

EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

April 2021

Regional Overview of Women Entrepreneurs and Entrepreneurship

In UN Women's Europe and Central Asia region, women are predominantly financially insecure, in lower-paid, and part-time and informal employment, with little or no social protection. The general lack of official, systematic, and empirical data about women entrepreneurs represents an important obstacle for decision-makers who need such information to inform social and economic policy that could improve the position of women in the labour market.

While not all countries have gender-specific data in this arena, statistics on female entrepreneurship in the Republic of Moldova show that the number of women entrepreneurs are expanding but are well below that of men. The share of businesses that were owned or managed by women in Moldova was roughly 34 percent in 2017, compared with 66

percent of men. In 2009, women's share of businesses was only 27.5 percent.

However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, only 36 percent of women are active in the workforce, the lowest figures in Southeast Europe. The country is ranked 46th out of 54 countries in overall entrepreneurial activity and opportunities.

In Georgia, women's economic inactivity rate is almost twice as much as men's, where only 50 percent of women participate in the labour force.

In general, women's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the region tend to be concentrated in sectors with lower profit margins than men, like agriculture, administrative and support services, and trade.

National support for women entrepreneurs

Many countries have put in place national strategies to promote gender equality, and others are starting to include women's entrepreneurship in their plans. The draft Action Plan to Increase Women's Employment in the Republic of Azerbaijan, for example, aims to enhance women's access to the labour market, identify and eliminate gender-based factors that prevent their careers in the private sector, and provide opportunities for women to pursue decent jobs.

The National Strategy for Enhancing the Role of Women in the Republic of Tajikistan gives priority to family and home-based

businesses, and aims for a more equitable distribution of labour, increased female agricultural employment, and retraining for unemployed women.

The Women in Business Programme is a women's entrepreneurship support initiative that operates in many in countries in the region, including Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Bosnia Herzegovina. Funded by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the European Union, it offers access to funding and advice for women-led SMEs, financing through local partner financial institutions, technical assistance for participating financial institutions.

Barriers faced by women entrepreneurs

The costs of gender barriers are high because of the untapped potential of female entrepreneurs and the value they can bring. In many countries in the region, beliefs persist that men should lead, and therefore are more deserving of scarce job opportunities. Traditional women's roles and society norms create limitations when it comes to balancing personal and family life with professional life.

Women entrepreneurs also face gender-specific barriers in obtaining credit, finding business partners, accessing new markets, and getting information on business opportunities. Those economic and financial impediments are among the

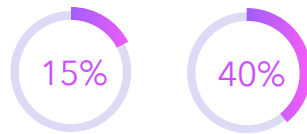
most important obstacles faced by women who want to become entrepreneurs. Women start businesses mainly with their own money, or that of relatives, friends, relying less on bank loans. Often in more traditional households, the property is owned by the husband, leaving women with few assets against which to obtain loans or bank credit.

Educational barriers, including lack of available advisory services for women who want to start their own enterprises, as well as financial illiteracy and inadequate ICT training are among other challenges that confront women entrepreneurs.

Impact of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs

A [UN Women Rapid Gender Assessment](#) surveyed the impacts of COVID-19 on people's lives and livelihoods between April and June 2020 in 10 countries in the Europe and Central Asia region.

More than 15 percent of employed women said they lost their jobs and 40 percent faced reduced working hours.



The share of women who had to reduce their working hours ranged from 31 percent in Georgia to 65 percent in Kosovo¹. Self-employed women suffered the worst consequences as one-quarter of them lost their jobs.

Reduced working hours or job losses particularly affected self-employed women in

Turkey

82%

Kazakhstan

81%

Azerbaijan

80%

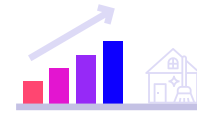
Kosovo

78%

Kyrgyzstan

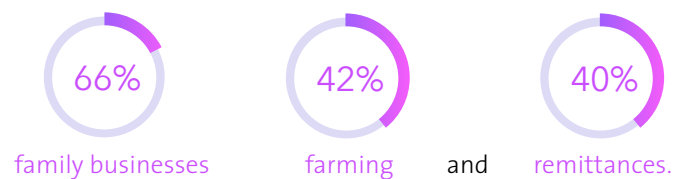
77%

Half of women reported increased time spent on at least one homecare activity.



Albania had the highest share of women spending more time on care work at 72 percent, followed by Kyrgyzstan (60 percent), Kosovo (67 percent) and Kazakhstan (65 percent).

The biggest losses in income for women and men were those generated from



To overcome some of the obstacles that confront women entrepreneurs, many countries pointed to government support, or assistance from other entities, that could make a positive difference:

- 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
- Expand training in up-to-date professional skills for women with secondary, technical, and higher education
- Develop awareness campaigns to counter stereotypes about women's and men's work and societal roles
- Develop gender disaggregated data and analysis on the impact of government programmes on women-owned businesses
- Provide training and develop special programmes dedicated to SMEs managed by women

¹ All references to Kosovo are made in the context of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999)