

WOMEN IN WESTERN BALKAN ECONOMIES IN A NUTSHELL



FOREWARD

Gender equality, a fundamental human right, is essential to achieving shared prosperity, peaceful societies and developing and maintaining a culture of dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance and openness towards cooperation across borders.

The economic empowerment is important for poverty reduction, economic growth and human development.

Policies and interventions aimed at promoting women's economic empowerment work towards the full recognition and realization of women's facilitates the achievement of other important public policy goals such as economic growth, improved human development, and reduced violence.

The aim is to accelerate gender equality and women's economic empowerment, as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its promise of leaving no one behind.

UNDP's engagement for women's economic empowerment must address issues of access to and control over resources, but also structural gender inequalities such as unpaid work.

In line with the ideas presented in this paper, UNDP gender equality work will prioritize women's economic empowerment in accordance with comprehensive framework [UNDP-RCC Joint Action in Western Balkans for women's economic empowerment](#) that outlines high-impact interventions to improve the status of women and advance gender equality in the Western Balkan region.

Joint Action in Western Balkans presents a strategic vision for long-term change, delineating actions to strengthen the human capital of women, whose participation and leadership in politics and the economy are crucial to inclusive socio-economic development.

We hope this paper will inspire others to join us and further develop the work on women's economic empowerment.

Sincerely,

Daniela Gasparikova,
UNDP RR in Montenegro



Abstract

This paper provides overview of the status of women in economies of Western Balkans and impact of public policies aimed to underline importance of economic empowerment of women and what does it entail.

Every economy depends upon the economic contributions of both women and men. Still, the environment for economic activity in countries often includes numerous barriers that disadvantage women as they pursue employment, business, and investment opportunities. This paper, provides review of the key elements of the enabling environment for women in the economy that encompasses the legal and regulatory framework in WB 6, policies and practices in place, including social norms that support women to operate in the formal economy or improve basic conditions for fostering of women's entrepreneurship.

Around the Western Balkan region, women's labour force participation rates are unequal to men's, decent work opportunities are limited, and significant gender pay gaps in the labour market remain.

Growing evidence collected in this paper reveal that women's low participation in the formal labour markets of WB countries impedes economic growth and poverty reduction.

Women are frequently discouraged and often effectively barred from economic engagement by disproportionate burdens of unpaid family care, gender-based violence, discrimination based on disability, underinvestment in their formal and informal education, need for spousal approval for employment and or entrepreneurial activity, and legal or systemic barriers to accelerate business.

Women entrepreneurs are a growing market force, serving as a critical source of innovation and job creation and fuelling economic growth. Therefore, assessment looked into women-owned businesses access to the capital needed to stabilize or expand. Furthermore, assessed women entrepreneurs access to markets, market information, digital services, networks, mentorship, and other resources that enable them to overcome the obstacles of starting and growing firms as well as connecting with buyers.

Advancing women's full and free participation in the economy requires addressing these barriers in comprehensive and meaningful ways. Systemic barriers require institutional reforms. The benefits of women in the economy are substantial. Therefore, this report includes set of recommendations to be concerned by policy makers in the WB6 economies.

REGIONAL GENDER STATISTICS

status of women in decision making in WB 6

A third of **PARLIAMENTARIANS** in WB6 are **women**, which is generally below the gender quota of most of these countries.



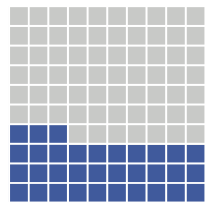
34%



2018 2019 2020 2021

The share of **women in the parliament**

33%



On average, women in the Western Balkans make up a third of **MINISTERS**

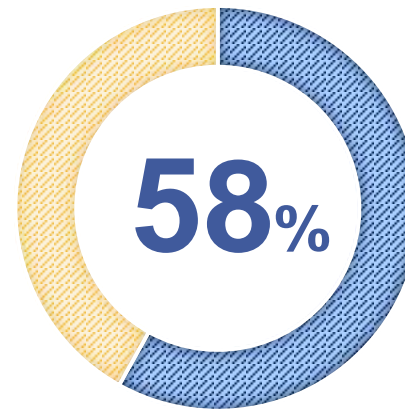
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*Average for region was calculated for illustrative purposes, as an average of percentages of each country/territory

** For the United Nations Development Programme, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)

Gender Equality Index 2020

*missing data for BIH and Kosovo**



58%

The share of women in **HIGH MANAGEMENT** positions in **public administrations** in WB6 is almost the same as the EU-27 average (44% in 2021).



2018 2019 2020 2021

31% of women hold highest decision-making bodies of **WB 6 CENTRAL BANKS**



2018 2019 2020 2021

The percent of **female JUDGES**

*missing data for Albania for years 2018,2019,2020

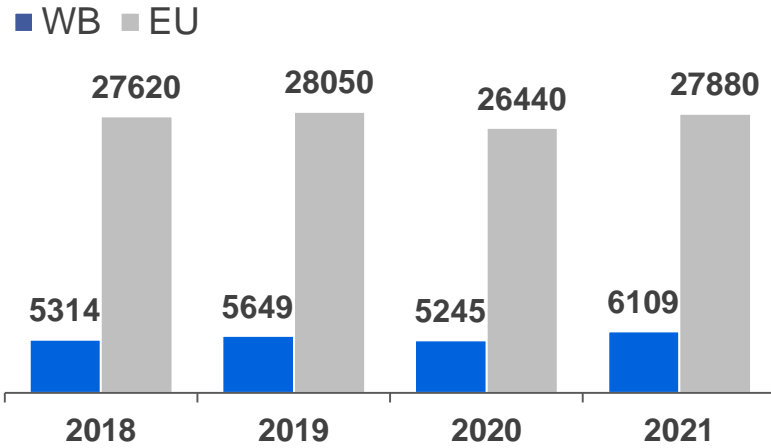


2018 2019 2020 2021

REGIONAL ECONOMIC GENDER STATISTICS

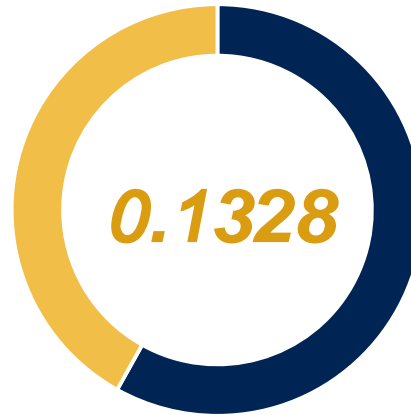
economies of WB 6 and status of women

GDP per capita *presented in EUR



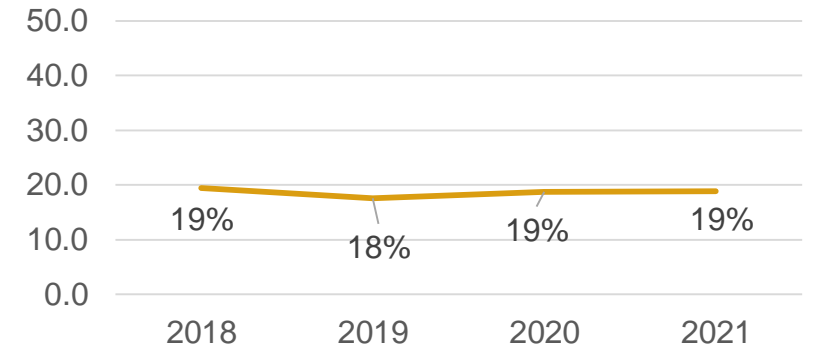
GII in WB in 2021

Missing data for Kosovo**

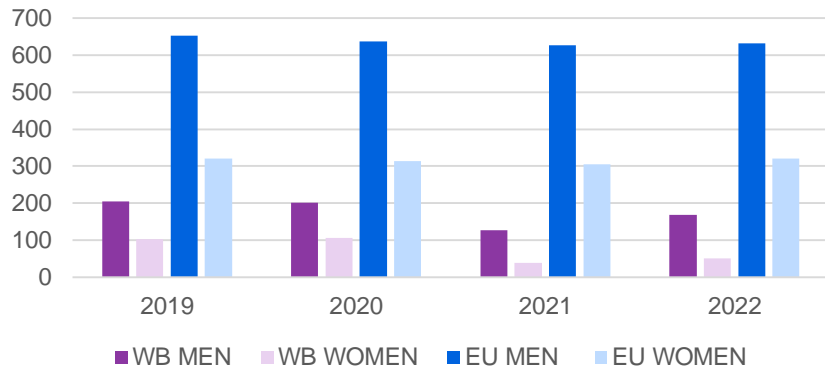


On average, 19% of **board members** in the **largest listed companies** registered are women.

*missing data for Albania and Kosovo**

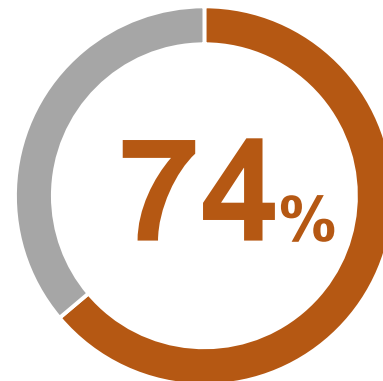


Number of self-employed by sex



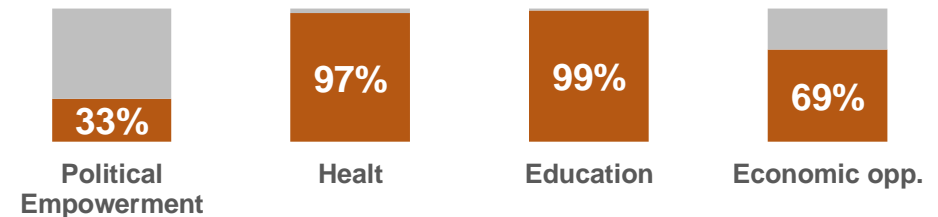
GEI in WB in 2021

Missing data for Kosovo**



GEI per categories

Missing data for Kosovo**



© Ipsos *Average for region was calculated for illustrative purposes, as an average of percentages of each country/territory
** For the United Nations Development Programme, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)



*Given in thousands

Screening women's status in WB economy:

- Although women make up 49% of the public administration, they are concentrated in traditionally female labor force sectors.
- Women accounting for only 14.2% of top managers in companies.
- The activity rate for women in the labor market is only 53% while for men the figure is as high as 73%.
- Over 40% of women did less paid work during the pandemic.

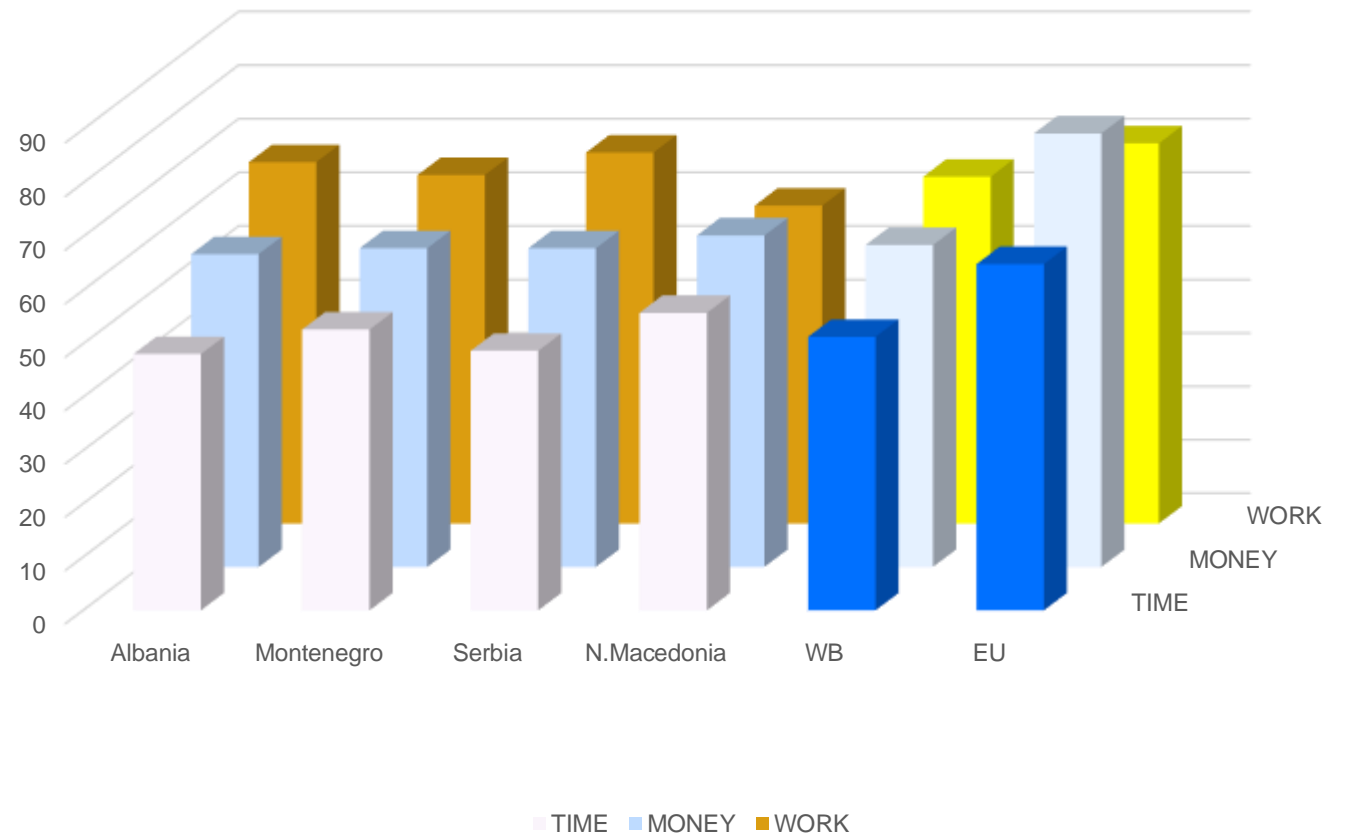
GEI: TIME – MONEY – POWER

1. Women of the Western Balkans earn less than EU women for a similar amount of time they work.

2. Women in the Western Balkans have less free time available than women in the EU.

More work, less money, less free time is directly related to the development of the economy and the position of women in the economy.

Gender Equality Index Domains
TIME – MONEY – POWER



Women's entrepreneurship in Western Balkans

Women are underrepresented among entrepreneurs and business owners, with a tendency to operate in smaller, non-capital-intensive sectors, which often cannot generate high and sustainable incomes.

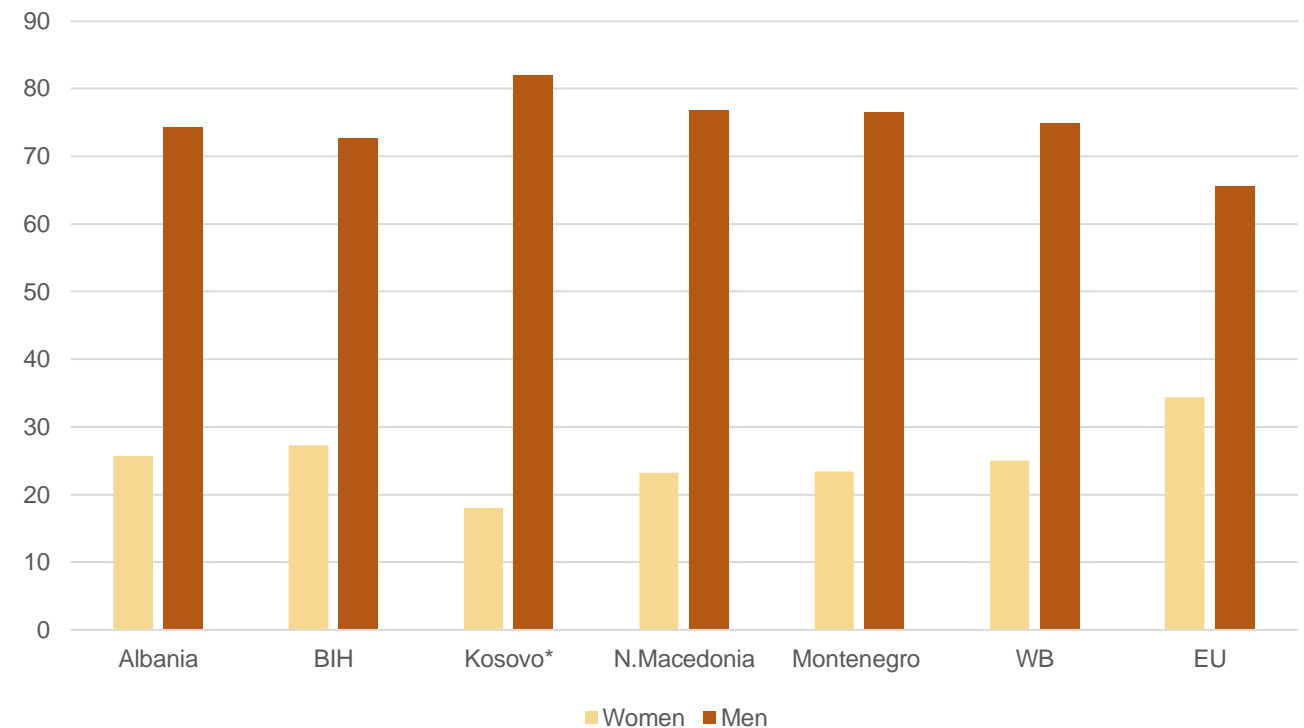
Gender stereotypes represent **one of the main barriers to women's entrepreneurship**: the most cited reason impeding women entrepreneurs from establishing a firm is that entrepreneurship is stereotyped as a "masculine task".

Many surveyed showed that women-led enterprises face more prominent obstacles to the use of financial products and services.

Traditional instruments, such as training and grants, do not always reach them, and need to be expanded.

It is necessary that trainings and grants be more focused on women as a target group.

Self-employment in Western Balkans



* For the United Nations Development Programme, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999).



WHAT DO WE KNOW ?

**WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO
EMPOWER WOMEN
ECONOMICALLY?**

AND WHAT DOES IT ENTAIL?

UNDP 2022



Screening

women's status in WB economy

Illustration or graphic

Women make up only about **40 percent** of the total employed in the Western Balkan region, while more than **23 percent** hold **insecure jobs**. With the exception of Albania, women are also underrepresented in decision-making positions at local and national levels.

Considerable challenges and barriers limit women's entrepreneurship opportunities: **women represent only 27.5 percent of business owners** and tend to operate in smaller, non-capital intensive and low-income sectors, often lacking access to credit and networking opportunities.

Working women

Insecure jobs of women

Working men

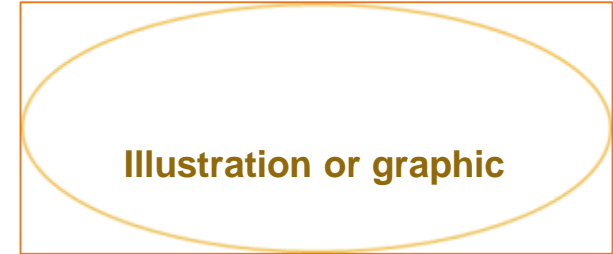
Screening

women's status in WB economy

Women in the Western Balkan region **perform on average three times more unpaid work than men** and spend about **half as much time in paid work**.

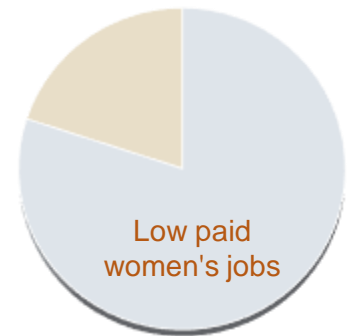
Women also account for almost **80 percent of workers in low-paid care sectors** (i.e. education, health and social care).

Gender stereotypes prevent many girls and women in the region from choosing education and career paths



Unpaid work

stereotypes



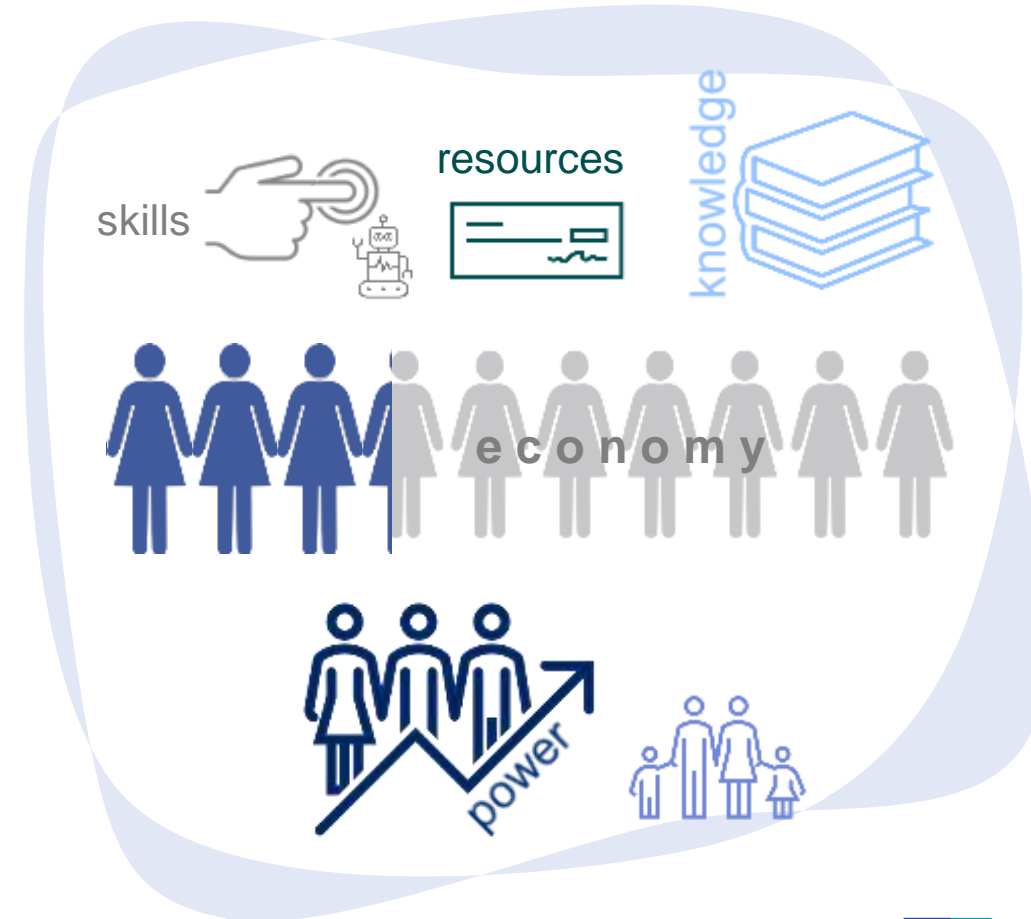
Screening

women's status in WB economy

Gender stereotypes prevent many girls and women in the region from choosing education and career paths in STEM fields: the share of women in STEM occupations is as low as 14 percent. Gender pay gaps and gender bias in technology further impede women's economic empowerment

What economic empowerment of women entails ?

1. Solutions to women empowerment, including in the workplace, are neither straightforward nor singular. They require a combination of sustain efforts to break norms, re-moulding policies and attitudes of employers or financial institutions to accommodate women's needs so as they don't have to choose between the roles they play at work or in the family.
2. Women's economic empowerment is beneficial not only for individual women but also for their families, households, communities and societies.
3. Women's economic empowerment is transformative process that helps women to move from limited power, voice, and choice in the economy to having the skills, resources, and opportunities needed to compete equitably in markets as well as the agency to control and benefit from economic gains.
4. Women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets and market information are preconditions for women's entrepreneurship development
5. Empowered women have built self-esteem, and consequently become highly-motivated employees and leaders who build good relationships and make strategically important decisions.





REPORT ON FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Qualitative Research 2022

For UNDP | By Ipsos

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OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

- The research was carried out with the aim of detecting and developing women's entrepreneurship potential in the Adria region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Serbia).
- The main goal of this research was to examine the perceptions of women entrepreneurs on socio-economic system's incentives and barriers for development of women's entrepreneurship.

METHODOLOGY

The target group included women entrepreneurs from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Serbia engaged in diverse areas of entrepreneurship including but not limited to innovative (software, IT, consulting, playrooms with digital and other innovative approaches...), traditionally female (hairdressers, weaving, agriculture...), hospitality and tourism, etc.



	Brief description
Desk analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• overview of existing data on representation of women in parliament, governments and senior management positions in 6 countries included in the Research• reviewed relevant documents by country, statistical databases and international reports
Online community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two online discussions• Discussion duration: 11th – 13th May 2022
Follow-up online focus group discussions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two online focus groups discussions Focus group discussion date: 16th May 2022



REPORT ON FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS

Qualitative research MAJOR FINDINGS on Women's Entrepreneurship in WB 6

I - Contrary to general belief, **women are not necessarily seeking to work less once they have the family** but are seeking flexibility in managing their time so that they can reconcile their different roles. Understanding the difference between the two is key in changing the stereotypes and biases towards women's economic activities (both entrepreneurship as well as employment or other income-generating engagement).

II - **Even where support is available, it's either not reaching the target audience or it's not relevant** - approach of institutions in systematic measuring the impact and relevance of their support would allow for continued fine-tuning and adjustment in advocacy strategies to ensure higher uptake among those who the support is aimed for.

Qualitative research MAJOR FINDINGS on Women's Entrepreneurship in WB 6

Reasons behind gender gap in entrepreneurship are not so clear – cut:

- Large number of entrepreneurs points to inadequate credit terms, such as collateral requirements and interest rates that are still accompanied with administrative barriers including high likelihood to be discouraged as borrowers.
- Absence of soft-package support such as tutorial or mentorship schemes to women entrepreneurs have been reported repeatedly including for start ups.
- Lack of adequate taxation system that encourages women's entrepreneurship and stronger involvement in business
- Poor enrolment of women into STEM field highly important for jobs of future either through formal or informal education

Qualitative research MAJOR FINDINGS on Women's Entrepreneurship in WB 6

Women's entrepreneurship must be examined both at the individual level (i.e. the choice of becoming self-employed) and at the firm level (the performance of women owned and managed firms) in order to fully understand the differences between men's and women's entrepreneurship.

Women's entrepreneurship is dependent on both demand side which is predominately gender blind political and institutional framework, family policy and market sources) and supply side factors - the availability of suitable individuals to occupy entrepreneurial roles.

Women's entrepreneurship depends on both the situation of women in society and the role of entrepreneurship in that same society. Both the factors that affect the gender system and the factors that affect entrepreneurship in society are involved.

Potential clearer, more available support and encouragement through educations related to writing of business plans, ways to further develop and innovate, could possible strongly influence further expansion of female entrepreneurship

There is visible lack of relying on systemic support from State and organizations, lack of knowledge related to administrative protocols and strong relying on personal competence and support from immediate circle (family and friends) – and this is the main specific all across the region



QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN WB 6

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH ON WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN WB6

GENERAL OUTLOOK

The main precondition for a successful entrepreneurship lies in good organisational skills, successful team leading, cautiousness in making decisions, tolerance and empathy. However, it has been observed that women continuously invest more effort in proving themselves as capable and generally a stronger drive to demonstrate their professional worth, due to existing patriarchal gender regimes in all WB6.

Women entrepreneurs recognise other women in business as successful and equally professional as men, as the result of individual abilities, management and self-confidence related to their own capabilities and potential of the business idea, but at the same time acknowledge far more work and assertiveness to get there.

CURRENT OPERATING

Current state of business is generally assessed as stable or improving.

Female entrepreneurs from all WB 6 countries have a generally optimistic outlook regarding the future of their businesses, but are highly aware of potentially severe negative effects of the global economic crisis, pandemic and geopolitical circumstances (e.g. the war in Ukraine).

DECISION ABOUT OPENING A BUSINESS

Primary reason for women to start businesses in WB6 is to accommodate work to their family needs that allows more flexibility and freedom than working for someone else.

Furthermore self-realization and a change of current job status quo – in order to have more freedom and independence to organize professional life and / or express one's full potential and creativity are among the most frequent reasons behind opening a business.

Qualitative research on Women's Entrepreneurship in WB 6

SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT

Expectations and perception of systemic support differ across WB region – but in general recognize national and local governing institutions; financial and non financial support from financial institutions, NGOs, business associations, but also close surroundings such as family and friends

However, women entrepreneurs reported that they are not always aware of importance of systemic and institutionalised support due to lack of information. Accordingly, they don't share opinion that state institutions should be urged to provide more comprehensive protection and support of female entrepreneurships.

Women entrepreneurs tend to maintain informal and personal connections for exchange of their experiences, and do not express a consistent idea related to the necessity to set up formal organisation of female businesses

Starting a business was supported by institutions either in a form of grants, or loans, while savings and constant financial help from their family was another modality of financing.

WORK – LIFE BALANCE

Women entrepreneurs recognise that there is a huge work in time invested in their business and that work life balance as such does not exist. It has been difficult for women in general to

Still, support from the family enables them to run their business

If systemic work life balance would be in place women recognize following benefits:

- higher level of general life satisfaction by doing what they love,
- self-realization,
- expanding their social network,
- proving themselves to be capable and resourceful

Qualitative research on Women's Entrepreneurship in WB 6

FUTURE SCENARIOS

Predicting future is hard being highly influenced by the global economic crisis and majority entrepreneurs keep the current focus is on stabilization of work and staying stable, coping with current challenges. Expanding business towards regional markets remains ambition of some entrepreneurs.

Expectation for stronger institutional support by providing financial stimuli and aid, including in crisis and through trainings, education and other means of support.

Digitalisation and integration of technology in business adjusting to market needs and opportunities remains priority for women's entrepreneurs.

Increased investment towards development of business skills and professional knowledge related to running a business.

Creating online platforms for business promotion and doing business online is also recognised and important future step.

EXPECTATIONS FROM EU INTEGRATIONS

Expectations from EU integrations differ across countries and are most neutrally perceived in Macedonia, while they meet with the most positive reactions in Kosovo* and Albania

Standardisation with EU laws is the main expected outcome from such integrations. Reactions to this outcome are twofold:

- On the one side, this will bring potential exchange of experiences in the region, accessibility to international funds, recognition within the international context
- The downsides refer to grey areas in which some of female entrepreneurs currently operate in order to sustain their businesses. New EU laws will prevent this (Montenegro), or they will be required to switch to legal software which are currently considered expensive (Serbia)



RESULTS PER COUNTRY

MONTENEGRO

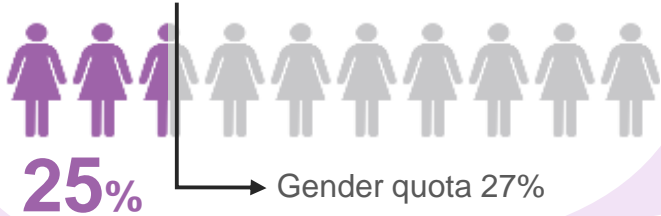
LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In order to develop and encourage female entrepreneurship in Montenegro, a set of documents was adopted, which are harmonized with both documents at the national level and at the international level, especially with the EU integration process and EU legislation and strategic documents:

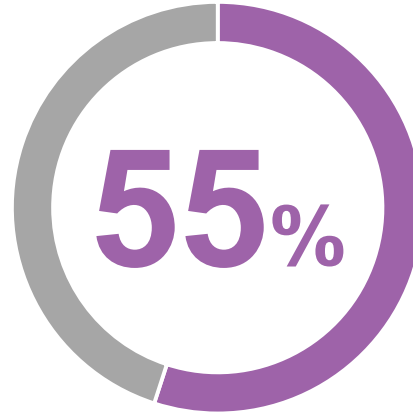
- **The Law on Gender Equality**, which specifically emphasizes that state bodies, state administration bodies and local governments, public institutions, public companies, as well as companies and entrepreneurs are obliged to, in order to achieve gender equality in all stages of planning, adoption and implementing decisions, as well as undertaking activities within their jurisdiction, assess and evaluate the impact of those decisions and activities on the position of women and men. (Article 3)
- **National strategy for gender equality 2021-2025**, which defined the following vision "For a society in which all women and men and persons of different sexual and gender identities have equal opportunities to contribute to the sustainable development of Montenegro and to equally enjoy its benefits." The goal that was set "To reach a higher level of gender of equality in Montenegro by 2025", is implemented through three operational goals.
- **Strategy for the development of women's entrepreneurship 2021-2024**. The three strategic goals (favorable business environment; better finances and advocacy of the interests and positioning of women entrepreneurs) that have been set, strive to fulfill the vision that reads "an encouraging business environment and systemic programmatic and institutional support contribute to the development, sustainability and competitiveness of women's entrepreneurship, which becomes a generator of economic growth , the creation of new jobs and the economic development of Montenegro."

GENDER STATISTICS

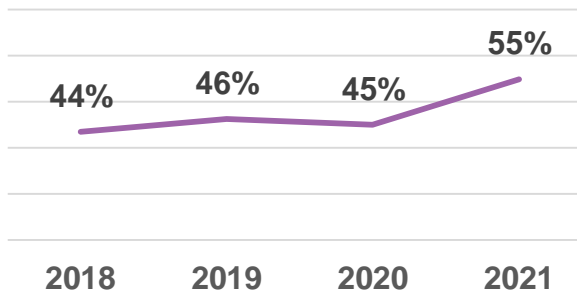
Montenegro is very close to its gender quota when it comes to **women** parliamentarians



Gender Equality Index 2020

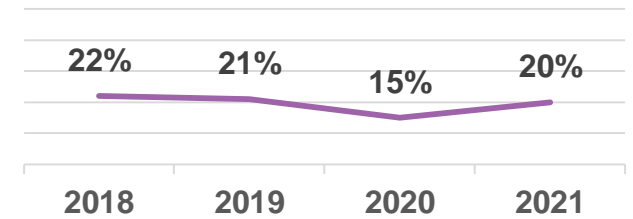


The share of **women** in senior management positions in public administration is above the EU-27 average (44% in 2021)

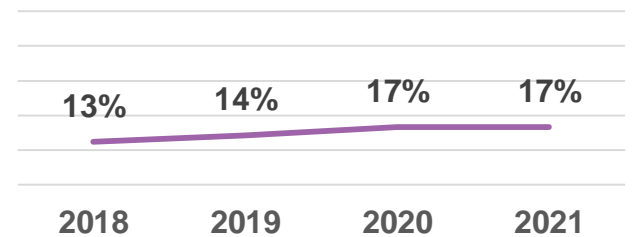


No women in the highest decision-making body of the National academy of science.

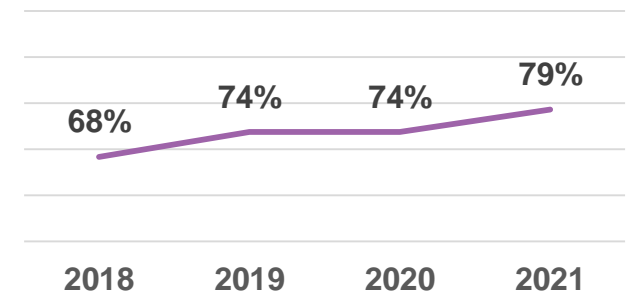
20% of board members in the largest listed companies registered in Montenegro are **women**



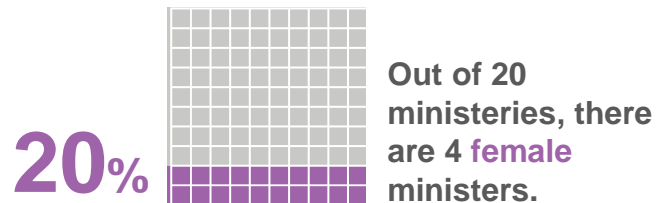
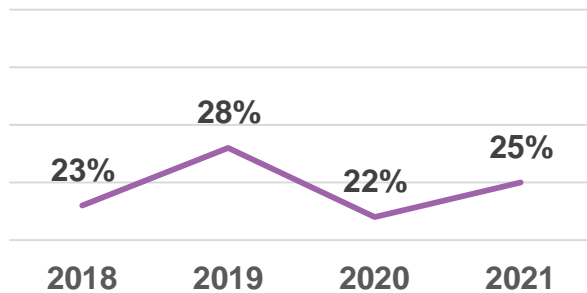
17% of **women** hold highest decision-making bodies of national central bank in Montenegro



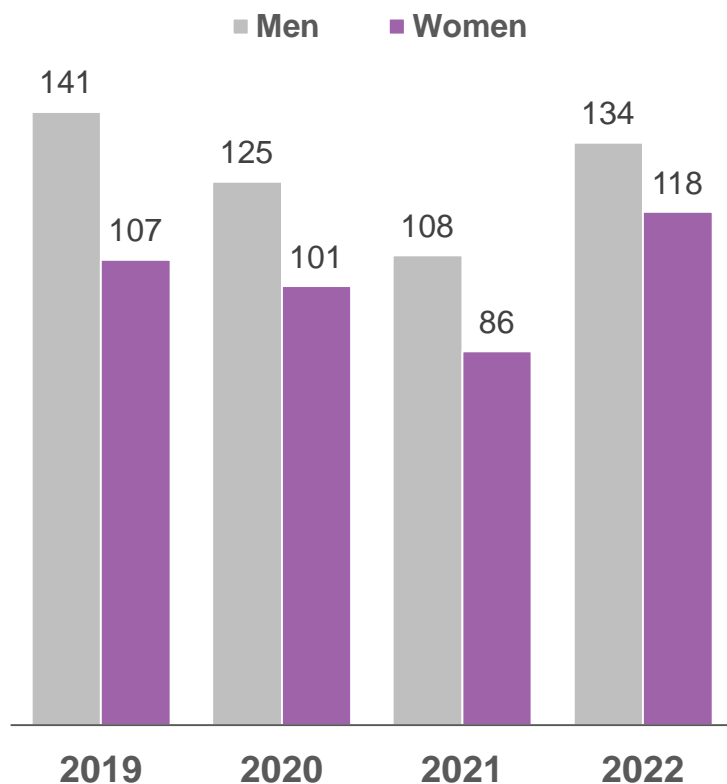
Percentage of female judges



The share of **women** in the Parliament

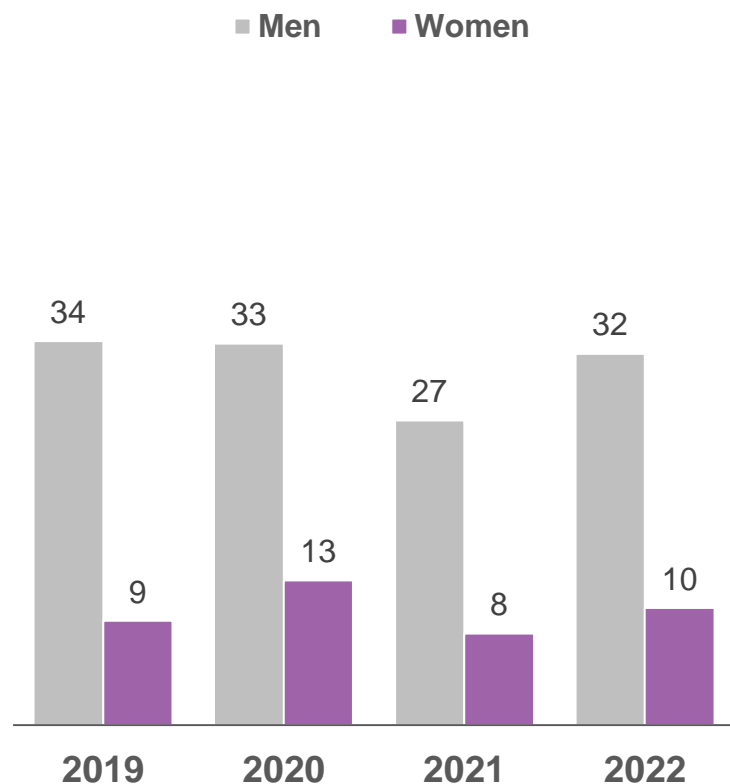


Number of employed by sex (Q2 2019 – 2022)



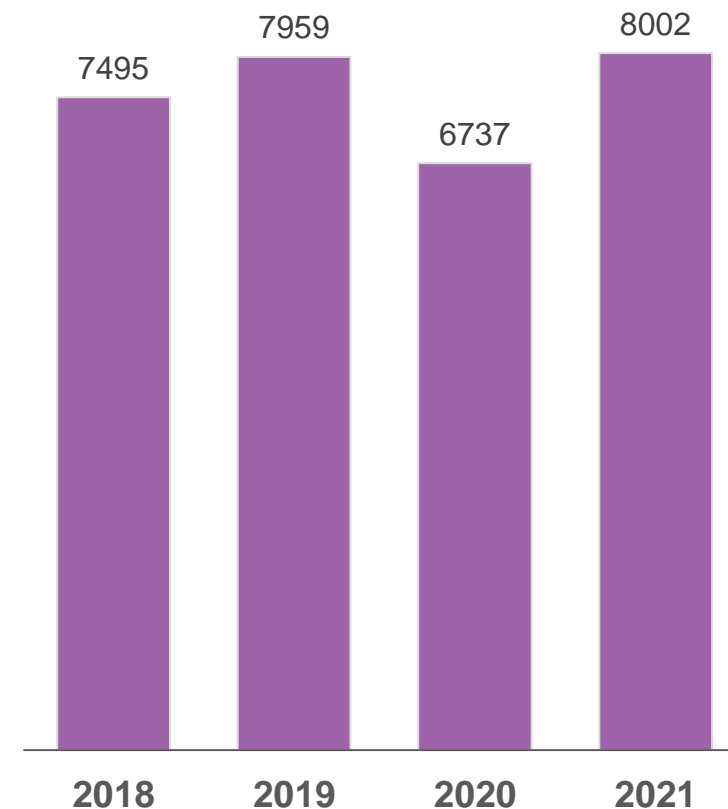
*Given in thousands

Number of selfemployed by sex (Q2 2019 – 2022)



*Given in thousands

GDP per capita



*GDP is presented in EUR

Decisions about starting a business



PREVIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS

Working experience of current female entrepreneurs in Montenegro can be divided into two main groups:

- participants aged 30+ previously worked at **state-owned companies, in unsatisfactory working conditions** (late salaries, workers often being made redundant, requests to retrain, devastation of companies)
- others **had experience in similar enterprises** and decided to try their own luck, with support of family members and close friends

DECISION ABOUT STARTING BUSINESS

Main triggers for a change and for making the decision to start their own business:

- decline of state-owned companies they worked for
- nepotism and unfair treatment from superiors
- late salaries
- consequences of taking maternity leave (being fired or made redundant)
- aspiration to be an independent entrepreneur

BUSINESS PLAN CREATION

In majority of cases, business plans for future entrepreneurship are made **single-handedly** - there is a **visible lack of information and systemic education regarding business plan drafting and preparation**

Only one female entrepreneur got help in business plan preparation from **Employers' association**.

It is necessary to invest in making support systems more visible.



Supporting mechanisms for starting a business

Majority did not have initial capital for investment and when they applied for business loans, their requests were refused by financial institutions, while only a minority of women secured donations from institutions (Employers' Association and Norwegian program supporting female entrepreneurship in rural areas, or a local government (Bar)).

The main sources of initial investments were personal savings and loans from family members, and in a few cases help from non-governmental institutions and rarely, from a local government in collaboration with NGOs. A number of entrepreneurs did several other side jobs in order to support their own business.

Main support and encouragement for starting their own business came either:

- from **colleagues**

- or **family and close friends**

“The start was very slow, with a small loan from my family. As business developed I saved a bit for further needs of business. In the end, a bigger loan from family enabled me to rent premises, and my husband, friends and children help. If I had had a bigger starting capital or help, everything would have gone much faster, but this is good too. I got advice about a business plan from a friend that knows these things.”

“I received starting capital from Municipality of Bar, and I borrowed the rest from relatives. If I had had a bigger amount of money I would have registered a DOO company and employ a programmer. My cousin helped me with business plan development.”

“I got a loan from the bank and my husband helped too. I purchased the material and designed a shop. I could have improved business much more with more money. This way I would skip some stages. I made the business plan with my family.”

“At the beginning, I didn't know any female business owners. But along the way I met many similar women with similar stories and they all went through more or less similar difficulties and challenges.”



Current operating

Majority of women entrepreneurs express **satisfaction and assess that their decision to start their own business was right and they have no regrets** about it.

The main decisions are made by them personally, but in many cases family members or business partners are consulted for bigger investments, before hiring new employees or introducing innovations and changes.

The main goal is (and only a minority of longer existing business managed to achieve it) **stable monthly profit and employment of more workers.**

The pandemic influenced entrepreneurships negatively and prolonged the plans for expansion – some women entrepreneurs managed to survive due to state help (provided for three months) as well as through minimizing expenses and reducing or cutting their own salaries.

Associates

The majority of businesses employ **members of their own family** – part-time or seasonally – the domain and capacity of businesses allow such functioning for now.

Innovations

Although **seen as important** – particularly **digitalization and specializations of skills**, in reality innovations happen mainly in the domain of online (Facebook and Instagram pages) and offline social networking in the form of seminars. Additional education is needed on the digitalization of business, in order to strengthen economic power.

“Now it is much easier, I go forward slowly, it is easier than before, because now I know what I am doing – I got the experience. It was slow learning, since I did everything myself, and was under very big stress.”

“I am very satisfied with my work, I do what I love, and dreamt about as kid. I am my own boss and I decide about everything by myself. There is always something to learn, some novelties and that makes the job itself better. It was hard during the pandemic, but everything got back to normal, it is harder now but hopefully it will get better.”

“All my expectations are fulfilled, nothing happened overnight, I want to emphasise that, but in time everything turned out as it should be. I make decisions in my company but the most important consultant is my husband.”

“I am not connected with regional businesses. There was one training I participated in and it changed the way I approach business. I aspire to implement digitalization and have a web shop but that will hopefully come one day, in time, it is not crucial now.”



Systems of support

THERE IS VERY LOW AWARENESS RELATED TO NEED FOR MORE COMPREHENSIVE AND SYSTEMIC SUPPORT FROM GOVERNING INSTANCES WHICH WOULD ADDRESS SPECIFICS OF FEMALE WORKING PRACTICES

The dominant perception is that there is **no sufficiently developed systemic support for female entrepreneurship** from State or from local institutions.

Some benefits and grants for new businesses appeared in several Municipalities (in Bar and Niksic).

There is an **expressed need for existence of Office for entrepreneurship** organised in Municipalities which could provide **information to new entrepreneurs, organise and systemise the data base** of all business.

Support from **state and local government stimulate legitimate entrepreneurship** (“*rad na bijelo*”) through **tax allowances and contributions**, but there is also perceived downside of this – lack of initial business aggressiveness, seen as crucial for success.

There is a certain degree of support from other female businesses through **Business Women Associations** (especially in larger cities), but at the same time, **solidarity exists only on a small scale** – in the form of exchange of personal contacts among similar entrepreneurships, especially in smaller rural areas.

“I don’t expect anything from the State and I never did. Now they started some programs but for me it is irrelevant – it only made my life and work harder. We, entrepreneurs finance the State and when they should have helped us they did nothing – especially during the pandemic.”

“When it comes to support I think women businesses are a relatively new concept and the system should grow and learn along with us.”

“It would be good to have an office which can provide some instructions and try to solve some problems with us, collect data so that as many women as possible can become familiar with existing programs.”

“This year Municipality of Bar, along with UK Government and International organisation gave 7 grants for female entrepreneurship and I was one of the recipients.”

General outlook on female entrepreneurship and future



GENERAL OUTLOOK

There is a general perception that **it is harder for women to make it in business in their local surroundings** – due to lack of trust, general and internalised patriarchal stereotypes that still prevail - women in business have to **prove their value in a much harder way than their male counterparts.**

In dominantly patriarchal environment **personal features of particular women, stubbornness, ambition** and even **spite** are perceived as crucial for successful entrepreneurship.

PERSONAL LIFE

Balancing family life and entrepreneurship is **considered admirable** – women who can achieve both are still perceived as heroes – and treated with additional respect. It is similar to entrepreneurship itself: **only strong, persistent women can have it both** – family and successful entrepreneurship, and this requires **excellent organisation, responsibility** and readiness for various personal sacrifices.

“I think that a capable woman can do whatever she wants, despite dominant stereotypes “

FUTURE

It is expected that the state can help by providing **financial stimuli** and **aid in case of crisis** (pandemic, for example) **and through trainings/ education.**

Also, subsidies from NGOs and foreign or local funds / Municipalities as at least part of financial aid are **expected in the future.**

Main positive impacts from EU integrations that are expected: potential **exchange of experiences in the region** and travel and education abroad.

SERBIA

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

To encourage female entrepreneurship in Serbia, the following acts and regulations are in place:

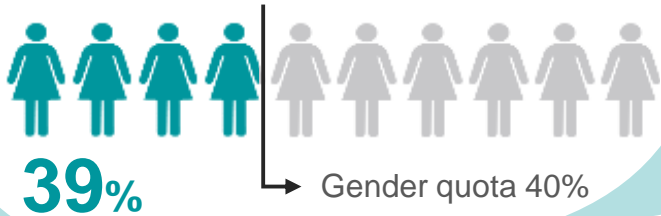
- **Law on Gender Equality:** The law defines the concept, meaning and policy measures for achieving and improving gender equality. These measures entail creating equal opportunities for participation and equal treatment of women and men in the field of work, employment and self-employment, social and health care, education, as well as in number of other fields. The law also regulates measures to suppress and prevent all forms of gender-based violence, violence against women and violence in the family. Further, the law regulates the obligations of public authorities, employers, and other social partners to integrate a gender perspective in the field in which they operate.
- **Strategy for Gender Equality:** This strategy establishes comprehensive measures for the promotion of gender equality as a factor that encourages the development of society in the Republic of Serbia.
- **Action plan for 2022 and 2023 for the implementation of the Strategy for Gender Equality for the period from 2021 to 2030:** This action plan is a public policy document adopted for the purpose of operationalizing and achieving the general and specific goals foreseen in the Strategy for gender equality.
- The Government of the Republic of Serbia also has established **the Coordinating Body for Gender Equality** to promote gender equality in the Republic of Serbia. This represents a national coordination mechanism for gender equality issues and has a mandate to coordinate the work of state administration bodies and other institutions to improve gender equality and the position of women and men in the Republic of Serbia.

Further, specifically related to female entrepreneurship, the following program was adopted during 2022:

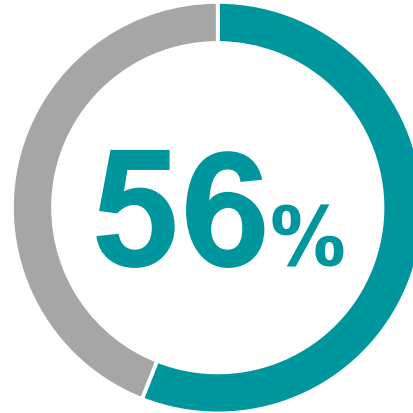
- **Program for encouragement of entrepreneurship** development through financial support for women entrepreneurs and young people in 2022: Possibility to participate in this program was given to entrepreneurs and micro and small businesses, whose founder and legal representative is a woman, or a young person aged 35 or less.

GENDER STATISTICS

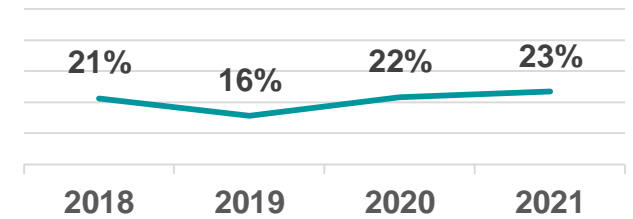
Serbia almost achieved its gender quota regarding **women** parliamentarians



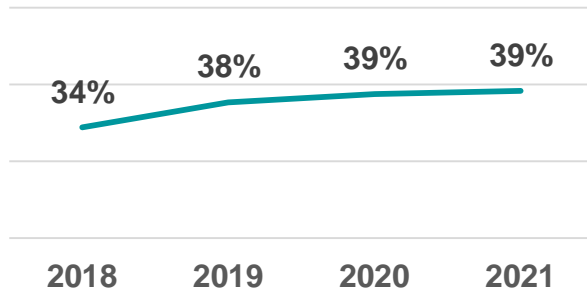
Gender Equality Index 2020



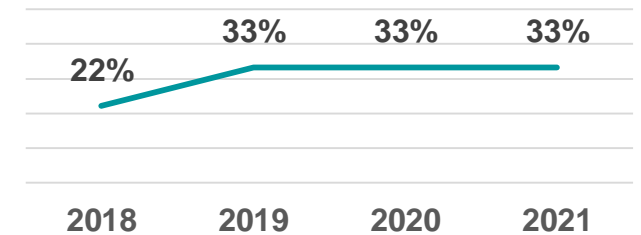
23% of board members in the largest listed companies registered in Serbia are **women**



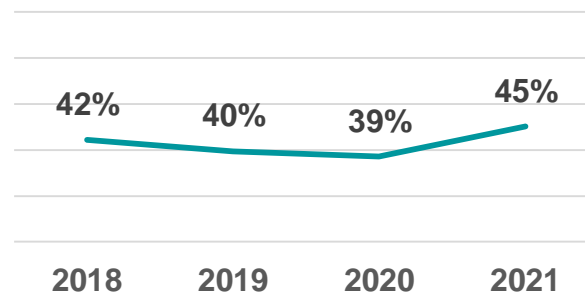
The share of **women** in the Parliament



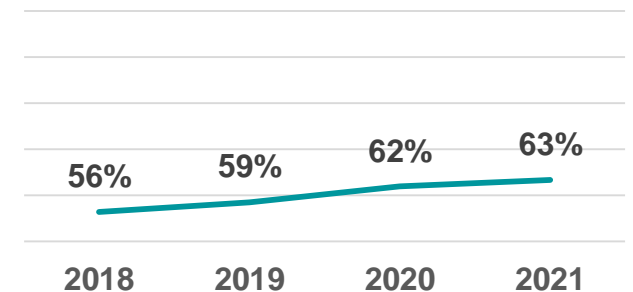
33% of **women** hold the highest decision-making bodies of national central banks in Serbia



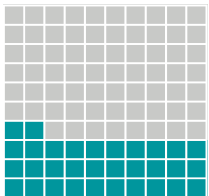
The share of **women** in senior management positions in public administration is slightly above the EU-27 average



Percent of **female** judges



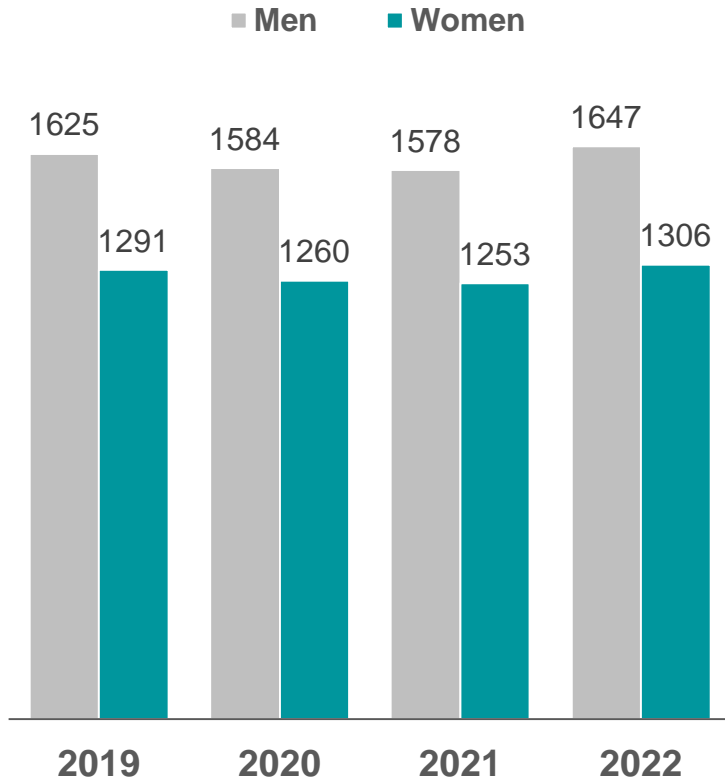
32%



Out of 28 ministeries, there are 9 **female** ministers.

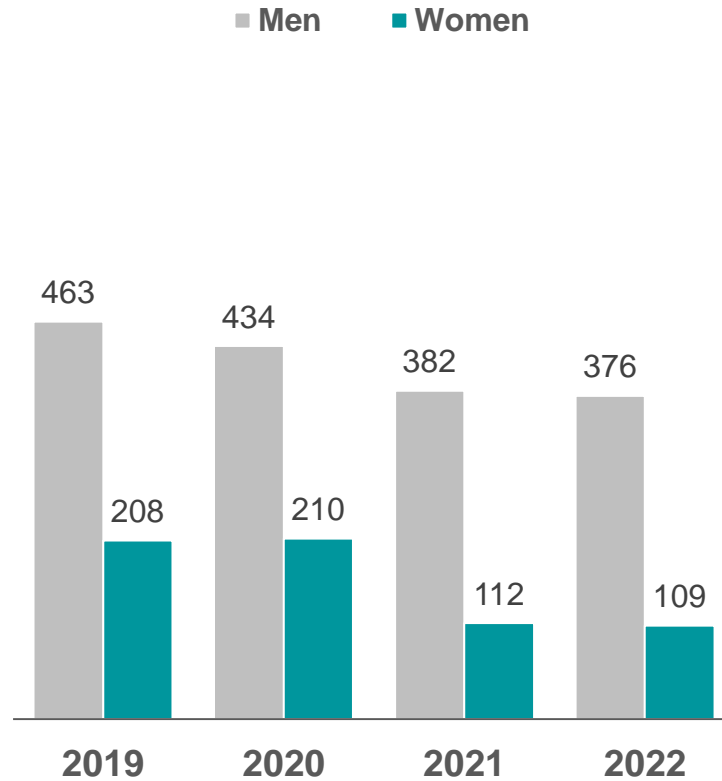
*Out of 14 members in the highest decision-making body of the National academy of science, there is only 1 **women**.*

Number of employed by sex (Q2 2019 – 2022)



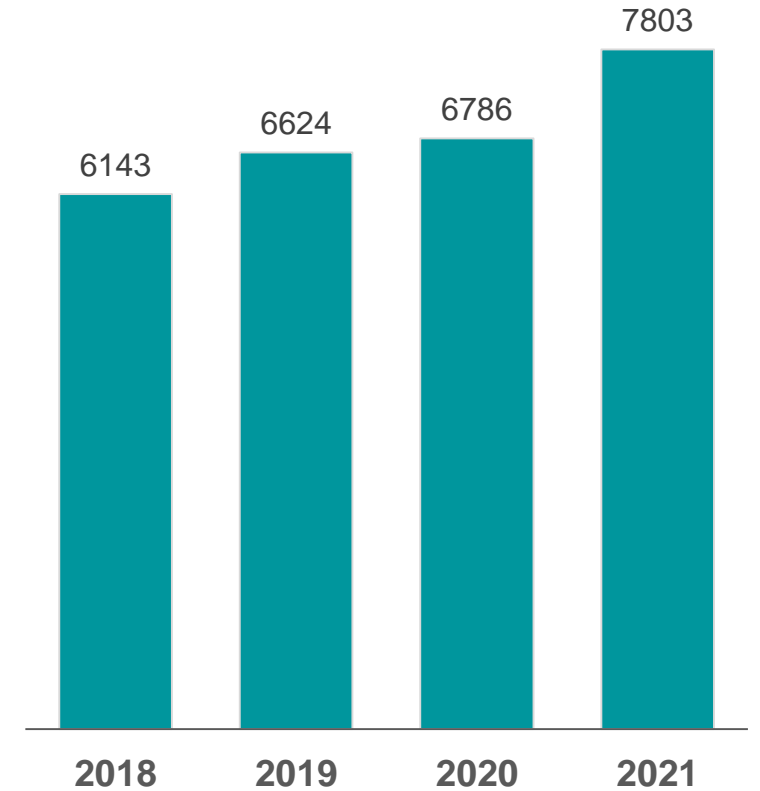
*Given in thousands

Number of self-employed by sex (Q2 2019 – 2022)



*Given in thousands

GDP per capita



*GDP is presented in EUR

Decisions about starting a business



PREVIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS

The majority of women prior to starting their own business worked **in the field of education and gained expertise and knowledge for future private business.**

Some women worked in other private enterprises under **precarious** dubious conditions (unreported, unpaid overwork) yet managed to gain additional skills to start their own private companies.

DECISION ABOUT STARTING BUSINESS

Decision to start one's own business is primarily based on experience and knowledge, as well as on a desire to be "one's own boss".

The decision was the result of different reasons, some of which were:

- **Generally unsatisfactory working conditions** – small salaries, night shifts, unpaid overtime work.
- **Unfair treatment from employers.**
- **Wish to self actualise and create work atmosphere according to personal needs.**

BUSINESS PLAN CREATION

In majority of cases, women made business plans on their own **or in cooperation with family members** (husband, sister) or relatives with similar experiences.

Administrative support was obtained from an accountant – in the majority of cases procedures for opening entrepreneurship went fast and smoothly.



Supporting mechanisms for starting a business

Bank loans, family and personal savings were primary sources for the start of entrepreneurship.

Starting a business was not easy. There is demanding administration and procedures to go through.

All females get primary source of support:

- **in their family**
- from **friends** with similar, private businesses

“I needed financial help during the second year. That year, due to lack of work I didn’t manage to pay all dues. In that situation my brother lent me some money to survive.”

“I sat down with my family and one relative who runs his own business. We made a plan, put everything on paper and worked on details. It meant writing down all the expenses for material, renting the space, possible preliminary loses and gains. I used my own finances that I got by selling a piece of land that I owned.”

“We had family savings, and my husband got a bank loan for 3000 EUR, as he was able to get it at the time.”

“I made my business plan alone. I realized that I needed to go through that process myself in order to understand what I want and need, and what I should be prepared to do if I want my independency.”



Current operating

Although majority of women express satisfaction with current work, general unfavourable circumstances influenced certain **stagnation and tactical restructuring**. Also, due to slow development and overall circumstances, certain expectations were not fulfilled, i.e. being able to travel more or have more time for themselves– having a private business turned out to be a full time one-person job – despite help from family and friends, the main decisions are made by business owners.

Associates

Most women, primarily those who own a service-providing business for which they rent/ own a space, work with family members or have one or two professional employees. The choice of associates primarily depends on the type of work (a graphic designer and a life coach work from home and do not need additional staff), while beauty salon and textile production entrepreneurs have employees and family members working along. Advice from more experienced friends among women entrepreneurs are given and asked for, mainly in domain of administration and regulations.

Innovations

Approach to innovations depends mostly on the type of work – digitalisation, fiscalization and further education are considered relevant, but most of the innovations are related to presence on social networking platforms (Instagram, Facebook).

“I expected to have more freedom for myself, to travel and have a break whenever I want, but I still have obligations to clients and cannot just leave.”

“I am well positioned in professional circles now, and it is far better than at the beginning. I fulfilled my own expectations– I work in line with my values, I managed not to neglect my personal and professional beliefs. But I have expectations that have not come true yet, such as the tempo of development, I had to delay some activities, and for some I feel I am not ready yet.”

“I didn’t have to fire anyone during the crisis, when faced with a decision I have to make I consult my daughter, but the final decision is always on me.”

“I bring all decisions in my company, of course I consult my colleague friends in terms of what to change, innovate. The crisis was more intense in the last year, currently it is better, even though there are always oscillations, but I manage to cover all the expenses and I am not in debt to anyone and that is most important.”



Systems of support

THERE IS DISSAPPOINTMENT REGARDING THE SYSTEMIC SUPPORT. IT IS MAINLY EXPECTED FROM STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT, YET IT IS MISSING, SO FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS MAINLY RELY ON CLOSE SURROUNDINGS AND THEIR OWN PERSONAL CAPABILITIES AND MANAGING SKILLS. THERE IS NO EXPRESSED EXPECTATION OR IDEA ABOUT ALTERNATIVE SOURCES OF SUPPORT.

A dominant perception is that **there is no systemic support for female entrepreneurship except occasional financial aid** – there are expectations from State and local self-government to support small businesses in terms of **trainings, financial aid and allowances, free administrative and technical advice.**

This is especially relevant when we bear in mind the specific position of women in the system – issues and systemic solutions related to **reproductive health and its specifics (pregnancy leaves, etc.).**

Lack of support such as tutorials or mentoring schemes for women entrepreneurs

Perception of support from State and municipal institutions also depends on the area of work and on the specific city – in smaller local municipalities there is visible satisfaction with help offered by local government (during the pandemic specifically).

Main sources of trust and support are, similar to other countries in the region, mainly related to **close surroundings** (family, friends), **other entrepreneurs and personal pervasiveness and determination.**

Only few women have had experiences with Women's Business Association, however such organisations are assessed as mainly irrelevant for their line of work.

“It is a barrier for women in entrepreneurship – in societies (not only ours) women are expected to do house work, look after the family, small kids, and owning a business gives you more of a headache than pleasure and independence.”

“I get huge help and support from my close surroundings, but when it comes to our State, you cannot rely on it. First, there are prejudices about women in business and distrust in their professional capabilities. I accept help and advices only from my relatives and close friends, not only in money but also related to business related advices and suggestions”

“Female entrepreneurs are even more determined in their work. For example, we still miss elements in the bureaucratic system that are not adapted to specific position of women – reproductive health (pregnancy leaves, menstrual cycles that many women have serious issues with, these elements are not recognised by society.”

“I am very sociable, curious, I often ask around, but main support finally comes from people I trust the most - my family, a few friends and colleagues with whom I exchange experiences.”

General outlook on female entrepreneurship and future



GENERAL OUTLOOK

There is a strong belief that a woman entrepreneur has to **trust her own capacities and skills** – wider community can often discourage them, however, all women surpassed initial insecurities by strong will and relying on experience and determination.

There is an impression that female businesses rely on several skills specific to women: tolerance, patience, bravery, capacity to make something out of nothing, despite personal doubts and structural obstacles.

PERSONAL LIFE

It is thought that women who manage to run a successful business and have family life are admirable. In case of Serbia a lot of businesses included in the research are family-run businesses, so primary family is directly included in running and managing time and strategies **of work**.

The main frustration comes from the lack of free time for oneself, especially for women with higher education who run their business alone.

FUTURE

The main plans for future are either expanding to regional markets, or keeping the company on a similar level as current.

Plans also involve getting more education, opening more shops, intense advertising through social networks.

For minority of female entrepreneurs ambitions are rather simple – for **business to be kept at a sustainable level**, similar to one they already achieved.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

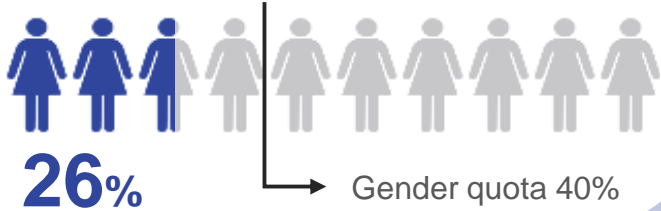
LEGAL FRAMEWORK

To encourage female entrepreneurship in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the following acts and regulations are in place:

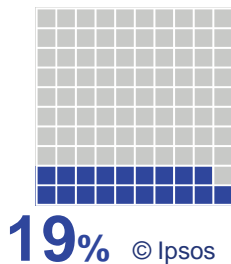
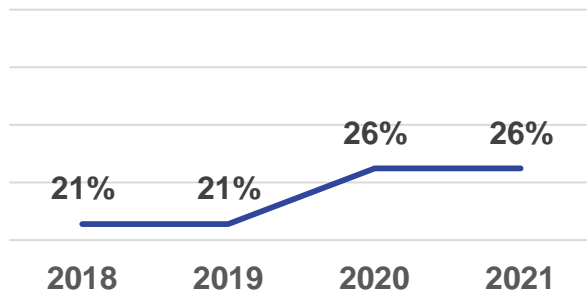
- **Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina:** This law regulates, promotes, and protects gender equality, guarantees equal opportunities and equal treatment of all persons, regardless of gender, in the public and private spheres of society, and regulates protection from gender-based discrimination. In charge for overseeing the implementation of this law is Agency for Gender Equality of BiH.
- **Law Prohibition of Discrimination:** This purpose of this law is to strengthen Bosnia and Herzegovina's mechanisms for fight against discrimination, including gender-based discrimination.
- Republic of Srpska has established **Council for Women's Entrepreneurship of the Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Srpska**, with the purpose of ensuring better coordination and support for the implementation of the following measures:
 - ✓ representing the interests of women entrepreneurs
 - ✓ enabling and facilitating networking with the purpose of creating business connections
 - ✓ development of support programs for acquiring new entrepreneurial knowledge and skills, as well as raising the capacity of female entrepreneurs
 - ✓ promoting female entrepreneurship
- Federation of BiH has established **the Gender Center of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina**, with the purpose of monitoring the status of women and their rights guaranteed by the national and international legislation, as well as promoting equal rights both for men and women.

GENDER STATISTICS

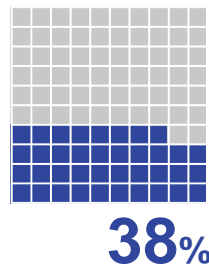
Bosnia and Herzegovina is still far from the established gender quota in the national parliament



The share of **women** in the Parliament



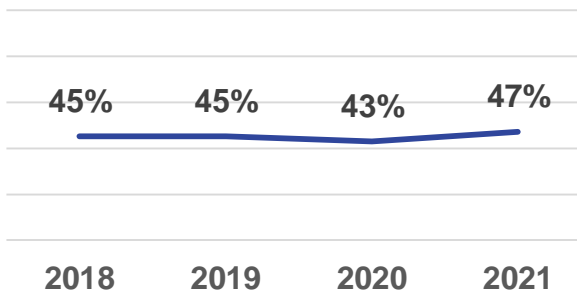
Out of 16 ministers, there are 3 **female** ministers in the Federation of BH and 6 in the Republic of Srpska



Gender Equality Index hasn't been developed

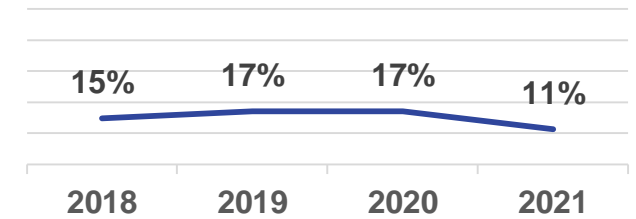
“The current obstacle to development of the Gender Equality Index in BiH is the lack of research implementation that is essential for the development of certain indicators needed to calculate domains within the Index, and hence the overall result of the Index.” (Country Gender Equality Profile of Bosnia and Herzegovina, UN Women 2021)

The share of **women** in senior management positions in public administration is close to the EU-27 average

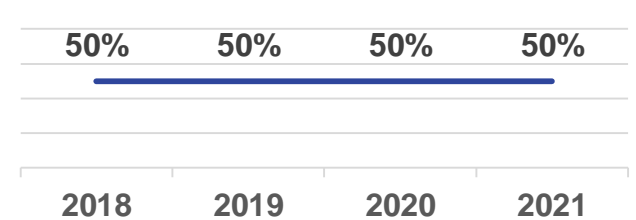


*Out of 16 members in the highest decision-making body of the National academy of science in, 4 are **women**.*

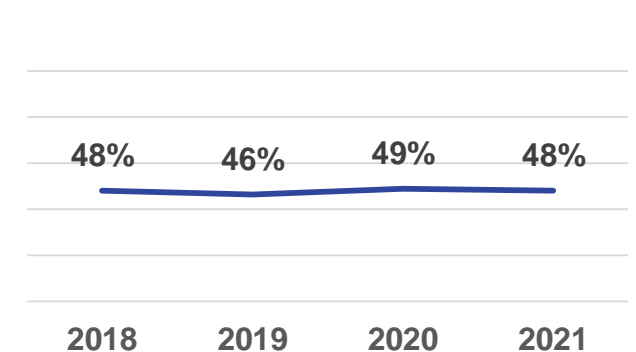
11% of board members in the largest listed companies registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina are **women**



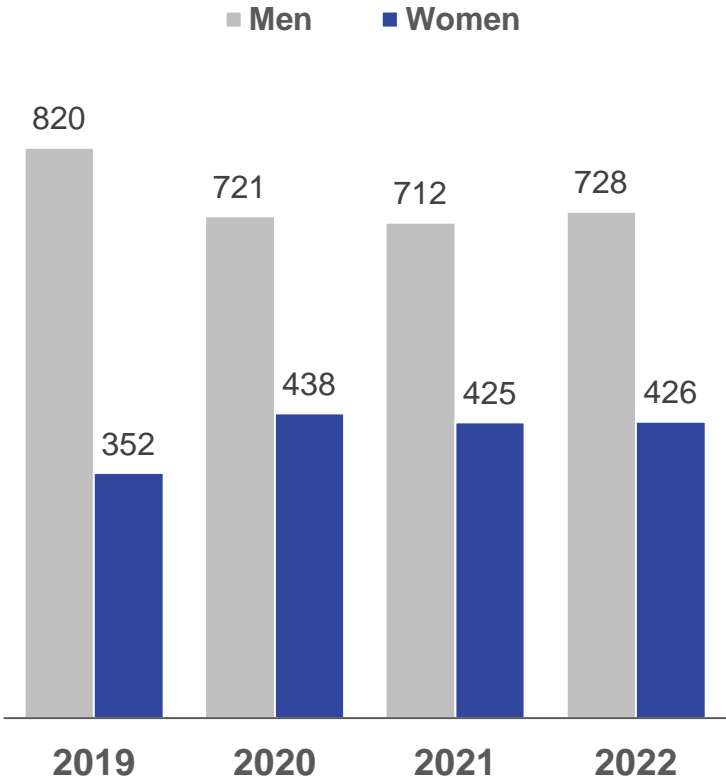
50% of **women** hold the highest decision-making bodies of national central banks in Bosnia and Herzegovina



Percent of **female** judges in supreme courts

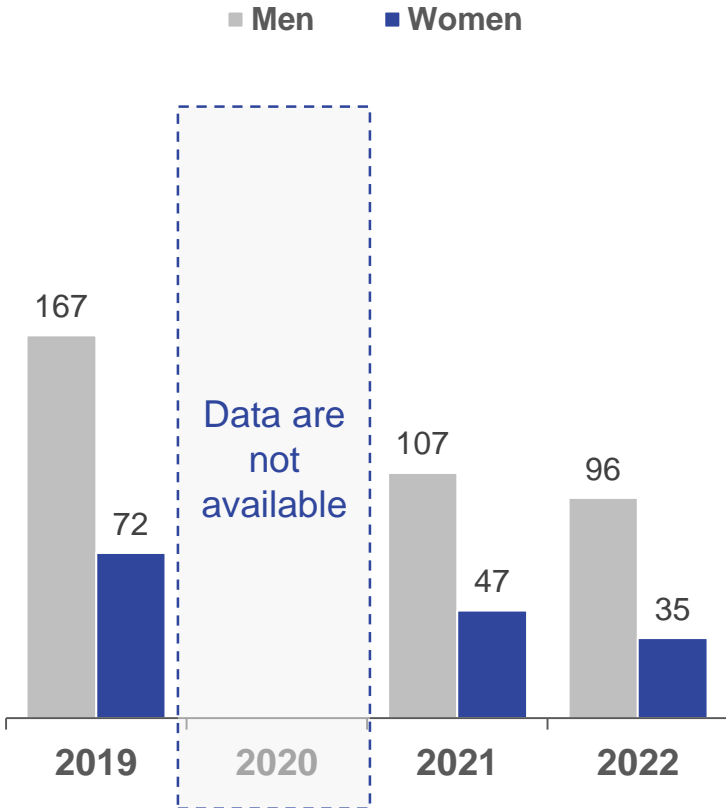


Number of employed by sex (Q2 2019 – 2022)



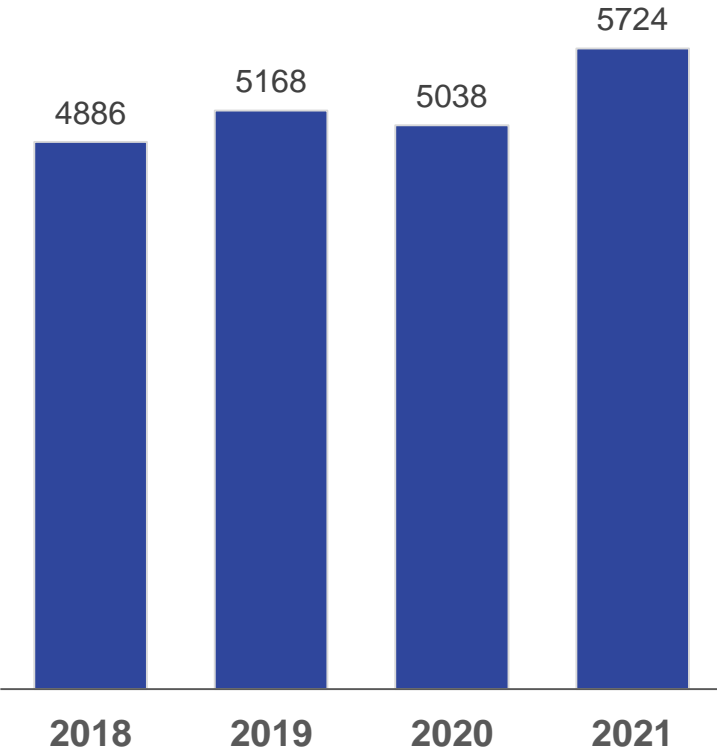
*Given in thousands

Number of selfemployed by sex (Q2 Second quarter 2019 – 2022)



*Given in thousands

GDP per capita



*GDP is presented in EUR



Decisions about starting a business



PREVIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS

Women either started working in the field that they were educated for, or changed a variety of jobs for financial reasons and in order to get experience, new skills or talents.

Majority of women **always worked on a certain additional and parallel skill**, improving it over the years until it became the source of inspiration and the main trigger for starting their own business.

DECISION ABOUT STARTING BUSINESS

Actual triggers for starting one' own business vary:

- Late salary payments and high demands by employers
- Poor working atmosphere
- Working long hours
- Decline of companies they worked for
- Personal need for self actualisation, combined with loss of work enthusiasm in previous jobs.

BUSINESS PLAN CREATION

Women made business plans **alone** or **with partners**, from scratch and without concrete background with the exception of two cases:

- Applying for grant from Federal Employment Bureau or Cantonal office for co-financing, although even in this case, business plan was made on one's own
- Business plan was made through support of members of Business Women Association of Bosnia



Supporting mechanisms for starting a business

A vast majority of women invested **their own savings** into starting a business, while some had **additional financial help from family members** and moral support from friends and relatives with similar experiences.

A minority applied for **Cantonal and Federal Competition** for donations and were awarded reimbursement for the first year of work.

However, the main initial support came from family, friends and relatives with similar experiences (similar to other countries in region).

Lack of knowledge regarding administrative protocols and strong reliance on personal competence and support from family and friends.

“I invested my savings in purchasing basic material. After that, I had some unexpected expenses were made, related to presentation, packaging and the work itself. I made a business plan myself relying on my own potentials.”

“I was aware of available grants and I waited for my turn for co-financing from Federal Employment Bureau, so I had a year of funded investment. It helped, but also made me feel too secure, so I didn’t look for clients aggressively enough.”

“It was a relief to have a relative with private business, so he taught me where to go and what to do. It was hard because it happened during COVID restrictions, so I couldn’t go anywhere personally.”

“I had about 1000 KM of my own savings. So I invested it into my private business.”



Current operating

Despite the dominant feeling that women did not regret starting their own business, there is a feeling of **certain stagnation and collision with initial expectations, as a direct result of inflation and the pandemic.**

The current state of business varies and depends on the company's field of work— while some businesses suffered a lot during COVID and regressed due to its consequences (service industry, beauty and cosmetics services), others experienced a rise in profit (craftwork, PU hygiene pads).

All major decisions related to work come from women themselves, although very often relatives and spouses are their main consultants when it comes to larger investments.

Associates

Majority of women are **the only employees** in their companies. Some work with relatives (sister, partner) while minority of businesses dealing with beauty and service industries have several employees, predominantly women. Collaboration between female entrepreneurs is considered very relevant and a network of similar entrepreneurs is considered to be one of the support pillars of women entrepreneurship, especially in unfavourable business circumstances.

Innovations

Main innovations are related to **online presence** – creation of websites and active social networking. Some innovations are intrinsically related to the type of work itself (sanitary towels), while others are related to **improvement of equipment** and the use of **more ecological raw material.**

“Main innovations are related to new machines for cleaning and the use of more eco-friendly detergents and cleaning products.”

“The best way to describe my earnings is to say that after my first year, I earned my first profit. It started moving from “positive zero”.

“At this moment post-pandemic period influences my private business a lot. The prices of raw material have increased a lot. If the situation were different, I'd be doing much better. The scope of work has been reduced after COVID, as well as the number of employees, and the prices have gone up...”

“I have regular clients who are satisfied and we are constantly trying to attract new ones. I make all business decisions on my own, but I do consult my husband.”



Systems of support

AWARENESS OF SYSTEMIC SUPPORT DIFFERS AND IS BASED ON EXPERIENCE – BUT A GENERAL IMPRESSION IS THAT IT SHOULD BE STRONGER AND MORE INSTITUTIONALISED, WHILE THE MAIN EMPHASIS IS ON FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP NETWORKS AND MUTUAL SUPPORT

Expectations of support **depend to a great degree on individual experience** – women who received grants and are included in work of business associations assess the situation as improving, with enough opportunities to apply for funds and learn how to run a business.

At the opposite end are women who rely mostly on support from their friends, family and local institutions.

Whatever the experience, all participants **consider networking of female entrepreneurship crucial** – whether through institutions (Business Associations) or private/ local initiatives.

There is little to low expectations and ideas related to what the actual systemic and institutionalised sustenance from International organisations or State itself should be like.

“Generally I think that if you don’t try it nobody will ask you to do something. I don’t want to comment on the State and their incompetence. I trust and rely on my family and I consult them the most. I think that women have to support each other and local governments should try to help more.”

“I believe that female entrepreneurships will grow, and we must be support to each other.”

“Many women entrepreneurs do not even try to apply for any public contests, and then, of course, they do not get any help. It is important to follow public contests and apply – on all levels.”

“In Sarajevo support for female entrepreneurship is developed and growing. In my case, when I decided to start my own business I was at the Academy for Female Entrepreneurship which was organised by Business Women Association.”

General outlook on female entrepreneurship and future



GENERAL OUTLOOK

Courage, persistence and organisation skills are considered crucial for success of a business regardless of gender.

There is a certain **tendency to neglect the gender element in the business sphere** – sharp, assertive and intelligent individuals with self-belief and good ideas are the ones that make their dreams come true.

Still, there is a **recognised dominant patriarchal stereotype** (internalised to some extent) considered to be the prevalent, but at the same time gradually changing – that women have to prove their entrepreneurial worth much more and harder than their male counterparts.

PERSONAL LIFE

There is an expectation that women still have to **individually prove their capabilities of being both successful at work and in their family duties** by relying on their own potentials and will.

There is an impression that families (husbands primarily) are there to help women entrepreneurs who are mothers, however, in the end, women carry most of the burden and their **personal capabilities are considered the key to success.**

“It is important for women to know how to organise time, work, family and find balance, and how the community looks at it is not my concern.”

FUTURE

Although they express generally optimistic views, there is a **bit of scepticism** related to strategies of survival in highly unfavourable global and local circumstances.

Further education, increase in the number of employees and expanding the business to be present in more shops and cities is the most optimistic prognosis. However, there are also more sceptical respondents who find it hard to cope with the current challenges.

NORTH MACEDONIA

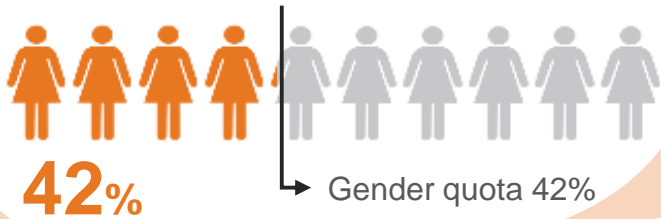
LEGAL FRAMEWORK

In order to develop and encourage female entrepreneurship in the Republic of Macedonia, a set of regulations, laws and strategies have been adopted and are constantly being upgraded and improved:

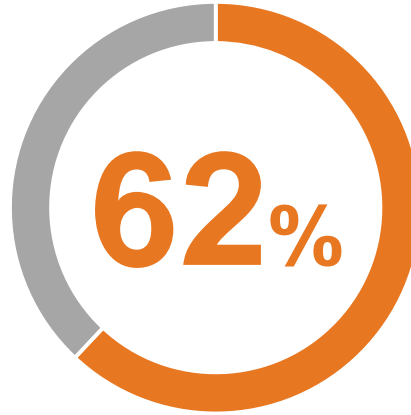
- **Law on equal opportunities for women and men** regulates the establishment of equal opportunities and the equal treatment of women and men in various fields, the basic and special measures for the establishment of equal opportunities for women and men, the rights and obligations of the entities responsible for ensuring equal opportunities for women and men, the procedure for determining unequal treatment of women and men, as well as the rights and duties of the Legal Representative for equal opportunities for women and men (hereinafter: the Advocate) as a designated person for implementing the procedure for determining unequal treatment of women and men.
- **Proposed law on gender equality (new 2022 proposal for improvement)** will contribute to overcoming obstacles and deficiencies in the effective provision of equality and eliminating stereotypes by strengthening the position and status of women in society, equal access to resources and equal participation in decision-making in all spheres of social life. This law regulates the measures for achieving gender equality, the application of gender integration, the competences and obligations of the entities responsible for the implementation of the law, gender mechanisms and the method of monitoring and reporting on the results of the implementation of the law.
- **The Strategy for Gender Equality 2022-2027** was voted, which is the basic strategic document of the Republic of North Macedonia, which establishes a comprehensive framework for further activities in the direction of promoting gender equality and empowering women. By adopting this Strategy, the Republic of North Macedonia strives to improve the state of gender equality in accordance with international standards, recommendations and obligations, recognizing that gender equality is one of the key aspects for the prosperity of the entire society. The strategy is based on the principles of legality, publicity, transparency, responsibility, accountability and inter-sectoral cooperation.
- **The strategy for development of female entrepreneurship in the Republic of Macedonia, 2019 – 2023** aims at the economic empowerment of women by creating a favorable business climate and providing support for the development of their entrepreneurial potential, which will contribute to the development of existing and opening new enterprises, the creation of new jobs, and thereby strengthening the overall economy. Long-term goal is building an entrepreneurial eco system for the continuous development of female entrepreneurship.

GENDER STATISTICS

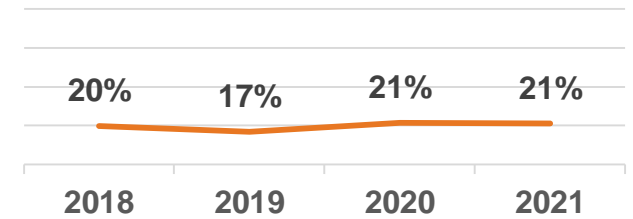
North Macedonia achieved the established gender quota regarding **women** parliamentarians



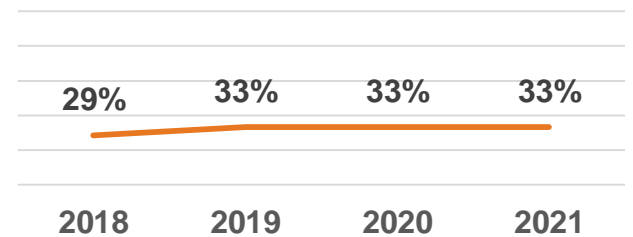
Gender Equality Index 2020



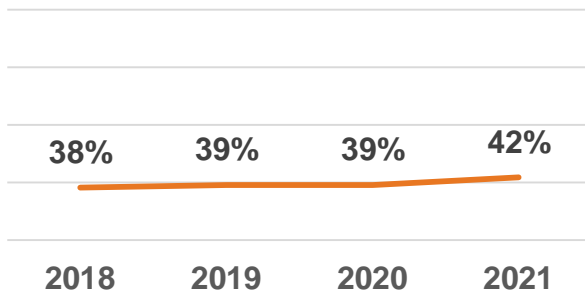
21% of board members in the largest listed companies registered in North Macedonia are **women**



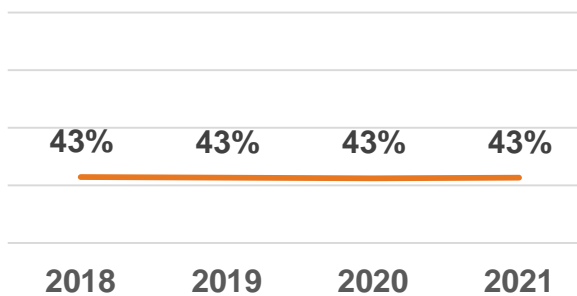
33% of **women** hold the highest decision-making bodies of national central bank in North Macedonia



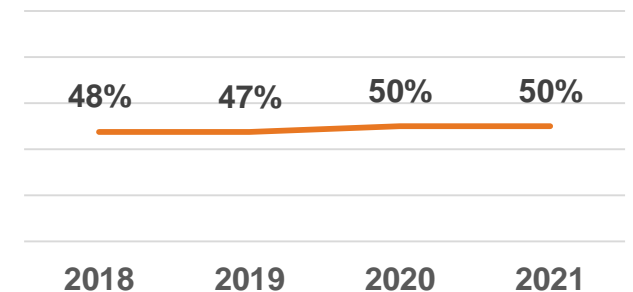
The share of **women** in the Parliament



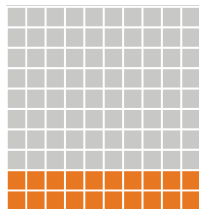
The share of **women** in senior management positions in public administration is almost the same as the EU-27 average



Percent of **female judges** in supreme courts



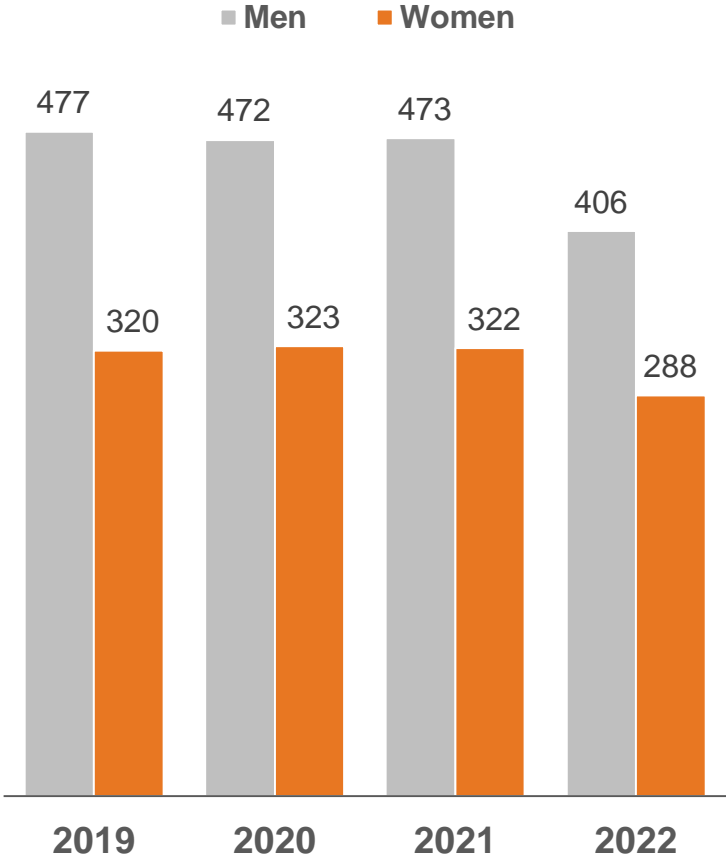
20%



Out of 20 ministries, there are 4 **female** ministers

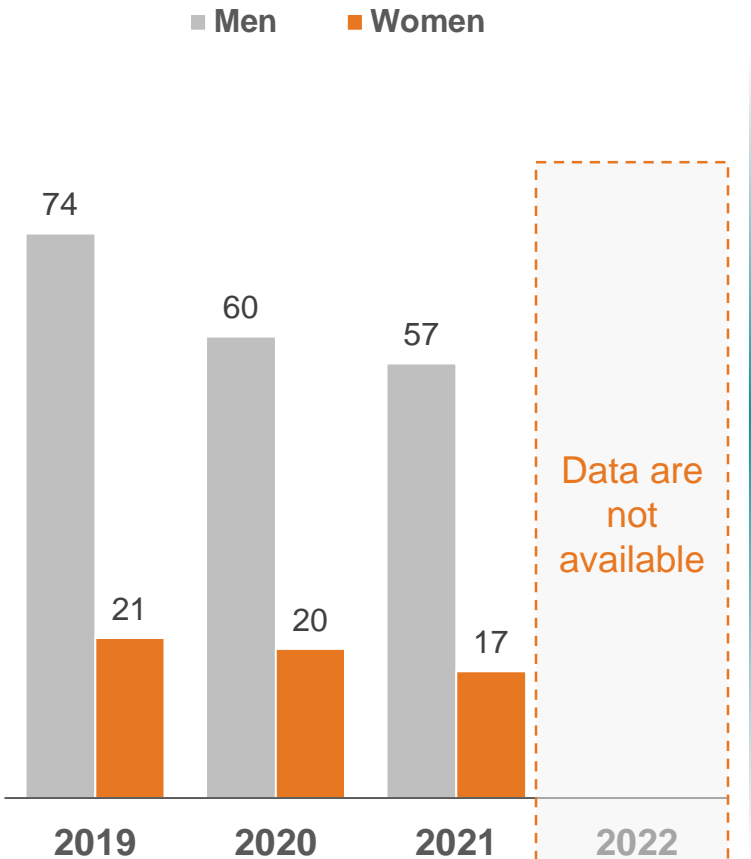
*Out of 11 members in the highest decision-making body of the National academy of science in, only 1 is **women**.*

Number of employed by sex



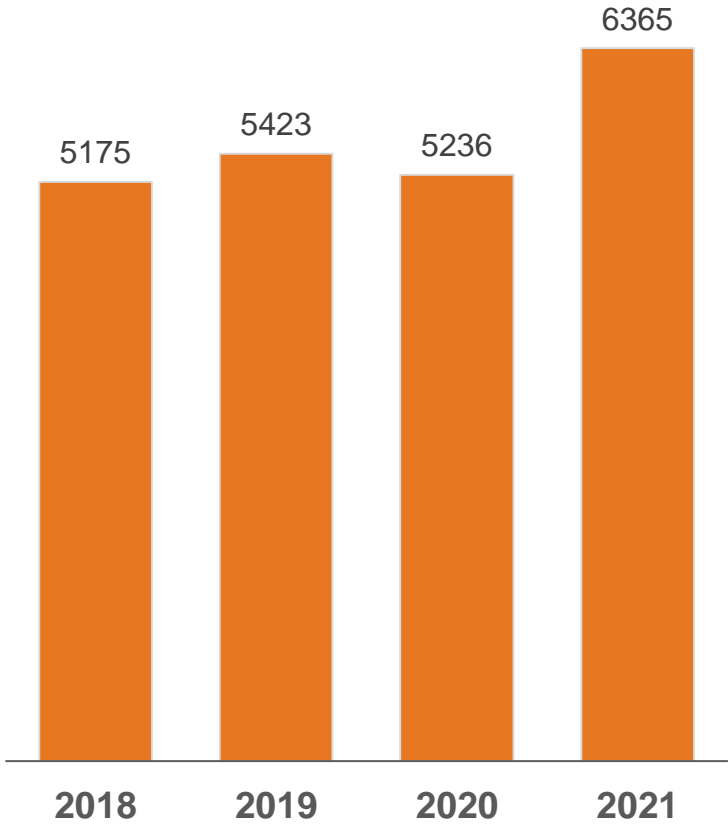
*Given in thousands

Number of selfemployed by sex



*Given in thousands

GDP per capita*



*GDP is presented in EUR

**The data for 2021 GDP per capita in euros is calculated according to the number of the total resident population from the 2021 Census



Decisions about starting a business



PREVIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS

All women included in the research had previous working experience that was **unrelated to their education or current field of work** and the business they started.

In their previous jobs they were faced with constant job instability and the fear of losing a job, as well as with frustration that they were not able to realize their true potential and express themselves.

DECISION ABOUT STARTING BUSINESS

The main triggers for starting their own business were dissatisfaction with their **salary, long working hours, as well as too many responsibilities and inability to achieve self-actualisation or freedom in decision making.**

Other initial ideas were related to **turning a hobby into a business, or putting into practice the knowledge** from previous jobs, and in one case by **actual market analysis** and finding market gaps.

BUSINESS PLAN CREATION

A couple of women who received a **grant from UNDP and Employment Service Agency** developed business plans with mentors who were assigned to them through the program.

Majority of those who did not receive any grants from organisations created their **initial business plan alone** or with some help from friends with similar experiences.



Supporting mechanisms for starting a business

Main support for starting a business is given by the family and closest friends and in a couple of cases it came through concrete aid from Employment Service Agency (ESA) or UNDP.

The main financial sources for the initial start came from **savings, loans from family** (parents primarily), **bank loans**, as well as (in a few cases) **grants from the ESA and the UNDP**.

“It’s not that I was that much dissatisfied as a kindergarten teacher . But I noticed back then, that there were not many rent-a-car companies. I think that I made the right decision to open my own business.”

“The thing that started to bother me was the administrative part in my previous work. When my professional engagement started to be a burden to me I knew it was time for a change. I wanted the freedom to make my own decisions, so I decided to start on my own - with all challenges and benefits that come with that.”

“Before drafted my business plan, I worked at several places: bookstore, copy shop, market. Confectionery was my hobby until I started doing it professionally. In all my previous jobs I simply did not find myself and I was not fulfilled. So my hobby (making cakes) became a business plan and a job I have been doing for 8 years.”

“My husband accepted my decision to start a business since the beginning. I always have his support with responsibilities and children, so we manage to arrange for everything to be done properly.”



Current operating

Overall, the current state of business is described as a **status quo**. This is primarily related to provincial Macedonian towns (areas of agricultural and flower business) and to businesses dealing with handicraft and jewelry sale in Skopje. However, some entrepreneurs from Skopje assess that their business lately **started to experience a descending trend** – especially in the last few months due to **high inflation, increased prices of raw materials and low purchase power of the population**.

Associates

At present, all the decisions about the work are made solely by women entrepreneurs themselves. Furthermore, a vast majority of women work alone in their own companies. Occasionally some of them include members of their family, and generally do not employ anybody outside the family, the reason being perceived lack of motivation and enthusiasm among job applicants, and lack of trust.

Innovations

Innovations in true sense are **rare and primarily related to the necessary changes** that help maintain work on the basic level of profitability. Those changes are: products diversification, investments in equipment for optimization of the work processes, additional professional education, expanding channels to enable online sale, as well as promotion of the business online (on Facebook and Instagram primarily).

“The current situation in my company is relatively good given the whole situation worldwide. Compared to the beginning, agriculture is going down, but flower trade is doing much better.”

“At first it was very difficult because I was expected to continue with my daily chores. Now I have great support from my husband and our responsibilities are divided.”

“I know a lot of women entrepreneurs and I will describe them as brave regardless of their success. I also have a few female friends who run a business and some friends whom I told that if they do not try they will not know if they will succeed or not.”

“What scared me the most was how I will manage on the market and how I will survive because of the overall atmosphere. Some of my relatives and my parents advised me that many things are difficult on the market and to be prepared even for failure.”



Systems of support

THERE IS A FEELING OF DISCONTENT AND LACK OF EXPECTATIONS REGARDING SYSTEMIC SUPPORT FROM STATE AND ITS INSTITUTIONS. FURTHERMORE, AWARENESS OF AVAILABLE AID AT THEIR DISPOSAL IS QUITE LOW.

Entrepreneurs who used grants from the Employment Service Agency and UNDP to start their business express **high satisfaction** regarding **support in starting the business**, mainly through mentoring, simple procedures and easy and brief time that passed between applying and final approval of the grants. Still, there is a perception that there is **low or non-existent systemic support for further development and implementation of innovations** in business.

However, majority of female entrepreneurs **have not had experience with institutional or organisational grants** and have low or no faith in efficiency and authenticity of such support.

Those females find primary sources of support in their **immediate surroundings** (family and friends, fellow citizens) and belief in themselves and their potentials, but also in other female business owners.

“I expect that in the future private businesses and female entrepreneurs will be taken much more seriously and supported by the State and the Government, in terms of costs, benefits and things like that.”

“I communicate and exchange experiences and advice with my fellow female entrepreneurs.”

“When it comes to the State and system, I would not comment on that, because many things do not work properly. When women start entrepreneurship, most of them are unmotivated, with fear of failure, lots of family responsibilities, low socio-economic status of the environment in which they live and where they should direct their services and products. The state should take care of these things.”

“I feel supported by my social surroundings. It is demonstrated through the social media, where in large number my fellow citizens add their friends to my group for sale and delivery of flowers. They also spread the word about my work.”

General outlook on female entrepreneurship and future



GENERAL OUTLOOK

It is a general impression that the main advantage for women in entrepreneurial context are **better organization and leading skills**, ability to make **more cautious and informed decisions**, but also an impression that the main difficulty is lack of self-confidence in dominantly patriarchal environment.

Despite high trust in female abilities in entrepreneurial environment, there is also an impression that it is **harder for women to make it** due to traditional expectations to be hard-working and contribute to house budget but also to be dedicated to unpaid housework as mothers and wives.

PERSONAL LIFE

Lack of free time for themselves is the first mentioned change that opening and running their own business might bring to their personal life.

This challenge can be solved by **adequate time management** and by **dividing responsibilities** with husbands.

Still, **expanding social connections and self actualisation** through work can compensate for occasional difficulties in balancing private life and work

FUTURE

Although optimistic, majority of female entrepreneurs consider that planning ahead and predicting future moves is hard as they are highly influenced by the global economic crisis. The current focus is on **stabilization of work and staying stable**.

Majority of women **wait for the crisis to slow down** to be able to slowly invest in novelties: equipment, inventory, education, employees, marketing and promotion, etc.

There are **no expectations or awareness** as to how EU integrations can contribute to their work.

ALBANIA

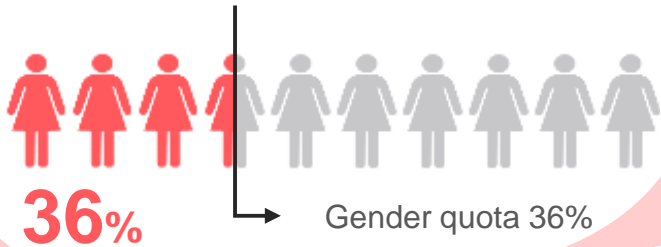
LEGAL FRAMEWORK

Law on Gender Equality in Society No. 9970, dates on 24.07.2008 - this law regulates fundamental issues of gender equality in public life, the protection and equal treatment of women and men, equal opportunities and chances to exercise their rights, as well as their participation and contribution to the development of all social fields. The aim of this law is:

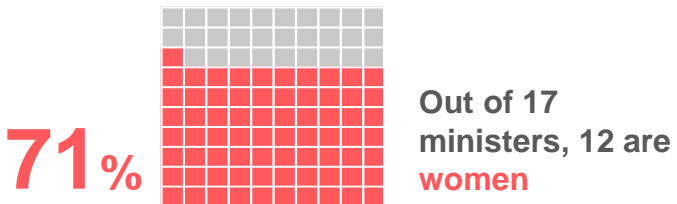
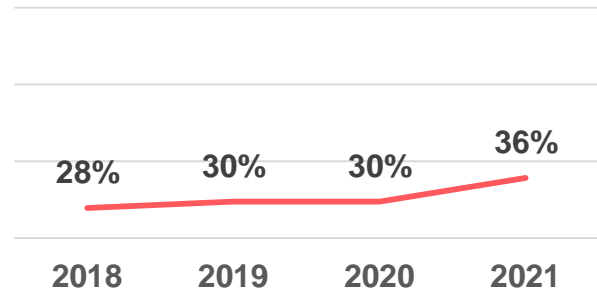
- ✓ To provide effective protection from gender discrimination and any other form of behavior that encourages gender discrimination;
 - ✓ To define measures that provide for equal opportunities among women and men and eliminate any form of gender-based discrimination
 - ✓ To define the responsibilities of central and local state authorities for developing and enforcing normative acts, as well as policies in support of encouraging gender equality in society.
- When it comes to female entrepreneurship, it is largely stated as a new phenomenon in the Albanian economy. Thus, there are not a lot of statistics or laws readily available to address challenges and policies accordingly. The latest Law on Entrepreneurs and Companies was published on 14.04.2008 and although it largely overlooks entrepreneurship in terms of gender throughout its articles, it is important to note that women and men can register a business in the same way (Law on Entrepreneurs and Commercial Companies, Art 6). Additionally, Family Code Arts.1 and 50, indicate that a woman can sign a contract in the same way as a man, whereas Law on Protection from Discrimination, Arts 1 and 20 (2)(e) indicate that the law prohibits discrimination in access to credit based on gender.

GENDER STATISTICS

Albania fully met its gender quota regarding **women** parliamentarians

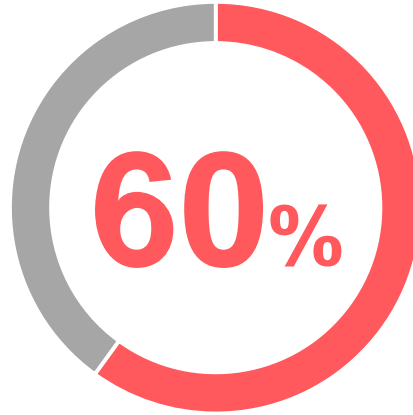


The share of **women** in the Parliament quite increased compared to the period 4 years ago

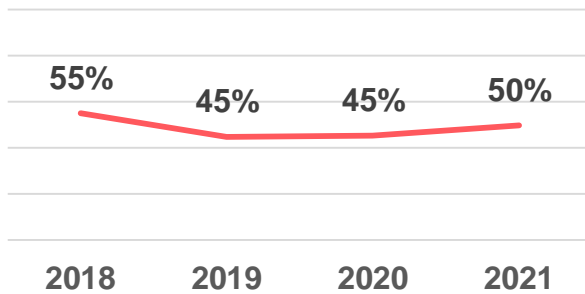


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Gender Equality Index 2020

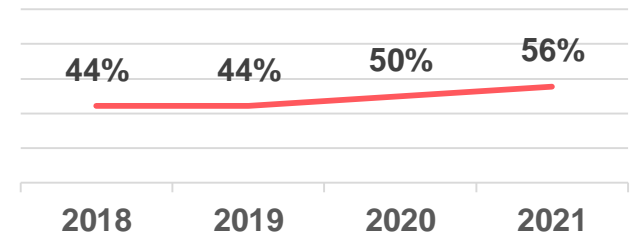


Women make up half of the employees in senior management positions in the public administration

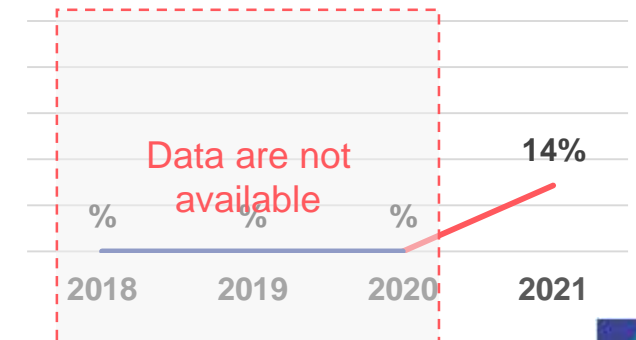


No women in the highest decision-making body of the National academies of science.

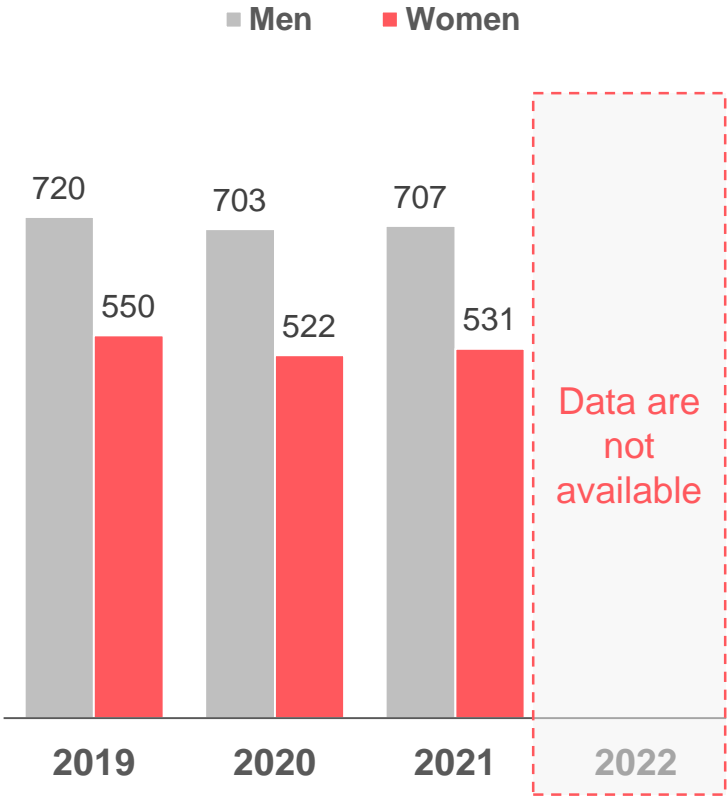
56% of **women** hold highest decision-making bodies of national central banks in Albania



The number of **female** judges in supreme courts

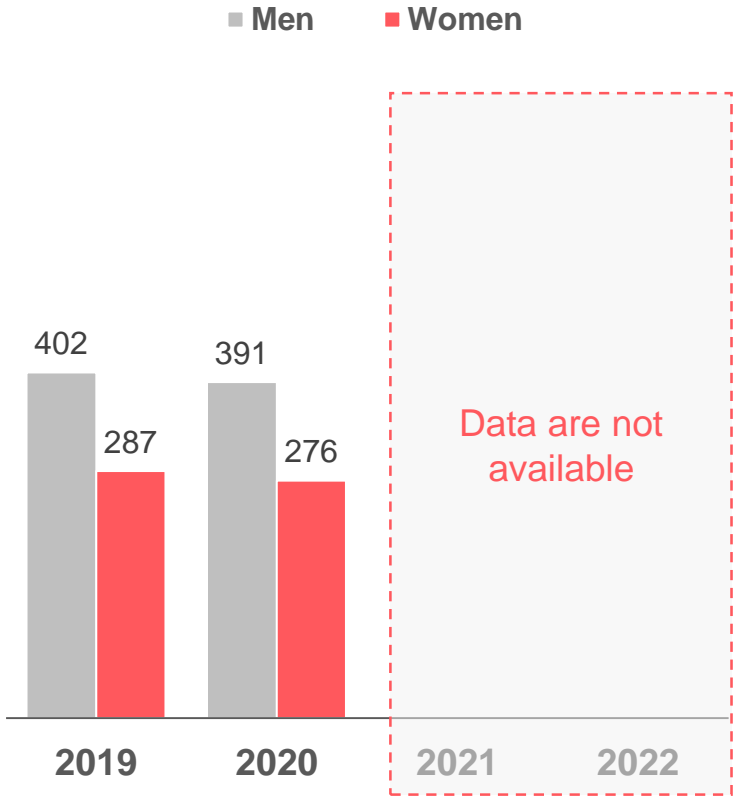


Number of employed by sex (Q2 2019 – 2021)



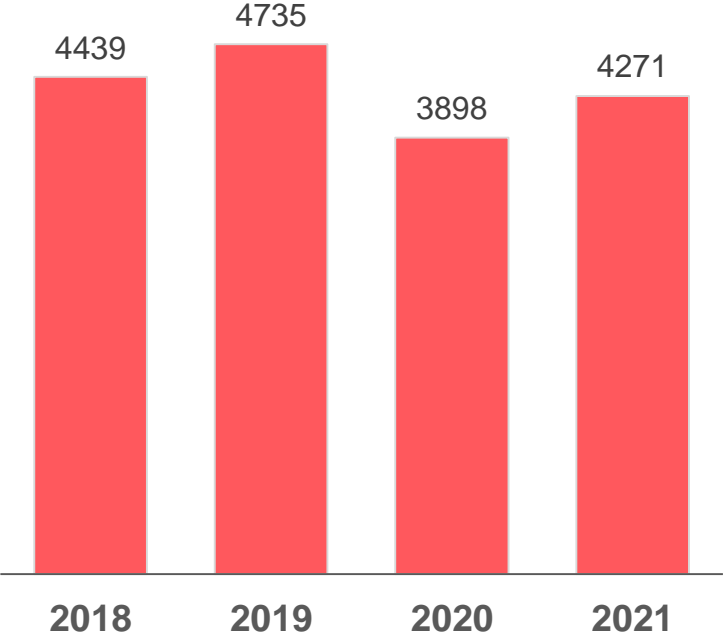
*Given in thousands

Number of selfemployed by sex (Q2 2019 - 2020)



*Given in thousands

GDP per capita



*GDP is presented in EUR



Decisions about starting a business



PREVIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS

A vast majority of 30+ **worked for private companies on positions related to their education.** After gaining experience as employees, they decided to move forward and start their own business.

Younger women (20+) started their own companies after finishing education.

DECISION ABOUT STARTING BUSINESS

The main reason for starting a private business was **general dissatisfaction with working conditions** or just a general idea that one can contribute much more to overall community on their own.

Also, after years of experience, they had increased confidence in their personal abilities and ambitions.

Also, some were inspired after receiving several requests from former satisfied clients.

BUSINESS PLAN CREATION

Business plans were made by women themselves, or in consultation with family members, friends, and other female professionals

“There have been many fears and insecurities. The biggest fear has been the bureaucracy in Albania. I really wanted to convince everyone around me that women can succeed in areas where men predominate.”



Supporting mechanisms for starting a business

In the majority of cases women did not have initial capital for investment. Some women applied for business loans which were refused, so they turned to **personal savings and loans from family members**. Additionally, some women worked in several jobs at the time to save some money that they could invest in the business plan.

Several interviewed women entrepreneurs received donations from institutions and funds.

Due to restrictions in the initial capital, there were no big investments in staff, and external contracts were made for any additional services.

The lack of an adequate taxation system that encourages female entrepreneurship and stronger involvement in business is visible.

“I paid for my first clinic with earnings from the therapy I was doing. I had collected some money that I gave for renting the space and I asked the parents of my client who were in the furniture making business to make the furniture for my office instead of paying for therapy, so I worked for 2 months with this client without receiving money”

“A great influence for opening my business has been my family, especially my father. My biggest hesitation at the time was that economic conditions were almost impossible to make such an investment, but thanks to my dad's courage and perseverance I took the big step. It has also been the biggest financial support for start-up capital”

“The first stimulus to quit work has been a dilemma between burn-out and awareness of the disbalance between my professionalism and a very symbolic salary that did not reflect my effort at all”

“During the fall of the communist regime, many women remained unemployed. In 1992, the Catholic mission led by Antonio Sciarra in Blinisht gave me the courage and support to start the job. So in 1993 we started cooperating with other women in the area. Year after year I saw the fruits of this cooperation and in 2006 we moved to Lezha to a larger center where we process fabrics”



Current operating

Overall participants are satisfied with their business achievements and admit that their business has been gradually growing over the years and their initial expectations have already been met.

Some of the achievements pinpointed by participants refer to **increased capacities in human resources, increased working space, updated tools and equipment, professional training and qualifications for their employees** (i.e. free online trainings, morning meetings part of scrum master program). Furthermore, some of them have started to digitalize their services and systems and have finalized service contracts with national and international clients.

However, some women entrepreneurs emphasize a great impact that pandemic have had and difficulties to recover from damage it caused

Innovations

Innovations are related primary to digitalization and expansion to international markets

“I secured the initial capital by borrowing some money from my family circle, not from any business loan because I could not even apply for approval as I didn’t fulfil the terms for it. Of course the quantity of money I could provide was minimal for starting a small business. In the beginning the working area was not in the state that anyone could want or in the state that it is today after 10 years. Today I have my property, larger space, new equipment and 3 other employees who support me through work and I have invested in other specializations by increasing so the range of services I offer”

“Impact on the family is inevitable. It happened that by the time I quit my full time job and focused on my business, my husband lost his job. So, we had the “fall” on one side of the husband and a very large flow of work and commitment for the wife. Overthrow of traditional roles. It is difficult not only within the family, with frequent tensions over the endless sharing of family responsibilities, but also a kind of “silent war” with the society surrounding you”



Systems of support

BELIEF THAT STATE AND GOVERNMENT SHOULD OFFER TRANSPARENT AND OPEN SUPPORT, BUT HAVE LOW EXPECTATIONS THAT THIS WILL HAPPEN SOON. ALSO HIGH BELIEF IN EU INTEGRATIONS AND ITS IMPACT ON FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Overall, **disappointment** is expressed **with the level of support offered by the system**. Majority claim that main and sometimes only support comes from family, friends and from other women entrepreneurs. Several women have been offered concrete support by women entrepreneurs' organizations and religious institutions in the country.

State and government are not relied upon – there is an impression that the state system offers any concrete support on rare occasions when there is a common interest in it

Concrete state support would be: strategies aimed at banks in order to **ease bureaucratic** procedures for loan applications for women, or **reducing taxes** for businesses run by women.

“I have seen that there are organizations, or state programs that occasionally give grants to women entrepreneurs, but I have no information on how these programs are developed. I believe more in foreign organizations as they are not controlled by the state. I feel supported but not as much as it should be as our social environment is complicated and support is usually given if there are common interests”

“I believe that women can support each other”

“I can't wait for EU integrations. It would help my business quite a lot. There are many bureaucratic procedures that I have to follow when I have a contract with other EU countries. EU integration will reduce significantly the costs of these contracts”

General outlook on female entrepreneurship and future



GENERAL OUTLOOK

In the last several years the number of women entrepreneurs has increased, even in areas perceived by society as male-dominated. However, there are **still prejudices and stereotypes present**

Dedication, professionalism, patience, perseverance and ability to multitask are considered as main values important for women in business, and have made the society reconsider the existing perceptions

PERSONAL LIFE

Despite efforts to create a balance women find it **very difficult to dedicate more time to themselves and their family.**

There is a high level of physical and mental exhaustion and constant pressure of responsibility to carry out several tasks at once: to be a businesswoman, a wife, a mother and at the same time find the time for personal interests or even further specializations.

FUTURE

Considering current state of business and its expansion, the future, despite the effects of the crisis, is thought of in terms of concrete plans: closer cooperation with state agencies, providing the **training for young professionals**, placing **emphasis on importance of sustainable businesses**, switching to payment through service contracts rather than monthly salaries to motivate younger employees more.

Digitalization is also part of future plans – primarily based on the idea of expanding work abroad.

KOSOVO*

**For the United Nations Development Programme, references to Kosovo shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council resolution 1244 (1999)*

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The internal legislation of Kosovo* guarantees and protects the values of gender equality, starting from the Constitution as the highest legal act and continuing with a series of laws and by-laws, where women and men are defined the same rights

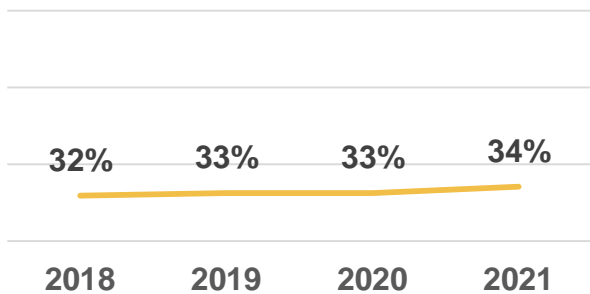
- **The Law on Gender Equality** explicitly states that there must be equal protection and treatment on the basis of gender in labour relations (this includes the prohibition of gender discrimination in labour relations and social security schemes at work, unpaid work assessment and in accessing and supplying goods and services)
- **The Law on Protection from Discrimination** of the Republic of Kosovo* prohibits all forms of discrimination in society, including discrimination based on gender. All institutions must act in accordance with the principles of this Law, during the exercise of their duties and during the drafting of policies and legislation.
- **The Labor Law** obliges employers to create equal conditions for both sexes, but also to respect maternity leave.
- **The Inheritance Law** of Kosovo* states that women and men have equal rights to inheritance.
- **The Law on Property and Other Property Rights** deals with the ownership of physical things, including the abandonment and registration of property. The law treats all parties as gender neutral and makes no direct provision regarding women's ownership rights.
- **The Strategy for the Development of the Private Sector** in Kosovo* 2018-2022 in a paragraph titled "Women in Entrepreneurship" describes the need to close the "gender gap in the private sector in order to increase the total number of entrepreneurs, resulting in more employment and productivity and having a positive impact on economic growth".
- **The National Strategy for innovation and entrepreneurship** foresees that it is essential for the significant promotion of the potential of economic growth, that women take an active role in the economy, as entrepreneurs or as workers. Developing a supportive business environment for female entrepreneurs is an essential prerequisite for that. Specific funding programs and the creation of national or local interest groups can mark a starting point.
- **The Kosovo* Gender Equality Program** aims to ensure that gender equality is at the center of transformational processes in Kosovo*, within all structures, institutions, policies, procedures, practices and programs of the government, agencies, civil society, the private sector and the community. donors. The strategic objective 1 of this program envisages the creation of equal opportunities to contribute to and benefit from comprehensive economic development and the improvement of social well-being. This objective aims to advance the economic empowerment and improvement of women's social well-being, improving the equal distribution of public funds and the participation of women in the management of resources.

GENDER STATISTICS

Kosovo* achieved the determined gender quota regarding **women** parliamentarians

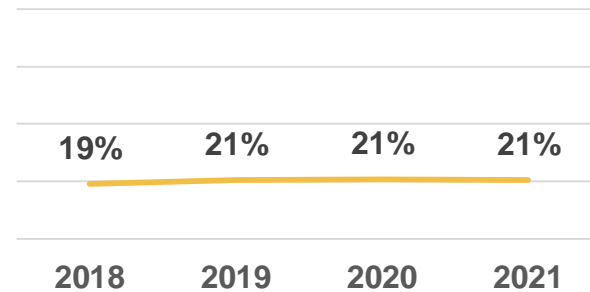


The number of **women** in parliament gradually increased to reach the stipulated quota in 2021



Gender Equality Index hasn't been developed

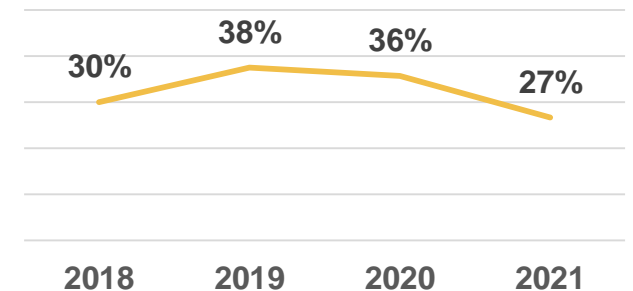
One-fifth of senior management positions in public administration are held by **women**, which is far below the EU-27 average



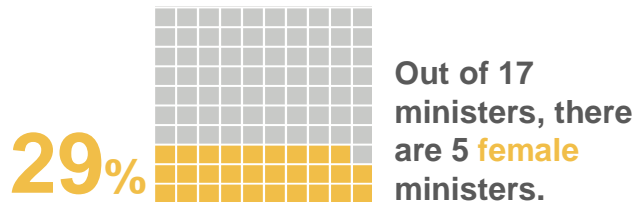
November 2015 – “Less than 10% of businesses in Kosovo* are **women-led** or **women-owned**, and only 3 percent of all business loans go to **women**”.

No women in the highest decision-making bodies of national central banks in Kosovo*

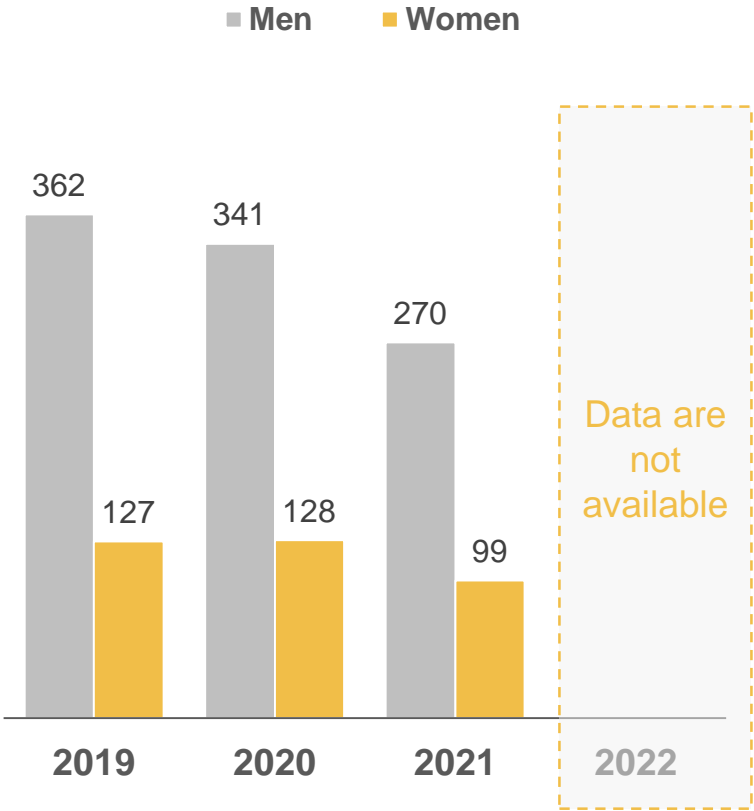
The percent of **female** judges



Out of 8 members in the highest decision-making body of the National academy of science in, 3 are **women**.

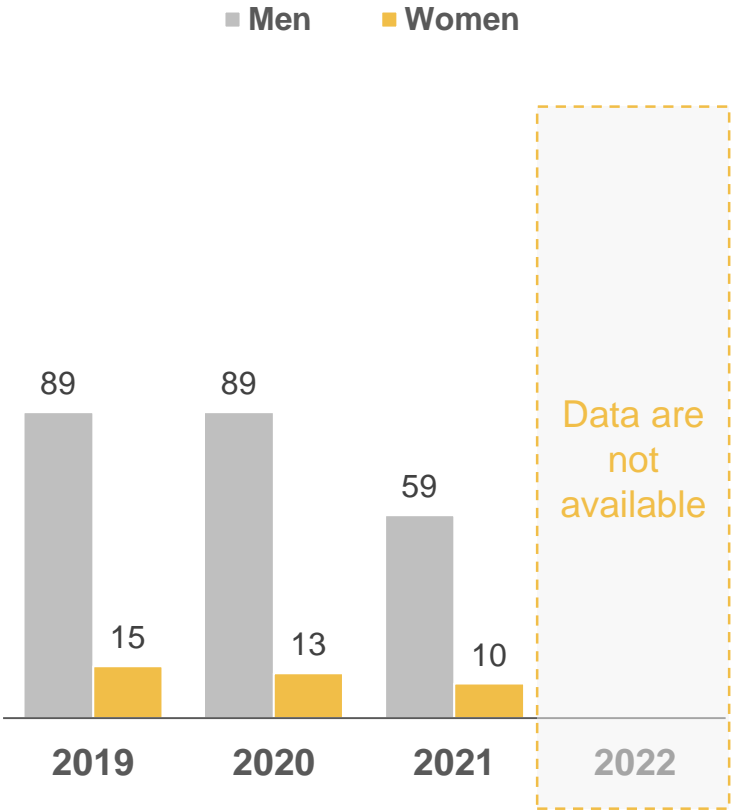


Number of employed by sex (2019 – Q2 2021)



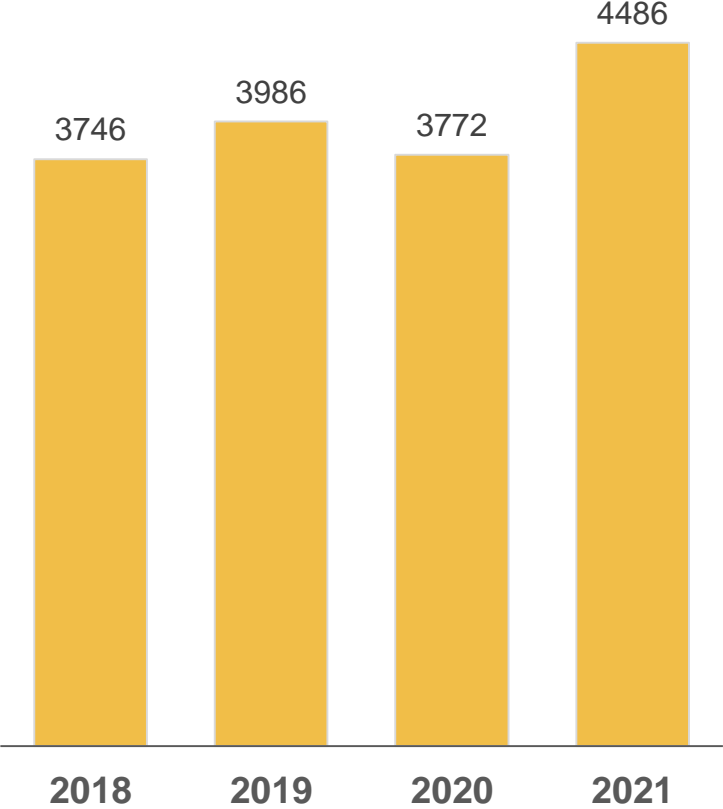
*Given in thousands

Number of selfemployed by sex (2019 – Q2 2021)



*Given in thousands

GDP per capita



*GDP is presented in EUR



Decisions about starting a business



PREVIOUS WORKING CONDITIONS

Similar to other countries, women **above 30 years of age worked for local private or state-owned companies**, and decided to set aside some time and effort for personal growth after the collapse of existing enterprises.

Younger women, similar to those in Albania, started their business right after school / University, confident in their personal abilities and ambition, and supported by their families.

DECISION ABOUT STARTING BUSINESS

In the majority of cases, women claim that they are grateful for **experience** they got in their previous jobs.

Most of them decided to play it safe and manage both jobs at the same time, but not for long, since after finalizing set up for independent businesses they decided to dedicate their time to development of their own entrepreneurship.

BUSINESS PLAN CREATION

Business plans were **made by women themselves**, or after **consultation with family members, friends, and other female professionals**.

“My mother used to love flowers and when she passed away, together with my sister we decided to open a flower shop. Now our business is two years old and with a new bigger location.”



Supporting mechanisms for starting a business

Majority of women **received business loans** as their initial capital.

In addition, some of them have applied for different grants, although not all of them were selected (a participant has received two start-up grants from USAID for programs focusing on women).

A smaller number of women found a **partner for investment**. Initially, they tried to carry out most of the work themselves and gradually as the business developed they were able to recruit more staff.

Current operating

Although their initial business expectations have been met, in future they plan to implement **digitalization** in order to adapt to consequences of Covid 19 pandemic. Furthermore, they plan to **invest in more in human resources**.

There are also plans to improve working conditions for current employers and to create multidisciplinary teams (marketing department). When it comes to finding associates, there is a certain lack of young professionals on the market, hence some women offer free of charge online trainings in order to attract and keep talented candidates.

“I secured the initial capital by taking a loan from a bank, a pretty low amount compared to the investment I wanted to make in the beginning. I started the business plan myself but later elaborated and expanded it with the help of other professionals. I started working with only one employee and now I have 22 colleagues.”

“I was lucky because I had support from my family and friends. I was even more motivated when I heard about the grants awarded for start-up businesses by USAID. I won two grants and bought equipment to start with.”

“I started working as a teacher seven years ago in a private school. I was very happy with the work I did especially when I saw the progress of the students but I was also very demotivated: the behavior of the staff, the management and direction of the school towards teaching, as well as its traditional approach. After 7 years I was very clear on how I should set up my business and change the approach from traditional to modern for staff, students and parents.”



Systems of support

MORE SATISFACTION IN SYSTEM, HOWEVER THERE ARE NO CONCEPTUALISED AND DEFINED EXPECTATIONS FROM SYSTEMIC SUPPORT. IMPLEMENTATION OF ADOPTED LEGAL ACTS. SIMILARLY TO ALBANIA, THE HIGHEST EXPECTATIONS ARE FROM EU INTEGRATIONS.

There is a belief that the system is more active in providing support to women who want to open their business in comparison to neighbouring countries, particularly Albania.

Still, this support is mainly oriented towards expansion of already operating businesses rather than towards support of new ones.

Support for promotion and innovation is perceived as very low.

Despite being perceived as moderately supportive, better functioning State and government agencies would be a pre-requisite for any possible innovation, expansion and improvement.

Obstacles to the development of female entrepreneurship are: type of education, weak social status, competing demands on time and access to finance.

“There was an unpleasant situation with state inspectors who were very aggressive at the beginning (in 2010), however, now that has changed a lot.”

“I see my business in the near future as continuing to be successful and expanding to other centers, with more employees. The future of my business depends on the investment, as we have specific plans for expansion but the only obstacle is lack of funds for investment and normally, it requires a lot of commitment and support, but I am not sure where can I look for it.”

General outlook on female entrepreneurship and future



GENERAL OUTLOOK

There is a general impression that women are more reluctant to start their own business since they face more difficulties to ensure the initial capital and are **faced with many prejudices** about their ability to succeed.

This is especially true in smaller towns and rural areas where they lack support both from the community and the system.

PERSONAL LIFE

The main personal advantages of running a business are related to the feeling of **personal growth and better economical status** which drastically improves their quality of life.

Still, on the other hand, there are many obstacles related to a **hard task of balancing professional and personal life, physical and mental exhaustion**, the fear of risking everything invested, **conflicts with the family, distancing from friends, judgements from the community** for being “*too ambitious*”.

This is especially true in smaller and less urban areas.

FUTURE

There are **great concerns** related to the future of entrepreneurship, due to global crisis (pandemic, war in Ukraine) that impacted the increase in prices.

Majority tend to create realistic survival strategies: education, building multidisciplinary teams, digitalizing services, investing in larger working space and increasing the network of associates.

Also, there is hope that if they optimize human resources, they will have more space for personal life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Qualitative research on Women's Entrepreneurship in WB 6

RECOMMENDATIONS

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Improving the overall position of women in society and promoting entrepreneurship generally will have benefits in terms of women's entrepreneurship.

Increase the ability of women to participate in the labour force by ensuring the availability of affordable child-care and equal treatment in the work-place.

Listen to the voice of women entrepreneurs by creation of national and local government offices of women's business ownership is possible way to facilitate information sharing, seminars and meetings, providing services of women's business centres.

Incorporate a women's entrepreneurial dimension in the formation of all MSME-related policies and ensuring that the impact on women's entrepreneurship is taken into account at the design stage.

Promote the development of women entrepreneur networks as major sources of knowledge about women's entrepreneurship and valuable tools for its development and promotion.

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RECOMMENDATIONS



Women tend to have latent entrepreneurial potential that is not realised so policy makers can help to unlock this potential by:

- **Improving the institutional conditions.** Entrepreneurs are strongly influenced by role models and social context. It is therefore important to promote women entrepreneurs as role models and ensure that the education system is gender-neutral and does not discourage women from going into STEM fields (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).
- **Improve access to entrepreneurship skills programmes.** Traditional policy action that supports the acquisition of entrepreneurship skills include entrepreneurship training, coaching and mentoring programmes, and support in building entrepreneurial networks. Such programmes are often tailored to the specific barriers faced by women and delivered to women-only groups of beneficiaries.

Increase the use of loan guarantees. Most government policies to improve access to finance for women entrepreneurs focus on interventions that provide grants, loans, and microcredit. A growing trend is to improve access to bank financing through loan guarantees. Evaluations in European Union of women-specific loan guarantees suggest that they create more jobs than mainstream programmes and show positive impacts.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

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Monitor and evaluate the impact of gender responsive MSME-related policies on the success of women-owned businesses and the extent to which such businesses take advantage of them, identifying ways to improve the effectiveness of those that should be retained.

Improve the factual and analytical bedrocks for understanding of the role of women entrepreneurs in the economy by integration of systems to continuously collect and conduct gender analyses of data, including cross-country comparative analyses and longitudinal studies of the impact of important developments and policies, especially over time.

Help women realise the growth potential of their businesses by setting up policies to assure systemic help for women to acquire and develop skills needed to successfully launch and run businesses with high growth potential.

Help women in all stages of business, not only in starting, but also in developing and expanding an existing business. Provide support to women entrepreneurs in terms of education and information regarding the protocol for writing and submitting grant applications. Also about the importance of innovation and digitization of business in terms of development.

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**THANK
YOU.**

