

SERBIA

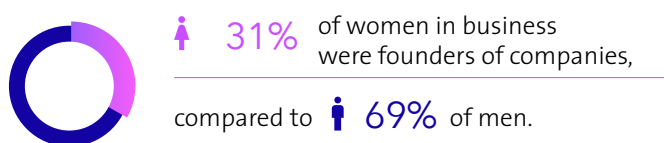
WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

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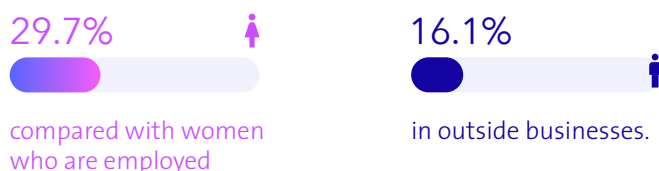
Overview of Women Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship

As stated in the [Strategy for Small and Medium Size Enterprises 2015-2020](#), women entrepreneurs in Serbia are restricted by gender discrimination, gender stereotypes, underdeveloped and inflexible childcare, difficulties in reconciling family and private and work obligations. Women also have less real estate registered in their name, which makes it difficult for them to access finance.

According to the Serbian Business Registers Agency data from October 2020,



Due to unequal access to capital, self-employed women tend to operate small businesses in sectors that offer less income. Self-employed women have a greater risk of poverty



Data from a 2015 Time Use Survey revealed that women spend less time daily on paid work than men and nearly 2.5 more hours than men on unpaid household work. The total daily work hours for women are roughly 1.5 hours longer than men. There are differences between urban and rural areas, with rural women spending more time on unpaid household work than any other category.

In Serbia, there is no systematic monitoring of gender and entrepreneurship. The absence of such monitoring hinders the profiling of adequate measures to improve women's entrepreneurship.

Women entrepreneurs in Serbia: What the data shows

Even though the Law on Gender Equality states that it is mandatory for all institutions at national, provincial, and local level to have gender disaggregated data, gender statistics in entrepreneurship are still lacking. Therefore, the most reliable estimate that just over 31 percent of women partici-

However, the Government has committed to improve monitoring of women's entrepreneurship through the Ministry of Economy and the Government's Public Procurement Directorate. As part of their gender responsive budgeting initiatives, both institutions have included monitoring and supporting women's entrepreneurship as their budget goals.

Although most government SME support programs are for sectors traditionally dominated by men, like production and manufacturing, the Ministry of Economy has allocated almost EUR 900,000 in 2021 to support strengthening women's entrepreneurship.

Businesses also benefit from the Development Agency of Serbia (DAS), which facilitates and implements direct investments, promotes and increases exports, improves the competitiveness of the Serbian economy and a balanced regional development of the Republic of Serbia. The main activity of the DAS is to support micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and entrepreneurs to strengthen the Serbian economy, support direct investment and export promotion. In addition, the Republic of Serbia Innovation Fund supports innovation, research and development, and is available to women's businesses.

The top three sectors of women owned businesses are trade, service, and IT in larger cities. The main challenges facing women entrepreneurs, include difficulties in securing initial funding; complications with company registration procedures; difficulties in finding clients; lack of knowledge of legal and other regulations on financial liabilities; and problems with debt collection.

Women are particularly affected by limited access to finance. Their micro-businesses are largely ignored by the commercial banking sector, especially if a woman is the sole proprietor. Loans often require real-estate or other assets as collateral, which women do not have.

pate in business comes from the 2014 research Status of Women in the Business Sector in Serbia, which distinguishes between participation of women in business organizations (24 percent) and among registered sole proprietors (32 percent).

There were more than 350,000 enterprises operating in the non-financial business sector in Serbia in 2017. Almost all of them were SMEs, employing less than 240 people. In Serbia, small and medium enterprises account for only 3.7 percent of all non-financial businesses.

Sectors such as tourism and software development are generally eligible for government support because specific programs already exist that benefit those areas of work. A [European Union gender analysis](#) indicates that women entrepreneurs operate mainly in the service sector, like trade, administration, finance, and informational technology (80.4%), while men mainly work in transport and constructions.

On average, female entrepreneurs are middle-aged (43.7 years-old), with secondary school education (55.9 percent). Just over 82 percent of female entrepreneurs are living and working in urban areas.

Impact of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs

According to a [survey by UN WOMEN and UNFPA on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic](#), more than one third of respondents reported a decrease of income from personal or family business, and more than one quarter of respondents reported a decrease in salary, agricultural activity, or investments and savings. The gender differences are significant. A higher proportion of women than men systematically reported a decrease in their incomes. A higher proportion of women than men expect to face financial difficulties after the pandemic.

According to the survey of both female and male entrepreneurs, only 42.4 percent of respondents reported that COVID had no impact on their businesses. For almost half of self-employed respondents, COVID had a negative impact on business.

Patriarchal values still prevail in Serbian society. Social surveys indicate a slow change in norms and values related to gender roles. *According to a survey Challenges of New Social Integration in Serbia: Concepts and Actors*, 57 percent of women and 61 percent of men in Serbia agreed with the statement 'If only one in the couple is employed, it is natural that this should be a man.' Additionally, 55 percent of women and men agreed with the statement, 'Domestic household tasks are by nature more appropriate for women.'

While families and educators may have discouraged girls from pursuing STEM in the past, an increased recognition of new technologies as lucrative career paths has started to close the gender gap as more women are attracted to the prospect of better salaries, in secure yet flexible companies. Economic instability from the COVID-19 pandemic will only increase the allure of the technology field.

For a small portion of self-employed (2.4 percent) COVID had a positive impact on business, while 5.9 percent had to close their businesses.

According to July 2020 data from the Serbian Business Registers Agency, entrepreneurial activity declined in the first half of the year. Furthermore, due to the pandemic and restrictive measures, many women entrepreneurs had to reduce company activity and find ways to adapt to new conditions. Many female entrepreneurs shifted to working from home, which led to difficulties as they took on increased domestic and care work.

Opportunities for promoting women's entrepreneurship and access to jobs

- Develop legal and policy frameworks that create opportunities for women's employment, micro family businesses, self-employment and entrepreneurship including in rural areas.
- Open direct financial lines for low-interest loans to support micro family businesses, social cooperatives, women's businesses, and women headed households, particularly in rural areas.
- Provide stimulus in the care sector to foster female micro firms in childcare, elder care, and care for persons with disabilities, particularly in rural areas.
- Stimulate micro firms in the green economy, including organic food production, rural tourism and other sectors that are favorable to women

- Enable the regular exchange of good practices to stimulate entrepreneurship of rural women
- Develop infrastructure in rural areas

Networks and associations for women

- Association of Businesswomen in Serbia
- Association for Affirmation of Women
- Association of Free and Independent Trade Unions

Best Practices and Opportunities for women in business

- Serbia Women's Business angels, part of Impact Hub Belgrade
- Fund for Innovation and Technological Development
- Gender Equitable Investment in Tech EQUALS program that promotes diversity and inclusion in investing.