaken at this stage, either at the beginning, to seek views on which groups, regions or sectors stand to lose or benefit from the planned trade agreement, or later, to verify the HRIA team's hypotheses. (See also Step 4 below). The HRIA team can also verify their initial hypotheses and analysis with experts, including those in the trade and other ministries.

The choice of indicators or benchmarks to assist with judging the impact of an agreement on human rights can be made at this stage, or in parallel with the data collection stage.

Many countries do not share draft texts of trade agreements under negotiation, or their negotiating positions. If the HRIA team does not know what the planned agreement is likely to contain, they can draw on public information, and expert and stakeholder views to make assumptions about the likely content of the agreement. Experience has shown that this usually provides a good basis for assessment.

3. Data collection and evidence gathering



The data and evidence required and the methods used will depend on the scope of the HRIA. A combination of sources can help to triangulate likely impacts. Sources might include quantitative information on potential impacts of the trade agreement, or qualitative data on the impact of comparable trade agreements and economic policy changes. Consultations with a range of stakeholders (described at step 4 below) will be a valuable source of information.

Integrating qualitative data with quantitative data is important for a number of reasons. For instance, it overcomes the false dichotomy that is sometimes drawn between economic and social factors. Qualitative data grounded in people's experience can give insights into human rights impacts that existing datasets may obscure.

Disaggregated data is essential for demonstrating the different impacts on different groups, regions or sectors of the population. Beyond national statistics offices, assistance in obtaining data is available from Regional Economic Commissions and international bodies such as the ILO, as indicated in Box 4. Data on the most economically vulnerable groups within a given country, and on human rights impacts of trade, social and economic measures can be found in country reports submitted to UN Treaty Bodies or the Universal Periodic Review.

In seeking data, the words 'trade' or 'human rights' may be of little use. A human rights approach starts from an appraisal of which groups, regions or sectors are most vulnerable to economic change within the country (for example, informal workers, women, the textile sector) at the preparation stage and then seeks data about these. During later stages, analysis should focus on how changes that the agreement might introduce can be expected to affect the specific group, region or sector.

Human rights sources add to the analysis as some identify specific measures that should be taken to respect, protect and fulfil human rights through trade-related measures. A comprehensive database of recommendations is available through the [Universal Human Rights Index](#).

Depending on the resources available, the HRIA team might want to undertake its own economic modelling. The advantage of doing so is that it can draw on qualitative insights to integrate the most relevant

Some sources of data

- ILO, [Trade and Decent Work Toolkit](#) contains comprehensive analytical data and tools to assess the impact of trade policy on labour markets
- ILO, Labour Statistics provide essential labour statistics for most countries
- UN Human Rights, [Universal Human Rights Index](#) contains recommendations made by international human rights bodies, searchable by theme and by country
- UN Human Rights, [Universal Periodic Review Documentation by country](#) provides detailed country-based human rights information

human rights-related variables, such as impacts on ecosystems on which rural communities depend, or gendered changes in labour market outcomes. A human rights lens can be applied to change or highlight the assumptions in the model and to direct more attention to distributional issues. Despite the shortcomings of most trade models (such as assuming perfect mobility of labour or capital across sectors), modelling is useful in that it enables simulation of alternative policy options, enabling identification of the optimal option. Modelling can be time-consuming and costly, so lighter HRIAs might rely mainly on secondary sources.

The specific quantitative data sought is not always available, but this is not an obstacle to HRIA. For instance, the human rights of informal workers or contributing family workers may be at risk from new trade rules or trade flows, but may not show up in any official data. It is often possible to locate proxy data and where it is not, qualitative methods and other types of evidence can help to fill data gaps. If well enough resourced, the HRIA can collect data in areas in which there are none, thus contributing to the broader body of knowledge.

The specific data sought may be lacking, but proxy data are often available. If not, qualitative methods can help fill the gaps.

Some relevant modelling tools

- IEEP, Trinomics, IVM and UNEP-WCMC (2021), [Methodology for assessing the impacts of trade agreements on biodiversity and ecosystems](#)
- UN Conference on Trade and Development (2017), [Trade and Gender Toolbox](#)
- World Bank (2021), [The Distributional Impacts of Trade: Empirical Innovations, Analytical Tools, and Policy Responses](#)

Illustrating good practice of integrating qualitative with quantitative factors

A 2004 study of how trade in the ASEAN region would affect women's employment showed how gendered social accounting matrix (SAM) and computable general equilibrium (CGE) models can usefully integrate quantitative (how many new jobs would be created) and qualitative aspects, through disaggregating jobs not only by gender but also by occupation/skill. As women were more likely to be found in low-skill occupations, and to have lower capacity to respond to new trade-related employment opportunities, the modelling enabled conclusions to be drawn not just that new jobs would be created, but about the quality of these jobs. This leads to more nuanced women's rights findings than the simplistic hypothesis often heard, namely that trade is good for women's employment because it creates new jobs. This in turn enabled attention to be paid to the wider menu of policies needed to maximise women's gains from trade.

4. Consultation and participation



Engaging people as free and active participants in trade negotiations and in a HRIA is a way to ensure that a broad spectrum of perspectives about the planned trade agreement are heard, and helps to uncover hidden impacts of trade agreements. Importantly, it also serves to inform public debate and raise the level of awareness of the objectives and impacts of trade policies. It also furnishes an opportunity to resolve misunderstandings about what might change following a new trade agreement.

Consultations should include stakeholders beyond traders and industry groups. Depending on the country and the human rights topics that the HRIA has identified, relevant groups might include peasants, Indigenous peoples, women, trade unions, public services or informal workers' associations. Particular effort is required to ensure participation of members of marginalised communities and vulnerable groups. Naturally, contacts should also be made with relevant government departments other than those responsible for trade, to ensure that likely impacts and governmental policy priorities are taken into account. Consultation processes meeting human rights standards will utilise various methods of engagement, the selection of which is context-dependent, based on participants' needs.

Given that the trade and human rights communities are quite separate, meaningful consultation can be a challenging process. Indeed, discussions of, say, rules of origin or services schedules

may mean little to a human rights audience. The HRIA team can thus play an invaluable role in setting out what types of human rights impacts might be anticipated from specific proposed trade rules, based on what the team discovered in the earlier stages of the assessment.

Ideally, a HRIA will take place early enough in the negotiations for those consulted to be able to respond to negotiating proposals, and for those responses to be taken into account in the formulation and modification of negotiating proposals.

5. Human rights analysis



At this stage, the different strands of knowledge generated through the previous stages should be drawn together to build up a picture of the likely impacts of the trade or investment agreement on the ability of the state to respect, protect and fulfil human rights (see Box 2, page 7), and the channels through which the human rights impacts – positive and negative – might occur. The indicators developed during the scoping and evidence gathering processes can be utilised as a basis for the analysis. The analysis will help in the identification of existing inequalities, groups or populations experiencing discrimination and propose policy measures to help meet international standards. The method used to analyse the impact on rights should be capable of being tested later as impacts occur, to enable a dynamic response to changing contexts.

Areas of potential inquiry might include: risk of food price shocks, disruption to labour markets and service provision, increased cost of basic goods indispensable for an adequate standard of living, environmental harm, extreme or disparate impact on income or wealth, impacts on women, viability of small-scale agricultural entities and subsistence farmers, along with other trade-offs that jeopardise livelihoods. HRIAs can usefully help pinpoint costs to state revenues, for instance through loss of employment-related revenue, changes in tariff revenues, as well as loss of protection for nascent or strategic industries. It can serve to assess non-revenue benefits or costs of a planned agreement, such as mechanisms that limit domestic policy space to protect the environment, health or other public policy objectives.

Analysis would usefully address whether the impact is likely to be significant and direct, whether there will be multiple connected indirect impacts, and whether the impact will be limited in geographic or temporal scope, or have widespread or longer-lasting effects.



6. Recommendations

The analysis should lead to recommendations on how tensions between the trade or investment agreement on the one hand, and human rights obligations on the other, may be addressed. Recommendations should be precise and policy-oriented, specifying the entity or individual required to take action in relation to each recommendation within a defined timescale. Recommendations can include adjustments to agreement provisions, proposals for flanking policies or programmes, as well as implementation and monitoring once the agreement is in force. Recommendations may be most effective when formulated in liaison with those senior officials responsible for taking decisions on policy.



7. Reporting

The HRIA and recommendations should be published in full in easy-to-access formats, alongside a report cataloguing the process for ensuring that the body responsible can be held to account, can contribute to the ongoing process of raising awareness of human rights dimensions of trade, and refine HRIA methodology over time.



8. Monitoring

Ideally, a HRIA should be reiterated or reviewed after a given period in order to provide insights into whether the anticipated impacts occurred and the usefulness of the proposed complementary or flanking measures. A review should encompass whether the original HRIA recommendations were implemented and whether predicted impacts have occurred or other unexpected impacts have arisen. Ongoing monitoring has several benefits. For one thing, it ensures that the HRIA is not simply a box-ticking exercise, but helps to deliver long-lasting positive impacts for the population. Importantly, ex post monitoring helps to build up the world's knowledge base about the impacts of trade policy changes, something that is currently lacking.

More detailed guidance

[Centre for Environment and Development \(CDE\) & International Institute for Sustainable Development \(IISD\)](#) (2021), *Quantity and Quality: Assessment of sustainability impacts of trade agreements*.

[Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (1999), General Comment No. 12: The Right to Adequate Food, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/1999/5.

[Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (2000), General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12, ICESCR), U.N. Doc. E/C.12/2000/4.

[Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (2002), General Comment No. 15: The Right to Water, U.N. Doc. E/C.12/2002/11.

[C. Dommen](#) (2020), *Blueprint for a Human Rights Impact Assessment of the Planned Comprehensive Free trade Agreements Between EFTA and MERCOSUR (2020)*, which includes detailed sections on analytical methods and tools, particularly on combining quantitative and qualitative analysis.

[C. Dommen](#) (2021), *Applying the human rights framework to economic policy: Insights from an impact assessment of Services Trade Liberalisations in Mauritius*.

[European Commission](#) (2022), *Guidelines on the analysis of human rights impacts in impact assessments for trade-related policy initiatives*.

[FES & OHCHR](#) (2017), *Human Rights Impact Assessment of the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement*, which contains a section that demonstrates how to apply the human rights framework.

[G. Gerout, A. Cren-Larvor](#) (2024), *Tariffs and Human Rights: a Pilot Analysis of the AfCFTA Tariff Schedules*

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Assessing Human Rights Impacts of Trade Agreements

Anticipating possible adverse impacts of trade agreements helps ensure that policies are robust, yield positive economic outcomes and enjoy popular support. The human rights framework offers tools for doing so. It can guide trade policy and support governments' efforts to craft the trade rules that are best for their country. This Guide illustrates **ways** that trade policy can benefit from a human rights lens. It introduces **what** human rights rules and principles apply in the trade context, and indicates **how** to go about human rights impact assessment.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

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