

# Female Entrepreneurship in the Danube Region

The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of the PAC 8 EUSDR.

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## SUMMARY

The paper is attempting to outline the policies towards supporting female entrepreneurship in the countries of the Danube region: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany, Hungary, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Ukraine.

Within the Danube region countries, EU member countries have already developed certain policies and programmes for gender equality and women support, which are having a positive and steady impact on promoting women's rights and the potential growth of women entrepreneurs in their national economies. On the other hand, the support of the transitional countries is weaker; hence Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and Ukraine's policies still need to be adjusted to meet the EU standards.

## INTRODUCTION

Public policy support for women's entrepreneurship dates back to the 1970s as a response to the growing numbers of women entering the labour market. Since this time, women's entrepreneurship policies and programmes have become common in both developed and developing countries. While much progress has been made in helping women overcome barriers to business creation and self-employment, women continue to face barriers, calling for continued public policy action. Within the European Union, this call for action is clearly articulated in the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan, which calls for awareness raising, entrepreneurship training, improved access to financing, stronger networks and support in reconciling business and family life.

In most countries, regions and sectors, the majority of business owner/managers are male (from 65% to 75%). However, there is increasing evidence that more and more women are becoming interested in small business ownership and/or actually starting up in business. Women are working in this multifaceted world. The organization scenario changes like a kaleidoscope with every responsibility, accountability and multiple pulls and pushes, which women have faced and came out with success. In addition, rates of self-employment among women are increasing in several countries. Although there are no official statistics relating businesses to the gender of their owner/manager, there is a good deal of evidence to suggest a significant increase in female entrepreneurship. One consequence of this is that women are a relatively new group of entrepreneurs compared with men, which means that they are more likely to run younger businesses. This in turn has some implications for the problems they face and their ability to deal with them.

Overall, women entrepreneurs have made leaps and bounds over the last decade. Women are launching businesses, growing them to new heights, and tackling barriers as they go. Female-run enterprises are steadily growing all over the world, contributing to household

incomes and growth of national economies. However, women face time, human, physical, and social constraints that limit their ability to grow their businesses.

Main stakeholders on women entrepreneurship in the countries from the Danube region are state institutions represented mainly by: Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Education and Research, Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Finance. Also, regional public institutions, public agencies and Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In countries where policies on women entrepreneurship aren't very developed the most active stakeholders tend to be associations, non-governmental organizations, women entrepreneurs' clubs, institutes and universities.

It is important to underline that multiple strategies have been adopted and approved by now, but it is complicated to admit their efficiency. Within the Danube region countries, members of EU have already developed certain policies and programmes for gender equality and women support, which are having a positive and steady impact on promoting women's rights and the potential growth of women entrepreneurs in their national economies.

On the other hand, the legal framework of the transitional countries is weaker, hence Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova and Ukraine and still need to be adjusted to meet the EU standards. For this reason, governments and policymakers in these countries should be concerned with:

- Changing the legal framework and enabling entrepreneurs to have similar conditions for starting a company as in other surrounding and/or European countries;
- Creating a centralized platform related to start-ups where start-ups, investors, educational institutions, accelerators and incubators, students and other interested parties could meet and exchange information (one-stop shop information).

Moreover, the governments and policymakers across all Danube region countries should be concerned with the development or improvement of:

- Specialised programmes for businesswomen start-ups.
- Creating policies that provide fiscal stimuli for women entrepreneurs.
- Providing financial instruments (bank loans, preferential rates, risk capital, etc.) for women entrepreneurs.
- Developing successful funding models to be used by national and regional programmes dedicated to women entrepreneurs and promoting them to both public and private persons of interest.
- Government policies to stimulate female entrepreneurship and leadership in business.
- Strategies to harmonize the business environment with the family environment for support and relief for women in their care for children, elderly parents, family life and recreation.
- Fostering of establishment and development of companies in specific sectors production and knowledge-based services, owned and/or managed by women.

For the analysis of existing policies on women entrepreneurship in the Danube region qualitative research methods were used. Targeted mapping, scanning and analysis of

available EU, regional and national policies that have relevance for promotion and support of women entrepreneurship were carried out.

## POLICIES TOWARD FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP ON EUROPEAN LEVEL

Analysis at EU level has shown that a number of measures have already been taken and that equal treatment, entrepreneurship in general and to a limited extent women entrepreneurship are targeted in a wide range of policies. The main ones are summarised below.

### Europe 2020

The Europe 2020 strategy is the EU's agenda for growth and jobs for the current decade. It emphasises smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in order to improve Europe's competitiveness and productivity and underpin a sustainable social market economy.

To reach this objective, the EU has adopted targets to be reached by 2020 in five areas:

- Employment
- Research & Development
- Climate change & energy
- Education
- Poverty and social exclusion

The **headline targets** related to the strategy's key objectives at the EU level cover:

- **Employment:**
  - > 75% of the population aged 20 to 64 years to be employed;
- **Research & Development:**
  - > 3% of GDP to be invested in the R&D sector;
- **Climate change & energy:**
  - > Greenhouse gas emissions to be reduced by 20% compared to 1990;
  - > Share of renewable energy sources in final energy consumption to be increased to 20%;
  - > Energy efficiency to be improved by 20%;
- **Education:**
  - > Share of early school leavers to be reduced under 10%;
  - > At least 40% of 30 to 34 years old to have completed tertiary or equivalent education;
- **Poverty and social exclusion:**
  - > At least 20 million people fewer at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

## **European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)**

The ESI Funds are the EU's main investment policy tool and provides the necessary investment framework to meet the goals of the Europe 2020 Strategy for **smart, sustainable** and **inclusive** growth in the European Union.

For the 2014-2020 programming period, EUR 454 billion have been allocated to the ESI Funds to kick-start growth and job creation. Adding to this figure national co-financing, which is expected to reach some EUR 183 billion, the total investment will amount to at least EUR 637 billion. Using this budget, the ESI Funds are the EU's main investment instruments. ESI Funds are used to boost jobs, growth and investment across Europe, while focusing on the least developed areas and sectors with growth potential.

ESI Funds target key investment areas to enhance growth in Member States and regions. The Funds contribute to smart growth, including research and innovation, information and communication technologies, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise (SME) development and the low-carbon economy. Beyond this, they offer an important purchasing power for innovative solutions in other fields such as energy, agriculture, the environment, and transport, which can help innovative firms.

Investing in human capital development through the European Social Fund (ESF) in particular, will play a key role in getting people into jobs, combating poverty and social exclusion and creating the workforce of tomorrow. This will be done by supporting workers, job seekers, and in particular those outside the labour market. The ESF helps people get the right skills for the right job by improving the quality of and access to education from early childhood to later life.

## **EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR)**

The EU Strategy for the Danube Region (EUSDR) is the second EU macro-regional strategy adopted by the European Commission in 2010 and endorsed by the European Council in 2011.

The Strategy brings together 14 countries along the Danube river, and covers an area which is home to 112 million people, or one-fifth of the EU's population.

9 EU Member States: Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Germany (Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria), Hungary, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, and Romania.

5 non-EU countries: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia and Ukraine (Odessa, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernivtsy and Zakarpatya).

The Strategy focuses on four pillars, and within each pillar, concrete cooperation actions specify priority areas:

### **CONNECTING THE REGION:**

- Improve mobility and transport connections.
- Encourage more sustainable energy.

- Promote culture and tourism.

#### **PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT:**

- Restore and maintain water quality.
- Manage environmental risks.
- Preserve biodiversity, landscapes and the air and soil quality.

#### **BUILDING PROSPERITY:**

- Develop the Knowledge Society.
- Support the competitiveness of enterprises.
- Invest in people and skills.

#### **STRENGTHENING THE REGION:**

- Step up institutional capacity and cooperation.
- Work together to promote security and tackle organised and serious crime.

### **The Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan<sup>1</sup>**

The European Commission's Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan aims to reignite the entrepreneurial spirit in Europe' through a range of support actions during the period 2014-2020.

It is based on three pillars: developing entrepreneurial education and training; creating the right business environment; role models and reaching out to specific groups. Section 4.2.1 of the Action Plan sets out actions specifically aimed at women entrepreneurs.

To bring Europe back to growth and create new jobs, we need more entrepreneurs. The Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan is the Commission's answer to challenges brought by the gravest economic crisis in the last 50 years. It is a blueprint for action to unleash Europe's entrepreneurial potential, remove existing obstacles and revolutionize the culture of entrepreneurship in the EU. It aims to ease the creation of new businesses and to create a much more supportive environment for existing entrepreneurs to thrive and grow.

The Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan identifies three areas for immediate intervention:

1. entrepreneurial education and training to **support growth and business** creation;
2. **removing** existing administrative **barriers** and supporting entrepreneurs in crucial phases of the business lifecycle;
3. **reigniting the culture** of entrepreneurship in Europe and nurturing the new generation of entrepreneurs.

The Action Plan and its key actions will be followed up by the Commission through the competitiveness and industrial policy and the Small Business Act governance mechanisms.

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<sup>1</sup> Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan, Brussels, 9.1.2013, [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/action-plan\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/action-plan_en)



## Small Business Act<sup>2</sup>

The Small Business Act is an overarching framework seeking to improve the approach to entrepreneurship in Europe by simplifying the regulatory and policy environment for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The communication ‘Think Small First – A Small Business Act for Europe’ from the Commission to the Council lists ten guiding principles to promote growth in the small business sector. Principle one focuses especially on women and young people: the European Union (EU) and Member States should “care for future entrepreneurs better (...) particularly among young people and women, and by simplifying the conditions for business transfers.”

It aims to improve the approach to entrepreneurship in Europe, simplify the regulatory and policy environment for SMEs, and remove the remaining barriers to their development. The main priorities of the SBA are:

- Promoting entrepreneurship.
- Less regulatory burden.
- Access to finance.
- Access to markets and internationalisation.

## Strategic Engagement for Gender Equality

[The strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019<sup>3</sup>](#) is the framework for the European Commission's future work towards full gender equality.

The strategic engagement focuses on the following 5 priority areas:

- increasing female labour market participation and economic independence of women and men;
- reducing the gender pay, earnings and pension gaps and thus fighting poverty among women;
- promoting equality between women and men in decision-making;
- combating gender-based violence and protecting and supporting victims;
- promoting gender equality and women's rights across the world;

The strategic engagement sets out objectives in each of these priority areas and identifies more than 30 concrete actions. It reaffirms commitment to gender mainstreaming: a gender equality perspective will be integrated into all EU policies as well as into EU funding programmes.

There are also some legal regulations and resolutions at EU level which support female entrepreneurship. Some relevant ones are mentioned below:

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<sup>2</sup> Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - “Think Small First” - A “Small Business Act” for Europe, Brussels, 25.6.2008, [https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/small-business-act\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/business-friendly-environment/small-business-act_en)

<sup>3</sup> European Commission, Strategic engagement for gender equality 2016-2019, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic\\_engagement\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/strategic_engagement_en.pdf)

## **EU Directive on Self-Employed Workers and Equal Treatment between Men and Women**

Directive 2010/41/EU of the European Parliament extends the right to maternity benefits to self-employed women or spouses, or partners of those who are self-employed. Regarding the first, case studies suggest that women continue to struggle balancing raising a family with the demands of running a business. Directive 2010/41/EU on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in self-employed activities sets out provisions on combating discrimination when establishing a company. The issues raised include equal treatment and non-discrimination, maternity benefits and social protection.

## **EU Directive on the Implementation of the Principle of Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment of Men and Women in Matters of Employment and Occupation<sup>4</sup>**

Directive 2006/54/EC prohibits direct or indirect discrimination on the grounds of gender in the labour market, including conditions of access to self-employment. It stresses the importance of equal treatment in relation to access to employment (including vocational training), working conditions (including pay) and occupational social security schemes.

## **European Parliament Resolution on Women Entrepreneurship in Small and Medium-sized Enterprises<sup>5</sup>**

This 2011 resolution of the Parliament includes background research and recommendations on enhancing the role of women in the small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) sector. The key issues raised include access to finance, educational support, networking opportunities and information and communication technologies.

## **Gender Equality and Empowering Women in the Digital Age<sup>6</sup>**

The European Parliament 2016 report on gender equality and empowering women in the digital age, by the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, includes recommendations for increasing women's entrepreneurship in ICT-related businesses and digital start-ups.

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<sup>4</sup> Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (recast), *OJ L 204*, 26.7.2006, p. 23–36, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:32006L0054&from=EN>

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament resolution of 13 September 2011 on women entrepreneurship in small and medium-sized enterprises (2010/2275(INI)), 2013/C 51 E/07, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52011IP0367&from=SL>

<sup>6</sup> European Parliament resolution of 28 April 2016 on gender equality and empowering women in the digital age (2015/2007(INI)); <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52016IP0204&from=EN>

## Support tools for female entrepreneurs

The Commission supports several tools such as networks and an e-platform helping women become entrepreneurs and run successful businesses:

- **The European on-line Platform for women entrepreneurs WEgate.** [The WEgate platform](https://wegate.eu/)<sup>7</sup> is a one-stop shop for women of all ages who want to start, run and grow a business. Launched in September 2016, it provides information and links on access to training, mentoring, advice and business networking opportunities.
- **The European Community of Women Business Angels and women entrepreneurs.** The goal of this initiative – funded by the European Parliament - is to support women entrepreneurs in accessing alternative sources of funding. It will do so by raising the awareness of business angels, training women who would like to become business angels and helping women entrepreneurs to present their business ideas to potential investors. The network was created in 2017, by means of 4 projects covering 14 EU countries.
- **The European network to promote women's entrepreneurship (WES).** The WES is a policy network with members from 31 European nations (the EU countries, Iceland, Norway, and Turkey). The delegates represent national governments and institutions. They are responsible for promoting and supporting female entrepreneurship at national level. WES members provide advice, support, information, and contacts regarding existing support measures for female entrepreneurs. They also help identify good practices.
- **The European network of female entrepreneurship ambassadors**  
The European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors was inaugurated in 2009. It is made up of around 270 entrepreneurs from 22 European countries. The aim of the ambassadors is to act as role models by telling their story to raise awareness and encourage entrepreneurship as a career option for women of all ages. Many of the ambassadors have gone beyond this, having also become actively involved in supporting the establishment of new businesses. The Network has been very successful and exceeded its objectives in terms of events organised and audience reached. Over 650 national meetings have been organised, reaching more than 61 000 would-be women entrepreneurs. The ambassadors have supported the creation of more than 250 new women-led enterprises and created 22 networking and business support clubs for women.
- **The European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs.** The European Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs was inaugurated in 2011. Seventeen European countries belong to the Mentors Network: Albania, Belgium, Cyprus, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey and the United Kingdom. The Mentors Network provides advice and support to women entrepreneurs on the start-up, management and growth of their businesses

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<sup>7</sup> <https://wegate.eu/>

in the early phases (from the second to the fourth year of existence of a new woman-run and owned enterprise).

## NATIONAL LEVEL POLICY REVIEW

### AUSTRIA

99 % of all Austrian companies are SME (around 328,900 SME, of which 120,500 sole proprietors). The Austrian SME sector is extremely diverse and includes traditional family businesses as well as highly innovative, internationally active start-ups. The number of one-person companies and hybrid entrepreneurs - i.e. people who are both self-employed and employed - is growing faster than the number of companies as a whole. More than a third of SMEs are managed by women. The percentage of women in start-ups is 44 %, for innovative and technology-driven start-ups only 7 %.

The promotion of entrepreneurship and the improvement of the attitude towards entrepreneurship (generally) is a clear objective of the Austrian government. However, little attention is paid to female entrepreneurship. Women are not explicitly mentioned in national strategies and action plans.

Some entrepreneurship policies and programmes are in place to support women in entrepreneurship. They seek to facilitate the acquisition of entrepreneurship skills and to improve access to start-up finance. However, there are no promotion schemes especially targeted to women entrepreneurs.

In Austria, the Federal Ministries were mandated by Ministerial Council Decision of 12 January 2016 for the coherent implementation of the sustainable development goals of Agenda 2030. The fifth goal is “Gender equality and women’s empowerment”. In Austria, a national action plan (NAP) has been elaborated in the field of gender equality (“NAP Gleichstellung” or “Gender equality in the labour market”) already in 2010 that calls for actions to improve entrepreneurship for women. 55 measures have been formulated such as the followings:

#### **Dismantling role stereotypes, e.g.:**

- Gender sensitivity in elementary education;
- Gender-appropriate presentation of content in school books;
- Push the use of gender-sensitive language.

#### **Diversifying education and career choices, e.g.:**

- Provide more gender-sensitive information, counselling and guidance for education and career in the 7th and 8th grades, with mandatory measures;
- Mandatory incorporation of gender-sensitive career guidance in further and advanced training of teachers and multipliers.

### **Targeted promotion of women's educational participation and completion of training, e.g.:**

- Offer further training for educationally underprivileged women, in particular women from immigrant backgrounds (low-threshold regional educational offers, promote basic and key competences, contribute to the strengthening of autonomy and self-determination);
- Integrate mobile educational measures for women with an emphasis on IT competences, which are offered chiefly in rural regions at the local level, such as the project "learn forever" (supported by multipliers, mayor, local newspaper);
- Continue the labour market policy programme for women run by the Public Employment Service (AMS) (Women in Crafts and Technology, Re-Entry – Fit for the Future).

### **Infrastructure that facilitates the reconciliation of job and family, e.g.:**

- Continue and extend the federal incentive system for the comprehensive development of child care places;
- Implementation of an action programme to ensure high-quality childcare (specifically for children up to the age of three);
- Flexible professional childcare by the hour, specifically for babies and toddlers, within a permanent care giving structure, especially in rural areas;
- Comprehensive offer for the professional care of sick children especially in rural areas;
- Promotion of comprehensive initiatives for childcare in the holidays.

### **Supporting women's self-employment:**

- Increase confinement benefit for female entrepreneurs and female farmers.

In Austria, the implementation and interaction of the ESI funds is described within the framework of the STRAT.AT 2020 partnership agreement concluded with the European Commission. The issue of equality between women and men in terms of gender mainstreaming is a guiding principle of the Austrian ESF programme.

The operational programme of the ESF defines thematic goals on the basis of three priority axes: promotion of sustainable and high-quality employment and the support of workers' mobility, promotion of social inclusion and combating poverty and all kinds of discrimination and investing in education, training and vocational training for skills and lifelong learning.

The goal of investment priority 1 in Austria – equality for women and men -are defined as improvement in equal opportunities for women and development and implementation of educational offers for women which contribute towards overcoming gender-specific barriers in access to the education system.

The Women's and Gender Equality Strategy 2020 defines the goals for the coming years. With this, it provides an operational framework for the future women's and gender equality policy pursued by the State of Styria. Different fields of action are mentioned, but the strategy does not address a specific issue for women entrepreneurs.

The Work Programme of the Austrian Government 2013-2018 promotes various measures of entrepreneurship and the Austrian entrepreneurship strategy "Start-up Country" guides SME and entrepreneurship policy overall. Especially concerning women, it itemizes the challenges and measures to achieve the following objectives: drive towards the development of gender budgeting and the provision of counselling and support services for women, equal treatment of women in the labour market, increase the security and safety of women, Women's Health Action Plan and further develop equal treatment law and equal treatment instruments.

There are several entrepreneurship networks in Austria, both at national and regional levels. Many of these initiatives are targeted at specific target groups. For example, the "Women in Business" group (Frau in der Wirtschaft - FiW), which is part of the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO), is also active in organising networking events for women entrepreneurs.

In order to break up role models, the Federal Ministry for Digital and Economic Affairs aims at strengthening different role models in initiatives like "UnternehmerinmachtSchule" (women entrepreneurs present the show the occupational profile woman entrepreneur in school classes), "u:start" (training program on self-employment and business foundation for university graduates and students) and "Zukunft.Frauen" (program for executives to increase the share of female executives).

There are also several aids provided for women entrepreneurs: An operating aid for women entrepreneurs with work incapacity of more than 14 days or for maternity leave.

Aspects addressed by current policies and measures are promotion schemes and mentoring programs as well as entrepreneurship networks for women in general and training programs for young women. The current policies/measures are supported by national/regional public institutions and associations in order to strengthen women entrepreneurs, still a disadvantaged group in Austria.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

Measures have had a certain effect; more and more women are getting self-employed and role models are changing. The women entrepreneurship is addressed by all kinds of measures, the more effect is generated.

Current policies do not put a stronger emphasis on female entrepreneurship, either through support and mentoring or financial aid. Furthermore, in order to support female entrepreneurship, traditional role models should be broken up, existing childcare services should be expanded and suitable networks should be created. Women entrepreneurs in



general are in favour of changing current policies, as they want to be equally treated and given a fair chance on the labour market.

## **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

In 1995 The Dayton Peace Agreement established Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH) as a sovereign state consisting of two entities, the Federation of BiH (FBiH) and the Republic Srpska (RS). In March 2000, Brcko District (BD) as a neutral, self-governing administrative unit, under the sovereignty of BiH, was created. Topics related to innovation, education and social infrastructure for vulnerable group –women are dispersed among the various levels of governance.

The important issue to be considered is that at the national level, there is a lack of unified policies with traceable budget lines in order to measure and monitor the target sector. At the entity level it is different, in example, in recent years, the Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, through the Federation Employment Service, in cooperation with cantonal employment services, has implemented active employment policy programmes aimed at training, vocational employment and advanced training, additional training and retraining, preparing the unemployed for the labour market and creating equal opportunities for all to access the labour market. Support is provided to target groups of unemployed people who are identified by strategic documents as those who face more difficulty in finding employment, especially women. These measures have proved to be short-term and inefficient, as they result in temporary improvements, given that recruits quickly return to the record of the unemployed.

Although there are many important stakeholders (as country is complex in terms of its administrative unites), we further identify some major and very relevant institutions for women entrepreneurship and they are briefly elaborated in the following text:

- Agency for Gender Equality of BiH has the main coordination role in the area of gender equality in BiH.
- State level Ministries (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of BiH - Sector for economic development and entrepreneurship and Ministry of Civil Affairs).
- Ministries at the level of Entities (e.g. The Federal Ministry for development, entrepreneurship and Crafts; Federal Ministry of Education) are taking care about policies and programs that would support entrepreneurship and development in areas of crafts, SMEs, and special target groups (women, young, rural and urban) but also education and innovations.
- Municipalities – as they decide about subsidies for entrepreneurship.
- NGO Sector dealing with education, entrepreneurship, business incubators.

Furthermore, in the area of entrepreneurship and start-ups, there is no special legal encouragement, as they are not representing top priorities. It should be improved and more aligned with the EU start up regulations and laws. However, there are programs at various levels in the country that encourage and support women and young entrepreneurs. Regional development agencies are rather active in that area. Also, municipalities are also

active in support of business development, women and young entrepreneurs in particular. However, despite these programs, women do not receive adequate support for launching their own businesses, and the measures put in place very often do not meet their actual needs.

## **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

Various kinds of support should be provided to women entrepreneurs, such as: financial support, training, mentoring, education, skills and knowledge transfer, expertise. Additionally, policy makers should be concerned with:

- Changing the legal framework and enabling entrepreneurs to have similar conditions for starting a company as in other surrounding and/or European countries.
- Creating a centralized platform related to start-ups where start-ups, investors, educational institutions, accelerators and incubators, students and other interested parties could meet and exchange information (one stop shop information).
- Starting concrete projects with an aim to (in addition to raising awareness) transfer best practices for employment and business development in these categories, based on the experiences from the Danube region.
- Creating a local start-up eco-system representative (organization) for the territory of BiH, which could articulate the voice of local start-ups, investors, young entrepreneurs toward the decision makers in BiH.
- Creating a strong network of mentors - supporting the organisations (accelerators & incubators) who are already building those networks.

## **BULGARIA**

The total number of enterprises in 2017 in Bulgaria is 406 310. The structure of the Bulgarian companies per their size is given on the largest share have the micro companies – 91.69% (0-9 employees), followed by small-sized companies (10-49 employees) – 6.87% and medium-sized ones (50-249 employees) – 1.25%. In terms of the structure of employment, it is indicative that employment of women on management positions is low, only 34 % in 2016, while it is 66 % for men.

The share of female working owners in 2016 is hardly 30% from the total amount of working owners. This rate for women-managers of the companies for the same period is a little bit higher - 42% and for female CEOs – 31%.

Since Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, state policies are almost entirely outlined in strategic documents developed at the request of the EC. The European Structural Funds through national operational programs become the main and almost unique source of state-level governance initiatives and become a key factor for the growth of the national economy. A significant number of policy measures in support of SMEs - e-Justice and e-government strategies, a new Public Procurement Act and a better regulation program (including the impact assessment and impact assessment guidelines) have been adopted in 2014 and the first quarter of 2015.

The gender equality policy is horizontal and unites the actions of the executive at all levels. This policy is conducted via combined implementation of integrated (mainstreaming)



approach and temporary stimulation (targeted) measures, requiring an effective national institutional mechanism.

Currently there is no specific law, strategic or other policy instrument for women entrepreneurship support. There are some policy attempts to include the gender issues with different measures for support under Operational Programs but it still not enough.

The main responsible stakeholders are: Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Labour and Social Policy.

Since the year 2000 the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) organizes and coordinates at national level the implementation of the state policy of the Republic of Bulgaria in the field of gender equality (CMD No 155 dated 2000, promulgated SG, Issue 65 dated 2000), in cooperation with a number of institutions and organizations. Since the year 2004 a specialized unit was set up in the MLSP. Currently this is the “Equal Opportunities, Antidiscrimination and Social Assistance Benefits” Department (EOASAB) with the Directorate “Policy for Persons with Disabilities, Equal Opportunities, and Social Assistance Benefits” (PPDEOSAB). The Department is also the Secretariat of the National Gender Equality Council with the Council of Ministers.

The Law for Equality between Women and Men has been in force since 2016. The experts from the specialized unit of the MLSP provide standpoints during the process of development of correlative normative and strategic documents at the EU level – directives, strategies, conclusions of the Council, and provide information, replies to questionnaires, etc. They participate in the work of key topical bodies and structures (councils, committees, expert groups) in the field of equality of women and men, with the European Commission and the Council of Europe. This provides the possibility for popularization of the national policy on gender equality, current exchange of good practices and participation in the formulation of the policy on the European level.

The Ministry of Economy is developing a Strategy for the Promotion of Women Entrepreneurship, together with women entrepreneurs’ organizations. Support for women's entrepreneurship by the Ministry of Economy is implemented through the measures envisaged in the Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan for Bulgaria, which is part of the strategy.

The main programmes available for youth and women entrepreneurship support are:

- Within OP Innovation and Competitiveness 2014-2020 - “Fostering the entrepreneurship”. The main goal of the procedure is improvement of production processes, increase of the production capacity and managerial capacity for increase of the export potential of start-ups. Priority to young women entrepreneurs up to 29-years-old is given.
- Within OP Human Resources Development 2014-2020 - “Development of policies and instruments for labour conditions improvement in SMEs in the production chain of multinational companies”.
- Implementation of the operation “Entrepreneurship support” also continues in 2018. It provides a complex of trainings and services for business development of the target groups.

- Another possibility for vulnerable group is the on-going scheme “Fostering of the social entrepreneurship” under OP HRD and the financial instrument “Microcredit with shared risk”.

## **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

National culture in Bulgaria is still not supportive enough for women entrepreneurs, does not encourage women to engage in entrepreneurship and advance in their careers. However, for those who are successful, the biggest support is found in their families and inner circle of friends. The main financial obstacle for WE is the access of finance, followed by lack of savings and high interest rates. The most important competences barrier is the lack of information about how to start business, followed by lack of entrepreneurial skills.

There is a need to be developed more tools for WE support focused to several areas:

- Fostering of establishment and development of companies in specific sectors production and knowledge based services, owned and/or managed by women.
- Improvement of cooperation between academia and business.
- Fostering of internationalization of SMEs, owned and/or managed by women.
- Improvement of entrepreneurial and managerial knowledge and skills of business women.
- Awareness raising of business women.
- Providing of financial instruments (bank loans, preferential rates, risk capital, etc.) for WEs.
- More opportunities for applying for specialized women entrepreneurship projects by NGOs are also needed.

Additionally, policy makers should be concerned with development or improvement of:

- specialized programs for business women start-ups;
- mentorship programs;
- programs for supporting participation in fairs in Bulgaria and abroad;
- women managerial and soft skills;
- government policies to stimulate female entrepreneurship and leadership in business;
- strategy to harmonize the business environment with the family environment for support and relief for women in their care for children, elderly parents, family life and recreation.

## **CZECH REPUBLIC**

The Czech Republic scores 44.4% on the European Institute for Gender Equality’s (EIGE) Gender Equality Index (GEI), compared to 54% in the EU overall.

Although the number of women who decide to start their own business has doubled in the last 20 years, they are still under-represented as entrepreneurs. Against the EU average of 15.6 % female founders, the Czech Republic still has to catch up regarding the proportion of female entrepreneurs (9.3 %) but the country is proven to be a great place for founders

with no university qualification (16.7 %, against 5.0 % EU average), supporting the widely held view that successful start-ups can be created without a university degree.

In the Czech Republic, nearly 290,000 women now run a business, of which 41% are 45-59 years old. Noteworthy is the fact that more than 11.2% of businesswomen are 60 years old or over. The smallest category of women entrepreneurs is formed by the very young. Young women looking for entrepreneurial careers are often afraid to reconcile their working life and the education of their children and also have a greater fear of failure or a lack of experience. In addition, they may also lack the finances with which to start a business and have less access to credit. The latter may be in part due to the fact that women entrepreneurs make up less than 33% of the total number of entrepreneurs. However, since 1993, when there were only 123,600 women entrepreneurs, their numbers have more than doubled. There are now eight times more women entrepreneurs in the group 50-59 years old than 20 years ago. In the past, the number of young women between 15 -19 years of age was higher. In 1993, this category consisted of 1,800 women (1.5% of the total). After that, the number of very young businesswomen decreased. The reason for this trend is thought to be their desire to pursue and complete higher education. At the same time, they are much less likely to operate innovative businesses. There is therefore a need to do more to prepare women for careers in innovative fields and instil the confidence that they can operate successful innovative businesses. There is currently a policy discussion about tailored measures that could be introduced to support women in entrepreneurship.

Although women in the Czech Republic are more likely to expect to create a business than the average across the European Union, they are much less likely to operate innovative businesses. There is therefore a need to do more to prepare women for careers in innovative fields and instil the confidence that they can operate successful innovative businesses. There is currently a policy discussion about tailored measures that could be introduced to support women in entrepreneurship.

Access to finance is seen as a major barrier to inclusive entrepreneurship. The Czech-Moravian Guarantee and Development Bank (ČMZRB) delivers a national programme GUARANTEE 2015-2023, launched by the Ministry of Industry and Trade in 2015. It includes the offer of individual guarantees with financial contribution for SMEs and social entrepreneurs. The eligibility criteria include: i) employment of persons disadvantaged on a labour market; ii) reinvestment of more than 50% of the profit back to the development of business; and iii) development of corporate social responsibility plan. In 2015, ČMZRB signed the COSME Counter-guarantee Agreement with the European Investment Fund to increase the capacity of the national programme. ČMZRB's activities are expected to continue through the new programming period and new calls were launched at the end of 2016.<sup>8</sup>

The Ministry of Industry and Trade run the programme Programme Enterprise and Innovation (Czech Republic) (OPEI) to support entrepreneurship activities to enhance equal opportunities of women. The Programme was implemented during 2007-2013. The aim of this project was to provide women entrepreneurs with loans at lower rates and grants to develop their business plans. The outcomes show that OPEI was able to help 1331 projects to obtain funding, which made a significant contribution to promote entrepreneurial activities amongst women.

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<sup>8</sup> OECD, Inclusive Entrepreneurship Policies: Country Assessment Notes, Czech Republic 2018, available at: [www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/inclusiveentrepreneurship.htm](http://www.oecd.org/cfe/leed/inclusiveentrepreneurship.htm)

This programme supports initiatives to:

- Provide guidance to women entrepreneurs;
- Education and training activities;
- National and transnational cooperation to support equal opportunities; and
- Publications to support the above activities.

The 2006 report for mid-term evaluation of the Operational Programme Industry and Enterprise, details the achievement of project against an equal opportunities priority. Measure 2.1, and specifically within it, the START and CREDIT programmes, were required to measure the female shares amongst their total beneficiary populations (i.e. where companies they supported had least half of its registered capital held by a woman/women); the target was to have at least 25% shares at project completion.

In the period 2004-2006 the overall programme achieved 39% shares. The evaluation found that the START and CREDIT sub-programmes ultimately achieved respective shares of 43% and 29%; according to the monitoring data, this support led to the creation of 163 (for START) and 64 (CREDIT) new SMEs by women.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

It is necessary to develop strategies that cover labour market support (among other policy issues) for women and tailored initiatives that shall be used to support them in business creation and self-employment. To further develop these types of supports, it is essential to develop as well an ambassador programme for women entrepreneurs to promote entrepreneurship, innovation and growth. Although women in the Czech Republic are more likely to expect to create a business than the average across the European Union, they are much less likely to operate innovative businesses. A mentoring element programme can be built into the ambassadors programme (i.e. the ambassadors also act as mentors for young women) to provide tailored individual support to innovative women entrepreneurs. Support should be provided to young women who start their own business and create conditions for a favourable work-life balance for entrepreneurs with families. In order to achieve stronger participation of women in entrepreneurship, it is important to encourage young women to start a business. It is also important to create a suitable environment for women who have started a family to be able to return to their business and balance their family and working life. This differentiated approach may respond more efficiently to the challenges faced by women in the Czech context than generic approaches targeted at vulnerable minorities or rooted in positive discrimination.

## CROATIA

The Republic of Croatia is one of the rare countries which has **Strategy for the Development of Entrepreneurship of Women 2014 – 2020**, but the new planning period of European Union requires an adjustment of the existing document. The strategy itself highlights the presence of some problems which is why stakeholders need to intensify activities related to gender equality. Those problems are related to higher rates of women's poverty, women are dominant in unemployment rate and males are dominant in

entrepreneurial activity. Also, there are some fragmented (partial) and unconnected programs and activities.

A research, which ended with reporting the finds, was conducted between 2010 and 2013. The report includes the analysis of 62 (out of 101) reports of holders and participants of the Strategy - ministries, agencies, institutions, chambers, associations of women entrepreneurs and employers and civil sector. The report shows that the largest share of planned activities is completed (out of 17 measures, 9 of them were performed completely, 7 of them partially and 4 of them were not performed. Also, report showed that there is a need for constant implementation of those activities; they need to be planned and redefined in the planned period of 2014 until 2020.

The strategic goals of the Strategy are: (1) improving poverty and public policy networking, (2) improving systematic support to women entrepreneurship, (3) introduction of women entrepreneurship in total institutional infrastructure, (4) promotion of women entrepreneurship.

The main goal of the strategy is achieving gender equality. In the period of 2018, until 2023, the main focus will be on 6 strategic areas: (1) preventing gender stereotypes and sexism, (2) preventing violence against women as well as domestic violence, (3) ensuring equal access to women's justice, (4) achieving a balance between women and men when it comes to decision-making, (5) protection of women's rights, as well as the rights of migrant girls, refugees and asylum seekers and (6) introducing gender equality in all public policies.

The main stakeholders in Croatia are various ministries and government agency like Ministry of Economy, Entrepreneurship and Crafts, Ministry of Science, Education and Sport, Ministry of Family, Veterans and Intergenerational Solidarity, HAMAG BICRO), regional development agency, entrepreneurship centers, incubators, technology parks, high education institutions, local and regional government, banks, funds, venture capital, but also various associations that involve business women, employers and artisans.

## **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

Some strategies have been adopted for women entrepreneurship, but not particular incentives for WE. Also, there are networks available, but by persons who have personal interest in fostering women entrepreneurship. Educational institutions promote the STEM area as desirable for everyone, regardless of the gender, which results in an increase in interest rates for technical faculties by young women, but still not enough. There are certain private initiatives to promote women's entrepreneurship. Their purpose is primarily - networking. What is missing in Croatia are specific women founding centres, dealing with obstacles and needs that women face. The establishment of funding programmes tailored specifically for women is one of the needs, since they are disadvantaged in terms of getting a funding. Same applies to tax incentives. That should also be approached.

The Strategy for the Development of Entrepreneurship of Women itself, as the main document for women entrepreneurship in Croatia, along with its action plan, has included some of the parts that are related to the empowerment of women entrepreneurship and stimulation of women's economic potential. By 2019, that strategy hasn't got some big visible effect on women entrepreneurship.



Croatian Bank for Reconstruction and Development (HBOR) is offering favourable (cheaper) sources of financing the women's entrepreneurship (lower interest rate), but women use those sources of financing when they need it. There are some educations and workshops implemented for women's entrepreneurship so they can be familiar with the opportunities. Because the policies and measures need to be carried and implemented together, there isn't much effect visible because there is still not enough kindergartens, there isn't a lot of good role models available and they mostly lack support because they are manoeuvre between professional and private life, because of the stereotypes that are not yet removed from the value system.

The main errors or limitations of current policies is that the old value system is still present in Croatia, which makes it somehow difficult to achieve goals, because it needs to be put mutual/joint effort, as stated before. Not only between the institutions, but also among people which are non-citizens of the country, in order to change and remove stereotypes about women entrepreneurs. Also, each sector which is involved into achieving goal of the Strategy has its own problems which institutions are solving, which makes it hard to achieve mutual effort at the same time.

## GERMANY

There are certain initiatives in Germany that support female entrepreneurship.

**Nationwide Female Founder Agency (Bundesweite Gründerinnen Agentur (BGA))** is a nationwide start-up agency (BGA), which has been in operation since 2004, is the first and only Germany-wide competence and service center for the entrepreneurial independence of women in all sectors and phases of business start-ups, consolidation and company succession. The Federal Ministry of Economics and Technology has launched the "Female Start-Ups Portal" in order to support women willing to set up their own businesses with tailor-made information. The portal not only presents local contact partners and networks, but also offers direct contact possibilities via the start-up hotline and, together with the national female start-up agency (BGA), presents women who have successfully founded their own businesses.

Support (especially for women):

- Consulting: Consulting facilities, forum of experts, founder's hotline.
- Networking: Get to know other female founders and entrepreneurs, exchange knowledge and experience, find support, mentors.
- Company succession.

### **Initiative: "WOMEN'S enterprises"**

The Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy (BMWi) encourages women to use their qualifications and skills to implement their own business ideas and build successful companies. Since 2014, the BMWi has been focusing on women entrepreneurs from almost all sectors with its "WOMEN'S enterprises" initiative.

For the initiative, successful female entrepreneurs act as "role models for entrepreneurs" and voluntarily draw the attention of schoolgirls, trainees, female students and university graduates as well as other women interested in setting up their own businesses to the opportunities and challenges of self-employment. At the same time, the "WOMEN'S EXPERIENCE" initiative makes the performance of women entrepreneurs visible: their success, their commitment and their contribution to the future of Germany as a business location.

Since 2014, the "Female Start-Ups Breakfast" has also been targeting women interested in setting up a business, bringing them together with successful female entrepreneurs and providing impetus on all relevant issues relating to entrepreneurship.

### **Introduction of a legal quota for women in management positions**

In order to finally significantly increase the proportion of women in management positions, the Act on the Equal Participation of Women and Men in Management Positions came into force on 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2015. Two years after the law came into force, it is clear that the quota is having an effect. All companies that are subject to the fixed quota regulation and had to fill new supervisory board positions in 2016 adhered to the fixed quota. Unless a women's share of 30 percent had already been reached, any vacancies on the Supervisory Board were filled by a woman throughout. Currently, only six of the 185 supervisory boards of the DAX, MDAX, SDAX and TecDAX listed companies and the 25 fully co-determined companies have a woman chairperson. And only about a quarter (25.9 percent) of the Supervisory Board members are female. Only 6.8 percent of the positions on the Management Boards are held by women, and the proportion of women in management positions in the federal administration is only 35 percent.

The fact that women hold management positions so much less frequently despite excellent qualifications is also reflected in their salaries: in 2014, female managers in Germany earned an average of 26.8 percent less than their male colleagues (Source: Eurostat). Against this background, measures to eliminate the pay gap have been agreed in the coalition agreement. In addition to the minimum wage, the further expansion of childcare, Parental Allowance Plus and the Act on Family Care Time, which have an indirect effect on equal pay, the Federal Government introduced two trend-setting laws in the 18th legislative period: The "Act for the Equal Participation of Women and Men in Management Positions" ("Women's Quota") obliges large companies to increase the proportion of women in management positions. In January 2017, the Federal Cabinet also cleared the way for more transparency in salaries with the "Act to Promote the Transparency of Remuneration Structures".

### **Power for female founders**

The "Power for Women Entrepreneurs" action programme was an initiative of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research with the aim of motivating women to set up their own businesses (duration: 01.01.2007-31.12.2013). The aim of the project was the differentiated motivation of women to start a business as well as the structural improvement of women's access to business start-ups. To this end, 40 sub-projects were funded within the framework of 20 projects. This involved technology-oriented, knowledge-based and non-academic target groups, awareness-raising, methods, training and counselling. The "Power for Women Entrepreneurs" projects analyzed the structures and potential of women setting up in business. In addition, model and innovative measures were developed to mobilize the start-up potential of women. An important pillar of the

"Power for Women Entrepreneurs" action program was the establishment of the nationwide start-up agency BGA. On the basis of the "Guidelines for the Promotion of the Establishment of an Information and Service Centre for Women Entrepreneurs", the agency received start-up funding provided jointly by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the Federal Ministry of Economics and Energy and co-financed by the European Social Fund.

### **Startup BW Women**

An issue close to the hearts of all start-up ecosystems in the country is the increase in the proportion of women. The Bundesverband Deutsche Startups e.V. has also addressed the low proportion of women in the scene (15.1%) and cooperates with the nationwide start-up agency (bga), which is based in Baden-Württemberg's Ministry of Economics.

## **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

Overall, Germany has a supportive regulatory environment for entrepreneurship. Family policies are advanced in Germany among European Union countries, offering parental allowances, public childcare services and tax deductions for childcare. These instruments help women participate in the labour market and are also supportive of self-employment. New, young and established businesses are able to access a wide variety of financial supports.

There is a well-developed entrepreneurship support infrastructure that offers a wide variety of supports, including training, coaching and mentoring and business counselling.

Entrepreneurship education is becoming more widespread and is advanced relative to most European Union countries. A number of business associations and women's entrepreneurship networks offer opportunities for peer-learning.

German society continues to ascribe housebound and family-related roles to women, thus implicitly rendering entrepreneurship as a less desirable career choice for women. This is reinforced by tax policies that favour households with a single income earner.

The policy could develop more flexible and needs-based care services like for example a nationwide legal entitlement to all-day schooling to make it easier for young women to become self-employed.

Women are under-represented in the financing industry itself. Mainstream financing programs often implicitly discriminate against female entrepreneurship by focusing on areas where women are less active (e.g. technological innovations) and by not considering the specific characteristics and needs of women-owned businesses.

Where entrepreneurship education exists, it mainly promotes a classic model of entrepreneurship (i.e. full-time self-employment) rather than the full spectrum of possibilities, including social entrepreneurship, part-time self-employment, group entrepreneurship, etc. Also, the specific training programs should take the specific characteristics of women in account.



## HUNGARY

Unfortunately, being an entrepreneur is not the most popular job in Hungary. Most women would like to have a secure job and that's why they choose to go to a favourable multinational company. Being an entrepreneur is also very expensive for women, because most of them don't really have any or just a small amount of savings. The government is trying to help young people to become entrepreneurs with various governmental programs (e.g. Széchenyi 2020, GINOP). However, there are no special programmes and promotions for women entrepreneurs.

The roles of women have gone through a subsequent transformation. Gender inequalities are moving in the right direction in Hungary. More women are willing to start their own enterprises and because of the promotional events, they have the chance to see and learn from the Western European good practices. In addition, one of the most successful multinational company (MAM) has a female CEO in their Hungarian factory for 20 years.

Women entrepreneurs tend to have a wide circle in Hungary, and they are more supportive with each other than men. Usually they attend events, make networking and later connect, organize events and study visits together to help other females. There are also special balls for female entrepreneurs, one of the most known is based in Szombathely, it is organized by NőiVállalkozói Klub and they choose the "Female Entrepreneur of the Year" in each year.

A major challenge is that low-skilled female entrepreneurs do not have the proper professional skills to set up and sustain the business.

Services for entrepreneurs are wide. There is no difference between men and women. Serious improvements have been carried out to make administration simpler. Almost every administration can be handled via an internet client portal.

Female entrepreneurs have priority on the market in some areas: beauty care, child care, medicine, education, training, beauty industry, miscellaneous business services, counselling, law and accounting etc. In other fields, they have the same opportunities to enter the market. Every year new surveys show out the labour market situation for women and men, which is not surprising as reducing gender inequalities are increasingly emphasized at European and global level.

According to current data, there is a steady increase in the number of SMEs established by women. The effectiveness of government economic and family policy can also be observed in this regard. The Ministry of National Economy also compiles statistics on this subject. The Central Statistical Office, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the local governments act as data providers.

Vocational Training Centres regularly or occasionally cooperate with statistical agencies and with reporting agents relevant to this topic.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

After over viewing the existing national strategies and policies, the women entrepreneurs cannot be fully satisfied. The reason is that there have been no actions on governmental level, which would specifically focus on young women.

The EU and also Hungary have attempted to support entrepreneurship in general but, however, women have not really taken their part. On the one hand, this can be derived from the general characteristics of women; on the other hand, the national culture and the strategic programs are not tailored enough to females. Although there have been different initiatives and policies aiming to support young entrepreneurs, the women are not really aware of them. Stereotypes referring to gender differences didn't totally disappear; furthermore, the lack of courage does not help the situation, either. In spite of their skills and knowledge, women face more difficulties on the market. The main difficulty for women is to access finance, followed by the cost of business registration and the lack of savings.

Also, a barrier is the lack of information about how to start a business (e.g. rules and regulations), followed by the lack of entrepreneurship skills.

## **MOLDOVA**

In Moldova, the development of female entrepreneurship is one of the objectives of state policy. Support activities developed by Government are reflected, first of all, in Action Plan for the years 2015-2017 on the implementation of the development of the SME sector for years 2012-2020 (Priority 7, DEVELOPMENT THE FEMININ ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA) as well as in THE FEMALE PROGRAM IN BUSINESS made by ODIMM and intended for women who plan to initiate or expand business, especially in rural areas.

Since 2015, the Ministry of Economy introduced "Priority VII: Developing Women's Entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova," as part of the SME Sector Development Strategy 2012-2020, as well as an associated action plan for implementation in 2015-2017. At that time, ODIMM added a targeted strategy, to encourage women to start and grow businesses. ODIMM's ambition is to raise the percentage of female entrepreneurs to 40-50 percent; therefore, program targets should be gradually increasing to achieve this. ODIMM spent its first three years targeting women in outreach efforts that allowed them to gain a deep understanding of the economic situation of women in Moldova, especially as regards to business start-up and ownership. They also appear to have built an extensive network that can be used effectively for outreach, organizing, and information collection.

From 2016, ODIMM is implementing the first National Programme "Women in Business" that aims to boost women entrepreneurship, especially in rural areas, and presents an integrated 3-stage approach to address business development needs in the following stages:

- Plan to start a business.
- Start-Up support.
- Support to business growth.
- The business environment, in particular the institutional milieu in supporting the new businesses as well as their growth.

The main national policy framework containing provisions related to women's entrepreneurship includes:

- Law no.5 from 09.02.2006 ensuring equal opportunities for women and men;
- National Development Strategy „Moldova 2020”;
- Small and Medium Sized Enterprise Sector Development Strategy 2012-2020 approved by Government Decision no.685 from 13.09.2012 and the action plan for 2015-2017;
- Government Commission for Equality between Men and Women established according to Government Decision no.350 from 07.04.2006;
- National Implementation Plan of Association Agreement (approved by Government Decision no. 808 from 07 October 2014);
- Action Programme of the Government of the Republic of Moldova for 2016-2018;
- Strategic Development Program of the Ministry of Economy for the years 2015-2017;
- Small Business Act for Europe;
- National Strategy on Agriculture and Rural Development for the period 2014-2020.

Within the SME Sector Development Strategy 2012-2020, and the associated action plan for implementation 2015-2017, it was introduced the chapter “Priority VII: Developing the women entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova”, that contains the following objectives:

- Facilitate the access of women entrepreneurs to trainings and informational resources,
- Promote entrepreneurship spirit among women,
- Facilitate the access to finance of young women entrepreneurs.

In Moldova there are several initiatives and support programs related to women entrepreneurs, such as:

- Program for Attracting Remittances in the Economy PARE 1+1;
- Credit Guarantee Fund;
- “Efficient business management” continue training Programme;
- „Women in business” Program, EBRD Business Advisory Service (BAS) Moldova;
- „Economic empowerment of women through increasing the employment opportunities in the Republic of Moldova”, UN Women;
- „Better opportunities for Youth and Women”, UNDP;
- Competitiveness Enhancement Project, grant component, World Bank;
- International Fund for Agricultural Development;
- Program for Development of Business Incubators.

The most directly related Pilot initiatives is the ‘Women in Business’ Program, coordinated by the ODIMM is providing integrated financial and non-financial support to women in business through grant support for investment, and associated business development services. The support contributes towards sustainable maintenance of employment in women's businesses, and creation of new jobs. The Program is targeting women in business with potential for growth through market expansion, export and/or innovation.

## **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

Just like in many countries of the region, Moldova has no clear and well-formulated definitions for the “female entrepreneurs” term and no estimations of what is the share of the “female entrepreneurship” in the total entrepreneurial activity. The entrepreneurship represents a very dynamic area. Moldova, being a state with a transitional or a developing economy based on the market economy principles, experiences the emergence of a large number of new businesses, on the one hand, and the cancellation of a considerable number of companies from the register or suspension and interruption of their activities for various reasons, on the other hand. As compared with other countries from the region, the female entrepreneurship from the Republic of Moldova is growing rapidly and is gaining more and more ground at all structural levels and residence areas.

The businesses that are run by women, mainly young, are concentrated in urban areas, 65% being registered in Chisinau. This indicator suggests that more attention should be paid to the rural development and especially to the entrepreneurial development.

It is essential that the National Employment Agency from Moldova develop and reinforce a system of consultation with the various gender equality bodies to ensure greater consistency and co-ordination between employment policies and other related policies, such as education, entrepreneurship, family and social protection policies. This would enhance both the general effectiveness of employment policies and women’s employability.

Additionally, is essential that the National Employment Agency establish a gender focal point or gender and employment unit and develop the expertise, know-how and tools (gender equality methodologies and evaluation procedures, training and awareness efforts, etc.) required to design gender-sensitive and gender-inclusive employment policies. Adequate financial and human resources should be assigned to this end.

The entrepreneurial culture in the field of women in Moldova requires an important effort in order to raise awareness of the target group. Also, new insights into how correctly and efficiently increase women participation at the local economy and public management should be shared.

Creating new businesses amongst women needs to be encouraged by promoting entrepreneurship success stories, supporting entrepreneurship, and improving existing mechanisms by which SMEs benefit from training, and financial and logistical support.

## **MONTENEGRO**

Montenegro has established a legal and institutional framework and adopted policies and strategic documents that support gender equality, promotion of women's rights and economic empowerment of women. However, the formal requirements are created, but the practice shows that the development of women's entrepreneurship still needs the full institutional support and appropriate incentive mechanisms.

Women are not sufficiently recognized as equal players in the economic arena, which leads to the worse starting position when establishing and later during the development of their own business.

Therefore, there is a need to introduce affirmative measures and to enhance them further and in order to increase their efficiency, implement those measures from the local to the national level, with the participation and support of all segments of the Montenegrin society - public, private and civil sectors.

At the moment, data for Montenegro are not encouraging. Although, there are more women in the total population, they are in minority in terms of their participation in economic and political life. They are represented in entrepreneurship significantly less than men, as evidenced by data that only 9.6% of women are business owner, which places Montenegro behind the EU and the countries of the region.

The reason for this is that for a large number of women entrepreneurship is not the primary goal in life, but they get into it mainly out of necessity, seeing it as a way to provide for their family.

A particular problem for women is the harmonization of the work and family life, than the lack of family support and proactive actions of the state in encouraging entry into entrepreneurial waters (especially at the local level). A number of other restrictions should be added and they are recognized through insufficient networking, limited access to information, business premises and business opportunities. Although there have been some positive developments in terms of statistical recording data on the ownership structure of business entities (by gender), this area in the future should be significantly improved. This is particularly important if we have in mind that one of the key elements for the success of the overall process of strengthening gender equality is the availability of relevant statistics that are gender-disaggregated, and which provide the ability to see the actual level of the existing (in) equality and then to define priorities that require special attention.

Improvements of entrepreneurship and increased number of SMEs have been recognized by the state authority as one of the future leader of economic development in Montenegro. Although almost all previous measures are gender-insensitive and focused on entrepreneurs, not taking sufficiently into account the gender dimension of obstacles for development of entrepreneurship in Montenegro, recently the emphasis is increasingly placed on women entrepreneurship, resulting in a higher participation of government in different projects. In addition, a special line of credits for women entrepreneurs has been launched, while significant funds are allocated through the IPA programs.

Montenegro established institutional mechanisms at all levels (National, Regional and Local) in order to institutionally support legal and policy framework for the promotion of gender equality. Within them, there are formed separate bodies responsible for improving the economic status of women and for the development of women entrepreneurship. Institutional mechanisms for supporting gender equality in Montenegro are: Department for Gender Equality - Ministry for Human and Minority Rights and Committee for Gender Equality – Parliament of Montenegro.

The following state institutions are engaged with the economic empowerment of women in Montenegro:

- Directorate for SMEs Development;
  - Investment and Development Fund of Montenegro;
  - Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro - Committee for Women Entrepreneurship
- Employment Agency of Montenegro Directorate for SMEs;



- Development Directorate for SMEs Development (former Agency for SMEs Development) is established by the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Montenegro

Particularly important is the work of the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro – Committee for Women Entrepreneurship that in 2006 established the Committee for Women Entrepreneurship with the goal of organizing training and workshops on current issues in the development and promotion of women entrepreneurship, analyzing the conditions and opportunities for improving the business environment for entrepreneurs and networking of women entrepreneurs in the local and regional networks. Chamber of Commerce is a member and one of the founders of the Forum of Chambers of Adriatic and Ionian Region (2000), as well as a part of the Council for Women Entrepreneurship in the Association of Balkan Chambers (2010). In cooperation with the Center for Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (CEED) 2011 and 2012, Chamber of Commerce conducted the project "Network of Mentors for Women Entrepreneurs in Montenegro" funded by the European Commission through the Directorate General of Commerce and Industry, which was implemented in the framework of The European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors established in 17 countries. The national network of mentors for women entrepreneurs was established to encourage and promote women in Montenegro to improve their business through personal and professional development. The network consists of successful entrepreneurs who have expressed a desire to transfer their knowledge and skills to women entrepreneurs, by the principle of "know-how". The project includes 11 mentors and 12 entrepreneurs. The chance to take part in the project was given to entrepreneurs and women had intention to start a business in the future (five of them).

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

The major problem women in Montenegro face is striking a balance between family and business. Female entrepreneurs need adequate institutional support. In order to make progress in the field of female entrepreneurship, it is necessary to create a better business environment for female entrepreneurship development. Further improvement of institutional infrastructure is necessary, which will ensure full provision of non-financial support, mentoring and coaching services and provision of business related information to female entrepreneurs.

In initial stages, access to business premises should be made easier.

A better access to funding is also needed. In this area, further improvement of current as well as development of new instruments is needed, in order to enable female entrepreneurs a simpler access to funding.

Provision of know-how and skills is also necessary. Various forms of training courses assist potential and existing entrepreneurs to acquire the known-how and skills for business development. Specialized training is necessary in the first years, and is aimed at further improvement and acquiring of specialized entrepreneurial skills.

Female entrepreneurship promotion should be given a priority in further development of Montenegro. By changing the mindset with regard to the significance and role of the female entrepreneurship, creation of a critical mass is possible, which will place female entrepreneurship in the centre of economic development. Association of female

entrepreneurs and putting in place the process of advocating their interests before public sector is strategically important.

## **ROMANIA**

Romania's economy has seen the greatest economic growth in the last 9 years, last year growing by 7% compared to 2016, however the annual inflation rate, index that measures the evolution of consumer prices, has seen a substantial rise in the last year.

Romania is doing well when it comes to economic growth, however statistics aside, doing business in Romania is full of challenges because of the legislative and fiscal instability, bureaucracy, corruption and hard-to-obtain business loans.

It can be said that 70% of entrepreneurs that start a business on their own do so with their own funds, as business loan requirements are high enough that most entrepreneurs (young men and women) that wish to start a business are not able to meet the requirements.

Few banking institutions develop products destined for female entrepreneurs, even though one third of Romanian companies are owned by women. On the other hand, those that do manage to get approved for a financing plan are in constant stress that they cannot make the payments in time.

There is no connection between the educational system and the business environment, leading to the main issue regarding entrepreneurship, the lack of entrepreneurial education in Romania, as such entrepreneurial courses should be added in the educational curriculum.

Unfortunately, regarding public policies, we notice that the state does not actively encourage entrepreneurship, and the measures taken, especially regarding fiscal obligations and requirements, are seen by entrepreneurs as a major barrier in business development.

In 2019, employers from Romanian SMEs can obtain non-refundable funds from the Romanian state, through 11 national support programmes for SMEs, however the allocated budget is much lower than last year. 2019's budget proposal, allocates 545.520.000 RON for national financing schemes for SMEs, and another 545.520.000 RON for budgetary financing schemes for the Ministry of Business. In 2018 these programmes were funded with 1.865.293.000 RON.

Regarding women entrepreneurship, we can say that public policies are highly lacking. The regulatory framework and the programmes that support and foster entrepreneurship do not seem to take into account the specific needs of women in general and the specific needs of women entrepreneurs, like the high degree of difficulty of achieving a balance between work and family life.

There are 11 national support programmes for SMEs, and only one programme is destined for women entrepreneurs, respectively The Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme, launched in 2005 through which training courses and seminars for women entrepreneurs are organised. For this year, this programme is to receive 1.000.000 RON. In 2018, 80 Romanian women entrepreneurs were able to take part in the entrepreneurial courses in Romania and abroad, through this programme.

As such, more programmes dedicated to women are necessary, and training and/or educational programmes should be a priority. In Romania, gender equality in the field of

employment is addressed by the establishment, in 2004, of the National Agency for Equal Chances, The Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity being the institution responsible for this project.

According to EGO Nr. 61/2008 regarding the implementation of the equal treatment principle between women and men regarding the access to goods and services and supplying goods and services, through the equality principle it is understood that no direct gender-based discrimination will take place, including less-than-favourable treatment towards women on grounds of pregnancy and maternity leave, and that no indirect gender-based discrimination will take place.

On the other hand, according to Law Nr. 202/2002 regarding equality in treatment and chances between women and men (republished), through equality in treatment and chances between women and men it is understood that the different capacities, needs and aspirations of both men and women are taken into account as well as the equal treatment of both. This law insured the legislative harmonization of international and community rules and regulations, while a series of relevant community judicial acts in the field of gender equality were transposed in Romanian law.

## **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

A link should be established between the public educational system and business environment, and the educational curriculum should be adapted to the needs of the business environment.

On the other hand, the state should simplify the current legislation and administrative bureaucracy as well as keep fighting against corruption. Both the public and private sector can contribute to the development of women entrepreneurship if there is involvement on both sides.

## **SERBIA**

In Serbia there is considerably less female than male entrepreneurship and female entrepreneurship is characterized by a focus on services and the trade sector and a higher rate of company closures. It consists of predominantly small, micro businesses, operates mainly in the services sector in the local market, and one out of two companies stagnates or faces difficulties in operation and survival.

Women's entrepreneurship accounts for only 26% of the total number of active (private) businesses and shops. Gender differences in entrepreneurship are evident in the fact that women's businesses are significantly more concentrated in the trade and 'other services' sectors (36.4% women and 28.4% men in the trade sector, 44% women and 41.6% men in 'other services'); women have started to engage in entrepreneurship later than men, they more often choose simpler legal forms (shops rather than companies) and independently owned businesses.

Moreover women's entrepreneurship is marked by a higher percentage of business closures: 47% of the shops and companies started and run by women have closed down, compared to 38% of companies opened and run by men. Women are especially exposed to the risk of failure in the early business phase (within the first 42 months of operation, according to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor methodology, which points to the fact that



women's entrepreneurship is more 'fragile' and harder to maintain, and that it requires more consistent support in its early phases.

In the recent years in Serbia women have been helped to develop their entrepreneurial ideas and enter the world of business through various measures of support. Examples include establishment of the European Network of Female Entrepreneurship Ambassadors.

Establishment of successful business women network should serve as a model of behaviour for future entrepreneurs across Europe. Initially, the network consisted of 150 ambassadors from 10 European countries (Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden), and at the end of 2010, 12 other countries, including Serbia, joined them.

Also, within the support program for female entrepreneurship in Serbia, the National Agency for Regional Development published a public call for grants aimed for the female entrepreneurship development through the business alignment of operations with international standards of business, improving business processes, products and services and strengthening human resources.

The National Agency for Regional Development in 2013 introduced program of support aimed for development of entrepreneurial initiatives of women in Serbia. Money was awarded (amount of 50.000 to 300.000 dinars) for decorating business in accordance with the requirements of international business standards, improvement of existing and development of new technological processes, improvement of existing and introduction of new services, test new products, development of specialized software, new design, electronic presentation of the company, management and training of employees through training.

One of the initiatives to support females to start business and become economically empowered is the Female Parliamentary Network, which consists of all women members of the National Assembly. This network is informal and will work on proposing and monitoring legislation in education and economic empowerment of female. This informal body will bring together women members of the Parliament, and the backbone of their work will be five, six topics, such as the fight against poverty among women, empowerment of women entrepreneurship and better health care.

Council for Women's Entrepreneurship - Serbian Chamber of Commerce also aims to promote women's entrepreneurship, promote examples of good practice, to ensure better coordination of activities in connection with the issue of female entrepreneurship, facilitate networking of women's businesses, both at national and international level.

The most significant programs of governmental support for entrepreneurs are:

- Self-employment subsidy (National Employment Service);
- Start-up loans (Republic Development Fund);
- Innovation subsidy (Ministry of Economy and Regional Development);
- Competitiveness subsidy (National Agency for Regional Development);
- Enterprise competitiveness and internationalization subsidy (Serbia Investment and Export Promotion Agency).

Women entrepreneurs are welcome to apply but there is no a single program supporting exclusively women entrepreneurs.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

It is also important to stabilize the institutional framework in order to increase security and provide better business climate.

Another needed change is simplification of existent complicated administrative procedure for business establishment that most of interviewees find complicated, time and money demanding. Specific actions combating corruption at all levels are required not only for the sake of female entrepreneurship but wellbeing of the society as a whole.

There is a need for better financial support to female entrepreneurship through start up funds targeting females (existent programs are aimed to both male and female entrepreneurs).

Financial and educational support is important not only in the business start-up but as continual support in order to empower women entrepreneurship.

## SLOVAKIA

Women are very active in business creation in the Slovak Republic. Between 2013 and 2017, 7.8% of women were actively involved in starting a business, or managing a new start-up that is less than 42 months old. This is approximately 1.6 times more than the European Union average for this period (4.9%).

The TEA rate was 10.3% over 2013- 17 in the Slovak Republic. Among the key target groups, the TEA rate was the lowest for women (7.8%) and highest among men (12.9%). Men were 1.7 times more likely to be involved in early-stage entrepreneurship activities during this period, a comparable ratio to what is observed in the EU on average.

Tailored entrepreneurship policies and programmes are increasingly available for key target groups such as women, but more can be done. There is room to more actively promote entrepreneurship to women with role models and success stories. It is also important to improve access to information on business creation and improve financial and business literacy, particularly among women.

The policy framework for supporting entrepreneurship for women is woven into several strategic documents for the allocation of EU Structural and Investment Funds (e.g. the Operational Programme for Research and Innovation, the Operational Programme Human Resources for the programming period 2014-20). Although related issues such as labour market participation are addressed via the National employment strategy of the Slovak Republic until 2020, there is no entrepreneurship strategy or policy framework aimed at the support of female business creation or self-employment.

As for government regulations relevant for women entrepreneurs, the aforementioned amendment No. 40/2017 of the Act No. 448/2008 on Social Services effective since March 2017, is expected to indirectly facilitate access to childcare for women entrepreneurs. The new conditions (having the child in custody, being enrolled either in education, actively preparing for the labour market or seeking employment or actively earning an income)

replace previous requirement to provide evidence of grave reasons for not being able to provide care for the child oneself or with the help of family members.

Microcredit is available to the whole population (i.e. not only to women) under the SBA microloan programme for micro enterprises (up to 10 employees) and small enterprises (up to 50 employees). The minimal amount of a micro-loan is EUR 2 500 and the maximum amount is EUR 50 000. The maturity period of microloan varies from six months to four years with interest rates from 1.13% up to 9.03%. In 2017, the women supported under the Microloan programme represented a little over 18% of the total aid.

There are tailored initiatives to support the acquisition of entrepreneurship skills for women such as mentors for women entrepreneurs and women entrepreneurial platforms. Despite these activities women entrepreneurs report the lack of skills and competences as one of their main issues. This is particularly relevant for the initial phases of business development, where there is a significant need for advisory support, which is only partly covered by the support services available (e.g. First Contact Points).

**The SBA's National Business Centre** operates several programmes open to all, some of which record significant female participation. The Acceleration Programme (one of the four NBC programmes available to SMEs) offers professional help with business plan preparing, counselling, training courses and activities aimed at the development of business potential to address the needs of those interested in entrepreneurship; increasing awareness about entrepreneurship as a career alternative; and presenting business success stories and good business practice. In 2017, the Acceleration programme was attended by 663 participants, 394 of which were women (59%). The Incubation Programme launched its activities in September 2017 supported 11 enterprises of which four were represented by women. The Start-up programme offers specific information and practical guidance linked to the support of creation and starting-up, including online guidance, web presentation and webinars, training courses on various business themes and participation at international start-up events. 105 persons attended international events in 2017, of which eight were women.

**The Slovak Business Agency** is currently implementing the international project “**Enhancing the cross-sector emergence of new Women Business Angels across the EU**”. The project aims at supporting the growth and development of new and early-stage businesses run by women and support female angel investors who are interested in investing their expertise, time and money into female start-ups. The project aims to facilitate the funding of women entrepreneurs through women business angels and contributing to the creation of a sustainable base of private investment in Europe.

As for the entrepreneurial culture and social capital, most promotion efforts tend to focus on women and youth. For example, there is an annual contest of the “**Woman Entrepreneur of Slovakia**”, organised by the Slovak Business Agency, celebrating successful women entrepreneurs.

There are also other events promoting economic and social successes of women. However, more can be done in entrepreneurship education and training programmes to promote a positive image of women entrepreneurship. Presenting a gender neutral image of entrepreneurship, showcasing success stories and demonstrating the various possibilities of entrepreneurship (e.g. part-time entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship, team

entrepreneurship) could help to motivate young women to consider entrepreneurship as a career option.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

In line with the European Union's Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan, entrepreneurs should be portrayed as positive role models to promote an entrepreneurial culture in the Slovak Republic and inspire more people to become entrepreneurs. In the short run, this can include media campaigns, competitions, or presentations of role models. Specific groups that could be targeted with tailored messages are women. In addition, the development of an entrepreneurial mind-set should also be introduced throughout the entire education system.

While financial support for women entrepreneurs is available, surveys indicate that women perceive the level of support as being insufficient. More targeted outreach and promotion could help to support women in accessing the existing financial support available.

## SLOVENIA

In Slovenia, equal opportunities for women and men are enshrined by law in the **Slovenian constitution** (Article 14)<sup>9</sup> as well as the **Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act**<sup>10</sup> and the Implementation of the Principle of Equal Treatment Act (ZUNEO-UPB1). The provisions of the **Employment Relationships Act**<sup>11</sup> are also important for employment and promotion. Based on the Protection against Discrimination Act<sup>12</sup> Slovenia established as a separate and independent authority the Advocate of the principle of equality<sup>13</sup>.

The Republic of Slovenia's strategic document for achieving gender equality in various areas of the lives of women and men in Slovenia is the **Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2015–20**<sup>14</sup>.

The Slovenian Government adopted in 2016 guidelines on gender mainstreaming in ministries for the period 2016 - 2020. Based on it the ministries prepare two-yearly report (first edition 2016 - 2017). In addition, within the Interdepartmental Commission on Human Rights, an interdepartmental expert subcommittee was set up, which prepared National Action Plan for Respecting Human Rights in the Economy (adopted in August 2018).

The **Slovenian Development Strategy 2030**<sup>15</sup> declares Decent life for all (eliminating all forms of discrimination, particularly through eliminating all forms of violence against girls

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<sup>9</sup> Art. 14 (Equality before the Law) In Slovenia everyone shall be guaranteed equal human rights and fundamental freedoms irrespective of national origin, race, sex, language, religion, political or other conviction, material standing, birth, education, social status or any other personal circumstance. All are equal before the law. Source: OJ RS, no. 33/91-I.

<sup>10</sup> OJ RS no. 59/02, 61/07 - ZUNEO and 33/17 - ZVarD

<sup>11</sup> OJ RS, no. 21/13; important articles that ensure equality of employees are 1st, 6h, 27th and 133th article.

<sup>12</sup> OJ RS no. 33/18 and 21/18

<sup>13</sup> More info:

<sup>14</sup> OJ RS 83/15

<sup>15</sup>Strategija razvoja Slovenije 2030 [https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/SVRK/Strategija-razvoja-Slovenije-2030/Strategija\\_razvoja\\_Slovenije\\_2030.pdf](https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/SVRK/Strategija-razvoja-Slovenije-2030/Strategija_razvoja_Slovenije_2030.pdf)

and women and domestic violence, providing conditions for access to basic goods and through the fight against hate speech and racially motivated violence). Under the Inclusive labour market and high-quality jobs, the promotion of employment of both sexes in gender atypical and deficient professions is proposed.

### **The Slovenian Development Strategy 2030 is monitored through the yearly Development Report (UMAR)**

According to the Development Report (UMAR, 2019) is Slovenia among the best performing EU countries for a long time in terms of various indicators that measure gender equality/inequality: for example: in terms of Gender Equality Index (GEI) is above the EU average. According to the Global Gender Gap Index Slovenia lost 4 places and is among the EU on 11th place due to the decline in the number of women members of parliament<sup>16</sup> and increased wage gap between women and men. In 2018 Slovenia also remained at the top of the EU according to the three UNDP indices of gender (in) equality. According to the Gender Inequality Index (GII) and the Gender Development Index (GDI), it is ranked 5th in the EU. According to the human development index for women (HDIw), Slovenia is in 9th place in the EU<sup>17</sup>.

### **From the perspective of EU Cohesion funds, the basis for its implementation in Slovenia is the Partnership Agreement between European Commission and Slovenia (further PA)**

The PA states that Slovenia has fully respected the horizontal principles of gender equality, the prevention of all forms of discrimination and respect for equal opportunities and accessibility from the very beginning of the 2014-2020 document programming for ESI Funds.

In the 2014-2020 programming period, more attention will be given to:

- training and capacity building for the relevant actors on mainstreaming gender equality and non-discrimination,
- ensuring a balanced representation and participation of women and men in decision-making, planning and monitoring,
- Planning and ex-ante criteria for mainstreaming the above-mentioned horizontal principles.

PA further stresses that training and capacity building to mainstream the principle of gender equality and the aspect of gender incorporation into the budget will be dealt with under the support structure providing guidelines and assistance for the implementation of gender equality in ESI funds. The funds for operating this structure will be allocated from the technical assistance fund.

**Operational Programme for the implementation of the EU Cohesion Policy** in the Period 2014 - 2020 (CCI 2014Si16MAOP001) in its priority axis 8 states that the **Equal opportunities will be promoted through the measures envisaged within all three investment priorities, especially the investment priority Access to employment for job-seekers and inactive people**. The measures will target **unemployed women with tertiary**

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[gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/SVRK/Strategija-razvoja-Slovenije-2030/Strategija\\_razvoja\\_Slovenije\\_2030.pdf](https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/SVRK/Strategija-razvoja-Slovenije-2030/Strategija_razvoja_Slovenije_2030.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Equality ratio has max divide 40%:60%.

<sup>17</sup>Strategija razvoja Slovenije 2030 [https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/SVRK/Strategija-razvoja-Slovenije-2030/Strategija\\_razvoja\\_Slovenije\\_2030.pdf](https://www.gov.si/assets/vladne-sluzbe/SVRK/Strategija-razvoja-Slovenije-2030/Strategija_razvoja_Slovenije_2030.pdf)



**education**, as the unemployment records show that the share of women with tertiary educational attainment who are unemployed is at a high level. Measures to promote reconciliation between work, family and private life throughout the life cycle, which will be implemented in the context of investment priority Active and Healthy Ageing. Gender equality will be implemented as a cross-cutting element, as the projects that promote equality between men and women in accessing employment and in reconciliation of work and private life throughout the individual's life span will be treated as a priority. Although the gender mainstreaming is a horizontal principle, the measure for women entrepreneurship is firstly, not under the priority 3, which is dedicated to entrepreneurship and secondly, as such is described as measure of employment policy (targeted is self-employment).

Current strategic document “**Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, 2015-2020**” outlines an approach to gender mainstreaming. This strategy is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology who are carrying out programmes aimed at promoting new employment opportunities by encouraging female entrepreneurship (e.g. a programme promoting the professional advancement of women and other programmes to develop equal employment opportunities funded by the European Social Fund).

**Active Employment Policy (AEP)** is one of the measures by which Slovenia increase employment and thus reduces unemployment in the labour market. Labour Market Regulation Act (LMRA) provides guidelines for the implementation of active employment policy measures.

**Slovenian Industrial Policy 2014 – 2020 (SIP)** puts as a guideline no. 30: Promoting entrepreneurship for young people, women, social entrepreneurs and micro-entrepreneurs for which the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology is responsible. Slovenian Industrial Policy 2014 - 2020 (SIP)

**Smart specialization (S4)** is a platform for concentrating development investments in areas where Slovenia has the critical mass of knowledge, capacities and competencies and where there is innovation potential for placing Slovenia within global markets and thus enhancing its recognisability. There is no gender-specific measures foreseen.

### **Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia 2011-2020**

In terms of age and gender, the structure of Slovenian researchers is satisfactory. The current share of women among the researchers amounts to 34 % for Slovenia and exceeds the EU 27 average (30 %). However, in the academic sector, there were only 17 % of women with the title of full professor in 2007. Through the professional body **Commission on Women in Science**, promotion activities will be supported, following the principle of balanced representation of both genders when appointing working bodies within the competence of MVZT, and when preparing legal acts and other strategic documents.

In response to the gender gap in entrepreneurship, a programme was launched in 2016 to boost women entrepreneurship named Subsidy for Self-employment. The purpose of the programme is to promote the entry of unemployed women with tertiary education into an independent entrepreneurship path in the form of subsidies for self-employment, having previously completed training for this purpose. The goal of the programme is to maintain the self-employment continuously for a period of 24 months. The training programme

involved 16 mentors and trainers with extensive knowledge in the field of individual training modules. The participants in all locations rated the training programme with the highest marks. The programme was also approved and evaluated by the Employment Service of Slovenia, the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs. It is a partnership between several institutions, which proved to be very effective and could serve as an example to other programs across Slovenia. Unfortunately, in 2019 the programme with excellent results abruptly ended (formally due to the decreased level of unemployed women with tertiary education).

The Ministry of Economic Development and Technology and the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs carried out different programmes aimed at promoting new employment opportunities by encouraging the self-employment of women and female entrepreneurship also in the past (e.g. a programme promoting the professional advancement of women and other programmes to develop equal employment opportunities funded by the European Social Fund).

## **CRITICAL REFLECTION**

The women entrepreneurs are complex in nature and need the cross-sectoral cooperation on different governance levels. For effective and efficient cross-sectoral cooperation, a governmental group should be set up to foster women entrepreneurship. It should be chaired by the ministry, responsible for entrepreneurship (current: Ministry of Economic Development and Technology). One of the priority tasks of the WE group would be to prepare (in cooperation with other relevant ministries, women entrepreneurs and their representatives such as chambers, employers' associations etc.) a national strategy for women entrepreneurship development that would be followed by the two-yearly implementation plan with defined timeline, objectives, indicators of success, budget, roles and responsibilities of involved actors. In order to have the evidence base the Statistical Office of the Republic Slovenia should collect women entrepreneurs' related data (no. of companies, owned or managed by women, they survival rate, profitability and internationalisation). The minister, responsible for economy, who should be also responsible for adequate budgetary planning, should adopt the documents. Therefore, the focus of measures (from self-employment within the labour market policy) should shift to set-up and growth of the women entrepreneurship. Special focus should be on one-stop-shop or at least joint platform for diverse initiatives in women entrepreneurship, based on mapping of services and organisations that would ease the women to get the right information and advice and select appropriate support services and/or institutions. The gender specific entrepreneurial training, mentoring, coaching and counselling should be developed further and financed through the implementation plan. Not only the women start-ups but also the female entrepreneurs in the whole life cycle of their entrepreneurial endeavours should be supported. The women entrepreneurs should receive assistance in the first few years (subsidies, grants) that would enable them to focus on their own product/service development. The need for gender specific instruments should be enhanced. In order to enhance the supporting environment for women entrepreneurship the female specific incubators as well as co-working spaces should be set up and finance within the measures of the ministry of economy. Several women entrepreneurship networks (national as well as regional ones) should be supported by the ministry of economy on the long run. More, the cooperation with the female entrepreneurs' networks

should be encouraged within and beyond the Danube region countries. The networks of women entrepreneurs should be encouraged as well - not only to exchange their experiences but also to provide needed services to successfully run the businesses (e.g. book-keeping, taxation, legal frameworks). The support to internationalisation activities should be more proactive, among others also by enhancing the cooperation with international platforms such as WE.GATE.

All above-mentioned challenges should be coordinated by the respective governmental body that would include also the female entrepreneurs, their associations, networks and other forms of groupings.

## UKRAINE

The discussion around female entrepreneurship has been raised recently in Ukraine. Historically, women were always considered as having equal opportunities for employment. Thus, during the chaotic times of the economic transition no attention was paid to the differences in opportunities and conditions between men and women as regards starting and running a business. Due to the risk and uncertainty associated with entrepreneurship women used to choose employment instead. However, in the 1990-2000s a certain number of women became entrepreneurs, driven mainly by the absence of any other opportunities to earn a living. Historically, in Ukraine women were employed in sectors such as services and trade. As a consequence women tend to start businesses in the same fields. Usually such businesses are significantly smaller as regards size, incomes and assets.

As economies are becoming more service-oriented, more opportunities for women entrepreneurs are arising in terms of business development and income growth. Also, women are more inclined to care about social issues, and entrepreneurship serves as a tool to make a difference and contribute to the positive change in society. As the government and corporations become more socially responsible, women have more opportunities to obtain help to start and run businesses and solve social problems they care about.

According to The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (2016) 47.3% of the working population in Ukraine is made up of women. The majority of women are employed in such areas as science and education, art, entertainment and media, fitness and beauty, tourism, human resources management and marketing. Ukrainian women own 20-22% of SMEs in the country (UN, 2014). One of the main reasons why women start businesses in Ukraine is the necessity and desire to earn a living and to have a better life.

Ukrainian women entrepreneurs do not perceive gender stereotypes as an impending factor for their success. Moreover, they think that it is important not to conduct business as men do in regard to bribes, tough negotiation, etc.

There are some women's entrepreneurship programmes applied in Ukraine:

- **“Women Entrepreneurs”** coordinated by iHub and supported by the Embassy of Finland in Kiev. The Programme for Development of Female Entrepreneurship aims to popularize innovative entrepreneurship for women and to provide them with the necessary knowledge, expertise and support.
- The **HERA** international grants program provides grants to women-owned ventures and initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe to prevent dangerous migration and trafficking.



- **Self-made Women**, programme for developing women's potential in their profession, personal growth, relationships with themselves and men.

However, the only national women's entrepreneurship support programme - **The Women in Business programme** in the Eastern Partnership countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine) funded by the EBRD, the European Union, Sweden and the Early Transition Countries Fund. The programme helps women-led SMEs access both the funding and the advice they need to grow, offering financing through local partner financial institutions, technical assistance for participating financial institutions and business advice for women entrepreneurs.

Financial support - this programme supports women-owned companies of any industry and sector of the country with up to 200 employees and a maximum turnover of less than € 50 million. The overall funding available within the programme is USD 55 million. However, more programmes aimed at experience exchanges and entrepreneurial trainings at international level could allow women from Ukraine to compare economic barriers, realise and overcome cultural prejudices and stereotypes.

## CRITICAL REFLECTION

The difficult economic situation and a business environment influenced by bureaucracy and corruption render women less able to compete in business. Conditions are the same for men and women, but usually women are more affected due to risk-averseness and lack of ability to make backdoor decisions. The legislation in Ukraine does not provide any special conditions or support actions for women entrepreneurs.

Poor access to financing and inappropriate tax rates make it difficult for women to run businesses. The issue is not only the lack of funding and difficulties in repaying credits but also psychological readiness to fund women-owned ventures.

Moreover, there is a lack of mentoring and communication, associated with PR and network management. Promoting success stories of women entrepreneurs would allow other women to feel more confident, and mentoring would enable spreading best practices within the community.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although there are many differences in the countries across the Danube region when it comes to female entrepreneurship, there are several similar positive and negative issues. In order to improve the current state of affairs, different stakeholders (i.e. national, regional, local governments, educational system actors, business support organizations, NGOs, employment service institutes and labour unions) need to come together with their efforts and shape the positive environment for female entrepreneurship growth. In this way, a real impact and an actual increase in the number of successful young women entrepreneurs can occur.

In order to support the development of women entrepreneurship the state has to take over some of their roles and create a functional and efficient system that will give women the opportunity to do business more freely and focus on the developing of it.

Each partner country from the Danube region offers some kind of support for women entrepreneurs. Germany is, without doubt, a very good example of a well-developed entrepreneurship support infrastructure, but here also the housebound and family-related roles are more related to women than men, which influence their choice of a more stable job over the choice of being an entrepreneur. Entrepreneurship is a form of self-employment this is why all of the partner countries from the Danube region mentioned that they have a law, a strategy or an action plan on gender equality. This aims to ensure the equal rights of women's participation in several fields but also in entering the labour market and entrepreneurship.

However, the rationale for targeted policies and programmes to promote women's entrepreneurship and to support women in business creation and self-employment is generally based on three arguments. First, women are under-represented in entrepreneurship relative to men and closing this gap would result in welfare gains for the economy, society and for individual women. Second, there is evidence that women are held back in entrepreneurship by institutional and market failures. This includes social attitudes that discourage women from creating businesses, as well as market failures that make it more difficult for women entrepreneurs to access resources (e.g. finance, skills). Finally, there is some evaluation evidence to suggest that women have a lower awareness of public support programmes and that in-take mechanisms favour men entrepreneurs.

An example of a national policy that addresses the specifics of women's entrepreneurship is the National Strategy for Development of Women Entrepreneurship 2014 – 2020 from Croatia. By 2019, several gaps in this strategy have been identified. First of all, the measures and activities aimed at enhancing women entrepreneurship are slowly setting in. Second, the Strategy does not specify customized approaches to address the barriers to rural women's entrepreneurship and other more vulnerable categories. Finally, a major issue was the lack of collaboration among different ministries, which narrowed the outreach of the implementation of the planned activities. No reports on implementation results of the Action Plan are publicly available.

The Ministry of Economy of Bulgaria is currently developing a Strategy for the Promotion of Women Entrepreneurship, but it is not expected to be finalized till the end of the current programming period.

It is obvious that there is a huge diversity in the type of entrepreneurship support among project countries. In some cases, like Austria, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Slovenia, there are limited opportunities for support for women entrepreneurs. In others, like Germany, Moldova and Romania, there are programmes for supporting women entrepreneurs. It is even observed that in Germany the mainstream financing programs often implicitly discriminate against female entrepreneurship by focusing on areas where women are less active (e.g. technological innovations) and by not considering the specific characteristics and needs of women-owned businesses.

Some of the countries, like Austria and Croatia, put a specific focus on supporting girls to participate in STEM for to achieve gender equality through educational programmes.

Based on the study it is necessary to stress that various kinds of support should be provided focused on women entrepreneurs. More tools for female entrepreneurship support should be developed taking into account the following:

- Change of the legal framework and enabling entrepreneurs to have similar conditions for starting a company as in other surrounding and/or Danube region countries.
- Fostering of establishment and development of companies in specific sectors production, knowledge-based services, social entrepreneurship, part-time self-employment, group entrepreneurship, etc. owned and/or managed by women.
- Improvement of entrepreneurial and managerial knowledge and skills of business women.
- Awareness raising of business women.
- Providing of financial instruments (bank loans, preferential rates, risk capital, etc.) for WEs.
- Improvement of cooperation between academia and business - educational curriculum should be adapted to the needs of the business environment.

Additionally, policy makers should be concerned with:

- Development of government policies to stimulate female entrepreneurship and leadership in business, also on international level.
- One-stop-shop for women entrepreneurs – through creating a centralized platform related to start-ups where start-ups, investors, educational institutions, accelerators and incubators, students and other interested parties could meet and exchange information.
- Development of specialized programs for business women start-ups.
- Development of mentorship programs and supporting the organisations (accelerators & incubators) who are already building those networks.
- Development of supporting tools for ensuring of trainings for business, digital and soft skills taking into account the specific characteristics of women.
- Development of a strategy and taking concrete actions to harmonize the business environment with the family environment for support and relief for women in their care for children, elderly parents, family life and recreation.
- Ensuring a joint support of diverse networks to set up eCommerce platform or at least assist YWEs in eBusiness. Encouragement of networking to cooperate in Danube region and so contribute to the visibility of women entrepreneurship on global scale.

The identification of these factors guides us on the identification of new policies and support instruments needed to be put in place for entrepreneurship development among women.

The women entrepreneurs should be able to have a good understanding of the financial assistance available to them and they must also understand the importance of social and business networking to their business success. They must take the initiatives to participate in training program organized for them. Besides this, it is imperative for government to do more in providing specialized assistance to women entrepreneurs on a continuous basis.

From the financial perspective, the women entrepreneurs must understand the advantages of external sources of financing for their businesses. Understanding the limitation of grants that could be provided by the government even by increasing the allocation, the

government should encourage more banks and micro institutions through tax incentives to provide a wider range of financial services with flexible terms and conditions so as to assist women in establishing and expanding their own enterprises. Besides government grants and loans from financial institutions, the associations of women entrepreneurs and NGOs should continue playing important roles in providing financial schemes to women entrepreneurs.

Additional support and services (co-working places, stimulation to increase the number of men taking over paternity leave, awareness-raising about double burden on women, one-stop-shop place/platform etc.) should be made available to women in view of the additional constraints they face, particularly the dual role they play in running a business while at the same time taking care of their households. The government should think of an effective mechanism to motivate more women entrepreneurs to support the national programmes designed for women in business.

Women entrepreneurs must realize the importance of networking in gaining access to capital and information from various stakeholders. The government, associations of women entrepreneurs and NGOs should cooperate closely and formulate strategies to enable informal mentoring supportive relationship among the women entrepreneurs. This will definitely help the new women entrepreneurs to bypass the obstacles which impede growth, success, and personal fulfilment.

In addition, more training opportunities for women entrepreneurs should be provided by engaging successful women entrepreneurs as trainers. More efforts are needed to improve the scope and quality of affordable, accessible entrepreneurial and management training and seminars targeted to women.

The training programmes should focus on marketing, accounting, participation in fairs and exhibitions, product quality and business opportunity identification. The associations of women entrepreneurs play important role in getting their members to participate in the training programmes.

Finally, the success of the recommendations above will not be forthcoming without the support from all the parties involved. The society should encourage the development of more women entrepreneurs and see them as key enablers in the nation's economic development agenda.

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