

Municipal initiatives on  
women's economic empowerment:

# STRENGTHENING THE EMPLOYABILITY, ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND DIGITAL SKILLS OF WOMEN IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES



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## OVERVIEW

The data from the State Statistical Office of North Macedonia show that although there is no significant difference in the number of the working-age population between women and men, there is a big difference in terms of active population when comparing women and men. Namely, in 2021, the percentage of employed women in the country was 40%, while the same percentage for men was 60%.

	2020*			2021*		
	Total	Women	Men	Total	Women	Men
<b>Total working-age population</b>	1,685,909	841,988	843,921	1,681,862	840,600	841,262
<b>Active population</b>	957,623	375,064	582,559	945,412	379,796	565,616
<b>Employed</b>	793,416	324,094	469,322	795,271	325,538	469,733
<b>Unemployed</b>	159,623	65,177	94,446	150,141	54,258	95,883
<b>Inactive population</b>	732,870	452,717	280,153	736,450	460,804	275,646

\*Active population in North Macedonia for 2020 and 2021, data from State Statistical Office

According to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2019-2020, women in North Macedonia have a lower perception of market opportunities than men (29% vs. 32%) meaning they are less aware of the market possibilities and have a higher level of fear of failure (43% vs. 36%) thus lower self-esteem in regard to own competencies to start a business venture (46% vs. 64%). This shows that the socio-economic conditions in the country differently affect women and men. Moreover, being focused on the household and the family and spending more time at home, women struggle more in access to resources, do less networking than men, and lack support in domestic activities. All this negatively affects their readiness to start a business venture, i.e. entrepreneurial activity (23% of women vs. 33% of men).

In 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic had a great impact on the socio-economic life in North Macedonia and particularly on vulnerable groups such as women. According to many analyses, COVID-19 has been disproportionately affecting more women than men which poses a risk of further deepening the pre-existing gender inequalities. Many women-led businesses have been affected and almost all needed to reinvent their business approach in order to survive.

## OVERVIEW

At the local level, UN Women in North Macedonia is working closely with municipalities in extending technical and expert support to advance initiatives for gender mainstreaming in local governance and service delivery. The project “Promoting Gender Responsive Policies and Budgets: Towards Transparent, Inclusive and Accountable Governance in the Republic of North Macedonia” has supported 31 municipalities that have piloted and implemented GRB initiatives focused on upscaling the proven approaches in mainstreaming gender in sectorial programmes through gender analysis, the introduction of gender-specific measures and monitoring the progress and impact on lives of women and men.

Recognizing the significant gender inequalities in the local labour market and the specific impact of the COVID-19 crisis on women’s livelihoods and economic security, 11 municipalities (City of Skopje, Centar, Kisela Voda, Aerodrom, Sveti Nikole, Kriva Palanka, Bitola, Kochani, Strumica, Gazi Baba, Mavrovo Rostushe) in North Macedonia budgeted measures for economic empowerment in their local programmes. These municipalities were supported by UN Women to effectively implement their initiatives which focused on strengthening the employability, entrepreneurship, and digital skills of women in the local communities.





## TRAINING TOPICS

To support this process, **Foundation CEED Macedonia** was engaged by UN Women to design and deliver a set of services intended to support the municipalities in implementing their women's economic empowerment initiatives.

In close cooperation with the respective municipalities and UN Women, the following trainings were delivered:

Training topics	Municipalities covered
<b>Development of business ideas and business plans</b>	Strumica, Kriva Palanka, Centar, Bitola, Aerodrom, Kochani, Kisela Voda, City of Skopje, Sveti Nikole, Gazi Baba
<b>Entrepreneurship and management skills</b>	Strumica, Kriva Palanka, Centar, Bitola, Aerodrom, Kochani, Kisela Voda, City of Skopje, Sveti Nikole, Gazi Baba
<b>Basic employability skills</b>	Kochani and Bitola
<b>Digital marketing, online sales and the use of digital technologies</b>	Strumica, Kriva Palanka, Centar, Bitola, Aerodrom, Kochani, Kisela Voda, Sveti Nikole, Mavrovo Rostushe
<b>Branding, packaging and sales of agricultural products</b>	Mavrovo Rostuse and Kochani
<b>Vocational trainings</b>	Aerodrom, Centar and Mavrovo Rostushe

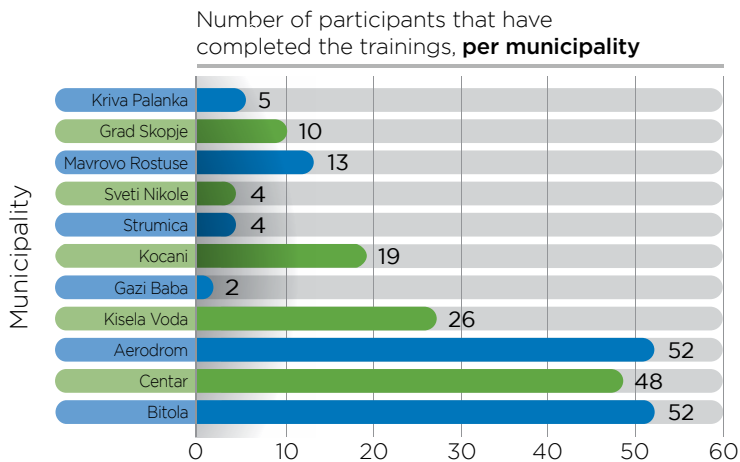
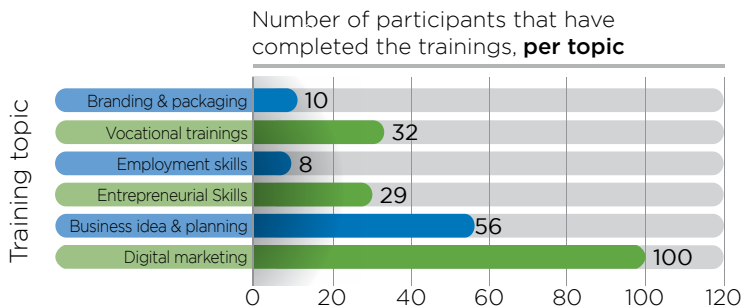
## PARTICIPANTS

A total number of 463 women from local communities across the 11 municipalities participated in the trainings. Still, not all of them completed the trainings due to variety of reasons, mostly concerning their domestic engagements, thus lack of time.

Majority of the participating women had secondary education and were mostly unemployed. However, the trainings also included women that own micro or unregistered businesses.

Most of the women that applied for the trainings were either seeking to increase their employability skills and become more competitive in the labour market or were interested in starting own companies and thus wanted to build their entrepreneurial and management skills and knowledge.

As a result, a total number of 235 women successfully completed the trainings.





## Lada Petrovska – owner of Filigree LARGO

Lada Petrovska from Municipality of Centar in Skopje is the owner of Filigree LARGO – a handmade silver jewellery micro-business. Her products are handcrafted and made with traditional filigree techniques, but with a contemporary and artistic design.

Originally, Lada is a violinist and has been playing music professionally for almost 30 years. Inspired by her artistic background, she started an unregistered jewellery business for designing and making unique silver jewellery.

Realizing building crafts skills is not enough to keep your business going, she decided to improve her business skills as well and learn more about how to promote her products.

*“The trainings for digital marketing and creating a business plan and business idea that were supported through UN Women were extremely helpful. I found the training to be exceptionally useful given that I have never had my own business or dealt with marketing before. I acquired the basic skills for digital (social media) promotion of my art, which helped me create my marketing approach and method on how to promote my products. The business planning training, on the other hand, gave me direction on how to design and develop my future business model, and how to plan my business better.”*

Lada claims that an essential way for achieving professional growth is by participating in specialized trainings. Participating in trainings and workshops can be extremely beneficial for microbusiness owners, because it enables them to explore a set of business strategies and learn how things are done in the business world, not just focusing on the craft.



## Biljana Lambeska – owner of Crochet Colombian “Mochila” Bags & Clutches

Crochet Colombian “Mochila” Bags & Clutches is a brand of handmade bags and clutches that Biljana Lambevka from Municipality of Kisela Voda has established, and under which she crafts and sells these pieces of artwork. Biljana was one of the attendees of the trainings supported by UN Women.

The bags she creates are made with artisanal techniques and are unique in their design and quality. She’s been making “Mochila” bags for 8 years, handcrafting is of special importance to her because the effort involved is irreplaceable and leaves lasting value to the product, she believes. “The tradition of all societies originates in the crafts, so we should cherish this heritage.” – Biljana says.

Focused on the global markets by the means of the internet, Biljana decided to improve her knowledge and skills in the area of digital marketing, thus increasing the volume of her sales.

*“I learned about the training completely by accident and immediately signed up because I knew that it’s only from professionals that I could get the necessary knowledge to expand my business. The trainings were extremely valuable to me. I attended the trainings to learn how to place my products; the mentors were excellent professionals who made an unreserved effort to support us in this journey and explain the entire process of creating and running a business. Since I use Instagram for promotion, the digital marketing training helped me a lot;”*

This is a great example of how good mentoring and the right guidance can support the growth of a business, as well as the process of accessing new, international markets. With the help of the trainings organized within the UN Women’s project, Biljana is taking a big step towards fulfilling her business goals.





## Jasna Vesikj – found employment at Bintern

Curious by nature, Jasna Vesikj from Bitola took part in multiple trainings which led her to successful employment at Bintern in Bitola - a start-up company founded with the purpose to help solve students' problems with finding internships and job opportunities.

Asked about how her journey as an employee at Bintern began, Jasna says:

*"I have been working at Bintern since April 2022 when I applied for a 1-month paid internship. At that time, Bintern had an opening for a digital marketer. My mentor, and project manager, was very satisfied with my work as an intern, thus I was offered to take this new job position. So, that's me now – a member of Bintern's team and an employed woman."*

By participating in several trainings, Jasna built crucial employability skills and gained knowledge for potentially starting her own business in the future. In her case, the result was immediate.

*"I am very satisfied with the trainings I attended which were supported by UN Women and implemented by CEED. The material covered during the training modules was practical and useful. In addition to learning new things, with these trainings, I improved my communication skills, boosted my self-esteem and motivation, learned how to make a business model, and improved my management skills."*

After completing these training programs, Jasna was able to find her long-awaited employment. The training has not just helped her build new skills but has encouraged her to search for employment, resulting in her becoming a member of Bintern's team.



## Daniela Gjorgievska Kostadinovska – owner of Dolci Di Dani

Daniela Gjorgievska Kostadinovska from Skopje – Municipality of Centar, is the owner of a small, confectionery business named “Dolci Di Dani”.

“Dolci Di Dani” is a Macedonian brand of pralines that Daniela started as a result of her personal love for chocolate and the joy she experiences while making little chocolate miracles. Daniela’s love for chocolate is truly genuine!

Professionally, Daniela is a part of a completely different world, but this hobby of hers slowly turns into a micro business. She has a growing list of customers among those who have at least once tried her pralines. Daniela handcrafts these exclusive, modern, and perfectly flavoured chocolate masterpieces by hand.

Asked about when and how she started this sweet business, Daniela says:

*“Even as a child I wanted to play with sweets, I won’t exaggerate if I say that I developed that passion for experimenting in the kitchen as early as in elementary school, but the real thing happened during one visit to a chocolate fair in Italy.”*

To improve her business skills and learn how to promote her products and expand her presence on the market, Daniela attended several trainings organized within this project.

*“The trainings organized really helped me create my business plan, learn about all aspects of starting a business and gain an understanding of how to market my product.”*

Business trainings are essentially important for micro businesses, especially for those who are just starting because they need specific knowledge in order to survive the many challenges of the market.



## Pavlina Vasilevska – owner of Dolce Vita Baby Shop

When it comes to running a business, you must be able to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances. And that's exactly what Pavlina did.

In 2016, she first started a business with a Candy Shop — a store for sweet treats and candies. It was quite successful, and she had no trouble filling orders from customers. But then came the COVID-19 pandemic...

When everything stopped working properly, she faced a problem: how to keep her customers coming back? Without celebrations of any kind, in a time when birthdays, weddings or any other parties were not being organized, selling candies was not an option anymore.

That's why Pavlina came up with a new idea and decided to open a Baby Shop. Now she offers baby clothing, from new-born to the age of two. Her products are made of high-quality cotton and designed for delicate baby skin. She also started with online marketing, and in that regard, she says that many companies which had not advertised before started following her example.

*"I am truly grateful for the trainings organized within the UN Women's project. They helped me to deepen my knowledge of digital marketing and to improve my entrepreneurial skills.*

*Digital marketing is like a living thing that has to be updated daily, so it cannot be learned easily. It is always nice to learn new things and improve your skills, and it keeps you motivated. Such trainings should continue in the future because many female entrepreneurs need them."*

