



Annual Report 2024

The Impact of Trade Policies on Economic and Social Rights

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Introduction

The year 2024 reaffirmed that international trade policies are not neutral from a human rights perspective. The way trade agreements are designed and implemented directly affects the realization of fundamental rights such as the right to food, health, education, and decent work.

As an accredited civil society organization with the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)**, the Arab-European Center for Human Rights and International Law (AECHRIL) continued to advocate for fairer and more inclusive trade policies throughout 2024. The Center also took part in major international forums, including the **WTO Public Forum** for three consecutive years (2023, 2024, and 2025) and the **13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13)** in Abu Dhabi, to highlight the social and human rights dimensions of global trade.



Trade Policies and Their Impact on Fundamental Rights: Key Examples from 2024

1. The Right to Food

- **Agricultural Trade and Food Security**

At the WTO's MC13 in Abu Dhabi (February–March 2024), agricultural reform once again proved contentious, with limited progress on reducing harmful subsidies and support mechanisms. This delay perpetuates inequalities, as small-scale farmers in developing countries remain unable to compete with heavily subsidized producers in developed nations. Rising food prices across import-dependent countries in 2024 underscored the need for trade rules that prioritize food security.

- **Global Nutrition Gap**

Research published in 2024 highlighted ongoing shortages in essential food groups—such as fruits, vegetables, and legumes—linked to high trade costs and tariffs on food imports. Such barriers increase the price of healthy food, disproportionately affecting low-income populations and undermining the right to adequate nutrition.





2. The Right to Health

- **Intellectual Property and Public Health**

In 2024, the WTO and WIPO organized executive training programs to explore the intersection of intellectual property (IP) and access to medicines. Discussions emphasized how rigid IP regimes can restrict the availability of affordable generics in low- and middle-income countries. Without reform, millions may be deprived of essential medicines, violating the right to health.

- **Access to Medicines and Vaccines**

Calls for further flexibility in the TRIPS Agreement resurfaced during 2024, echoing earlier COVID-19 debates. The Arab-European Center advocated for balanced rules that protect innovation while guaranteeing equitable access to life-saving treatments in times of global health emergencies.



3. The Right to Education

- **Digitalization and Education**

The WTO Public Forum 2024, held in Geneva in September, featured discussions on

“Digitalization as a catalyst for inclusive trade.” Digital technologies are

increasingly central to education systems, yet the digital divide prevents millions

from accessing these benefits. High tariffs on computers, tablets, and other

educational tools in certain regions continue to restrict access to quality education.

- **Educational Resources and Trade Costs**

In many developing countries, customs duties and non-tariff barriers on textbooks

and digital resources elevate the cost of learning. The Center highlighted that

education should not be treated merely as a tradable service but as a human right,

requiring trade policies that facilitate rather than obstruct access to resources.





4. The Right to Work

- **Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement**

One of the most notable outcomes of MC13 was the adoption of the *Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement* by 123 WTO members. This agreement aims to improve transparency and streamline investment procedures, potentially boosting job creation in developing economies. The Center emphasized, however, that such investments must also safeguard labor rights and ensure decent working conditions.

- **Graduating Least Developed Countries (LDCs)**

MC13 also introduced transitional support for countries graduating from LDC status, allowing them to retain certain trade benefits temporarily. This measure is crucial to avoid sudden economic shocks that could lead to job losses and exacerbate poverty in vulnerable economies.





AECHRIL's Role in Monitoring and Advocacy in 2024

Throughout 2024, the Arab-European Center undertook a wide range of initiatives to connect trade policy with human rights concerns:

- Delivered **oral and written statements** at UN forums highlighting the link between global trade rules and economic and social rights.
- Actively participated in the **WTO Public Forum 2024**, contributing to discussions on digitalization, inclusive trade, and sustainability.
- Partnered with other civil society organizations to raise awareness among policymakers in the Arab and European regions about the human rights implications of trade liberalization.
- Monitored specific trade policies, publishing research and recommendations to ensure they are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).





Challenges Observed in 2024

1. **Non-tariff barriers and lack of transparency** continued to burden small exporters in developing countries.
2. **Unfair competition** persisted, as powerful economies and multinational corporations maintained significant advantages over small and medium-sized enterprises.
3. **Environmental trade-offs** emerged, with some trade policies encouraging practices harmful to climate goals and local communities.
4. **The digital divide** remained a critical obstacle, leaving many countries unable to harness the opportunities of digital trade.

Recommendations for 2025

Based on its observations, the Arab-European Center makes the following recommendations:

1. **Reform agricultural trade policies** to reduce harmful subsidies and enhance food security in developing countries.
2. **Introduce greater flexibility in IP rules** under the TRIPS Agreement to balance innovation with the right to health.





3. **Lower tariffs on educational resources and digital tools** to ensure equitable access to education.
4. **Integrate decent work standards** into all bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.
5. **Strengthen capacity-building support for developing countries**, enabling them to participate effectively in trade negotiations.
6. **Ensure greater civil society participation** in global trade policymaking, enhancing transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

The year 2024 demonstrated once again that trade is not just about economics—it is about people. Trade policies shape the conditions under which individuals and communities access food, health, education, and decent work.

The *Arab-European Center for Human Rights and International Law* reaffirms its commitment to ensuring that trade serves as a driver of equity, justice, and sustainable development, rather than a source of inequality and exclusion.

