



South East European Centre
for Entrepreneurial Learning



WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

A JOB CREATION ENGINE FOR SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

**FROM PROJECT TO PROCESS
& FUTURE PERSPECTIVES**

BACKGROUND

The South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (hereafter: SEECEL) is an institution founded in 2009 upon the request of the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey¹ to establish structured regional cooperation in the field of **human capital development**. As the host country of SEECEL, Croatia - EU Member State, is committed to working as an equal partner in all SEECEL activities.

SEECEL's core human capital development activities can be summarised into three groups:

- **Entrepreneurial learning:** SEECEL supports efforts of its member states to incorporate entrepreneurship as a key competence into their education systems.
- **SME skills:** SEECEL supports the development of a systematic approach to upgrading the skills of small and medium enterprises in the region in order to increase their competitiveness.
- **Women's entrepreneurship:** SEECEL supports the development of women's entrepreneurship as a job creation engine for South East Europe, including through developing tools for identifying the training needs of women entrepreneurs, developing training modules and to strengthen the role of women's business associations.

SEECEL's goals and approach are fully in line with European Union documents, in particular with the Small Business Act for Europe (SBA), and with sustainable development goals, with the ultimate aim that every citizen should think and act entrepreneurially.

The project entitled "Women Entrepreneurship – a job creation engine for South Eastern Europe", financially supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), was initiated in 2012 in joint cooperation of three partners: SEECEL, the Gender Task Force (GTF) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). The activities undertaken within the scope of the project are all in line with the SBA and thus contribute to the SBA drive in each country.

¹ The eight SEECEL member states are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo^{*}, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey. (* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.)



STATE OF PLAY

THE ECONOMIC CASE FOR WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Women play a crucial economic role in the introduction of innovation to markets, in employment-creation and in contributing not only to the overall wealth of economies², but to the development of local communities³. These arguments have prompted a shift in the policy paradigm, with women's entrepreneurship increasingly seen as primarily an economic issue, not a gender-equity issue. Economies worldwide have turned towards expanding women's economic opportunities as smart business and find it as one of the most important driving forces behind economic growth⁴. Thus, when new companies and industries flourish, everyone benefits⁵.

The percentage of women entrepreneurs in the total number of entrepreneurs varies in South Eastern Europe, Moldova Turkey. Nonetheless, in all countries male entrepreneurs' presence is substantially higher, with examples of 71% in Albania and Montenegro, 74% in Serbia, 80% in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and 85% in Turkey. Croatia is country with the highest proportion of women entrepreneurs (37%)⁶. Acknowledging that women represent around half of each country's population, it is not surprising that women are considered to represent a large pool of entrepreneurial potential in Europe⁷, with further arguments from the European Commission stating that female creativity and entrepreneurial potential are not sufficiently recognised as a source of economic growth and jobs⁸.

WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP

FROM PROJECT TO PROCESS

The goal of the project "Women Entrepreneurship – a job creation engine for South Eastern Europe" is to promote best policy practices in women's entrepreneurship in line with the SBA and to work on capacity-building of national and regional women entrepreneurs' networks and associations in order to better support and represent women entrepreneurs and their interests. The results of the project include:

-
- 2 Brush, C. G. (2006) Women entrepreneurs: A research overview. In *The Oxford handbook of entrepreneurship*, eds., M. Casson, B. Yeung, A. Basu, and N. Wadeson, 611-28. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - 3 Court K. L. (2012) Mapping the Economic Contribution of Women Entrepreneurs, *Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Innovation (JEMI)*, Vol. 8, Issue 4, 97-114.
 - 4 Simavi, S., Manuel, C., & Blackden, M. (2010). *Gender Dimensions of Investment Climate Reform*. Gender Dimensions of Investment Climate Reform. Washington DC: World Bank
 - 5 Mitchell, L. (2011). *Overcoming the gender gap: women entrepreneurs as economic drivers*. Kansas City: Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
 - 6 European Commission (2014). *Statistical Data on Women Entrepreneurs in Europe*. DG Enterprise & Industry. Brussels: European Commission
 - 7 European Commission. (2013). *Entrepreneurship 2020 Action Plan–Reigniting the Entrepreneurial Spirit in Europe*. European Commission, DG Enterprise & Industry. Brussels: European Commission.
 - 8 European Commission. DG Growth official web page, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/growth/smes/promoting-entrepreneurship/we-work-for/women/index_en.htm

- the development of a new set of indicators of women's entrepreneurship for the SBA
- a report on the training needs of women entrepreneurs
- training modules for women entrepreneurs (developed according to the analysis carried out in each respective country)
- videos featuring good practice examples of women entrepreneurs'
- the creation of a strong, responsive network of women entrepreneur associations across the region.

As one of the project activities, an international conference entitled "Women in Entrepreneurship: A South East European Response" was held in Opatija, Croatia from 13 to 15 October 2015. The conference, which gathered women entrepreneur associations, women entrepreneurs and other key stakeholders of the women's entrepreneurship policy agenda across the participating countries, aimed to present and discuss the results and to agree on next steps to be taken in order to further strengthen women's entrepreneurship. The conference was a great success with participants keen to engage and share their experiences, and reaching a clear consensus on the following issues:

- **Firstly**, a consensus was reached on the need for policy makers to highlight the economic case for women's entrepreneurship, via policy efforts focused more strongly upon women entrepreneurs and the barriers or impediments that impact women's ambition, ability and aspirations to start a business.
- **Secondly**, a consensus was reached on the fact that an equality case is also necessary, focusing on ensuring that all the talent and human capital has equal access and can benefit from the necessary education, advice and support, thus creating a skills base to ensure the competitiveness of the economy. In so doing, not only will women entrepreneurs be encouraged and supported but those who for personal reasons do not wish to engage in a start-up will nonetheless be empowered.
- **Thirdly**, a consensus was reached on the need for an eco-system case for women's entrepreneurship, which needs to be both self-sustaining and crucially, continuously improving.

In addressing the three consensuses, the conference participants agreed upon the need for policy makers to create a top down framework for women entrepreneurs that **is targeted and integrated, that strengthens the role of associations as the bridge between national policy and practice, and that fosters intra and inter-regional cooperation**. To achieve such an ambition it was felt that formalised structures are needed to ensure effective and informed dialogue with existing and successful practitioners feeding into policy as a bottom-up perspective. Furthermore, in order to achieve an effective and self-sustaining eco-system a number of issues were identified. Three key considerations were highlighted for policy-makers specifically:

- **Data:** Start the systematic collection of data on women entrepreneurs, make it publically available and analyse it to measure the impact of policies for increasing women's entrepreneurship (and the social and economic impact of women's entrepreneurship).
- **Training:** Make evidence-based decisions on what women entrepreneurs need in terms of knowledge and skills in each country, design training solutions for these specific requirements, make them increasingly available to women entrepreneurs and further support the quality assurance of these trainings via monitoring and evaluation of trainings.
- **Partnership / networking:** Further strengthen dialogue among women entrepreneurs through the established regional platforms. Furthermore, women entrepreneurs from each participating country have called for more intra-regional and intra-sectoral business-to-business (B2B) meetings, thus building their social capital, increasing the possibilities for regional clusters and increasing competitiveness.

FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The experience of developing women's entrepreneurship in South Eastern Europe, Moldova and Turkey during the last four years has been an invaluable experience which yielded numerous gains, successful stories, but also ideas for follow-up activities which build on the momentum of the project's achievements. In particular, five building blocks were identified for the improvement and future promotion of women's entrepreneurship, which all highlight the importance of strengthening the human capital. These activities then build the national stock of entrepreneurial competences which then increase the national competitiveness and thus promotes entrepreneurial culture in line with the: G20⁹, B20¹⁰, C20¹¹ and W20¹² priorities.

- 1. "Start and grow":** Support for women with potential to create growing enterprises with specific training, mentoring and coaching, which is backed-up with access to finance measures. This package should be designed, piloted and scaled-up by each country's business support associations.
- 2. Growing businesses:** Make available country-wide specific training, mentoring and coaching to women-owned enterprises experiencing higher rates of growth in sales or employment. These activities should be strengthened with networking and access to finance measures.
- 3. Internationalisation:** While activities for increasing human capital for growing enterprises and those going internationally are closely related, there is need for more training on regulatory and international standards across all countries.
- 4. Women entrepreneur role models:** In order to further build a critical mass of women entrepreneurs and create an entrepreneurial culture, measures should be developed to promote women entrepreneurs as role models by showcasing their success stories.
- 5. Training Navigation System¹³:** All trainings for entrepreneurs should be designed based on training needs analysis surveys, which collect evidence from entrepreneurs themselves on their needs for additional knowledge and skills. Building on this, in the next step (women) entrepreneurs should be engaged in the process of designing the training packages in regards to both content and delivery. Trainings should be made available across countries, and once the trainings are delivered, the impact of trainings should be monitored, evaluated and made publicly available. In order to take care of all the steps this system necessities an independent quality assurance for each step in form of an expert body.

9 G20 Priorities (2015) available at: <https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/2015-TURKEY-G-20-PRESIDENCY-FINAL.pdf>

10 SMEs & Entrepreneurship Taskforce Policy Paper (2015) available at: http://b20turkey.org/policy-papers/b20turkey_sme.pdf

11 Gender Equality Policy Paper (2015) available at: http://c20turkey.org/uploads/C20PolicyPaperOnGenderEquality_v3.pdf

12 W20 Priorities (2015) available at: <http://w20turkey.org/w20-priorities/>

13 Srhoj, S., Heder, E., & Ljubić, M. (2015) Training Needs Analysis and Quality Assurance for SMEs – Western Balkans and Turkey's Small Business Experience. Zagreb: South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (p. 72-74)

We would like to thank all our partners and stakeholders from the following countries participating in the project

WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP A JOB CREATION ENGINE FOR SEE

**Albania
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Croatia
the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Kosovo*
Moldova
Montenegro
Serbia
Turkey**

Once more, thank you all for your immense support and for active participation in this exciting regional project celebrating the potential of women's entrepreneurship.

The SEECEL Team

This project is supported by



implemented by



in cooperation with



and



The content of this document does not reflect the official opinion of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).
Responsibility for the information and views expressed in the document lies entirely with the author.