



*Progressive  
Policies*

# OSH in trade – evaluating the impact of current EU Free Trade Agreements

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# Objectives of the ETUC project

- ✓ Develop a trade union analysis of the impact of OSH provisions in EU trade agreements
- ✓ Inform policy debate on OSH provisions in upcoming or renegotiated trade agreements

# Deliverables of the ETUC project

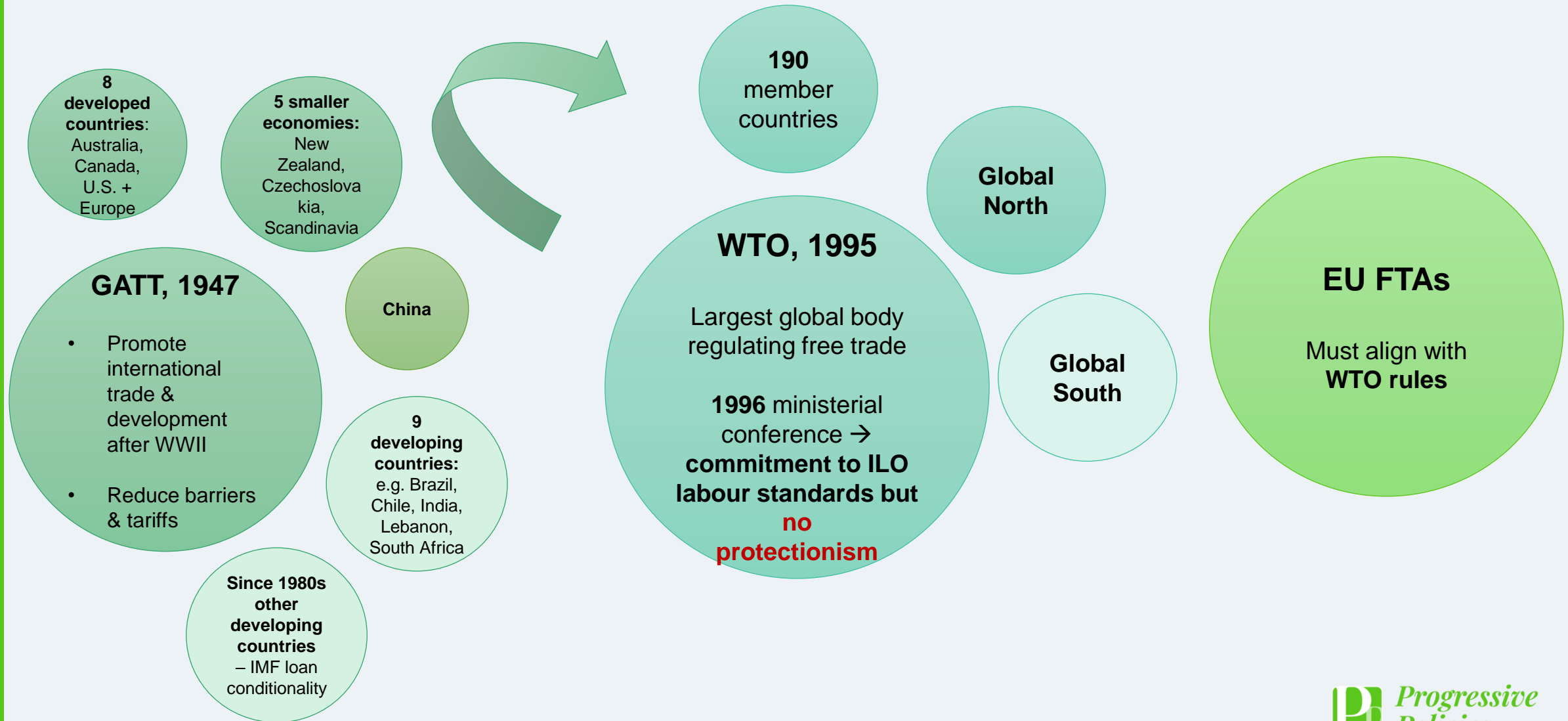
- ✓ A report providing proposals for an EU trade agenda that protects OSH both in EU and partner countries

# Project Timeline



# Labour rights in free trade

# International trade liberalisation



# Winners and losers of free trade

EU economic  
strategy  
Employment  
creation

Competition on low  
labour costs  
Deregulation (« non-  
tariff barriers »)

Poor evidence on the  
**impact of trade on  
OSH**



# OSH and free trade

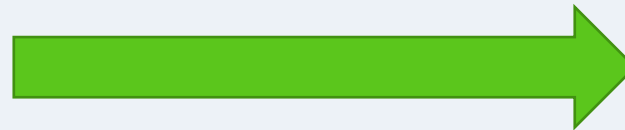
# Global North-South trade flows



Raw materials, agricultural products and fisheries



Manufactured goods, technology, and **electronic waste**



(ILO, 2012)

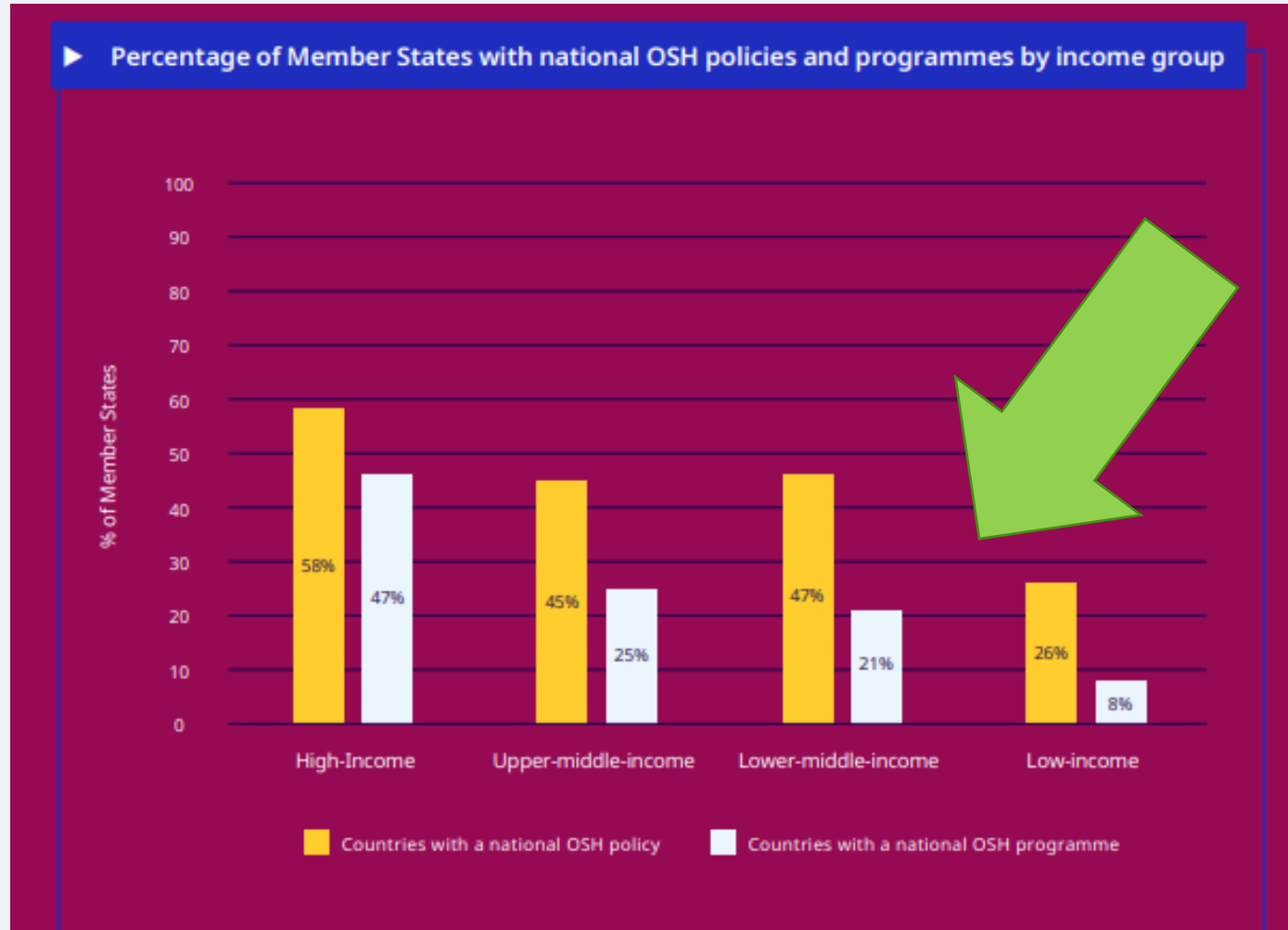
# Global OSH Inequities

- **African and South Asian** countries are **top net exporters of occupational accidents** resulting from trading relationships with countries of the Global North, mainly **Germany, France and Italy** in the EU (Alsamawi et al., 2017).
- Exported fatal and non-fatal injuries in **Africa and South Asia** occur most often in **agriculture**.
- The most frequent causes of occupational deaths in **Africa and South Asia (agriculture)** are **machinery-related accidents, pesticide poisoning and zoonoses** (Alsamawi et al., 2017).



- The attributable fraction of work-related deaths is **the highest in Africa (7.39 per cent)**, followed by Asia and the Pacific (7.13 per cent) and Oceania (6.52 per cent)
- **Africa sees 7.2% of occupational injuries** caused by **extreme heat**, the highest globally (ILO, 2019).

# Global OSH Inequities



Poor OSH laws and compliance

Poor access to OSH services

Child labour

Informal labour

Source: ILO, 2023

# High-risk sectors

The exported fatal and non-fatal injuries in Africa and South Asia  
(Alsamawi et al., 2017)

Agriculture,  
forestry &  
fishing

Manufacturing

Mining &  
quarrying

Construction

Utility sector  
(including  
**chemical  
waste  
processing**)

60% of all fatal accidents at work, globally (ILO, 2023)

Highest fatal occupational injury rates, globally (ILO, 2023)

# Agriculture in the Global South



Credit: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/15161175@N00/>

# OSH risks

Most frequent causes of work-related deaths:

- Machinery-related accidents
- Pesticide poisoning
- Zoonoses
- Exposure to extreme heat & humidity
- Inadequate OSH services, training, lack of PPE
- Child labour, informal labour

# Mining in the Global South





# OSH risks

- Significant underreporting of injuries and deaths at work
- Artisanal and small-scale mining (gold, cobalt and lithium) - flooding, unstable surfaces, and falling rocks and collapses
- Machinery-related injuries
- Exposure to dust
- Exposure to carcinogenic, mutagenic, and reprotoxic chemicals
- Inadequate OSH services, training, lack of PPE
- Child labour, informal labour

# Chemical waste processing in the Global South



# OSH risks

- Export of hazardous waste (often banned from use) from the EU to the Global South, often under the guise of recycling or disposal (Ilankoon et al., 2018).
- Exposure to carcinogenic, mutagenic, and reprotoxic chemicals
- Inadequate OSH services, training, lack of PPE
- Feminised and child labour

# OSH provisions in current EU FTAs

# EU approach to OSH in trade

Cariforum  
2008

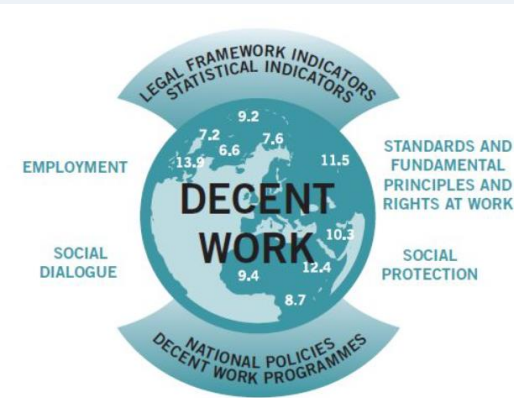
South  
Korea  
2011

Since 2008 a  
growing focus on  
labour provisions  
& OSH

Trade and  
sustainable  
development  
chapters (TSDs)

ILO's Decent Work Agenda

ILO's Declaration on  
Fundamental Principles and  
Rights at Work, 1998



The eleven fundamental instruments are:

- Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87) >
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98)
- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (No. 29) > (and its 2014 Protocol >)
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (No. 105) >
- Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138) >
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182) >
- Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) >
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111) >
- Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) >
- Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187) >

The 2022  
amendment,  
C 155  
C 187

Commitment to ILO  
labour standards

Including OSH

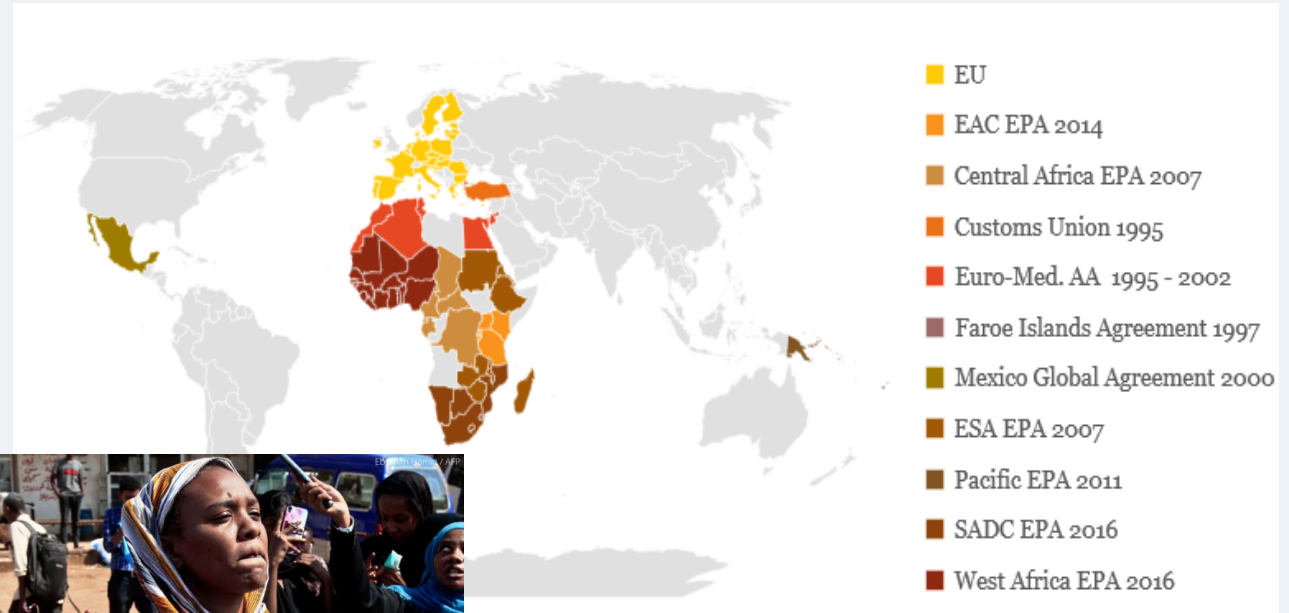
Implementation and  
compliance measures

Cooperative, non-  
sanction approach

# Mapping of OSH provisions in current EU FTAs

# EU FTAs with no OSH provisions

- Some FTAs recent, yet no OSH provisions.
- Possible reluctance of African governments: fear of losing the competitive edge perceived as relatively lax enforcement of OSH regulations and poor labour inspections.



- The countries relying on the most hazardous exports are also those whose FTAs contain no OSH provisions.
- Countries ranking high in labour rights violations on the ITUC Global Rights Index

# I. Cooperation & exchange of good practices on OSH

- Non-binding commitment to information exchange, capacity building, and technical assistance in the implementation of international OSH standards.
- Tend to contain no TSD chapters.
- OSH failed to be addressed in TSD chapters (Central America AA, 2012)



- Soft approach, b/w „equal” partners
- Lack of research documenting the overall impact of provisions limited to the promotion of labour standards
- No improvement of OSH in the high-risk sector (e.g. pineapple industry)
- Monitoring entrusted to civil society which lacks capacity



## II. OSH as part of TSD chapters

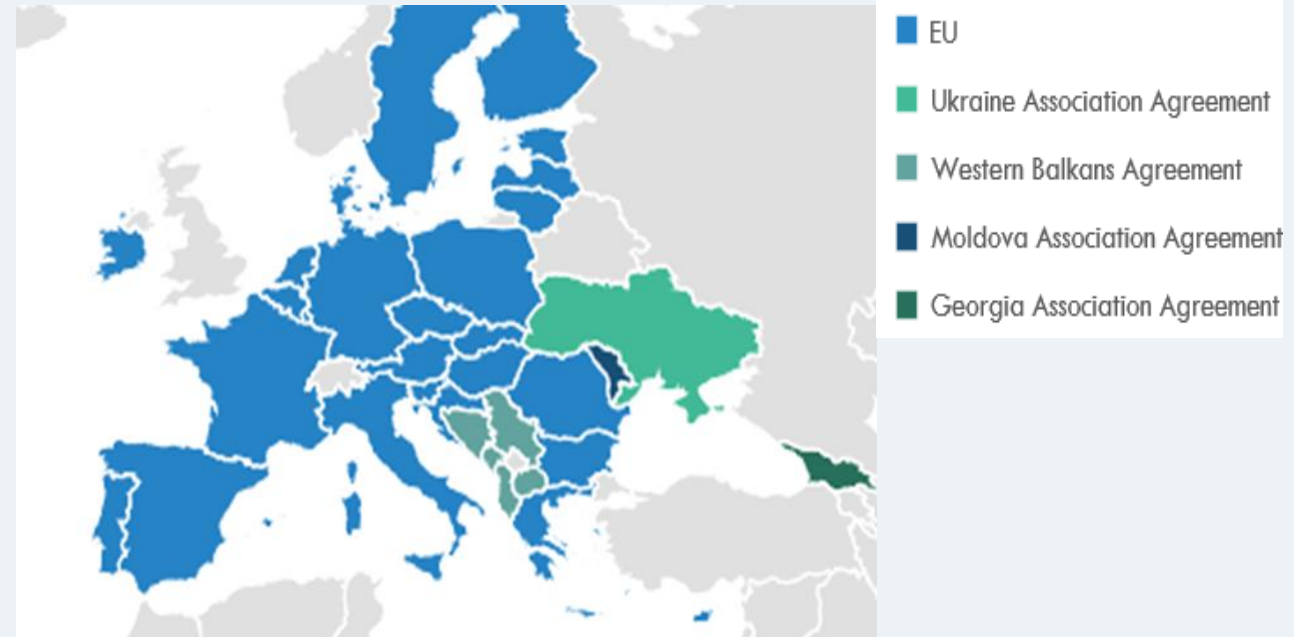
- Commitment to implementation/ratification of core ILO standards, including OSH.
- Since 2011 specific obligations to develop and enhance OSH policy but not protectionist.
- Japan and Singapore with no OSH clauses in the TSD chapter.
- Monitoring under TSD Committee, DAGs and CSFs.



- Labour standards not a priority in trade delegations.
- Issues with CSOs role in effective monitoring of TSD chapters, lack of resources and expertise.
- Raising a dispute for violations of labour rights only if persistent breaches and with a significant negative impact on trade.
- Lack of trade sanctions for failing to respect labour rights or dispute decisions.

# III. FTAs imposing an approximation of OSH laws

- Obligation on the trade partner country to progressively **implement all EU OSH directives** within a specified timeframe.



- EU actively monitors the implementation of OSH Directives.
- CSOs and trade unions empowered to monitor TSD chapters.
- EU trade agreement acts as a deterrent to attempts of weakened labour inspections.
- Real improvements in OSH observed.

# Impact of FTAs on OSH – Overview of challenges

**Growth of hazardous industries**  
(poor quantitative data)

**FTAs with no or very general  
OSH commitments**  
(e.g.: Africa, Turkey, upcoming  
China)

**Poor monitoring of OSH  
commitments**  
(labour standards often not a  
priority for TSD Committees)

**No enforcement**  
(no or limited dispute settlement)

**Positive influence of  
approximation of OSH laws**  
(improvement of labour  
inspectorates in Moldova, Georgia)

# Thank you!

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