UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

Disability inclusive trade: leveraging digital technologies



UN trade & development

World Trade Organization

International Trade Centre

Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

International Labour Organization

Content

1. Disability inclusion and trade agreements: Clarifying the nexus

2. Disability inclusive trade and digitalization

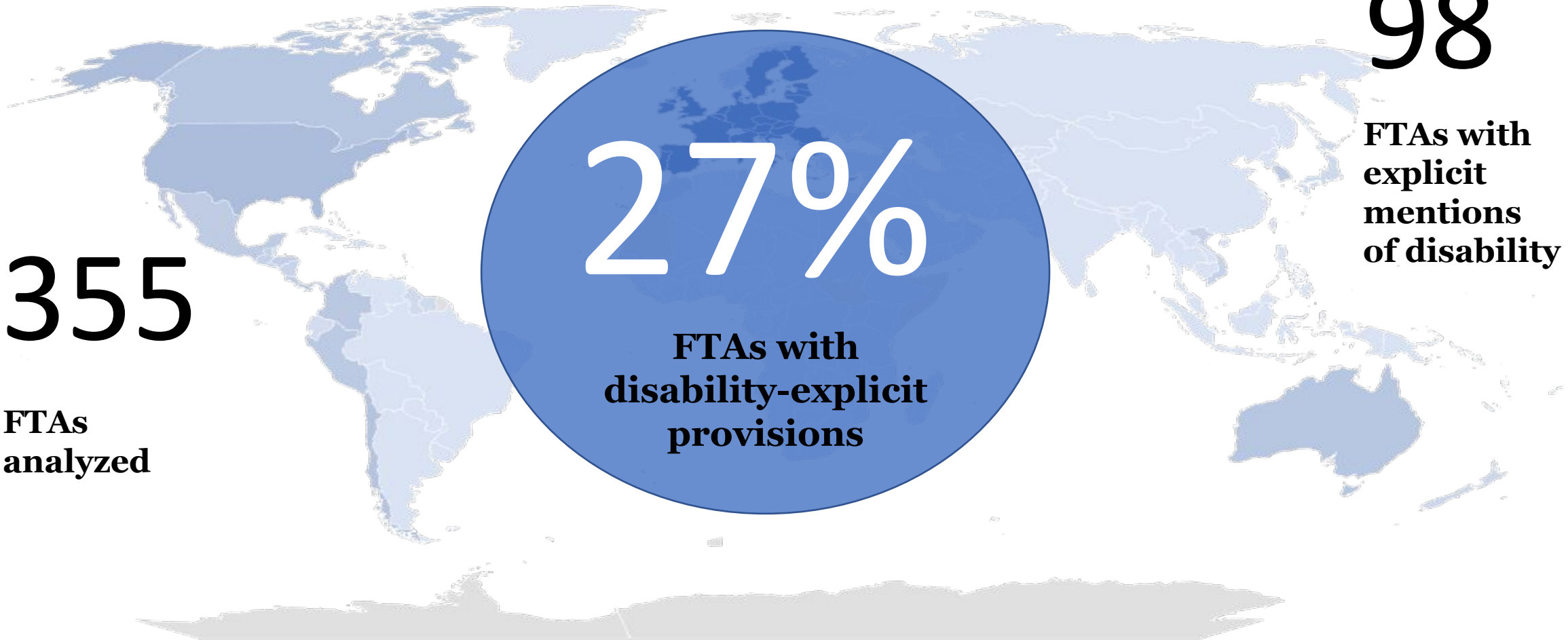
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1. Disability inclusion and trade policies and agreements



Disability Provisions in Trade Agreements (FTAs)



355

FTAs analyzed

27%

FTAs with disability-explicit provisions

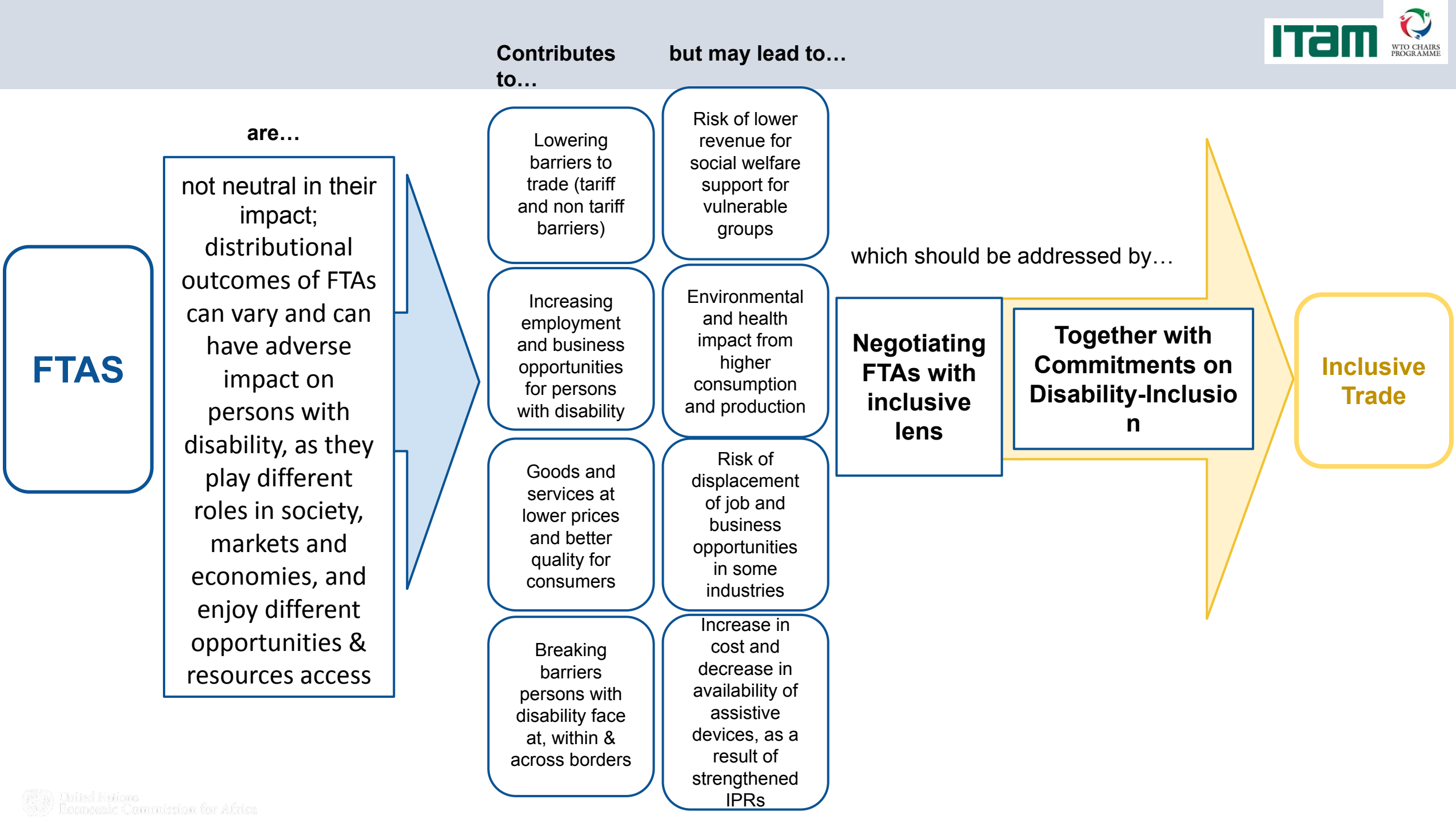
98

FTAs with explicit mentions of disability

List of explicit keywords:
disabled, disability, disabilities, differently-abled, handicapped, invalidity, PWD

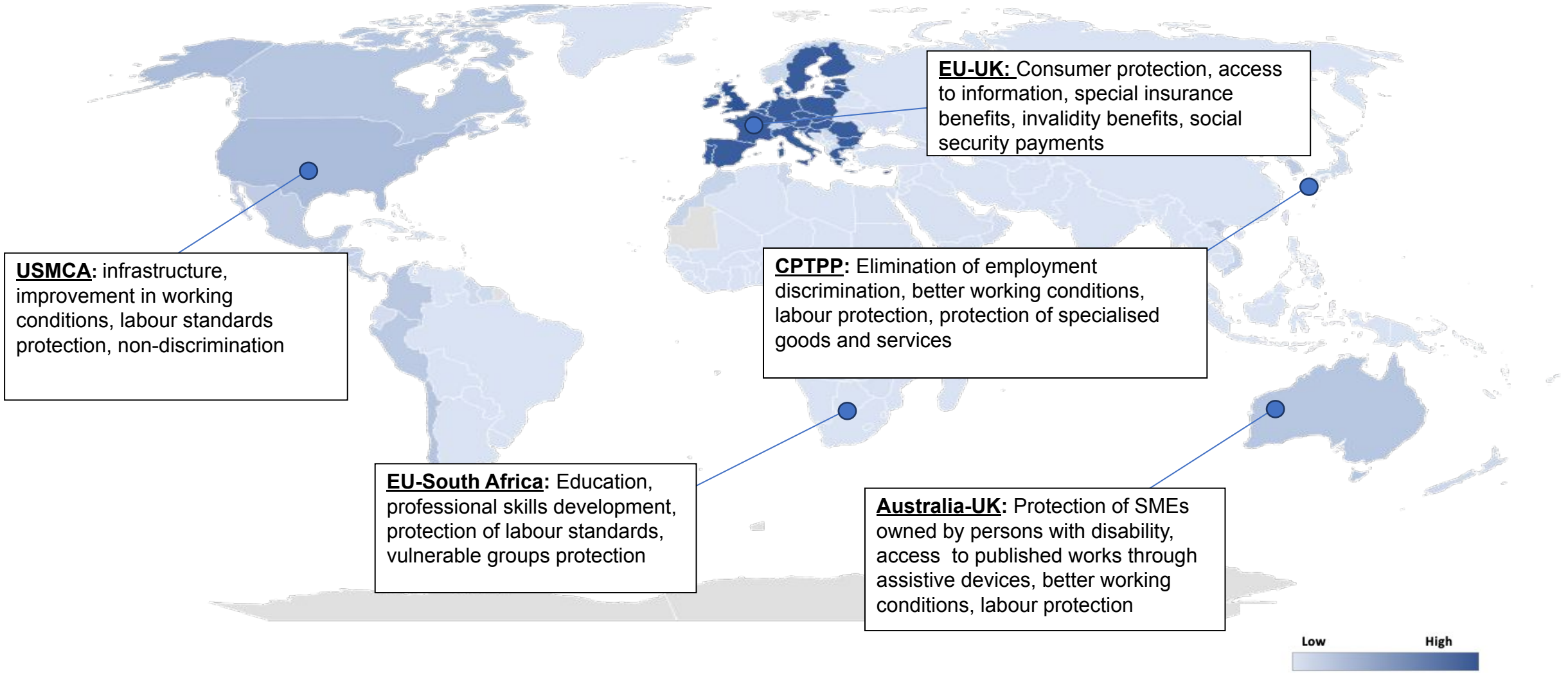
Low — High

Findings from 2022 UK FCDO and TAF2 study


Contributes to…
but may lead to…
are…
FTAS
not neutral in their impact; distributional outcomes of FTAs can vary and can have adverse impact on persons with disability, as they play different roles in society, markets and economies, and enjoy different opportunities & resources access
Lowering barriers to trade (tariff and non tariff barriers)
Increasing employment and business opportunities for persons with disability
Goods and services at lower prices and better quality for consumers
Breaking barriers persons with disability face at, within & across borders
Risk of lower revenue for social welfare support for vulnerable groups
Environmental and health impact from higher consumption and production
Risk of displacement of job and business opportunities in some industries
Increase in cost and decrease in availability of assistive devices, as a result of strengthened IPRs
which should be addressed by…
Negotiating FTAs with inclusive lens
Together with Commitments on Disability-Inclusion
Inclusive Trade

The Frontrunners

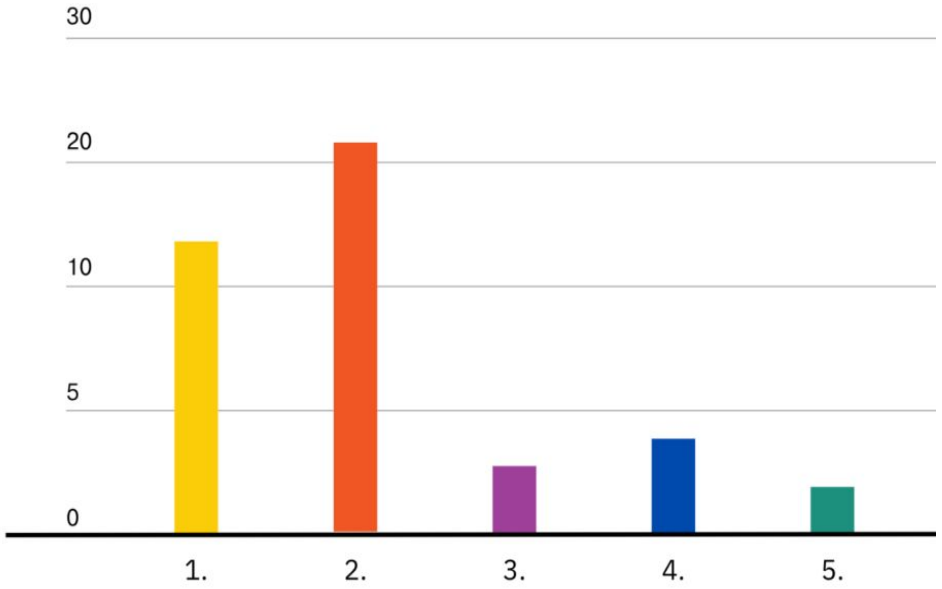
The UK and EU are pioneers in terms of the number and content of disability provisions within their FTAs



Findings from 2022 UK FCDO and TAF2 study

Types of Cooperation-based Provisions in Current FTAs

1. Cooperation on Labour, Equality, Non-discrimination and Employment Related Aspects
2. Cooperation on Social Security, Health and Employment, Dialogue on Social and Cultural Matters, Human Development, Reduction of Poverty, Combating Discrimination and Social Exclusion
3. Cooperation on Information and Communications Technologies, Protection of Privacy and Digital Trade
4. Cooperation on Education, Capacity Building, Technical Training, Vocational Training and Information Exchange
5. Cooperation on Market Access and Protection of Small and Medium Enterprises

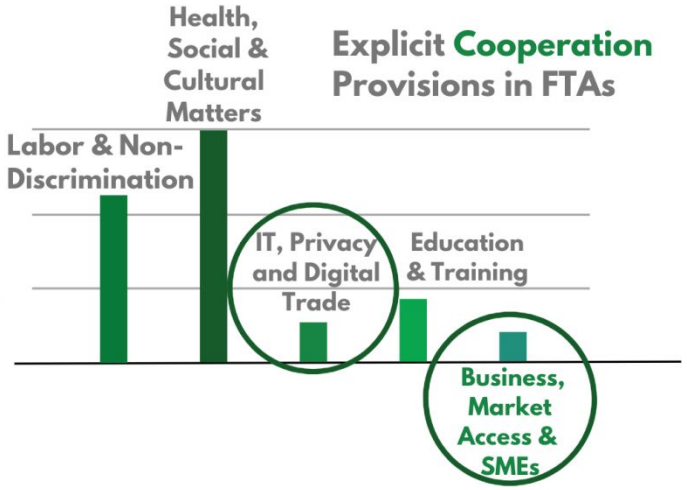


*Number of FTAs that contain a provision relating to the Sub-Categories under this Category



PERSONS WITH DISABILITY SEEN IN TRADITIONAL ROLES

Provisions related to business and entreprenuership appear very infrequently, as most of these provisions seek to focus on persons with disability in their **traditional roles** (i.e., as employees, social or cultural actors and consumers.)



The Deep Disconnect

IF NEGOTIATED WITH AN

INCLUSIVE LENS

FTAs can lead to **positive** results for all including the marginalised groups such as **persons with disability**

27% TRADE AGREEMENTS CONTAIN AT LEAST ONE EXPLICIT PROVISION THAT RELATES TO DISABILITY

BUT THERE IS A DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE BARRIERS THAT PERSONS WITH DISABILITY FACE AND THE CONTENT OF THE DISABILITY PROVISIONS



BECAUSE CURRENT INCLUSIONS DO NOT DIRECTLY RELATE TO BARRIERS EXACERBATED BY INTERNATIONAL TRADE, ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS BEING LACK OF ACCESS TO ASSISTIVE DEVICES

2. Disability inclusive trade and digitalization



Disability inclusion in trade and e-commerce

- Limited data and research on the intersection of trade, digitalization, and disability
- UNCTAD's work on the role of women in e-commerce offers insights that can be applied to persons with disabilities

4 Barriers to digital inclusion

4 Opportunities from digital trade

4 Potential outcomes for persons with disabilities engaging in e-commerce

Barriers to digital inclusion

Access and accessibility

- **Ability of individuals to use mobile phones and services.** Persistent digital divide for persons with disabilities in mobile ownership and usage of internet
- Access barriers (e.g. coverage, and access to electricity) affect all individuals, but are more pronounced for persons with disabilities
- **Products, content, and services to be usable by persons with disabilities**. Availability of assistive technology; websites, apps, and business platforms may lack features such as screen readers, keyboard navigation, or text alternatives

Affordability

- Cost of smartphones, data, and mobile services is a barrier to digital inclusion for persons with disabilities, who often have lower incomes
- Limited access to formal employment is a challenge in securing loans
- Discrimination and bias from financial institutions
- Lower financial literacy may limit ability of disabled individuals to navigate financial systems
- Physical and digital inaccessibility of financial services

Use and beneficial use

- Traditional digital literacy programs often not designed to meet the needs of persons with disabilities
- Assistive technologies may require specialized knowledge that is not widely taught, creating additional barriers to using digital business tools
- Limited access to business networks, lower entrepreneurial skills, and reduced access to market information, all of which are essential for successful participation in digital trade

Opportunities from digital trade

E-commerce can mitigate entrepreneurial barriers for disabled individuals:

- **Lower entry barriers** for small businesses by providing access to global markets
- **Lower upfront capital,** can be funded through non-traditional means, such as crowdfunding, reducing reliance on conventional lenders
- **Remote work** avoids daily commutes and offers flexibility in managing time
- **E-commerce platforms** may offer tools such as managing supplier relationships, analyzing business performance, and marketing
- **Online learning** may provide accessible training to run an e-commerce business, making it easier to acquire the skills needed for entrepreneurship

Potential outcomes for persons with disabilities engaging in e-commerce

Similar to the case of women, some of the potential outcomes of engaging in e-commerce include:

- **Overrepresentation in low-value added sectors** with low profit margins and limited potential for growth and innovation (e.g. online retailing)
- **Lack of scale and informality:** Above challenges may lead to run small-scale businesses, often within the informal sector. While informality may allow them to start a business, it can also trap them in low-growth, low-profit activities
- **Sectoral concentration:** Persons with disabilities may be concentrated in sectors that are more accessible but offer lower economic returns and growth (e.g. small-scale handmade crafts, textiles etc)

Conclusion



- Digitalization may offer inclusive pathways for persons with disabilities to participate in and benefit from trade
- Barriers in accessing and effectively using digital technologies for business purposes need to be addressed
- Need for targeted policies ensuring equal access and participation for persons with disabilities in the digital economy

Thank you

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