

Running up that hill: economic strengthening of women in Western Balkans



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Gender structure of the economy	8
Unpaid domestic work and care	8
Albania	9
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10
Macedonia	11
Montenegro	11
Kosovo	11
Serbia	12
Conclusions	13
Differential access to and control over resources	13
Gendered composition of the labor market and participation in productive activities	17
Labor market segregation (vertical / horizontal) per sectors of economy	18
Covid-19 and Common Regional Market	20
The gender impact of Covid 19 on the economy	22
Albania	22
Bosnia and Herzegovina	23
Macedonia	23
Montenegro	24
Kosovo	25
Serbia	25
The Common Market Regional Agenda 2021-2024	25
Women Economic Empowerment in Western Balkans	27
Albania	27
Accelerate women's entrepreneurship	
Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes	27
Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes	29
Boost networking opportunities for businesswomen across the Western Balkans and with the European Union	30
Recommendation	30
Bosnia and Herzegovina	30
Accelerate women's entrepreneurship	31
Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes	31
Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes	31
Boost networking opportunities for businesswomen across the Western Balkans and with the European Union	31
Encourage innovation investments and support women-owned businesses	31
Reduce gender gaps in digitalization and STEM	32
Promote formal and non-formal STEM-related education among girls and women	32
Support women's employment in STEM fields by reducing gender discrimination in recruitment, promotions and gender pay	32

Encourage employers and policymakers to adopt an ecosystem approach to assess how women are progressing along the digital inclusion continuum	32
Develop a sub-regional online advocacy platform to promote gender equality in STEM fields	32
Recognize and redistribute unpaid work and invest in the care economy	32
Promote recognition of unpaid care work volume	33
Support public investment in care sectors and ensure decent work and social protection for paid care workers, including migrant workers	33
Promote employer- or state-funded provision of childcare or tax policies that encourage both spouses to work	33
Encourage the adoption of flexible work arrangements	35
Support businesses investing in childcare plans	35
Promote women's leadership and access to decent work	35
Assess policies and advocate for decent work	35
Ensure equal opportunities and treatment in employment	35
Ensure flexible work arrangements and a safe working environment	35
Establish a gender monitor to measure progress made	35
Establish a leadership academy to ensure gender equality in economy, digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution	35
Transform the public and private sectors to deliver gender equality	36
Develop accountability frameworks in public institutions and the private sector	36
Make gender-responsive budgeting mandatory gender standards	36
Step up women's participation in the boards of financial and governing institutions and companies	36
Facilitate mentorship programmes to advance women in leadership positions	37
Introduce a certification for gender equality in the public and private sectors	37
Promote gender parity in leadership and flexible work arrangements	37
Kosovo	37
Accelerate women's entrepreneurship	37
Reduce gender gaps in digitalisation and STEM	39
Recognise and redistribute unpaid work and invest in the care economy	40
Promote women's leadership and access to decent work	41
Active Labour Market	42
Transform the public and private sectors to deliver gender equality	42
Montenegro	43
Accelerate women's entrepreneurship	43
Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes	44
Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes	46
Encourage innovation investments and support women owned businesses	46
Reduce Gender gap in digitalisation and STEM	46
Promote formal and non- formal STEM-related education among girls and women	47
Support women's employment in STEM fields by reducing Gender discrimination in recruitment, promotion and Gender pay	47
Encourage employers and policymakers to adopt an ecosystem approach to assess how women are progressing along the digital inclusion continuum	47
Recognise and redistribute unpaid work and invest in the care economy	47

Promote recognition of unpaid care work volume	48
Macedonia	48
Accelerate women's entrepreneurship	48
Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes	48
Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes	50
Boost networking opportunities for businesswomen across the Western Balkans and with the European Union	51
Encourage innovation investments and support women-owned businesses	51
Reduce gender gaps in digitalisation and STEM	52
Promote formal and non-formal STEM-related education among girls and women	54
Support women's employment in STEM fields by reducing gender discrimination in recruitment, promotions and gender pay	54
Encourage employers and policymakers to adopt an ecosystem approach to assess how women are progressing along the digital inclusion continuum	54
Develop a sub-regional online advocacy platform to promote gender equality in STEM fields	54
Recognise and redistribute unpaid work and invest in the care economy	55
Promote recognition of unpaid care work volume	55
Promote employer- or state-funded provision of childcare or tax policies that encourage both spouses to work	56
Encourage the adoption of flexible work arrangements	56
Promote women's leadership and access to decent work	58
Assess policies and advocate for decent work	58
Ensure equal opportunities and treatment in employment	59
Ensure flexible work arrangements and a safe working environment	61
Establish a gender monitor to measure progress made	62
Establish a leadership academy to ensure gender equality in economy, digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution	62
Transform the public and private sectors to deliver gender equality	63
Develop accountability frameworks in public institutions and the private sector	64
Make gender-responsive budgeting mandatory gender standards	65
Step up women's participation in the boards of financial and governing institutions and companies	65
Facilitate mentorship programmes to advance women in leadership positions	66
Introduce a certification for gender equality in the public and private sectors	67
Serbia	67
Accelerate women's entrepreneurship	67
Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes	68
Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes	70
Boost networking opportunities for businesswomen across the Western Balkans and with the European Union	70
Encourage innovation investments and support women owned businesses	71

Introduction

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is an all-inclusive, regionally owned and led cooperation framework. Through various regional actions, RCC aims to advance European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the SEE region. RCC works in alignment with the regional political guidelines set by the set by the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECp), by developing and maintaining political climate of dialogue and cooperation, with the implementation of regional programs for the development of the economic and social aspects of the people in the region.¹

A regional cooperation between the Western Balkan six economies should be considered as a necessity for all, since is a key condition for their EU integration. For purposes of the sort, at the Sofia Summit of the Berlin process in 2020, the Common Regional Market 2021-2024 initiative was endorsed by the WB6 leaders, which is envisioned to serve as a catalyst for deeper regional economic integration and a stepping stone towards EU Single Market.

Western Balkan Six economies- North Macedonia, Serbia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo and Montenegro are jointly interested in the promotion of a democratic prosperous open society based on shared values of pluralism, solidarity and justice, with a helping hand such as the rule of law. With the endorsement of the Common Regional Market initiative, the economies were further motivated to rise above the economic, societal, environmental, security and political challenges with which they are commonly faced with. Hence, with a regional cooperation between the economies, their joint path to the EU will be reimbursed.

Based on EU procedures and standards, the WB6 through the Common Regional Market Action Plan aims to establish free movement of goods, capital, people and services all the way through the region, with the inclusion of their joint approach in the aspects of regional digital area, regional investment area, regional trade area and regional industrial and innovation area as further key objectives to be pursued – additionally integrating and increasing the attractiveness of the region for investment and production, as well as closely associating the WB6 with the EU Single Market.

The public institutions are responsible for the implementation of the Common Regional Market 2021-2024 Action Plan, specifically the ministries and institutions. The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and the Central European Free Trade Association (CEFTA) as the leading regional organizations are responsible for the facilitation of the implementation process in coordinating and supporting the Western Balkans in this endeavor. Private sector involvement contributes through the Western Balkans 6 Chambers Investment Forum which since 2017 is the business community's response to political processes of integration in the region.

¹ RegionalCooperationCouncil (RCC) is made of 46 participants and funded by EU and SEE member economies

Gender structure of the economy

Gender equality, particularly necessitating the empowerment of women and girls is fundamental human rights and a development goal in itself: half the human population should benefit from equal opportunities and to fully participate in social, economic, political and civil life. The EU uses gender equality as an instrument and a prerequisite to attain other development goals: better opportunities for women and girls can increase overall productivity, accelerate economic growth, foster more representative institutions, and contribute to better outcomes for all. The EU Gender Action Plan III calls for accelerating progress, focusing on the key thematic areas of engagement, including fighting against gender-based violence and promoting the economic, social and political empowerment of women and girls.

There are three specific structural differences between men and women in the economy: i) unpaid domestic work and care; ii) differential access to and control over resources; and iii) gendered composition of the labor market/participation in productive activities.

Unpaid domestic work and care

A necessary starting point for applying a gender lens is to recognize the importance of unpaid household work for the effective functioning of the market-oriented economy. The time spent on non-market activities such as cooking, cleaning, collecting water and fuel, or looking after children and the elderly, contributes directly to the paid economy by providing basic services and support to the work force of today and tomorrow. Such unpaid work, usually a responsibility of women and girls, although essential, remains invisible. Acknowledging the interdependence between productive and reproductive activities and the related gender division of labor is of crucial importance (UN Women, 2017b). Secondly, the burden of care work represents a critical dimension for women's roles as economic agents as it determines their time availability and subsequently their ability to engage in income-generating work. Regardless of a economy's level of development, balancing professional and domestic responsibilities remains one of the major barriers to women's participation in the economy.

The situation with unpaid care work in each economy in WB6 is the following.

Albania

The Gender Equality Index² for the first time published in 2020 in Albania detected lowest index score (48.1) in the domain of time, indicating very unbalanced care responsibilities and unpaid household work.³ Women face a double burden if they have paid job, as unpaid care work is primary responsibility of theirs. The Time Use Survey (TUS)⁴ as

² INSTAT, 2020. Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Albania. The Gender Equality Index in Albania was developed with EIGE's support under the EU Instrument of Pre-Accession (IPA), funded by the European Union. Retrieved from: <https://shendetesia.gov.al/shqiperia-publikon-indeksin-e-pare-te-barazise-gjinore-manastirliu-te-dhenat-e-vendosin-shqiperine-ne-mes-te-vendeve-te-bashkimit-europian/>

³ Ibid

⁴ INSTAT, UNFPA and UN Women, 2011. "Albania 2010-11 Time Use Survey". Retrieved from <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/social-condition/time-use-survey/>

well shows that women spend significantly more time than men in unpaid work, both in terms of hours and minutes and with reference to the proportion carrying out unpaid work on an average day. Over 90 percent of women regardless of their employment status participate in unpaid work compared to less than 50 percent of men.⁵ Furthermore, employed women devote about 4 hours to unpaid work compared to less than one hour for their men counterparts.⁶ Women who are not employed have spend even more time in unpaid care work (6 hours in unpaid work compared to about one hour spent by men who are not employed.⁷ The report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights points out, for women of the extremely poor households, this unequal distribution results in a violation of basic social, cultural, economic, and political rights.⁸ Unpaid work as mostly invisible has several built-in weaknesses: it is repetitive, and frequently time-consuming, does not allow for upward mobility or promotions of unpaid workers, and therefore these are dead-end jobs with no retirement or pension connected to this type of work.⁹

Bosnia and Herzegovina

COVID-19 outbreak visualized the reality of women's unpaid work and its importance for economies across the world. As for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the situation hardly differs from that in other economies. With children attending school in the online mode, increased need for care taking of older persons and persons with disabilities – the unpaid work of women across the economy increased. According to the available data, in the initial phases of COVID-19 crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 34% of women, as compared to 24% of men worked from home. Furthermore, 66% of women reported more unpaid domestic work, while 56% of men reported the same.¹⁰

Additionally, in both Republika Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entities, one of the measures affected both single parents and families in which both parents are employed. The parent(s) could stay home with their children younger than 10 years of age. This absence was justified. However, this both added up to the unpaid work, strengthened gender roles, as well as was a measure seldom used by mothers whose life-work balance is still rarely deemed important by employers.

Despite a bigger percentual rise in men's activities regarding the unpaid work, women still spend a larger amount of time (33% as compared to 26%¹¹) on at least three activities related to unpaid care work. As the previous statistical data has shown, more

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ United Nations, 2015. Human Rights Council. Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5576d95b4.pdf>

⁹ Hirway, I. 2015. Unpaid Work and the Economy: Linkages and Their Implications. Levy Economics Institute of Bard College

¹⁰ UN WOMEN: Rapid Gender Assessment on the impact of COVID-19 on women's and men's lives and livelihood, 2020 (<https://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eca/attachments/publications/2020/07/factsheet-bosnia-fin-min.pdf?la=en&vs=1208>)

¹¹ Zašto Bi Pandemija Mogla Unazaditi Ženska Prava? (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2021) <<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/za%C5%A1to-bi-pandemija-mogla-unazaditi-%C5%BEenska-prava-/30978517.html>> accessed 2 September 2021.

women have lost their jobs (as in Bosnia and Herzegovina women most often work in the hardest hit sectors) as compared to men, which made them stay home and take the burden of taking care of the household and other household members.

Macedonia

Women in Macedonia face issues that are deeply rooted in the traditional, patriarchal values and gender roles in the family and in the society. The traditional gender role is rather dominant and present among half of the women, especially among the non-majority communities.¹² Compared to men, women are often disproportionately impacted and spend three times more on household activities and have less free time.¹³ As a result, women take on multiple roles, including unpaid care, domestic work and paid jobs at the same time. This has tremendous negative effect on women's economic independence, resulting in disproportionate balance between household activities and work.

The COVID-19 crises did not improve the situation partly due to the measures taken to respond to the effects of the virus. Most notably, the Government extended maternity and childcare leave rights by providing the right for one of the parents to remain home with the children of up to 10 years of age during lockdowns. This measure strongly exacerbated the traditional gender role of women. CRPM's survey of 63 kindergartens showed that out of 2.450 persons that used the measure in the survey, 99.4% were women.¹⁴ This has led to loss of opportunities for career progress, participation in public life and other activities of the women's interest.

Montenegro

The Gender Equality Index shows that 42.7% spend time taking care of children, elderly and relatives with disability in comparison to only 23.8% of men who do the same.¹⁵ The data from the Statistical office, MONSTAT, show that 68% of women spend at least one hour per day in unpaid household work which is the case of 10.3% men. Hence, the Covid - 19 pandemic has in addition had negative effect on unpaid work which in the three months of the pandemic (April, May and June) according to UNDP have contributed with 122,3-million-euro worth of unpaid care work in the household compared to the 63,5-million-euro worth of unpaid care work done by men. The gap in the unpaid work is estimated at 92% between women and men during the pandemic.¹⁶

Kosovo

In Kosovo, the Law on Gender Equality calls for recognizing care work as a contribution to social and economic life;¹⁷ However, in terms of policy and practice, Kosovo does not

¹² Risteska M., Mickovska Raleva, A. Lazarevski G. (2012) Perspectives of women in rural areas Baseline study of the status and livelihoods of women in rural areas and recommendations for gender responsive policy responses, CRPM

¹³ Time-use survey 2009, State Statistical Office; Time-use survey 2014/15, State Statistical Office

¹⁴ Center for Research and Policy Making, 2020. Study 42 - Dealing with COVID-19: How does public spending affect gender equality?

¹⁵ Gender Equality Index 2019 | United Nations Development Programme (undp.org)

¹⁶ Miloš Vuković (2020) Doprinos žena ekonomiji Crne Gore: Neplaćeni ženski rad i njega u vrijeme Covida 19, UNDP

¹⁷ Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, Law on Gender Equality, Article 18, 2015.

have any structured way of recognizing or compensating private care work. Lack of recognition of care work contributes to lower pensions for women later in life, as their contributions to the economy from within their homes are not considered.¹⁸ Women spend an average of 46.0% of their time on care work at home, compared to men who spend only 30.7% of their time.¹⁹ Several surveys have confirmed that care work at home is among the main reasons why women do not work²⁰, contributing to women's particularly low labour force participation rates (26.1% compared to 73.9% among men).²¹ The dearth of affordable, accessible childcare, as well as elderly care and care for persons with different abilities, pose major challenges. Kosovo is far from reaching the targets set by the EU Barcelona Objectives of 33% of children under age 3 and 90% age 7 to have access to childcare; in Kosovo, 24,309 children were without care in year 2016.²² The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated gender inequalities, as isolation measures and care centre closures contributed to women having to quit or being fired from their jobs because they had to care for children, as a result of traditional gender roles that tend to mean that women continue to carry out the majority of care work.²³

Serbia

In 2020 UN Women in Serbia supported the analysis of economic (monetary) value of unpaid work.²⁴ The analysis is based on the Time use survey from 2015 that showed that 95% of women and 77% of men participate daily in unpaid jobs. Women spend 5.07 hours on unpaid jobs while men spend 2.58 hours, which is 40% less. The value of the Gender equality Index for Serbia in the sphere of time is 48,7 out of 100 (EU average 65,7). In care economy time it is even lower: 56,6/100 and in the time of social activities 41,9/100.²⁵

Using the opportunity approach costs (average time spent on unpaid care activities and minimum wage in the Republic of Serbia), estimated value of unpaid care activities amounts to 15.1% of GDP Serbia (10.4% of GDP for unpaid women's care activities and 4.7% for men).

In the expired National Strategy on Gender Equality (2016-2020) was set the objective related to balance of unpaid work between men and women, but according to the finding of the evaluation of the National Action Plan implementation effects and results of the measures are insufficient.²⁶

¹⁸ KWN, Budgeting for Social Welfare, pg.25, 2015.

¹⁹ Millenium Challenge Corportation, Kosovo Labor Force and Time Use Study Research Report, pg.11, 2018.

²⁰ Kosovo Women's Network, The Pandemic Knows no Gender?, 2020.

²¹ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Labour Force Survey, 2019.

²² For a full analysis, see KWN, Who Cares?, 2016.

²³ KWN, "The Pandemic Knows No Gender?", ...

²⁴ http://socijalnoukjucivanje.gov.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Analiza_monetarne_vrednosti_neplacenog_rada_UN_Women_SRB.pdf

²⁵ Gender Equality Index, Republic of Serbia, 2016.

²⁶ KWN, Budgeting for Social Welfare, pg.25, 2015.

Conclusions

It is estimated that in the EU women also do 80% of their home work when they are employed and spend twice as much time caring for children than men. The above data show that the situation in the Western Balkans is far more critical. The fact that none of the economies include the value of unpaid domestic work in GDP contributes to the ILO's estimated \$11 trillion globally. In most countries, the value of unpaid work is estimated to be equivalent to about 50% of GDP. The non-recognition of economic value of the unpaid care work for the economy, is not only a matter of rights, but also of the effectiveness of the economic system as a whole. Therefore, support in the sphere of unpaid domestic work and care includes strategies aimed at reducing and redistributing the time of these types of activities (UN ECOSOC, 2015). Investments in basic infrastructure such as essential child care and elderly care services, and the provision of adequate social protection would contribute to reducing the amount of time for caregiving and domestic activities and to freeing up women's time and enhancing their economic opportunities.

Differential access to and control over resources

Gender disparities in accessing and exercising control over resources such as credit, land or productive inputs remain a critical constraint for women in many developing economies. Structural inequalities across these dimensions severely hamper women's productive potential in their role as producers or entrepreneurs, often confining them to low value-added business activities in smaller and less-dynamic segments of the economy than men.

Persistent patterns of inequalities in land ownership and tenure are typically the result of legal discrimination in inheritance and ownership rights, or of patriarchal norms and socio-cultural practices enshrined in customary law, often accompanied by the lack of awareness of legitimate rights when these are granted (IFC, 2016).

The table below shows that the situation with assets ownership is most positive in Macedonia, while this is the case with land ownership in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The situation is most dire in terms of assets ownership in Montenegro, where only 4% of women own houses/flats; and in Macedonia in terms of land ownership where only 5 or 6 % of women own agricultural land.

Table 1: Status of land ownership in WB6 and Moldova

Economy	Assets ownership (houses, flats)		Land ownership (agricultural) ²⁷	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
Albania	n/a	n/a	92%	8%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	75%	15% ²⁸	70%	30% ²⁹
Macedonia	72.73%	27.27% ³⁰	94-95%	5-6% ³¹
Montenegro	96%	4%	92%	8% ³²
Kosovo	95%	5% ³³	84%	16% ³⁴
Serbia	Not available ³⁵	24.18% ³⁶	81,9%	18,1% ³⁷

The annual publication of the Institute of Statistics³⁸ does not generate any information or data about the asset's ownership or land ownership for men and women in Albania. The Kosovo Agency of Statistics also does not generate accurate sex-disaggregated data related to assets nor land ownership, although Article 46 of Kosovo's Constitution guarantees the rights of all citizens to own property; however, women struggle to overcome cultural barriers to inherit immovable property from their birth families and spouses and widespread informality that prevents them from registering their ownership rights in the cadaster. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia the Cadaster offices keep and publish the data. However, none of these institutions integrate keep sex disaggregated data, but conduct analysis using social security number of the owners. Systematic approach for keeping data on land and assets ownership sex disaggregated is needed across all the economies in the region, so that ownership is considered an important economic empowerment factor

²⁷ According to CEDAW report where the Committee notes that only a small percentage of women in the State party (8 per cent) own land, that Law No. 33/2012, which provides for joint ownership by both spouses of property acquired during marriage, is not being implemented effectively and that women are frequently discriminated against in matters of inheritance.

²⁸ Data from 2015, with 10% of common ownership

²⁹ Data from 2015

³⁰ https://www.katastar.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/rodova_ednakvost/izvestai/Tabela_so_broj_i_procent_na_zapisani_prava_pol_i_po_katastarsko_oddelenie_2019.pdf

³¹ Data from 2020: Report on the real situation with gender equality and equity in rural environments in Pologand the Northeast planning region, Rural Coalition - <https://rural.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/lzvestaj-RK-finalno.pdf>

³² 2011

³³ The Kosovo Agency of Statistics does not generate accurate sex-disaggregated data related to assets nor land ownership. According to some data from KASKosovo Agency of Statistics, Women and Men in Kosovo 2014-2015, Prishtina, Kosovo

³⁴ According to a USAID-sponsored property rights survey conducted in 2015, only 16 percent of women in Kosovo own land. Most of the land is registered under the name of the husband or eldest male member of the family.

³⁵ The calculation is not available for assets where men have 100% of ownership.

³⁶ According to data from Republic Geodet Office, from 2020. The percent is related to all assets (not only houses or flats). Women have a share in shared ownership in 12.27% of assets. <http://upisnepokretnosti.rs/Files/00071/Rodna-analiza-sa-predlogom-indikatora.pdf>

³⁷ Agricultural Census, 2012

³⁸ Institute of Statistics, 2021. Women and men in Albania. Retrieved from <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2021/women-and-men-in-albania-2021/>

and trends are monitored and analyzed.

Adequate financial resources would enable women to acquire the necessary productive inputs to start-up or expand a business activity as producers or entrepreneurs. However, factors such as a lack of collateral, high interest rates, and low financial literacy, as well as discriminatory gender norms, inhibit women's access to credit, and other financial services. Women are less likely to have a bank account or to borrow at formal financial institutions: in developing economies, 59 % of women have an account, compared to 67 % of men³⁹ (WorldBank, 2017a). Women tend to resort to a larger extent to informal sources of borrowing, most notably informal moneylenders or personal networks such as family and friends. The World Bank estimates a 1.5 trillion gap in financing to women businesses,⁴⁰ while just 2.3% of VC funding in 2020 was received by women-led start-ups.⁴¹

Women's economic opportunities are also highly dependent on their access to market information and business networks, which enable them to sell their produce at fair prices, to engage in more profitable markets and to be exposed to successful business practices.⁴² Male dominance in decision-making environments and in business networks often favors them in terms of pursuing better business opportunities, therefore marginalizing female players operating in the same sectors.

Access to finance is one of the main barriers to doing business for women in Montenegro the Gender responsive investment climate assessment shows.⁴³ However, it should be additionally explored if this is due to weak creditors' rights or lack of credit information, which can disproportionately disadvantage women, particularly if they have little collateral or control over assets, being the case for women in Montenegro.⁴⁴ Similarly, in Macedonia 52,1% do not have enough opportunities for financing their business.⁴⁵ Making the business case for women led businesses to access finance should be a priority for women in business policies around the region. This should be in combination with efforts that increase financial literacy of women as in Albania the latest data shows that the proportion of adults (18 years and older) with a loan account at a bank or other financial institution or with a mobile-money-service provider, is 56.8% men versus 43.2% women.⁴⁶ The same percentage is also for the proportion of adults (18 years and older) with a deposit account.

³⁹ MSME Finance Gap: Assessment of the shortfalls and opportunities in financing micro, small and medium enterprises in emerging markets. International Finance Corporation. World Bank Group, 2017.

⁴⁰ Ibid

⁴¹ Women-Led Startups Received Just 2.3% of VC Funding in 2020 (hbr.org)

⁴² Bamber and Staritz (2016) "The gender dimensions of global value chains", International Center for Trade and Sustainable Development, available online: [the-gender-dimensions-of-global-value-chains-ictsd-september-2016.pdf](http://www.ictsd.org/Doc/2016090101.pdf) (tralac.org)

⁴³ Risteska, Marija (2021) Gender responsive investment climate Roadmap for Montenegro, SCC

⁴⁴ Ibid

⁴⁵ Barometer of women entrepreneurship, National Platform of Women Entrepreneurship, November 2021, available online: Барометар за женско претприемништво (final).pdf

⁴⁶ Institute of Statistics, 2021. Women and men in Albania. Retrieved from <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2021/women-and-men-in-albania-2021/>

Educational attainment and literacy levels are crucial endowments to effectively pursue economic opportunities and carry out important tasks such as applying for credit, participating in extension training or accessing and using market information. In the region data below shows that the economies have closed the education gap between women and men in primary and secondary education. Educational participation by gender in the education cycles indicates the existence of gender differences at various education levels. The ratio of boys attending pre-university education is higher compared to girls, whereas women are more numerous in tertiary education than men. The competitiveness programs data around region shows that women participate more than men in trainings, extension services, or in skills development programs to acquire basic entrepreneurial and leadership skills, despite the gender-specific obstacles such as time availability, household responsibilities, mobility constraints. However, due to women's lower representation in positions of responsibility and business networks they remain excluded from supply chains, clusters and different access to finance opportunities that allow their business to grow.

Table 2: Education status in WB 6 and Moldova

Economy	Primary education		Secondary education		Tertiary education	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
Albania ⁴⁷	99.9%	94.2%	96.8%	90.1%	46.7%	71.9%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	51.3%	48.7% ⁴⁸	50.1%	49.9% ⁴⁹	41.6%	58.4% ⁵⁰
Macedonia	52.0%	48.0%	48.0%	52.0%	58.0%	42.0% ⁵¹
Montenegro	55.1%	44.9%	53.6%	46.4%	50%	50% ⁵²
Kosovo	51.5%	48.5% ⁵³	50.9%	49.1% ⁵⁴	43.2%	56.8% ⁵⁵
Serbia ⁵⁶	40.1%	22.9% ⁵⁷	60.7%	45.3%	66.9%	65.6%

⁴⁷ The data for Albania has been taken from the publication "Women and Men, 2021, prepared by the Institute of Statistics of Albania

⁴⁸ Data from 2019, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁴⁹ Data from 2019, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁵⁰ Data from 2018/2019 academic year, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁵¹ Data from 2019/2020: Women and Men in North Macedonia, 2021, State Statistical Office: <https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2021/Gender%202021.WEB.pdf>

⁵² MONSTAT (2019), LaborForce Survey

⁵³ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Education Statistics 2020/21.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Women and Men in Kosovo 2018/19.

⁵⁶ 2019 - Men and women in Serbia, Republic Office for Statistics, 2020.

⁵⁷ At the same time, In Serbia women are majority of persons with unfinished elementary school or elementary school.

Gendered composition of the labor market and participation in productive activities

Significant gender disparities are found in women's participation in the labor market and in their employment conditions. Over the last decades, the global gender gap in laborforce participation has narrowed only slightly, from 28.96 percentage points in 1990 to 27.04 in 2019 (The World Bank, 2021). To a greater extent than men, women tend to be concentrated in vulnerable employment and to have informal work arrangements: in least developed economies, 81.3% of women are in vulnerable forms of employment, compared to 65.7% of men (The World Bank, 2021).

Table 3 Status of women and men on the labor market

Economy	Active on labor market		Inactive on labor market		Employed		Unemployed	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
Albania ⁵⁸	77.1%	61.2%	22.9%	38.8%	67.8%	53.6%	11.5%	11.9%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	59.2%	37.7% ⁵⁹	40.8%	62.3%	56.6%	43.4% ⁶⁰	42.4%	57.6% ⁶¹
Macedonia	67.0%	45.0%	33.0%	55.0%	55.7%	38.4%	16.9%	14.7% ⁶²
Montenegro ⁶³	41.8%	58.2%	N/A	N/A	55.9%	44.1%	54%	46%
Kosovo	55.9%	20.8%	44.1%	79.1%	42.8%	14.1%	23.5%	32.3% ⁶⁴
Serbia ⁶⁵	62.3%	46.8%	37.7%	53.2%	55.8%	41.3%	10.57%	11.8%

Informality, part-time occupations or jobs that demand a low degree of responsibility may offer women the necessary flexibility for child care and household chores. On the other hand, workers in this category typically have no social or labor protection, and no access to pension schemes or other social benefits, which traps them in vulnerable and insecure situations that are often perpetuated throughout old age. Most of the economies in the region do not have data on informality disaggregated by sex. While estimates of informal economy are not officially available, various surveys show that

⁵⁸ Institute of Statistics, 2021. Women and men in Albania. Retrieved from <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/publications/books/2021/women-and-men-in-albania-2021/>

⁵⁹ Data from 2020, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁶⁰ Data from June 2021, Labour and Employment Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁶¹ *ibid.*

⁶² Data from Q1, 2021, State Statistical Office.

⁶³ MONSTAT (2019), Labor Force Survey

⁶⁴ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Labor Force Survey, 2020.

⁶⁵ Labour market Survey, 2021, Republic Office for Statistics

⁶⁶ Tabak, P. and Borkovic, S., (2019) Albania Diagnostic, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

women tend to work more in unpaid family businesses or in the informal sector. In Albania large informality is observed, estimated to range from 25 to 50% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).⁶⁶ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the informality rates vary between entities⁶⁷, but the latest data are from ILO estimate informality at 30% of the gross domestic product in B&H. Gender-disaggregated data on the informal economy in Kosovo is of poor quality and outdated as the latest official data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics are from 2012 suggesting that the rate of informality may be higher among men (47%) than women (36%). The three economies that publish sex disaggregated data on informality are Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. However, all these show that men are more numerous in informal economy than women as observed from the table below.

Table 4 Status of informality in WB6

Economy	Informality on labor market	
	Male %	Female %
Albania [*]	n/a	n/a
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Up to 30%	Up to 30% ⁶⁸
Macedonia	15.61%	10.56% ⁶⁹
Montenegro	25%	20% ⁷⁰
Kosovo	n/a	n/a
Serbia	63,7%	36,6%

Labor market segregation (vertical / horizontal) by sectors of economy

In the labour market, there are notable positive developments even amid the setbacks caused by the COVID-19 crisis. In general, employment rates are rising. In 2020, the labour participation rate in the Western Balkan's economies was highest in 59.7% (Albania), while the unemployment rate was highest in Kosovo 26.17%. Yet, significant gender inequalities exist, such as in Kosovo where only two in ten women are officially employed. The WB six still lag behind EU in terms of labour force participation and gender employment gaps, which in 2019 were 10 and 5 percentage points wider than in EU.

⁶⁶ Tabak, P. and Borkovic, S., (2019) Albania Diagnostic, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

⁶⁷ Labour Market survey https://www.fzzz.ba/ckFinderFiles/files/Regulativa/DJAGNOZA_TRZISTA_RADA.pdf

⁶⁸ No data on this at the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, data from 2019, according to ILO About The ILO In Bosnia And Herzegovina (ilo.org, 2021) <https://www.ilo.org/budapest/countries-covered/bosnia-herzegovina/WCMS_471903/lang-en/index.htm> accessed 2 September 2021.

⁶⁹ Data from 2020, State Statistical Office.

⁷⁰ 2014 Labour Force Survey; MONSTAT

There is also very prominent horizontal gender segregation especially in low skilled occupation which is evidence of the influence of gender stereotypes on the choice of occupation. The recent period of turmoil affected different groups in society differently. In example, the crisis “imposed back” the traditional role of women as caregivers and stopped previous advances in closing gender gaps, such as the gap in female labor force participation, especially for those working in low-paid occupations.



Table5 - Labor market segregations per sector and country

Segregation on labor market	Montenegro		Macedonia	
	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
[A] Agriculture, forestry and fishing	68,08%	31,92%	61,75%	38,25%
[B] Mining and quarrying			100,00%	0,00%
[C] Manufacturing	87,53%	12,47%	51,95%	48,05%
[D] Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	100,00%	0,00%	79,44%	20,56%
[E] Water supply; sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	65,91%	34,09%	94,32%	5,68%
[F] Construction	93,87%	6,13%	94,73%	5,27%
[G] Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	43,91%	56,09%	57,73%	42,27%
[H] Transportation and storage	90,08%	9,92%	86,51%	13,49%
[I] Accommodation and food service activities	60,82%	39,18%	72,32%	27,68%
[J] Information and communication	74,36%	25,64%	77,08%	22,92%
[K] Financial and insurance activities	50,00%	50,00%	28,80%	71,20%
[L] Real estate activities				
[M] Professional, scientific and technical activities	50,74%	49,26%	44,87%	55,13%
[N] Administrative and support service activities	72,55%	27,45%	63,17%	36,83%
[O] Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	59,97%	40,03%	69,23%	30,77%
[P] Education	24,71%	75,29%	36,94%	63,06%
[Q] Human health and social work activities	15,64%	84,36%	19,81%	80,19%
[R] Arts, entertainment and recreation	42,31%	57,69%	53,57%	46,43%
[S] Other service activities	36,36%	63,64%	36,07%	63,93%
[T] Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of households for own use				
[TOTAL] Total - all NACE activities	56,74%	43,26%	59,67%	40,33%
[U] Activities of extraterritorial organisations and bodies				

Covid-19 and Common Regional Market

The economies in the region were experiencing positive macro-economic developments with stable growth projections before the COVID-19 crisis emerged in spring 2020. As the crisis was unfolding, the governments in the region imposed severe restrictions to slow the spread of the virus, which heavily burdened the socio-economic system of all countries. The economies plunged into deep recession affecting all economic sectors, hitting demand and disrupting supply chains. The Covid-19 pandemic did not deter, but additionally motivated the six economies towards a greater regional

Serbia		BiH		Kosovo	
Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %	Male %	Female %
65,15%	34,85%	55,00%	45,00%	15,88%	84,12%
93,41%	6,59%	97,00%	3,00%	6,18%	93,82%
60,25%	39,75%	68,00%	32,00%	15,95%	84,05%
79,32%	20,68%	82,00%	18,00%	8,33%	91,67%
88,89%	11,11%	83,00%	17,00%	8,94%	91,06%
90,94%	9,06%	94,00%	6,00%	1,60%	98,40%
46,28%	53,72%	49,50%	50,50%	27,53%	72,47%
84,12%	15,88%	89,30%	10,70%	18,25%	81,75%
42,43%	57,57%	58,00%	42,00%	7,67%	92,33%
59,21%	40,79%	67,00%	33,00%	24,92%	75,08%
27,82%	72,18%	39,20%	60,80%	27,64%	72,36%
		36,00%	64,00%	10,26%	89,74%
46,06%	53,94%	68,00%	32,00%	31,48%	68,52%
58,13%	41,87%	60,10%	39,90%	29,46%	70,54%
60,51%	39,49%	61,90%	38,10%	22,00%	78,00%
27,38%	72,62%	30,15%	69,85%	49,21%	50,79%
26,80%	73,20%	32,50%	67,50%	56,39%	43,61%
55,89%	44,11%	31,00%	69,00%	28,06%	71,94%
43,39%	56,61%	51,80%	48,20%	42,04%	57,96%
38,55%	61,45%	67,00%	33,00%	52,37%	47,63%
55,80%	44,20%	60,00%	40,00%	24,82%	75,18%
		81,20%	8,80%	26,61%	73,39%

integration. Although GDP as a measure homogenizes and thus ignores differences among women and men particularly in difficult situations like Covid-19, still it is the only measure available to comparatively assess the change that occurred in the economy as result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the response to it. The average GDP growth in the WB six economies was -5.85 % in 2020, ranging between -15.3% (Montenegro) and -0.9 % (Serbia).

Forceful anti-crisis measures cushioned the heavy blow and limited loss of jobs, however at the expense of unprecedented public spending which worsened the condition of

the public finances of the economies. The choice of some was to keep the economies more open after the initial impact of the virus, in combination with the underdeveloped health systems also lead to excess death mortality rates in rankings among the top five in the world (Serbia 2nd and North Macedonia 5th) by the end of 2021. Nonetheless, in 2021 the region experienced economic recovery which exceeded previous projections with GDP growth rate of average 5.9%, with further positive projections to resume the pre-crisis path in 2023.

The positive outlook of the region's development is subject to many downside risks such as depleted fiscal space, political uncertainty, weak firm-level productivity and institutions. Inflation is also becoming a rising concern as pressures push on an upward trajectory, with projections set at 2.3% in 2021 in the WB six. The pressure is related to the recovery in the aggregated demand, coupled with the shocks on the supply side and imported inflation which led to increases in food, fuel, commodity, electricity and transport prices. The global energy crisis transferred to all economies in the region and by the end of 2021, almost all declared emergency state in the energy sector.

The gender impact of Covid 19 on the economy

Albania

The COVID-19 pandemic affected both women and men., but the measures taken by the Government, in rare cases were gender sensitive. The survey conducted by the Gender Alliance for Development Centre in 2021 shows that women were put at a greater risk because the activities where women were involved as workers such as domestic workers or garment workers remained open during the lockdown period.⁷¹ The Government response was timely and distribution of funds was very effective. One of the weaknesses was the absence of financial aid for the informal workers where women are mostly represented. Albanian government used the budget reserves, budget reallocation, rapid facilities and increased debt in the domestic market as ways to finance the response to Covid-19.

According to a study conducted by UN Women,⁷² women faced more limitations than men when trying to access food (46% vs. 43%) due to market closures and the reduced opening hours of stores. In addition, more women than men encountered difficulties paying essential outgoings due to restrictive measures. In addition, women and men were not equally hit by job losses and reductions in paid working hours: 17% of men lost their jobs compared to 12% of women ⁷³. More women than men switched to home-based working. As women's economic security was shaken, their share of unpaid care and domestic work increased.⁷⁴

⁷¹ GADC, 2021. Fiscal Gender Analysis 2020.

⁷² UN Women Albania, 2020. The impact of COVID-19 on women's and men's lives and livelihoods. Retrieved from <https://wbc-rti.info/object/news/21090/attach/factsheet-albania-fin-min.pdf>

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ <https://wbc-rti.info/object/news/21090/attach/factsheet-albania-fin-min.pdf>

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Despite the fact that the economic growth was declining even prior to the pandemic, the Covid-19 crisis is unprecedented in its effects on the growth. The GDP of Bosnia and Herzegovina decreased by 4.3% in 2020⁷⁵ and the external and internal debt of Bosnia and Herzegovina increased totalling up to 12.82 billion BAM⁷⁶ (Approximately 6.55 billion EUR), amounting to 36.01% of the GDP of Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the number of unemployed persons in Bosnia and Herzegovina increased where the share of women in registered unemployed persons was 57,1% or 240.615.⁷⁷ This trend continued through 2021 as the June 2021 data show rate of unemployed women even marginally increasing to 57.4% of the unemployed persons.⁷⁸

The Covid 19 crises influenced on the increase of men's activities in unpaid work, but women still spend a larger amount of time (33% as compared to 26%⁷⁹) on at least three activities related to unpaid care work.

The Government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted a Regulation on Intervention Measures to Support Vulnerable Sectors of the Economy of the Federation of BiH in 2020, allocating approximately 90 million BAM (45 million EUR) for it.⁸⁰ These measures were deemed successful thus the government decided to continue on allocating funds for this particular purpose.⁸¹ Similar measures were adopted in Republika Srpska entity.⁸² However, none of these measures took the gender perspective into consideration.

Macedonia

The COVID-19 crisis had significant negative impact on the Macedonian economy. It led to sharp decline in GDP, record levels of government debt and adversely affected the labor market. The State Statistical Office published that GDP had shrunk by 1.9% in the first quarter of 2021, while the cumulative decline for 2020 is expected between 4.4% and 5.4%⁸³ in circumstances of record budget deficit of 873 million euros or 8.11% of GDP.⁸⁴

⁷⁵ EBRD, 2021

⁷⁶ Ministry of Finance and Treasury of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2021

⁷⁷ May 2020, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁷⁸ Data from June 2021, Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁷⁹ Zašto Bi Pandemija Mogla Unazaditi Ženska Prava? (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2021) <<https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/za%C5%A1to-bi-pandemija-mogla-unazaditi-%C5%BEenska-prava-/30978517.html>> accessed 2 September 2021.

⁸⁰ Sjednice Vlade Federacije BiH (Fbihvlada.gov.ba, 2021) <http://www.fbihvlada.gov.ba/hrvatski/sjednica_v2.php?sjed_id=949&col=sjed_saopcenje> accessed 3 September 2021.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁸² <https://komorars.ba/mjere-vlade-republike-srpske-za-podrsku-privredi/>

⁸³ <https://p.dw.com/p/3jwXk>

⁸⁴ <https://dzt.mk/mk/210702-pandemijata-negativno-se-odrazi-na-budetskiot-deficit-za-2020-godina>

The crisis has directly hit Macedonian citizens' disposable income, translating into rise in the relative poverty rate (60% of median equivalent income) by 1.2 percentage points, placing 25,000 more people into poverty.

Due to the crisis, the labor market experienced shocks leading to 17,985 less employees in the first quarter of 2021, compared to the same period last year. The share of women in the lost employment positions is 21%. The state labor statistics also shows that 12,146 men and 11,623 women decided to give up job searching or refused to work under the current labor market conditions, when the same period is analyzed.

Montenegro

COVID-19 is hitting the labor market hard: the number of unemployed women increased by 3,560 between the end of February and the end of June, representing 56% of the total number of new unemployed. Thus, employers laid off more women than men in the crisis. Namely, the decline in the net wages of the female population in Montenegro was recorded in the following sectors: accommodation and food services, agriculture, forestry and fishing, the wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles. In some sectors, such as health and social protection, education, public administration, information, construction, water supply, electricity supply, mining and quarrying, wages have increased.

According to UNDP, women worked 92% more than men in the field of unpaid care and domestic work achieving the value of cash equivalent of unpaid care and domestic work in the amount of 489 million euros or 10% of GDP for 2019.⁸⁵

Kosovo

The pandemic has deeply affected the economy of Kosovo. Women are undoubtedly in a particularly vulnerable economic situation due to pre-existing societal norms and power relationships mainly represented in unseen unpaid care work. Kosovo's GDP contracted by 6.9% in 2020, owing primarily to lower spending, particularly diaspora-related travel services exports and investments. Considering that Kosovo came into the crisis with plenty of budgetary room to cushion the blow, the external debt did not suffer. However, Kosovo is particularly vulnerable to the crises because of the existing health and social protection systems flaws, as well as significant unemployment and informality. The government has continued to implement the Economic Recovery Programme, which provided EUR 365 million to help companies, generate employment, and boost aggregate demand. In early December 2020, the Kosovo Assembly adopted a new fiscal stimulus package of EUR 200 million (about 3% of GDP) for the Economic Recovery Programme. According to research by KWN, these measures included little to no gender perspective.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Miloš Vuković (2020) Contribution of women to the Montenegrin economy, UNDP

⁸⁶ KWN (2021) The pandemic knows no gender, KWN-The-pandemic-knows-no-gender_-ENG-1-1.pdf (gbwn.net)

Serbia

In Serbia data showed that more men than women became unemployed or inactive in the labour market, as well as that pandemic had a bigger impact on women's unpaid work. The main reason for loss of employment for men is that company stopped with work during the pandemic, while for women main reason is lack of transportation and unavailable child care. The impact on rural women economic position is more complex, due to the lack of transport and other services, and more women who work informally. The biggest impact pandemic has on people who worked informally – 21.7% of women and 30.6% of men employed in that way lost the job⁸⁷. The impact on self-employed women, or entrepreneurs was also severe and majority of women have business in the sector of services that was affected the most by the measures against pandemic.

The government supported measures to respond to the Covid-19 crises as per GKH⁸⁸ analysis were aimed to preserve employment, thus allocating support to business resulting with men benefiting more from the response measures because companies are primarily male owned. There were no measures aimed at providing child care, transportation or to entrepreneurs who stopped with economic activity.

The Common Market Regional Agenda 2021-2024

As the overview above showed the Covid 19 impacted differently on women and men, and thus gender mainstreaming of the crises response around the region is needed and was in majority missing from the response to the virus inflicted crises in general and specifically was missing from the support to the business.

The economies of the region responded differently. Some countries strived towards saving jobs and thus the financial support through the budget has been diverted to the companies employing the biggest number of employees as it was the case in Macedonia. Of course, we are aware that women are dominantly owners or managing companies that are micro and small; which makes women owned and women led companies least benefiting from this response measures. In Bosnia and Herzegovina in example the agricultural sector was in the focus where women are unpaid family workers and thus women farmers were least benefiting. In Serbia the key driver of the economic recovery was the program on production, processing and export activities which focuses on sectors in which women's participation is traditionally below the level registered for other economic sectors excluding entrepreneurs (self – employed) as grant beneficiaries, where women are mostly represented

Nevertheless, rare examples of gender responsiveness in measures directed to business were also detected. In Kosovo, and Macedonia for instance businesses that pro-

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⁸⁸ ANALIZA COVID 19 MERA-final_ENG (gbwn.net)

vide care for children or are kids playgrounds were supported. The Competitiveness program of Montenegro was for the first time mainstreamed in 2020 when the crises started. Hence, the regional review shows that women businesses were supported with training and mentoring mostly, and less for production modernization and innovations in response to the crises.

To this end it is very important how the RCC supported Common Market Regional agenda 2021-2024 that has envisioned to benefit citizens and companies from the region, provided additional support in the period of the crises. The policy plan envisioned several vehicles of intervention: **(i) regional trade area** based on the 'four freedoms approach' through mutual recognition arrangements, removing obstacles, and cutting costs and time needed for goods, services, capital and people to move freely across the region⁸⁹; **(ii) regional investment area** that aims to foster sustainable industrial activity, trade and jobs providing EU investors a more balanced distribution and diversification of supply sources and develop means of production closer to consumers⁹⁰; **(iii) regional digital fostering-Commerce**, introduction of interoperability and mutual recognition of electronic identification schemes; **(iv) regional industrial and innovation area** that increases the entrepreneurial spirit in the WB region, assisting start-ups and early stage firms, creating mechanisms for diaspora knowledge transfer, and fostering green and women entrepreneurship.

⁸⁹ Common Regional Market Action Plan 2021-2024

⁹⁰ IBID

Women Economic Empowerment in Western Balkans

The Women's Economic Empowerment: areas for joint actions, is a comprehensive framework designed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) aimed at fostering women's economic empowerment in the Western Balkan region, and advancing gender equality as envisioned in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The initiative identifies **five key inter-linked priorities** to achieve the goal of women's economic empowerment:

- ✓ **Accelerating women's entrepreneurship** (27,5% of business owners are women mostly operating in smaller, non-capital-intensive and low-income sectors, lacking access to credit and networking opportunities);
- ✓ **Closing gender gaps in digitalisation and STEM** (The share of women in STEM occupations is 14%, due to gender stereotypes, pay gaps and gender bias that prevent many girls in the region from choosing education in STEM fields);
- ✓ **Transforming the public and private sectors** to deliver for gender equality (only 14.2% of companies' top managers are female and even though nearly half of all public administration employees are women, they are mostly concentrated in lower paid branches);
- ✓ **Promoting women's leadership and access to decent work** (40% of the total employed in the Western Balkans are women and more than 23% of them hold insecure jobs);
- ✓ **Recognising and redistributing unpaid work and investing in the care economy** (Western Balkan women perform on average 3 times more unpaid work than men and spend about half as much time in paid work where they account for almost 80% of workers in low-paid care sectors).

Albania

Accelerate women's entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurship in Albania is yet in need of a strong and effective boost. Recent years have marked the improvement of the national legal framework, the updating and supplementation of this legal framework in accordance with the ratified international acts, its approximation with the legislation of the European Union as well as significant progress in building a modern institutional framework. Challenges remain for women in business, should we consider the SMEs ecosystem, despite improvements made to the business and regulatory environment. Policymakers must not underestimate constraints to women entrepreneurs as they might not be apparent immediately. They do, however, arise strongly when considering their developing social role of women and the lower education and literacy levels of certain vulnerable groups.

Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes

There is a wide recognition of the important role of women entrepreneurship in economic development and the losses arising from the current gender gap in entrepreneurship. Albania had a National Action Plan for Women Entrepreneurship (NAPWE) which has been designed for the period 2014-2020 to overcome challenges within the business environment, promoting women entrepreneurial initiatives and additional collaborative approaches to the development of a vivid climate for women in businesses in Albania. This plan was a blueprint for coordinated action and kicked off with high expectations, but was not able to resist/maintain relevance throughout the institutional restructuring of the key line Ministry and other Ministries. A more rigorous monitoring and an evaluation framework should have been envisaged with the inclusion of additional stakeholders and ensured source of financing as of the beginning. There are some success stories from local government in financial/grant schemes mainly from the Municipality of Tirana that are testimonies that systemic financial support to women entrepreneurship is possible, where public accountability is high.

At the local level, efforts have been made to encourage women's economic empowerment through financing schemes. The Municipality of Tirana has established such a scheme for several years now and in 2020 and 2021 distributed 20 grants totaling around 200,000 USD (100,000 USD for each year). The same amount of money is planned for the 2022 budget on the same purpose. In the past five years the scheme has supported around 70 women entrepreneurs.

While these programs have had an impact, the funds and budget of the Municipality of Tirana are insufficient to strengthen these initiatives, ensure their sustainability and follow-up as well as to invest in new avenues for women's economic empowerment in both urban and rural areas of Tirana. There is no information available about the businesses supported even though a database is in place. Furthermore, the municipality has not applied a gender and climate change analysis in its policy and grant giving scheme to truly understand the impact on women and girls.

However, public institutions overall at the central level have fallen behind with innovative schemes implementation in support of women entrepreneurs especially women in the rural areas. Experts and good practices suggest several options, to be considered in the near future. A unique woman oriented financial/banking product could be developed and supported, targeting increased access to finance and credit. The Bank of Albania and the Association of Albanian Banks should engage to facilitate the process to such a product. Conduct a study on suitable financial instruments for women and make information about SME financing available to female entrepreneurs through information sessions, selected publications, media/social media, LGU offices and Business Associations.

The New Strategy for Business and Investments include a priority on the Increasing access to finance for businesses, including:

- Reconceptualization of existing SME grant schemes by creating a single Fund “Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise Development Fund;
- Online application for Grants for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises;
- State guarantee scheme for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises; 50-million-euro state guarantee for the manufacturing in case of change of orders to cover the costs of construction and transfer to new production lines.

On February 10, 2021, UN Women, FAO, and the Italian Cooperation with the assistance of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development⁹¹, presented a three-year initiative that will contribute to the empowerment of rural women in Albania and strengthen the roles and contribution of women in rural development. The program for ‘empowerment of women in rural areas and tourism’ (GREAT) will be implemented in three cities, contributing to the sustainable economic development of rural women and their communities and increasing their income and ability to earn jobs.

Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes

In 2021, National Agency for Employment and Skills (NAES) designed a curriculum for entrepreneurship and business plan development to be delivered in Vocational Training Centres and the self-employment programme has been made available to registered unemployed jobseekers upon its approval, 3 years after its first piloting (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2021).⁹² National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) also included reforms in terms of developing an Albanian qualifications framework and individual qualifications; the revision of framework curricula; the organisation of basic pedagogy training for all VET teachers and instructors; the creation of multifunctional centres catering to the needs of both young people and adults; and the development of flexible offerings for jobs and VET delivery etc. In overall 9 VET training Centre/Regional Directorates are currently in place and one mobile training centre. Development and implementation of the Albanian Qualifications Framework marked good progress in 2020 with the design of 19 occupational and qualifications standards.

In addition, a particular and much welcomed practice is the Start Smart instrument, developed with the support of the PROSEED - Programme for Sustainable Economic

⁹¹ https://ambtirana.esteri.it/ambasciata_tirana/sq/ambasciata/news/dall_ambasciata/2021/02/comunicato-stampa-unwomen-fao-e.html

⁹² Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2021, National Employment and Skills Strategy 2019 – 2022: Annual Progress Report 2020. Available at <https://financa.gov.al/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/NESS-Annual-Progress-Report-2020.pdf> [Accessed 4 December 2021]

and Regional Development, Promoting Employment, Vocational Education and Training in Albania⁹³, implemented in the period 2017-2021. Provision of soft skills prior to employment supports jobseekers to adapt and have better chances of a smooth integration into the labour market. This instrument yet to be made available in all Employment Offices and Vocational Training Centres around the economy. The design of the new digital skills curriculum has also become part of the employment services, included in the career guidance service.

Boost networking opportunities for businesswomen across the Western Balkans and with the European Union

On this topic there is no action so far from Albania. There are some initiatives for Albanian women entrepreneur networks such as the Woman Chamber of Commerce, The National Albanian Women Entrepreneur Network (NAWE) and an initiative under developed from the Gender Alliance for Development Centre “She Leads”. The project “She Leads” goal is to set up a platform for Albanian women entrepreneurial competence development and support.

Recommendation

Combine financial support to know-how and improved business literacy: implement financial incentives targeting women-led enterprises and scale up the provision of entrepreneurial and financial literacy training for women, especially in rural areas.

Albania should prepare another dedicated plan of actions to strengthen women entrepreneurship in Albania. Main considerations for the preparation of a possible new Action Plan should consider:

- Inclusion of a strong monitoring and evaluation mechanism.
- Creation and inclusion of a single coordinating financing mechanism.
- Actions and interventions on the Action Plan should be of an integrated and concentrated nature, considered more effective than fragmentary ones. They should aim for systemic changes, without forgetting the short-term landscape.
- Activities should not dismiss the need of a nation-wide campaign that promotes women entrepreneurship.
- Should ensure large stakeholders' involvement in different phases, including media representatives.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) consists of two entities – Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS), and one district – Brčko District (BD).

⁹³ ProSEED is a programme commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and implemented by GIZ. The programme works on the supply and demand side of the labour market to increase employment opportunities for Albanian Youth. It aims to support youngsters to develop their skills; MSMEs to grow and innovate, young entrepreneurs to develop their business idea, and enables vulnerable groups to gain soft skills and integrate in their communities.

FBiH is made of 10 cantons, while RS of municipalities. It is important to highlight that the following policies and actions discussed vary in each administrative unit, thus it is impossible to do a thorough analysis thereof.

Accelerate women's entrepreneurship

Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes

Despite the fact that the action plans dealing with women's entrepreneurship on entity levels in BiH (FBiH and RS respectively) exist, women entrepreneurs continue to encounter numerous difficulties in their work, and due to the absence of a coordinating body of women entrepreneurs, their ability to network is slowed down. Because of the state structure of BiH, the administrative division into entities, cantons and municipalities, business opportunities also differ across the country. The grant schemes aimed at development of rural areas (municipal, cantonal/entity level) are rarely gender-responsive in BiH. There is a positive example of the Ministry of Agriculture of RS which takes into consideration gender providing subsidies for agricultural business owners, a process in which there is an added value if the owner is a woman (additional points on the list of subsidies' application).

Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes

The creation of gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes by the governmental levels are non-existent. However, there are trainings organized by local governments for youth and their start-ups, but not directed at mitigating the consequences of gender inequality in this sector.

Boost networking opportunities for businesswomen across the Western Balkans and with the European Union

There are no such initiatives in BiH from the top down, only by non-governmental organizations, except for the Chambers of Commerce of FBiH and RS. The major problem lies in the lack of a coordinating body for women entrepreneurs on a state/entity level, despite the fact that there is both will and effort to establish one such body.

Encourage innovation investments and support women-owned businesses

Only 0.2% of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian GDP is invested in innovation. When compared to the European standard of 3% - the general situation regarding innovation investments is deteriorating. The number of women in business is growing, mostly due to the attempts of foreign investors and the international community to incentivize institutions to provide both financial and procedural support for women in business. This is done unequally on different government/administrative levels in BiH. The entity of RS has strategically approached supporting women entrepreneurship and women in business. The Chamber of Commerce of RS has constituted a Council for Women's Entrepreneurship, with the goal to advocate for the interests of women

entrepreneurs, as well as to help them network. The Chamber of Commerce of FBiH has expressed interest in engaging women entrepreneurs in the development of the sector, as well as have worked for a long time to make sure women get proper representation in the managerial positions within the Chamber.

Reduce gender gaps in digitalization and STEM

Promote formal and non-formal STEM-related education among girls and women

STEM promotion in BiH is done on various levels of governments. The highest educational authority – the Agency for Preschool, Primary, and Secondary Education (APOSO) has proposed a curricula which was adopted by line institutions and represents a starting point for altering the approach to teaching because it provides clearly defined learning outcomes and progress indicators for appropriate developmental ages in the six subjects falling under the category of STEM. A backfall in this case is the missing framework to actually integrate and coordinate these subjects, due to rather backwards approach to creating study plans and programs. However, the promotion of women and girls in STEM is mostly done by non-governmental sector along with the companies which work in the sectors in question. There have been some attempts by local governments to support the promotion of STEM among girls and women. Also, there has rarely been disagreement by the line ministries (14 ministries) regarding the approval of implementing projects and organizing events concerning the promotion of women and girls in STEM.

Support women's employment in STEM fields by reducing gender discrimination in recruitment, promotions and gender pay

The strategic documents BiH (on the state level) adopts on the subject of gender equality also cover employment. Also, the legislative basis on the topic of discrimination and gender equality is existing. However, little to no actions have been directed at reducing discrimination in recruitment, promotions, and gender pay in STEM fields.

Encourage employers and policymakers to adopt an ecosystem approach to assess how women are progressing along the digital inclusion continuum

N/A

Develop a sub-regional online advocacy platform to promote gender equality in STEM fields

N/A

Recognize and redistribute unpaid work and invest in the care economy

Promote recognition of unpaid care work volume

According to data from the BiH Agency for Gender Equality, women spend between

10 and 30 additional working hours a week, or four hours a day, on household chores. These chores in 93 percent of cases in BiH are done exclusively by women, even though they work full time. On the other hand, according to estimates, men do routine household chores for less than 10 hours a week. All of this negatively affects women's careers in various ways. The unpaid work is not recognized, which is most often problematized by all of the institutions and organizations tackling the issue of gender equality. BiH has the lowest registered economic activity of women in South-eastern Europe, which is in the lower section of the European average (only 33.5% of women are economically active). The recognition of unpaid care is done mostly by the Agency for Gender Equality which emphasizes this in the majority of documents related to employment policies, gender based discrimination, etc. Systematically, however, this issue is not addressed.

Support public investment in care sectors and ensure decent work and social protection for paid care workers, including migrant workers

Care sector investments in BiH are still in their developmental stage. Especially when it comes to paid care workers whose legal status is rather complicated or undefined. For example, personal assistance is not covered by any of the laws in BiH which regulate the issues faced by persons with disabilities, except for partially in the Law on Social Protection of RS. As for Federation of BiH, this is not legally regulated. Personal assistance does not exist as a profession listed the codebook of professions. A personal assistant can be employed either as a medical assistant or as an administrative assistant, through the establishment of an official business/company. Thus, personal assistants as care workers are discriminated against. No examples of public investment in care sectors have been proposed lately, while the migrants do not work as there are still no employment programs for this particular group.

Promote employer- or state-funded provision of childcare or tax policies that encourage both spouses to work

As there is a decline in the birth rate in BiH, there is plenty of data considering the policies undertaken to mitigate the consequences thereof. Parallel with this, there is a high number of cases of gender based discrimination in the workplace, with women coming out with stories of getting fired or their employment depending on their pregnancies, planned pregnancies, etc. None of the benefits and policies in the country are even. A large number of women entitled to maternity benefit do not exercise this right due to the lack of budget allocations for this particular group. Social protection and family policy laws are the responsibility of entities and there is no unique approach to this issue. The entity-level/district-level governments create these policies and legal regulation while the cantons (FBiH), the Public Fund for Child Protection (RS), and the BD implement them.

FBiH

The fact that the compensation differs in different cantons affects unemployed women to a greater extent, because in some cantons this is not at all compensated. As per the previously mentioned administrative division of BiH, the maternity benefits for employed women are the following (according to the latest data by Women's Network of BiH and governmental sources):

Una-Sana Canton	50% of the average salary (in the last 6 months) of an employed woman is paid for 12 months (minimum 343 BAM, approximately 175 EUR)
Posavina Canton	Not included in the law, benefits are determined based on annual decisions, employed women do not have the right to access maternity benefits.
Tuzla Canton	The minimum amount is 55% of the average salary is paid for 12 months, maximum amount is not defined; the latest policy change set out a general compensation which is around 1000 BAM (approx. 500 EUR).
Zenica-Doboj Canton	Minimum amount is 200 BAM (approximately 100 EUR), and the maximum amount is 724 BAM (approximately 350 EUR) and is paid for 12 months. The latest policy change set out a general compensation of 1000 BAM (approx. 500 EUR).
Bosnia-Drina Canton – Gorazde	80% of the mother's salary; the minimum amount is 359 BAM (approximately 120 EUR), while the maximum amount is not defined, and it is paid for 12 months
Central Bosnia Canton	50% of the average salary of the employed mother in the previous 6 months, the minimum and maximum are not defined, and the compensation is paid for 12 months.
Western Herzegovina Canton	70% of a salary in the past 9 months, the minimum is not defined while the maximum is the average salary in FBiH in the past month; the compensation is paid over a period of 12 months
Herzegovina-Neretva Canton	40% of the salary received in the last 6 months before going on maternity leave. The canton reimburses employers the costs in the amount of 40 percent.

Sarajevo Canton	1000 BAM (approx. 500 EUR) regardless of the employment status of the mother. This benefit is paid over a period of 12 months.
Canton 10	100% of the salary from the past month, minimum being the lowest salary in FBiH and the maximum the highest average salary. This compensation is paid over a period of 12 months.
RS	100% of the net salary for 12 months, cannot be lower than 50% of the aforementioned. Paid by the Public Fund for Child Protection.
BD	80% of the basic salary, cannot be below the lowest average salary in the District.

Some administrative units have other policies in place which encourage both spouses to work, such as the paternity leave, obligatory for a certain amount of time, and up to maximum of 10 months by choice in FBiH and RS. However, due to the gender roles and norms which are still present in BiH, the paternity leave is not as used in practice. Some administrative units have subsidies for the day care and kindergartens (such as Sarajevo Canton) which incentivizes both parents to work. However, it is not uniquely regulated in all parts of the country.

Encourage the adoption of flexible work arrangements

Only in cases such as COVID-19 were flexible work arrangements encouraged through policies in BiH. In general, this is not an issue systematically tackled by any governmental level.

Support businesses investing in childcare plans

N/A

Promote women's leadership and access to decent work

Assess policies and advocate for decent work

This is promoted through adoption of laws regarding the protection of workers and workers' rights. However, especially in the private sector, these policies are often neglected. The assessment of policies is mostly done by NGOs.

Ensure equal opportunities and treatment in employment

The employment rate in BiH is still experiencing huge gender gaps with 40% of women and 60% of men employed. From all the reported cases of gender-based discrimination, 60% fall under the field of work and employment. There are no actions taken to tackle this issue, except by the Agency for Gender Equality which publishes reports on this and are mostly the first step or point of contact works with women in these cases.

Ensure flexible work arrangements and a safe working environment

This is promoted through adoption of laws regarding the protection of workers and workers' rights. However, especially in the private sector, these policies are often neglected. The assessment of policies is mostly done by NGOs.

Establish a gender monitor to measure progress made

Gender monitoring is done solely by NGOs tackling these issues, who do not only do reports on this but also monitor judicial proceeding on this topic.

Establish a leadership academy to ensure gender equality in economy, digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

Done through the work of NGOs, no governmental policies or attempts in place. Only example which could be found is that of Agency for Gender Equality, i.e., their support for the Leadership Academy of the Economic Faculty at the University of Sarajevo, with the goal of strengthening leadership capacities of women in politics.

Transform the public and private sectors to deliver gender equality

Develop accountability frameworks in public institutions and the private sector

Mostly directed at diminishing corruption in the public sector.

Make gender-responsive budgeting mandatory gender standards

Most often done solely nominally, on all governmental levels. Thus, the budgets do not mirror the gender responsiveness, which was very obvious through the COVID-19 crisis when the rebalances of budgets mostly had negative or neutral gender impact. The monitoring of the implementation of the promises of policies and budgets being gender-responsive is done by NGOs in BiH. There are steps forward to doing gender audits which might contribute to implementation of this action.

Step up women's participation in the boards of financial and governing institutions and companies

The NGO Rights for All analysis on the representation of women in management positions of public companies in BiH, confirmed earlier findings that speak of how low the number of women in these positions is. In the position of directors in state-level public companies there are no women; in BD, there is only one woman director (out of 4), in RS as well, while in FBiH women are in the position of directors in 16.6% of public enterprises. When discussing the lack of representation in legislative bodies at all levels of government, an initiative was launched to amend the BiH Election Law, which should lead to changing the current state. Amendments prepared by the initiative "Let's Share

Responsibility" requires that "each candidate list has an equal number of candidates, male and female, which are distributed consecutively on the list", as well as the change to the basis on which the missing number of elected women would be filled from the compensation lists of at least 40%.

Facilitate mentorship programmes to advance women in leadership positions

Done by the non-governmental organizations.

Introduce a certification for gender equality in the public and private sectors

N/A

Promote gender parity in leadership and flexible work arrangements

N/A

Kosovo

Accelerate women's entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurs' ideas, inventive problem solving, and identification of new industries benefit entire civilizations on a bigger scale. Nonetheless, entrepreneurship among women in Kosovo remains low, with women being less likely than males to establish a business. Women-owned businesses are often smaller, more frequent in the informal sector, and less likely to participate in high-value, high-growth areas. In Kosovo, women-owned businesses often use informal labor, use old equipment, and mostly specialize aesthetics, tailoring, and food preparation.⁹⁴

There are no incentives in place to encourage women to join in business, which is why the proportion of women-owned businesses in the private sector remains so low. As a consequence, according to statistics from SME surveys conducted by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) over a number of years, women own fewer than 10% of enterprises in Kosovo.⁹⁵

Accelerating women's entrepreneurship and support for women-owned businesses are key objectives for different laws and strategies in Kosovo. The women's rights movement with limited support,⁹⁶ primarily from external funders like ADA and Sida, has continually pushed for the government to include more gender transformative measures in its efforts towards economic development including following the covid-19 pandemic.

In Kosovo political leadership academies exist for women but they are not necessarily focused on the economy, nor are they supported by the government. It is a legal obligation for the Agency for Gender Equality (AGE) to monitor progress towards gender equality including progress of Kosovo towards gender equality; women's rights organisations monitor AGE and reforms though they need sustained financial support for their monitoring, therefore no additional mechanism would be needed.

⁹⁴ Riinvest Institute, Women's Entrepreneurship: An Analysis on Doing Business In Kosovo, 2017.

⁹⁵ Kosovo Agency of Statistics (ASK DATA)

⁹⁶ KWN, Where's the money for women's rights?, 2020.

Given women's current underrepresentation among small business owners, affirmative measures are needed, in line with the Law on Gender Equality, in the procurement criteria and procedures in order to ensure women have access to these benefits. According to the Kosovo Law on Gender Equality, there are special temporary measures to ensure the advancing of gender equality in areas it is lacking⁹⁷. Those measures include the quotas as well as affirmative measures for women and women-owned businesses. Kosovo's existing procurement legislation does state that "contracting authorities may decide, inter alia, specific contract conditions which allow social objectives to be considered"⁹⁸. Among these is the "Obligation to implement, during the execution of the contract, measures that are designed to promote gender equality or diversity on other grounds"⁹⁹. Hence, as per this Law, for example, ministries and municipalities, as contracting authorities, can use affirmative actions to encourage women-owned businesses and/or companies with more women employees to apply. Budget organizations can ensure that both women and men benefit from jobs created by government-funded projects.

In Kosovo, there are some affirmative measures from the Kosovo Investment and Enterprise Support Agency (KIESA) in support to women-led businesses. An example of that is the subsidies given to 32 micro, small and medium enterprises owned by women in September 2020. Moreover, MTI KIESA has organized multiple mentorship and training programs for women and girls in entrepreneurship. In September 2020, KIESA publicized a call for SMEs to strengthen businesses that have at least 50% co-ownership by women, thus increasing the number of women-led enterprises as well as increase women employment. Also, the budget for 2021 foresaw an increase in the budget for subsidies for women-led enterprises compared to previous years. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) which now has merged with the Ministry of Finance into the Ministry of Finance, Labour, and Transfers (MFLT) has been working in its active labor programs together with UNDP to have affirmative measures for women to increase their employment and their access to finances, especially in rural areas.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an effect on women and women-owned businesses. According to "*The pandemic knows no Gender*"? fiscal analysis, there were a few financial measures in response to the pandemic COVID-19 which were directed towards supporting businesses, however given the low representation of women in the business community, these measures were mostly not considerate of gender or perhaps even gender blind.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Law on Gender Equality, article 6.

⁹⁸ Law on Public Procurement in the Republic of Kosovo, 2011.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ KWN, "The Pandemic Knows no Gender"?, 2020.

Reduce gender gaps in digitalisation and STEM

The outdated Electronic Communication Sector Policy- Digital Agenda for Kosova 2013-2020 aims at maximizing all the social and economic advantages provided by technologies, and it recognizes internet as an instrument that allows the flow of services, work, entertainment and better communication. According to this Digital Agenda Kosovar women are under represented in ICT. At present, women comprise only 20% of ICT employees in Kosovo.¹⁰¹ Until now, there is not enough effort taken by the Government regarding women in STEM and/or women in the process of digitalization. However, the Ministry of Education, Technology, and Innovations is planning on supporting financially girls that are pursuing a career in STEM. There is no available gender-disaggregated data on internet or technological devices availability for children in more vulnerable positions (e.g., rural locations, minorities etc.), so this makes it difficult to estimate accurately the digital inclusion of women. The National Development Strategy, Economic Reform Program(s) as well as the National Programme for the Stabilisation Association Agreement, do not reflect a clearer logic in measures and chapters related to improving the correlation between skills acquired in education and labor market needs and on specific measures or chapters related to deployment of Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure, and they do not clearly address the impact that the distribution and use of information technology in business process, public institutions and education impact the and meet the needs of the labor market, even more so by corresponding to the underrepresentation of women. Gender-based disaggregated data related to the ICT sector is still not available and generally there is no intersectional lenses in different strategies mentioning this matter.

More focus has been directed towards digitalization practices following the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, following the closure of schools the pandemic offered free e-learning for all children in primary and secondary educations. Schoolchildren in grades 1 through 5 began learning through video lectures broadcast on two Public Service Broadcasters channels on March 24. MEST was in charge of creating these video-lectures. Initially, just two topics were included: mathematics and language. A week later, video-lectures for grades 6–9 were also made accessible. For high school and professional school students, several online learning platforms were employed.

The most important initiative taken by the Government of Kosovo on the matter is the Kosovo Digital Economy Project (KODE). The KODE Project aims to improve access to better quality and high speed broadband services in project areas and to online knowledge sources, services and labor markets among citizens, and public and academic institutions, and it is being implemented by the Ministry of Economic Development. The Project is structured along three components: Digital Inclusion, Digital Work and Empowerment, and Project Implementation Support. In the awareness activities the Proj-

¹⁰¹ KWN, "The Pandemic Knows no Gender?", 2020.

ect will have a customized approach with an aim to reach more women, which will result in more female beneficiaries, thus contributing to addressing the existing gender gap in labor market participation and, consequently, the gender gap in employment.¹⁰² Moreover, this project is one of the very few documents prior to which a gender impact assessment has been conducted.¹⁰³ According to project document, KODE is expected to reduce gender disparities through specific actions to address the distinct needs of females in the Project's activities, namely subcomponents 2.1 (Youth Online and Upward (YOU) Program) and 2.2 (Increasing Access to Knowledge Information and Services).

Recognise and redistribute unpaid work and invest in the care economy

The economy of Kosovo is characterized by a significant trade imbalance, poor GDP growth rates, and high unemployment. Over the previous five years, the growth rate has been roughly 4%. The service industry accounts for a considerable portion of national production. According to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, the labour force participation in Kosovo is one of the lowest in the region, with an average of 39 percent participation rate over the last five years. It is particularly low for women which averages below 20 percent over the same period. The unemployment is high with almost one-third of those in the labour market reported to be unemployed. High unemployment rates among women can be attributed to the high demands of the unpaid care work as women are the primary caretakers of children, the elderly, and the household.

In general, the Government of Kosovo is not focused on this topic; however, CSOs continuously work on advocating towards family-friendly policies and unpaid care work. WCSOs in particular have an important role on this as they are the ones introducing the importance of the care economy in Kosovo. Currently, unpaid care work is not recognized in Kosovo. When it comes to family-friendly policies, the law on labour needs to be amended to include provision of flexible working hours as well as regulate maternity and paternity leave. Kosovo law currently provides two days of paid leave to fathers on the birth or adoption of their child. This increases the unequal amount of care work between two parents.

We have seen during the pandemic how in many ways, the weight of dealing with the crisis has been shifted from the state to the home, where traditional gender norms place the largest additional load of unpaid labour on women. The Government of Kosovo has issued some measures related to employment as a response to the situation caused by the pandemic, however these measures do not take into account the amount of unpaid care work and also consider the fact that women are unrepresented in employment, thus, benefiting men more.

¹⁰² ENVIRONMENTAL and SOCIAL MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK Kosovo Digital Economy Project, 2018.

¹⁰³ KWN interview.

¹⁰⁴ Agency for Gender Equality, Gender pay gap in Kosovo, 2020.

We can conclude that to this day none of the proposed actions by RCC are currently a representation of the situation in Kosovo when it comes to unpaid care work and the care economy. However, the Law on Labour is currently being amended and it will soon be available for the public.

Promote women's leadership and access to decent work

There is clear evidence elaborated below that women and men are not treated equally in employment. According to a recent research by the Agency for Gender Equality, evidences that men systematically receive more pay than do women.¹⁰⁴

Labour Law is the most important instrument to ensure decent work in Kosovo. Chapter VI of this Law regulates occupational protection and safety. Women, as well as employees under 18 years of age and employees with different abilities, are said to enjoy 'special protection under the law'. This includes a prohibition on pregnant and breastfeeding women working in labour that is classified as harmful for the health of the mother or the child.¹⁰⁵

Moreover, The LL also states that pregnant women, mothers of children under three years, and single parents with a child under the age of 3, and/or a child with a serious disability are not obliged to work more than full-time working hours (40 hours per week) or night shifts.¹⁰⁶

According to a research conducted by the Kosovo Women's Network in 2019 and repeated in 2022, gender-based discrimination exists in Kosovo, particularly in hiring, promotion, maternity leave and sexual harassment at work.¹⁰⁷ Survey findings suggest that such discrimination particularly affects women in the private sector, those receiving lower salaries and persons ages 40 to 49.¹⁰⁸ Different research reports in Kosovo suggest that gender-based discrimination may affect women's labour force participation.¹⁰⁹

Towards aligning Kosovo law with the EU directives, the ongoing process of amending Kosovo's Law on Labour began in 2015. During this process, civil society representatives and governmental officials alike have discussed the implications that amending this Law may have for women's participation in the labour market. One of those implications discussed is the regulation of the parental leave as the current maternity leave

¹⁰⁵ LL, Art. 46. This includes prohibition from physically difficult labour, including exposure to biological, chemical or physical factors that may 'risk the reproductive health'. Administrative Instruction No. 11/2011 for the classification of hard and dangerous forms of labour that may damage the health of pregnancy and breastfeeding women [sic] lists specific areas where pregnant and breastfeeding women are prohibited from working (Arts. 4-5). The LL provides that any prohibition of underground labour 'shall not be applicable to women who are not pregnant in leading posts, for health employees and student interns' (Art. 46.4). It is unclear what purpose this provision serves.

¹⁰⁶ LL, Article 48.

¹⁰⁷ KWN, Gender-based Discrimination and Labour in Kosovo, 2022.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ KWN, Striking a Balance: Policy Options for Amending Kosovo's Law on Labour to Benefit Women, Men, Employers and the State, Pristina: KWN, 2016, at: and Riinvest Institute, Women in the Workplace: an Analysis of the Workforce Conditions for Women in Kosovo, Pristina: 2017, p. 9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

and the lack of paternity leave puts the care burden on the mother; hence implicating the mother's future in employment. KWN had assessed that the current maternity leave provisions contribute to discrimination against women in hiring, as employers seek to circumvent costs affiliated with maternity leave.¹¹⁰ The law is in the process of being amended and it is supposed to be available for the public late 2022. Another recommendation from the Civil Society side has been the flexible work arrangements which the government has committed to include in the new draft law.

Active Labour Market

The Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo (EARK), established in 2015 by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW), is the central authority that coordinates the implementation of Active Labour Market Policies across the country. Under the agency operates Vocational Training Centres (VTC) that provide professional training services on practical knowledge and skills for unemployed and jobseekers in order to better match the labour market needs. Currently, there are 8 VTCs across Kosovo that offer training services on 30 different professions.

Transform the public and private sectors to deliver gender equality

Promoting gender equality is not a political priority. This is why gender equality is still stagnating in Kosovo. However, there have been some efforts in including it as a cross-cutting theme in different strategic objectives of the Government throughout the years. There are different frameworks that promote gender equality in Kosovo: the Constitution of Republic of Kosovo; Law No. 05/L-020 on Gender Equality; Law No. 03/L-182 on Protection from Domestic Violence; Law No. 2004/26 on Inheritance; Law No. 2004/32 on Family; Law No. 05/L-021 on Protection from Discrimination; Kosovo Program(s) for Gender Equality; The National Development Strategy 2016-2021 (DSD); Better Regulation Strategy 2.0; The Kosovo Program for the Implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between Kosovo and the European Union (2017-2021); The Kosovo Program for Economic Reform 2020-2022; National Strategy and Action Plan for Protection from Domestic Violence,; Annual Budget Circulars

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo, Article 7.2: 'The Republic of Kosovo ensures gender equality as a fundamental value for the democratic development of society, equal opportunities for participation of women and in political, economic, social, cultural, and other areas of social life.'

In 2005, the Agency for Gender Equality (AGE) was established as a separate governmental institution. This Agency operates in the framework of the office of the Prime Minister of Kosovo. Also, officers for Gender Equality have been appointed in all municipalities and ministries in the territory of Kosovo and their role is to monitor the progress of gender equality in their institution.

The Kosovo Law on Gender Equality makes gender-responsive budgeting mandatory

for all public institutions including ministries, municipalities and all other budget organizations. Apart from that, the Ministry of Finance, Labour, and Transfers issues the Budget Circulars which requires that all budget organizations provide an annex with the information on GRB when submitting their budget proposals. It is important to note that the Kosovo Institute for Public Administration has adopted the well-informed curricula on GRB produced by KWN to train budget officers. The law on Gender Equality provides some special measures to accelerate the realization of gender equality. One of these measures makes obligatory the 50% representation of each gender in all legislative, executive and judiciary bodies and other public institutions.

There is a gender quota when it comes to politics and decision-making. Reserved seats for women aims towards a more equal representation of both men and women. However, there are no provision for other financial advantages to encourage gender equality when it comes to the procurement of goods and services.

Apart from the Law on Gender Equality, there is also the Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-24 which aims to “ensure that gender equality is placed at the center of the transformation processes in Kosovo, within all structures, institutions, policies, procedures, practices and programs of government, agencies, civil society, the private sector and the donors’ community”. The first Kosovo Program for Gender Equality was developed covering the period 2008-2013.

According to the Kosovo Law on Procurement “contracting authorities may decide, inter alia, specific contract conditions which allow social objectives to be considered”. Among the special measures foreseen by the Law on Gender Equality is the “Obligation to implement, during the execution of the contract, measures that are designed to promote gender equality or diversity on other grounds”. This means that budget organizations as contracting authorities can encourage women-owned businesses with more women employees to apply. A small number of municipalities use affirmative measures to support women-led businesses. In the fiscal impact assessment of COVID-19, budget officers from ministries and municipalities were asked whether women-led businesses have been subject to affirmative measures such as the signing of more points for them during the pandemic, and the findings show that there is no such affirmative measures related to procurement.

In conclusion, although there are multiple frameworks establishes that protect the advancement of gender equality, the harmonization with all the legislations is stagnating.

Montenegro

[Accelerate women's entrepreneurship](#)

Although the Government recently announced that Montenegro took a high second

position in implementation of women's entrepreneurship policy, according to the SME Policy Index Report for Western Balkans and Turkey, there is still a lot of space for improving of women's entrepreneurship in Montenegro, both for already active companies owned by women, as well as for encouraging unemployed women to start their own business.

The goal of Strategy for Development of Women's Entrepreneurship (SDWE) 2021-2024 in Montenegro is to respond to identified challenges and provide support for the economic empowerment of women by strengthening their entrepreneurial potential and creating a business environment favorable for starting and developing women's businesses. In the interest of fulfilling the above, the Strategy, along with key measures and activities, also established the following strategic priorities:

- Creation of a favourable business environment for the development of female entrepreneurship
- Better access to finance
- Providing the necessary knowledge and skills
- Promotion, networking and advocacy of the interests of women entrepreneurs.

The Government of Montenegro adopted, at 21st July 2022, the *Report on the implementation of Action Plan of Strategy for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in Montenegro 2021-2024*, for 2021, where is indicated there are achieved result of 88% of total planned activities provided in Action Plan for 2021.

In addition to great impact of the epidemiological situation in country caused by



The Ministry of Economic Development and Tourism recognizes the importance of female entrepreneurship as a driver of economic and overall social development. In the coming period, it is necessary to continue with the existing support programs for women in business, as well as with the development of new ones, and additionally work on strengthening coordination in the process of planning and implementation of programs within the public, private and NGO sectors, all with the aim of achieving the defined goals of Strategy.¹¹¹

¹¹¹ <https://www.gov.me/clanak/crna-gora-druga-zemlja-u-sprovođenju-politika-zenskog-preduzetnistva>

Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes

Access to finance is often crucial for creating a successful and competitive business, which develops and grows, and is owned by women. In this context, the establishment of specific financial instruments and credit lines for women entrepreneurs within existing financial institutions in the public sector at the national and local level is of great importance.

In above mentioned Report on the implementation of the Action Plan of the Strategy for the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship, without other details, it is emphasized: Within the framework of operational objective 2.1: Better access to finance, 11 activities were implemented, which mostly relate to the provision of financial support to women's entrepreneurship at the local and national level.

The Program for the Improvement of Women's Entrepreneurship for 2022, adopted by Investment and Development Fund (IDF) aims to encourage the establishment and development of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises and entrepreneurs in which women are business owners. In this way, they want to support female entrepreneurship and promote the affirmation of women in business.¹¹²

Financial support through grants/subsidies for the co-financing of specific projects of women entrepreneurs has been established in the largest number of local self-governments and needs to grow into a continuous practice of financial support for women's entrepreneurship at the local level.

- For 2021, the Investment and Development Fund of Montenegro (IDF) granted women entrepreneurs €7.4 million through 77 projects, while the Ministry of Economic Development, within the Program for Improving the Competitiveness of the Economy 2021, supported 84 MSMEs owned by women in the total amount of €370,433.71. (Achieved target value 2021: 161)
- 12 municipalities allocated funds in the total amount of €291,000.00. All 12 municipalities have allocated funds. 131 business ideas were supported in the amount of €270,832.00
- Institute for Employment, from IPA funds, awarded 159 grants for self-employment, of which 107 were given to women (67.3%) in the amount of €792,845.0
- The Program for Improving the Competitiveness of Economy for 2022 has as one of its specific goals: encouraging the development of entrepreneurship among women and young people through co-financing of investments in equipment of low value. We do not have data on the realization of the program because it refers to the current year.

¹¹² https://www.irfcg.me/images/documents/DokumentaDesniMeni/Dokumenta_2022/Izmjene_linija_spasoje/PRG-13-6_Program_unaprjedenja_zenskog_preduzetništva_-_NOVA.pdf

Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes

All those who applied for funds from the Innovative Program for Continuous Stimulation of Employment and Entrepreneurship in Institute for Employment underwent training.

Investment and Development Fund of Montenegro, as a credit institution, is primarily responsible for providing financial support. However, through the very process of approval and realization of credit funds, especially when it comes to women-beginners in business, we are also available for non-financial support. Mostly in terms of coordination and advice related to the development of a business plan and the realization of an investment. Also, there is a credit line for beginners in business, which is realized in cooperation with Ministry of Economic Development (MED). Under this credit line, future entrepreneurs apply by MED's public invitation and are required to undergo certain training-education organized by MED in order to then acquire the conditions for consideration of financial support from the IDF.

- Realized 8 advisory support projects through the EBRD program "Women in business".

Strengthening business infrastructure (incubators, business and start-up centres, at the local and regional level) and their mutual coordination should be in the function of promoting female entrepreneurship and should attract as many female beneficiaries as possible. In 2021, the percentage of female entrepreneurs using the existing business infrastructure remained at the previous level.

By involving employers in the education system through practical education, professional practice and the dual education system, better interaction and benefits are achieved for the economy and participants of the education system, but in 2021, a decrease in the percentage of female students attending dual education was recorded. The negative epidemiological situation caused by the corona virus affected the course of implementing part of the activities within the formal education system, the pandemic directly affected the process of implementing teaching activities, performing extra-curricular activities and visiting employers in order to acquire knowledge and skills of students.

During 2021, the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro organized 80 trainings for entrepreneurs. A little less than 5,000 participants (4,858 participants in total) took part in these trainings. Out of total number of participants, slightly more than 2,040 participants are women (or 42%)

Encourage innovation investments and support women owned businesses

In 2021, 4 loans were financed from the Innovative program for continuous stimulation of employment and entrepreneurship in Montenegro with a total value of €20,000, 1 financed loan in the amount of €5,000 is intended for a project led by a woman.

Reduce Gender gap in digitalisation and STEM

Promote formal and non- formal STEM-related education among girls and women

In Montenegro, about 17 percent of those enrolled in IT universities are women. As part of the Schools for the 21st Century programme, the British Council has developed a guide and a range of activities to help primary schools set up Coding Clubs as an extra-curricular activity. This program is attended by both girls and boys.

Things are changing for the better, the situation is improving and the gender gap is narrowing, but if we really intend to meet the needs of the 21st century economy, we need to break down the barriers, increase girls' interest in STEM and encourage more women to start or continue careers in STEM.

The Strategy on Gender Equality in Montenegro 2021-2024 was adopted in July 2021. For the first time, this document contains Measure (3.6): Empower girls to enroll in undergraduate, master's and doctoral studies in STEM. There are no information about realization of activities regards on this measure.

The regional network "*Women in STEM*" was formed as a common platform for strengthening cooperation between women working in STEM fields in the Western Balkans. The network was created under the auspices of a joint platform of cooperation between two international organizations: UNDP and RCC, which recognized the potential of women in this area, but also their needs, with the aim of providing equal conditions for achieving results in STEM fields and empowering girls and women to step freely into areas that are perceived as "masculine" in certain "traditional" terms. The last meeting of the Network was held in Budva (Montenegro) in June 2022.¹¹³

Support women's employment in STEM fields by reducing Gender discrimination in recruitment, promotion and Gender pay

In research carried out by UNDP in Montenegro in 2022 Assessing the digital gender gap management and in designing, developing and managing STEM products/services by public administration it was concluded that there is no data by gender in the field of STEM employment, but it is also recommended as a long-term measure to widely promote the education of girls in STEM fields, through various events and highlighting examples and sharing the experiences of successful women in STEM in Montenegro and the region.

Encourage employers and policymakers to adopt an ecosystem approach to assess how women are progressing along the digital inclusion continuum

Digital transformation of business is part of measure 2.2.1. Strategy on Development of Women Entrepreneurship 2021-2024 in Montenegro and a part of the activity related to that measure has already been implemented in the following way:

¹¹³ <https://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/bez-ravnopravne-zastupljenosti-zena-u-najplacenijim-profesijama-nema-ni-odrzivog-razvoja>

- 9 women underwent training on the topic of digital transformation organized by the EBRD and NLB Bank. The EBRD implemented 3 projects of digitalization of business, 2 projects of improvement of the organization and 1 project of improvement of marketing for women in business.
- During 2021, the Chamber of Commerce of Montenegro organized 54 hybrid meetings. The Chamber organized the conference “Cyber Security: Challenges of Industry 4.0” on December 15, 2021. The meeting was attended by 22 participants.¹¹⁴
- The Chamber also organized two educational activities “Marketing management in the era of change and digitalization” (01/12/2021) and “The Future is Digital - Digitization of business, trends in the world and intellectual property rights” (31/03/2021).

Recognise and redistribute unpaid work and invest in the care economy

Promote recognition of unpaid care work volume

Although unpaid work is not recognized in official policies in Montenegro, so it is invisible - it is estimated that its contribution to the national economy is huge and makes up 15% of GDP.

Macedonia

Accelerate women's entrepreneurship

Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes

With the Operational plan on employment for 2022, significant progress has been made in encapsulating women in the national employment measures and programs, which has been respectively budgeted. For instance, unemployed women aged by 58, women victims of domestic and gender-based violence, unemployed Roma women (aged by 58) as well as women returnees from foreign battlegrounds were one of the main target groups in the Measure #1 – Self-employment support (entrepreneurship). The financial assistance in category was budgeted on 307.500 mkd individually or 615.000 mkd with co-founder(s). Women have been targeted in the second category / measure – Support for creating new jobs via subsidizing the salary related taxes with 19.000 mkd for a period of 3,6, or 12 months. In this measure, a special emphasize is given to women victims of domestic or gender-based violence, Roma women or other women from ethnic groups, single parents, parents of children with disabilities and etc. In relation

¹¹⁴ <https://www.privrednakomora.me/projekti-aktuelnosti/industrija-40-mogucnosti-izazovi-i-perspektive>

to this, If we analyze the Report on the implementation of the Employment Operational Plan on 2021, we can see that out of 3654 submitted applications for this measure, 1282 were submitted by women. Additionally, of the total 1877 contracts made, 805 were done with females (42.9%).

The operational plan also provides training program for gaining new skills and competences (measure 3). Here brief reference is also given to women as target group, mentioning “women” in general terms. The financial benefit is 9.000 mkd for trainee as well as 15.000 for the employees who provide the training, and 24.000 mkd for the trainings targeting deficient jobs (social services, green jobs and e-commerce).¹¹⁵ If we make reflection on the last year for the same measures, the Report on the implementation of the Employment Operational Plan on 2021 shows that out of 1575 total trained individuals, 338 were women (21,46%) which present less than quarter of the trained group. In addition, with only 162 women a post-festum contract was signed.¹¹⁶ Speaking precisely on the Measure for Self-employment in 2021, the Agency for support of entrepreneurship's report shows that of total 1747 developed business plans, 47% have been done by females and 53% by males. Furthermore, during the last year, according to the Agency, the Voucher counseling system was marked with even greater gender imbalance – from 48 issued vouchers, 10 have been issued to females and 38 to males The gender financial summary shows that in 2021, from total spent 20.800.000 MKD, 10.623.110 have been spent on boosting women's entrepreneurship (with highest amount on 9.116.800 on business plan support).¹¹⁷ In 2022, a significant progress was made when it comes to the financial support for women in the rural / agriculture sector. Namely, due to extensive lobbying and advocacy, especially in the Macedonian granting scheme in the framework of the Gender Budget Watchdog Network, the Measure 115 known as “Rural women” was doubled from original 3.000 eur to 6.000 eur.¹¹⁸ Another woman targeting measure is the Ministry of Economy's May 2022 public call for financial support for female entrepreneurship in tourism. The subject of the public call was subsidization of tourism and hospitality enterprises owned by women (over 50%) and managed by women through co-financing of 50% of the proven costs but not more than MKD 100,000.00, per applicant for the following purposes:

- Purchase of equipment and tools;
- Arrangement/improvement of the business space or
- Holding trainings for employees to improve the quality of the service.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Agency on employment, Operational plan on active employment measures and labor market services on 2022

¹¹⁶ Employment service Agency of North Macedonia, Annual operational report 2021;

¹¹⁷ Agency for promotion of entrepreneurship of the republic of North Macedonia, Annual report on state of affairs on equal opportunities on women and men for 2021;

¹¹⁸ Announcement of Ministry of agriculture, forestry and water management, 20.04.2022

¹¹⁹ Public call for financial support for female entrepreneurship in tourism, National Platform for Women Entrepreneurship, May, 2022

According to the Strategic plan 2022-2026 of the Agency for entrepreneurship, blurry reference is given to the women's entrepreneurship with a broad planed activity "Further strengthening of the women's and social entrepreneurship" with 600.000 MKD budget.¹²⁰

Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes

As mentioned above, the Operational plan on employment 2022 foresees both business training and entrepreneurship up skilling programs / measures. However, this is not the single document that projects such activities. The Strategy on Women Entrepreneurship and the Respective Action Plan are crucial documents that need serve as a roadmap in terms of enhancing the entrepreneurial and economic position and activity of women in Macedonia, but the pandemic obviously caused serious disturbances in the implementation pace. Even though the deadline for its overall implementation is still valid (2023), there are two key priorities in the Action plan that still need to fully available and institutionalized and for which public data / information need to be available in order to assess the eventual progress:

Activity ¹²¹	Indicator	Time frame	Budget
To develop web seminars and web advisory services by creating an online platform.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created online web platform seminars and advisory services 	2019	1.500.000 (from donors)
To provide mentorship from experienced business women for startups and entrepreneurs who want to grow, as well as for women entrepreneurs in technology the intensive business ventures as well as in export oriented sectors;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An increased number of Mentors; An increased number of users of mentoring services; 	2019-2023	1.200.000 (donors)

Since the beginning of this year, Macedonia has a new government. In the Program for Work of the Government 2022-2024, there is no reference to women's entrepreneurship which was not case with the previous one capturing the period 2020-2024 where specific reference to Increasing youth and women employment was given.

¹²⁰ Agency for promotion of entrepreneurship of the republic of North Macedonia, Strategic plan 2022-2026;

¹²¹ Ministry of Economy, Action plan for the implementation of the development strategy of women's entrepreneurship in the Republic of Macedonia 2019 – 2023

Boost networking opportunities for businesswomen across the Western Balkans and with the European Union

In May, 2021 the National Platform for Women Entrepreneurship was established. The main goal of this EU project based initiative is *to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations to create public policy proposals and advocacy in the field of women entrepreneurship, by merging existing networks into a single platform that will be of interest to women entrepreneurs at all levels and emphasizes the need for dialogue, structural cooperation and trust between national / local government and the business community for the economic empowerment of women, including young and rural women.*¹²² Such initiatives are present even on local level with the establishment of the City of Skopje Council on women's entrepreneurship aiming at supporting women entrepreneurs through creating gender budgeting policies, promoting gender equality and financial support programs for women starting their entrepreneurial story.¹²³ Even though this young national level idea is still in its initial phase, the regional networking remains challenge and scarce. The Macedonian Association of business women is the single member from Macedonia in the Balkan Women Coalition that aims at creating stable and multinational network to help women gain new qualifications and help women in the business field. Based in Thessaloniki, Greece, the network currently joins seven members from Greece, Albania, Turkey, BiH, Bulgaria and Montenegro.¹²⁴

Encourage innovation investments and support women-owned businesses

The Ministry of Economy in the annual sector program scheme(s) touches upon this driver. For instance, in the last year call in Measure #1 Development and support of micro and small sized enterprises and craftwork, sub measure 1.2 is devoted to this matter titled Financial support for female entrepreneurship in the total amount of 4,000,000.00 MKD. The main focus of this intervention is subsidizing enterprises owned by women (above 50%) and managed by women, through co-financing of 80% of the proven costs but no more than 150,000.00, MKD for the listed purposes:

- Procurement of equipment and tools;
- Arrangement/improvement of the business space;
- Introduction of software solutions (50% of proven costs, but not more than 60,000.00 MKD).¹²⁵

Though the innovation investment in this call is not so emphasized, still we can find its traces and say that this measure foresees this component in the second and third pillar of the listed purposes. According to the GRB report from the Ministry of Econo-

¹²² National Platform for Women Entrepreneurship, About us

¹²³ https://skopje.gov.mk/mk/vesti/2019/18012022_grad_skopje_formirase_sovet_za_poddrska_na_zenskoto_pretpriemastvo/

¹²⁴ <https://balkancoalition.com/>

¹²⁵ Ministry of Economy, Program for competitiveness, innovations and entrepreneurship for 2021

my for selected programs in 2020, in the framework of this measure 2.500.000 MKD have been budgeted, but spent 2.307.370 MKD among 21 female applicants.¹²⁶ In this year patch of call(s), however the women targeted support is still missing / pending. Namely, this year *Program for development of entrepreneurship and competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises for 2022* is structured into three main pillars / measures:

- **Measure 1:** Financial support for micro, small and medium sized enterprises in the total amount of 50,000,000 MKD
- **Measure 2:** Subsidizing the costs of craftsmen in the total amount of 6,000,000 MKD.
- **Measure 3:** Co-financing of projects for the development and promotion of entrepreneurship and crafts in the Republic of North Macedonia in a total amount of 6,000,000 MKD.

In the respective call there is no even a single sub-measure, criteria or affirmative initiative targeting women owned businesses or women in general as special target group.¹²⁷ However, according to the Government, since the introduction of this program in 2012, 152 companies led by women were supported with 14.1 millionMKD.¹²⁸

The State Audit office in its final performance audit report on the effectiveness of the measures of the government for gender equality and the respective gender budget initiatives highlights one crucial fact that needs to be seriously taken into consideration when it comes to the effective implementation of the Ministry of economy's measures related to women's entrepreneurship. The auditors have concluded that in the period 2017-2020, two changes have been made in regards to the position coordinator and deputy coordinator on equal opportunities, which has an impact on the overall process of implementation of gender responsive budgeting and the gender equality process within the ministry. Another burden in this line is the systematization of work rules for 2021 in which new position - assistant coordinator is planned for the concrete sector, but still no one has been employed or reallocated for this job place.¹²⁹

Reduce gender gaps in digitalisation and STEM

Promote formal and non-formal STEM-related education among girls and women

The female participation as employees in the IT sector in Macedonia is nearly 27% with only 12% in the decision-making positions. However, some promising signals are com-

¹²⁶ Ministry of Economy, Report on GRB 2020

¹²⁷ Link

¹²⁸ Ministry of Economy, Announcement, May, 2021

¹²⁹ Final performance audit report on the effectiveness of the measures of the government for gender equality and the respective gender budget initiatives, State Audit Office

ing if we see the educational trends. The changes in the STEM studies proportions have been made after serious efforts and advocacy from the CSO as well as the Ministry of Education among the high Scholl students in form of research, Open coding days, state¹³⁰ and non-state funded scholarship schemes. This education sector for a long time was men dominated, but the latest official figures show dramatic changes.

The latest data from the National Statistics shows that in terms of the Electro-technical and IT studies in the biggest state university, in the academic year 2021/22, there have been 510 freshwomen and 534 freshmen enrolled. The situation is different when it comes to the Technology and Metallurgy studies were this proportion between females and males is even more visible in favour of female. Namely, for the first time after long years, there have been 238 freshwomen and 67 freshmen, whereas the Mechanical Engineering Faculty from the largest state university is having a gender enrolment percentage ratio of 62:38 in favour of freshmen.¹³¹

Faculty	Female (fresh)	Female (fresh)
Faculty of Natural Sciences and Mathematic	785	785
Faculty of Mechanical Engineering	315	315
Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Information Technology	510	510
Faculty of Technology and Metallurgy	238	238

Regarding the informal knowledge centres / academies (out of the regular tertiary education), it can also be said that are becoming quite popular among the youngsters, both among men and women. Some of them in the course of last year (with a support from foreign donors) have created special educational programs for girls and women from vulnerable background to be equip with digital marketing skills.¹³² However, the government can still make more efforts in treating this matter with gender transformative lenses. Namely, in the third Covid-19 recovery package *Measure 3.3*. Financial

¹³⁰ International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellowship Program (MSCFP), Ministry of Education

¹³¹ Enrolled students in higher schools and faculties in the Republic of North Macedonia in the academic year 2021/2022 (first cycle of studies), State Statistical office available at : https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2022/2.1.22.28_mk.pdf

¹³² <https://umno.mk/sedc-dodeluva-stipendii-za-devojki-i-zeni-od-ranlivi-kategorii/>

support for young people up to 3,000 MKD in the form of vouchers for co-financing for IT and digital training skills as gender neutral with no extra incentives or support for girls / women. Also, in this year Employment Operational Plan, a special Measure #4 is devoted to development of digital skills. This measure is projected with a co-funding from the educational centres that are conducting the training and has several strands such as automation tester, cloud administrating, java developer, Microsoft data analysis, Python developers and etc. However, this measure is completely gender neutral with no even a single provision or criteria related to women / girls pointing the targeted group for this measure only as “unemployed young individuals aged by 34 with minimum secondary education, registered in the Agency”.¹³³ However, it is soothing to say that the statistics from the last year utilization of this measure shows gender balanced outcome – from 728 total trained, 375 have been women (ca. 52%).¹³⁴

Support women's employment in STEM fields by reducing genderdiscrimination in recruitment, promotions and gender pay

According to some national research conducted by Finance Think, IT sector is one of the most fair payment sectors from a gender perspective.¹³⁵ However, as mentioned above, the women proportion in the STEM as employees remain challenge as well as their capture in the decision making positions. These driver's parameters are mainly left to be implemented as internal policies of the companies trying to meet the European standards and trends. This includes gender-sensitive recruitment efforts to attract more female applicants to ICT companies, mentoring, and amenities that improve work-life balance as well as mentorship schemes by people with extensive experience in the field.¹³⁶

Encourage employers and policymakers to adopt an ecosystemapproach to assess how women are progressing along the digitalinclusion continuum

No systematic approach has been noticed, neither ad-hoc measures.

Develop a sub-regional online advocacy platform to promote genderequality in STEM fields

Despite the “Regional Network of Women in STEM in the Western Balkans” joint initiative of the RCC and UNDP established in April 2021 which is aiming atempowering and encoring high-school girls and young females to access STEM higher-education and careers,¹³⁷ there is no other concrete regional action that will serve as a platform to

¹³³ Employment service Agency of North Macedonia, Annual operational report 2021;

¹³⁴ <https://av.gov.mk/content/%D0%94%D0%BE%D0%BA%D1%83%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82%D0%B8/%D0%98%D0%B7%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%88%D1%82%D0%B0%D1%98%20%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%90%D0%92%D0%A0%D0%A1%D0%9C%202021.pdf>

¹³⁵ <https://edplako.mk/grafikonii/#/>

¹³⁶ The stereotype still exists that IT jobs are man's profession, Interview with Aleksandra Risteska (Reactor), April, 2021 available at: Link

¹³⁷ [RRI GOOD PRACTICE] THE REGIONAL NETWORK OF WOMEN IN STEM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS available at: <https://wbc-rti.info/object/link/22750>

advocate for enhancing the position of women in this economic activity. In the Open Balkan Initiative, no political decision has been made in enhancing STEM.

Recognise and redistribute unpaid work and invest in the care economy

Promote recognition of unpaid care work volume

Recently adopted Strategy on gender equality 2022-2027 recognizes this challenge. It is stated that according to employment status, women outdo men in the category “unpaid family worker”, with a double ratio - 61.8 % vs. 38.2 %. The strategy reeferes to this phenomena as a main challenge that needs to be tackled, especially those from vulnerable background, caring for disabled family members, those from the rural areas and affected by the climate change consequences. The document sets some target results in order to improve the situation, though bit vague and with indicators that can be more specified.¹³⁸ The NGO sector is quite vocal when it comes to this issue, especially during the Covid-19 restrictive reassures, especially during the closure of schools and kindergartens when the obligation to care of children at home and their educational process in most cases taken over by women. This measure led to the loss or leaving of work due to the care of children and the home and in support of this argumentation is the fact that 77% of the total 10.426 requests for work release (paid), were from women. Similar numbers are coming from other NGOs which estimated that the overall unpaid work in Macedonia is predominantly carried by women with 77%, but another striking fact is the calculation which shows that the minimum monetary value is estimated at €1,917,895,508, which presents 17.18% of the Macedonian national GDP.¹³⁹ Having this in mind it can be said that the government makes insufficient steps and actions to mollify this situation. As some initiatives in this direction we can mention the continuous increasing of the amount for personal assistance for disabled persons (2020 - 223 MKD per hour,¹⁴⁰ 2021 - 233 MKD per hour;¹⁴¹ 2022- 269 MKD per hour;¹⁴²) as well as the number of personal assistants (123, 146, 219 respectively).

Support public investment in care sectors and ensure decent work and social protection for paid care workers, including migrant workers

The investments and measure in the health sector where according to the Annual register of the public servants for 2021 72,48% of the total employed are women¹⁴³ were especially visible during the most serious phases of the pandemic in 2020 when we can highlight the ad hoc procurement of 200 respirators in and regular reconstructions of some of the Skopje based and inner based hospitals in the country (Skopje, Stip, Ohrid...).

¹³⁸ <https://api.klimatskipromeni.mk/data/rest/file/download/94db77cf7037ed0de3210c9a3ae1efe723f6ec9a79142791b87cd946eb2a5376.pdf>

¹³⁹ <https://www.radiomof.mk/novo-istrazhvanje-na-reaktor-za-mazhite-i-neplatenata-grizha/>

¹⁴⁰ <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/pravilnicisocijalna/1-merged.pdf>

¹⁴¹ <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/dokumenti.nspix>

¹⁴² <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/dokumenti.nspix>

¹⁴³ https://www.mioa.gov.mk/sites/default/files/pbl_files/documents/reports/finalen-izveshtaj_2021_rabotna_30.03.2022.pdf

In the pandemic caused crisis, the health staff investments were also noticeable. Namely, 20% reward of the basic salary for 2 months for the front-line health workers in the so called *Covid Centers* was implemented. In 2021 and 2022 the investments in the public health system continued in 2022 such as the renovations in the hospital in Prilep, new equipment at Skopje Radiology Institute, the Children's Clinic and etc. However, the low level of salary in the Macedonian health sectors is an issue which lasts since the independence of the country. This is the main push factor for doctors and other medical staff to often migrate in the private sector or in the EU countries, leaving the state health system in constant scarcity in terms of providing professional and timely care and service. This was extremely visible and felt during the surges and the overwhelming capacities in the hospitals which resulted in exhausted staff. In line with this, is the latest measure for 5% increase in salaries for all employees in public health institutions beginning from 01/2022.¹⁴⁴ Another positive action was the paid shift and health insurance for the young health trainees in 2021.¹⁴⁵ When it comes to the children care sector (where women are predominantly employed), besides the increase of children's nurseries salaries in 2019 and several renovations and construction of new kindergartens, still the lack of sufficient capacities and overwhelmed staff remains a huge challenge for the authorities. For illustration, only 3000 children are placed on the waiting list only in this year.¹⁴⁶

On the relevance of the migrant workers it is hard to conduct in depth analysis is limited due to scarcity of numbers and statistics, but according to the officials the care sector is not the economic activity that employs foreign workers. Namely, according to the minister of economy they are mostly concentrated in the construction and production activities and up to June, 2022, 70% of the national foreign workers quota has been exhausted.¹⁴⁷

Promote employer- or state-funded provision of childcare or tax policies that encourage both spouses to work

Though the equal access and non-discrimination clauses on employment and employment related benefits are regulated with the Constitution (Art.32), the Law on equal opportunities for men and women (Art. 3), as well as the Labor Code (Art.6), still the concrete employment encouraging measures are sublimated in the annual employment operational plans elaborated above. Still, very limited to no state measures can be enlisted in this driver. However, positive and promising examples are coming from the private sectors, mostly from the big companies that can afford such initiatives. For instance, one of the biggest pharmaceutical companies in November, 2021 introduced the program "Benefits for the employees' children". The program envisions benefits for employees' children from the company's fund in the amount of 1,000 MKD per child per employee per month, intended for additional education in the field of foreign languages, comput-

¹⁴⁴ <http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/vo-2022-godina-5-zgolemuvanje-na-platite-na-site-vraboteni-vo-zdravstvo/>

¹⁴⁵ <http://zdravstvo.gov.mk/investirame-vo-mladite-lekari-nadomestoci-za-dezhurstva-i-zdravstveno-osiguruvanje-za-specijalizantite/>

¹⁴⁶ <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/3-000-detsa-vo-skopje-se-na-lista-na-chekane-za-gradinki-opshтинite-se-polakomija-za-zgradi-a-zaboravija-na-javni-objekti/>

¹⁴⁷ Foreign citizens are interested in working in Macedonia, Bektesi says, available at: Link

er courses, sports and recreational activities, as well as activities in the field of science and culture, throughout the school year.¹⁴⁸ In addition, another private company from the telecommunication sector in 2020 introduced the internal program called “Flying nanny”. The “Flying Nanny” program includes two concepts (i) intended for children aged 6 to 12, in an educational center in the premises of the administrative building, where the children spent a week filled fun and socializing, visit a museum, a cinema, walks in nature and (ii) concept where children aged 8 to 14 are included IT classes, where they acquired computer skills according to a pre-defined program adapted to their age and interest.¹⁴⁹

Encourage the adoption of flexible work arrangements

The Macedonian labour market under the pressure of globalization, digitalization, and reorganizations undertaken by the businesses to increase their productivity, widespread use of information and communications technology is also changing, albeit at a slower pace. The relationship between the employer and the employee changed, especially during and after Covid-19, but the labour legislation has not. As a result of that, many new jobs and flexible relations remained unregulated, even worse some of these jobs are outside of the social protection system which leads to loss of revenue for the state. Currently, the national Labour Code recognises following work arrangements: (i) standard form of employment; (ii) Temporary employment (non-standard employment; (iii) fixed-term employment contract; (iv) seasonal work; (v) temporary employment via private agencies for temporary work; (vi) part-time work; (vii) part-time work with several employers and (viii) work from home. On the other hand, casual work, on-call work or ad-hoc work types are not part of the existing legislation. Most of the employment relations in Macedonia are based on open-ended contract with full-time work (which presents the standard form of employment) by concluding written employment contract, whose duration is not determinate in advance (2021 this percentage is xx). However, official statistical data shows that annually more than half of the newly established employments are based on a fixed-term contract, and in 2019 compared to 2016 the number of workers employed with this type of contract increased by more than 8%. The Labour Relations Law prohibits dismissal of pregnant women, but only if she has an open-ended contract, because there are no special mechanisms in place which protect women on fixed-term employment contracts.¹⁵⁰

If we make some in depth analysis on the current “flexy” dimension of Macedonia labour code, fixed-term employment contract lacks legal certainty that the employment relationship will continue and that contracts can be terminated before the expiration or earlier than the largely stipulated deadline. Additionally, employee cannot exercise certain rights in accordance with the Law on Pension and Disability Insurance.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Promotion of the Project “Benefits for children of employees” in “Alkaloid” AD Skopje

¹⁴⁹ <https://kariera.mk/article/5691/a1-makedonija-angazhirashe-dadilki-za-decata-na-svoite-vraboteni>

¹⁵⁰ Zorana Gadzovska Spasovska. Radio Free Europe. 06.11.2014. Women are hard to find work but can easily be fired. Available internet source: www.slobodnaevropa.mk.

¹⁵¹ News agency Zurnal. 03.04.2018. Trade unions call for abolition of fixed-term employment. Available internet source: www.zurnal.mk.

Work from home according to the stated categorization belongs to the type of functional flexibility. The Law on Labour Relations regulates also the work from home and in accordance with the provisions, work from home is work that the employee performs in his/her home or other optional premises which are outside the employer's business premises.¹⁵² The Law provides for compensation for the employee for use of personal assets during work from home, but additional efforts need to be invested in regards to the safe working conditions which should be regulated according to the contemporary social-economic needs.

Support businesses investing in childcare plans with subsidies and grants

No such initiatives / examples?

Promote women's leadership and access to decent work

Assess policies and advocate for decent work

The Decent Work National Program 2019-2022 presents a comprehensive document that brings both analytical and strategic approaches on one place. It actually, assesses relevant policies and directs the way on improving the concept on decent work in each pillars. The program highlights the fact that in the age group 25-29, women presents more than 52% of the individuals who are neither in employment nor in education and training affecting the access to decent work for this category of Macedonians, alongside the higher likeliness of mismatch between occupation and education (in 2017 15,2% of women have been overqualified compared to 12% of men in 2017). The document also brings seven country priorities with respective outcomes, targeting women's position(s) directly in two of them:

Priority	Outcome	Women related target
Improved labour market governance through enhanced social dialogue	Increased relevance of the Economic and Social Councils as dialogue platform in shaping the national and local economic and social reform agenda	33% of presidents, vice-presidents, CEO/secretary-generals of TUs and Eos should be women;
More and better jobs for inclusive growth and improved youth employment prospects	A comprehensive National Employment Strategy promoting decent jobs adopted in consultation with the social partners	By 2022 reduction in the number of inactive women aged 25–29 by 5%

¹⁵² Law on Labour Relations ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" no. 62/2005; 106/2008; 161/2008; 114/2009; 130/2009; 149/2009; 50/2010; 52/2010; 124/2010; 47/2011; 11/2012; 39/2012; 13/2013; 25/2013; 170/2013; 187/2013; 113/2014; 20/2015; 33/2015; 72/2015; 129/2015; 27/2016; 134/2016; 120/2018; 110/2019 and 267/2020.

If we focus on these two parameters, we can see that Macedonia performs better compared to the region when it comes to women's occupation of the top management positions with 33.98% (in 2021 and in publicly listed joint stock companies). However, women remain to be far less engaged as employers / owners with 29198 women compared to men 96687, mostly in the small enterprises with 10 max employees which give as a ratio of 23% v. 77% in favor of men.¹⁵³ However, the situation in the public sector is even worse. Last year's local election even in the start provided small hopes in terms of the gender balance. Namely, among 299 candidates for mayors, only 8% were women.¹⁵⁴ As expected, this resulted in elections of two female mayors (for the first time in the capital) among 79 men elected mayors. The central level government is also critical. Out of 31 ministerial and deputy positions, only 4 are occupied by women (1 deputy prime-minister and three ministers).¹⁵⁵ Speaking about the reduction in the number of inactive women aged 25-29 by 5%, we can say that this target is also accomplished (though national statistics presents the age group in range 25-29), having in mind that the inactive women in this group counted for 113398 in 2019, whereas this total in 2022 (1stquarter) is 92655.¹⁵⁶

Ensure equal opportunities and treatment in employment

The domestic legal framework provides equal opportunities both for men and women when it comes to employment commence and treatment while employed. Such regulations can be found in the Constitution as well as in the Labor Code. In the first document, Art. 32 stipulates:

Everyone has the right to work, free choice of employment, protection during work and material security for time of temporary unemployment. Every job is available to everyone, under equal conditions. Every employee has the right to adequate earnings. Every employee has the right to paid daily, weekly and annual leave. Employees cannot waive these rights.

On the other hand, Art. 6 of the Labor Code stipulates those women and men must be provided with equal opportunities and equal treatment related to (i) access to employment, including promotion and professional enhancement; (ii) working conditions; (iii) equal pay for equal work; (iv) professional schemes for social security; (v) absence from work; (vi) working hours and (vii) cessation of the employment contract. On paper everything seems good and balanced, even if you read the last year Annual report on the work of the Commission for the Prevention and Discrimination from Discrimination where it says that in 2021, 12 applications from natural persons have been processed, of which 3 submitted from women (9 complaints from men) complaining on the basis of "education" and "personal / societal

¹⁵³ <https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2021/Gender%202021.WEB.pdf>

¹⁵⁴ <https://www.sep.gov.mk/data/file/Pregovori/North-Macedonia-Report-2021-%D0%9C%D0%9A2.pdf>

¹⁵⁵ <https://vlada.mk/sostav-na-vladata>

¹⁵⁶ https://www.stat.gov.mk/pdf/2022/2.1.22.22_mk.pdf

status".¹⁵⁷ But the reality check tells a different story. In the biannual statistical report *Women and men in 2020*¹⁵⁸ from the Macedonian Statistical office, we can easily notice the present pay gap in Macedonia. Namely, in all wage categorizations, men perform better compared to women, with a most significant difference in the higher amounting ranges:

Wage range	Women (in %)	Men (in %)
up to 5000	18.3	81.7
5001-8000	26.6	73.4
8001-10000	27.8	72.2
10001-12000	46.1	53.9
12001-16000	43.4	56.6
16001-20000	34.0	66.0
20001-25000	37.8	62.2
25001-30000	31.8	68.2
30001-40000	36.1	63.9
40001 and more	19	81

Additionally, in a comprehensive research aimed to identify shortcomings in the labor legal framework and respective awareness and prevalence of gender-based discrimination in the WB related to work, in 2021 36% of surveyed women in Macedonia experienced discrimination at work, compared to 18 % men. Asked about the eventual discrimination during hiring, affirmative answer has been given from 76% of the surveyed females and 53% of the males. On the other hand, 12% more women have experienced discrimination in promotion (total 28%), whereas in a similar situation in 2021 have been 16% of the surveyed men. Another concerning data is the one on the relevance of sexual harassment at work place – high 44% of the surveyed females have experienced such situation which presents the highest rate compared to other WB countries.¹⁵⁹ Speaking about this driver from the decent work perspective, it is worth mentioning that textile industry is the most critic one. Namely, two of the four

¹⁵⁷ <https://kszd.mk/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Godisen-izvestaj-2021.pdf>

¹⁵⁸ <https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2021/Gender%202021.WEB.pdf>

¹⁵⁹ <https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2021/Gender%202021.WEB.pdf>

founding pillars of this concept, rights at work and social dialogue are at continuous neglect in this economic activity in which predominantly work women. According to the report “Safety and healthy work conditions in the Macedonian textile industry”, 75% of the survey participants in the respective study have said that they do not participate in the process of selection of representative on healthy and safe work conditions even though such representative is elected, textile dust is not recognize as a work hazard so due to this employees face respiratory and sight problems. According to the findings, there is a lack of continuous training related to hazards at work which affect the safety of the workers.¹⁶⁰ On the other hand, the social dialogue in the framework of this activity always lacks dynamics and in recent times the CSOs (both regional and national) are more vocal and vigilant compared to the existing labor unions.

Ensure flexible work arrangements and a safe working environment

The Government is working on a new Labour law which will approximate Macedonian labour legislation with the EU directive from 2019 including introduction of flexible working arrangements. Although in Covid'19 the labour relations became much more flexible they still remain under regulated leaving room for precarious work, burn out.

Establish a gender monitor to measure progress made

There is no a systematic set up when it comes to gender monitor and assess the progress made in the respective fields with a comprehensive toolkit, but ad-hoc efforts are visible. When it comes from the official side, it is worth mentioning the so called Gender Equality Index for the year 2017 – a document done by MLSP and the national State Statistical Office in cooperation with the European Institute of Gender Equality (EIGE), within a project in the framework of the Instrument of Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) of the European Union and based on the EIGE's methodology and framework. In this document, an analysis in eight strands has been made - work, money, knowledge, time, power, health and violence. In the strand called power, Macedonia is below the EU average in each indicator, thus concepts that have been measured. For instance, in the power strand, sub-domain political power where following concepts have measured (i) participation as ministers, (ii) members of the Parliament and (iii) members in the local level policy-making, Macedonia is ranked with 50,1 points, 2 points behind the EU average. When it comes economic power in which the assessment is based in the domains of participation as members in management boards, supervisory boards or board of directors in highly reputable companies and participation as members in the Central Bank, our country stands better than the EU average (MKD: 44,6 vs. EU39.5). Speaking about the last strand, the social power, where researches have been interested in the (i) participation as members in management bodies of organizations/ institutions for financing of researches, (ii) participation in management bodies of national broadcasting organizations and (iii) Olympic sport organizations, Macedonia also performs better compared to

the EU average by outdoing with 10 points (65,2 vs. 55). No such assessment is done since 2017 on national level.¹⁶¹ Another national index that partially focuses on the gender perspective in these areas in the biannual publication *Men and women in N. Macedonia*, with latest edition since 2020. The decent work as concept is not part of this statistical index, but in the section labor market which besides comprehensive overview on the gender capture and balance in terms of the active / inactive population and proportion of total working population by age and gender, it also gives overview on the gender balance between female and male owners of companies (as mentioned above 29.198 vs. 96.687 in favor of men.¹⁶² Also the CSOs are quite active in indexing the gender balance in Macedonia such as <http://rodovindeks.mk/>, managed by Reactor. This gender equality index is set of indicators on the status of women and men in different spheres of life, the availability of public services that are relevant to achieving gender equality, and the municipality's efforts to promote gender-responsive policies. In terms of the leadership and access to decent work, this index touches upon partially to these domains, with some indicators such as employed persons, registered annual employments, and persons with acquired higher education, monthly salary (net), ownership of facilities and land ownership that can give some perspective at least when it comes to the leadership strand. Currently, 17 municipalities currently are labeled with low ranking, and 64 moderately ranked in terms of the listed indicators.¹⁶³

Establish a leadership academy to ensure gender equality in economy, digital transformation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

In a situation of a lack of such academy that would be content feed and maintained on national and local level by relevant officials, CSOs are trying to fill the gap in the framework of their ongoing projects supported by foreign donors' schemes. The National platform for women's entrepreneurship last autumn organized several webinars on enhancing women's entrepreneurship and promoted and disseminated the second WEgate academy which aimed at supporting women entrepreneurs and strengthening their capacities, accelerating their growth through financial literacy education and access to finance, green and digital transformation.¹⁶⁴ Additionally, this spring / summer 20 women from vulnerable background were trained for digital marketing tools such as lead generation, e-mail marketing, social media campaigning and etc. This academy was implemented by one of the largest IT academy centers in the country and Impact foundation as an activity within the RECONOMY project, funded by SIDA and HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/dokumenti/2019/Gender%20Index_ENG.pdf

¹⁶² <https://www.stat.gov.mk/publikacii/2021/Gender%202021.WEB.pdf>

¹⁶³ <http://rodovindeks.mk/>

¹⁶⁴ Second WEgate Academy, 2021

Transform the public and private sectors to deliver gender equality

Develop accountability frameworks in public institutions and the private sector

In the latest final performance audit report on the effectiveness of the measures of the government for gender equality and the respective gender budget initiatives, the lack of accountability tools and mechanisms is pointed as a serious weakness and challenge for the authorities. Namely, the auditors highlight that selection criteria are not provided for members who are part of the commissions, bodies and other bodies responsible for monitoring the gender equality on national and local level, especially in the inter-sectoral group within MLSP. Concerning finding in the report is the fact that the government has not yet appointed coordinator and deputy coordinator for equal opportunities, which should monitor the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities of women and men on the basis of the strategic plans of line ministries and their budgets. Additionally, the delay or no publishing progress reports as well as the lack of integrated data system for collecting gender segregated information on the appointed officials in the working bodies and consultancy / coordinating bodies is also criticized in the report. For instance, in 2020, 24 out of 120 bodies of state administration submitted a report, of which 3 incomplete, while 49 local self-government units submitted a report, of which 4 were incomplete reports (out of 81). Under criticism is also the Sector for equal opportunities within the ministry – an official body that is responsible for implementation of positive legislation (the Law on equal opportunities for women and men and the National Action Plan for gender equality) as well as in charged for prevention and protection from any kind of violence and discrimination. The auditors have evaluated that the Sector's staff lacks sufficient personnel for effective work but also call for more effective and intense coordination between all relevant commission, both on national and local level in order to streamline the efforts and assure tangible progress in promoting gender equality.¹⁶⁶

Some progress on this matter is expected with the new Law on Organic Budget where in the draft version several novelties are introduced such as:

- the complete budget documentation set that is send to the Parliament for plenary debate will now includes the complete set of gender –budget initiatives of each budget users;
- the rationale of the special part of the Balance Final Account of the budget will encapsulate achieved goals and results, as well as the gender-responsive indicators;
- Among approved financial plans, quarterly performance reports and annual financial plans, with the adoption of the new law, budget users on their websites will need to upload their annual gender budget initiatives;¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ <https://umno.mk/20-zheni-od-ranlivi-kategorii-steknaa-veshtini/>

¹⁶⁶ https://dzt.mk/sites/default/files/2022-07/RU_Efektivnost_merki_Vlada_rodova_ednakvost_0.pdf

¹⁶⁷ Amended draft Law on organic Budget, August 2022

In addition, the newest strategy on Gender equality 2022-2027 as one of the expected results foresees “enhanced mechanisms for gender equality on central level”, alongside “established mechanisms for continuous gender equality capacity building on central and local levels” accompanied by a no time defined indicator “established body on governmental level with concrete goals and targets”. Having in mind that this document was recently adopted, it remains to scrutinize and monitor the implementation of this commitment.¹⁶⁸

Make gender-responsive budgeting mandatory gender standards

Unfortunately, the gender responsive budgeting in Macedonia still will be partially applied, rather systematically integrated in the national budget cycle(s). The proposed new organic Law on Budgets GRB that I expected to be voted in September, 2022 (the relevant committee debate finished in July, 2022) regulates GRB in a way that it does guarantee comprehensive application of GRB neither in the planning, nor in the preparatory and execution phases. Namely, in Art. 8 titled Fiscal and other implications when proposing regulations and acts, in section 6 it is stipulated that “in case when proposed new regulations or acts have implications in direction of promoting gender equality, a gender budget statement must be submitted in addition to them”. This paragraph limits the application of preparing such statements with conditionality and neglects the fact that almost all spending have implications on gender equality. Another shortcoming in the proposed law is in Art.31 which regulates the drafting financial plans phase, in paragraph 2; sub-paragraph 6 where minimum requirements are listed, GRB is again *conditionally* regulated:

- (6) *gender responsive indicators and identifying at least one gender target where feasible;*¹⁶⁹

However, this is step forward and for the first time GRB component is incorporated in the Budget Organic Law, though CSO involved in this filed advocated and had higher expectations, especially in terms of its systematically institutionalization and fixed element in all budget cycles. This means that besides the new law regulations linked with conditionality, budget users will still consult the three main documents that are/were the main pillars in this process since 2013 - the Methodology for GRB, the GRB Guidebook and the annual Budget circular which obliges budget users to prepare gender budget initiatives for their budget programs. In addition, the newly adopted Strategy for gender equality 2022-2027 foresees establishing of a Resource center which aims at improving the skills for the public servants both on central and local level for more effective and gender sensitive budgeting.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Strategy on gender equality 2022-2027

¹⁶⁹ Amended draft Law on organic Budget, August 2022

¹⁷⁰ Strategy on gender equality 2022-2027

Step up women's participation in the boards of financial and governing institutions and companies

As for the financial institutions, we can say that Macedonia is performing well when it comes to the gender parity. Namely, besides the fact that the governor position is held by women since 2018, the gender parity is also visible in the Council of the National Bank of the Republic of North Macedonia where among the executive members 3 are females, and one male. On the other hand, in the non-executive members' composition, all five members are men.¹⁷¹ In the Ministry of Finance, the situation is bit different. Namely, since the independence, Macedonian state finances have been managed by female minister only once (period 2019-2020) and with a current male minister. When it comes to the state advisors within the ministry, the gender parity is there – 2 females and 2 males.¹⁷² Speaking about the overall public administration, according to the annual report by the Ombudsman (2020), males hold more managerial and decision making positions compared to females – 54% vs. 45%.¹⁷³ This ratio is even worse in the private sector with an estimation of 19% women on managerial positions, having in mind that there is no central database on this matter.¹⁷⁴ Similar data is coming from the Macedonian stock exchange (MSE) on the basis of the statistics from the companies who are registered and perform stock commerce. Namely, women make 23,6% in the management structure compared to 76,4% men (from those registered at the MSE). The same data set shows that from the total registered companies, 19,6% are lead by female directors and 80,4% by male directors. According to the MSE, there is no economic activity where there is partial or exact gender parity in companies' management, except the agriculture with 56% vs. 44% gender managerial parity. On the other hand, the commerce with oil and oil derivatives is the worst one with gender managerial parity 94% vs. 6% in favor of men. Interesting fact coming from the MSE is the one which tells that in 2021, from the total companies managed by males, lost has been reported by 20,3% and profit by 79,7%, whereas this ration in the women managed companies is 27,8% (loss) and 72,2% (profit).¹⁷⁵ Another concerning thing that representatives from the chambers assure is that even though women have been appointed on higher positions, still the decision making process is dominantly made by men.¹⁷⁶

All progress done as well as the detected shortcomings is achieved with no systematic solutions or regulations, mostly as a result of the continuous scrutiny and advocacy from the CSOs with sporadic campaigns and motivational events with

¹⁷¹ https://www.nbrm.mk/clenovi_na_soviet_na_nbrm.nspix

¹⁷² State advisors at the Ministry of Finance

¹⁷³ <https://ombudsman.mk/CMS/Upload/NarodenPravobranitelj/upload/documents/SPZ/Izvestaj-SPZ-2020-po%20pol-zbirno-final.pdf>

¹⁷⁴ Women far from decision-making positions, Radio Free Europe available at: link

¹⁷⁵ <https://www.mse.mk/mk/news/8/3/2022/gender-analysis-2022>

¹⁷⁶ <https://akademik.mk/edna-tretina-od-kompaniite-se-osnovani-od-zheni-no-tie-se-na-rakovodna-pozitsija-samo-na-hartija/>

partial commitment and participation of the national and local officials. The newly adopted Strategy on gender equality 2022-2027 contents several goals for enhancing the gender parity, both in the overall and sector composition of the public administration, including the gender parity in hierarchical sense as well as the involvement of women in the decision making process on national and municipal level. However, the document has almost no reference on this matter in the private sector.¹⁷⁷

Facilitate mentorship programmes to advance women in leadership positions

The research on this particular driver shows a scarce of comprehensive and regular available program, both on central level or local level. The Agency for entrepreneurship runs mentorship program for small and medium enterprises that is supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) that helps owners or managers to recognize the key point of the potential growth of their company. Among the main pillars of the program such as diagnosis, understand the current situation of the enterprise, assistance in preparing development activities, action plans and projects, assistance in preparing credit applications to commercial banks and other available programs, trainings, referral to appropriate specialist consultants, there is no component which is exclusively devoted to women's leadership. During the last year, 54 enterprises have been mentored, but the gender ratio tells once again that this is a gender neutral measure – 13 mentored women owners and 41 trained male owners.¹⁷⁸ Researching the educational services provided by the biggest chambers in Macedonia, no women exclusive program / service is available either.^{179 180} The so far taken initiatives in this regard are dominantly by the civil sector and private initiatives. Training on women's leadership and entrepreneurship in rural areas organized by the National federation of framers,¹⁸¹ leadership skills development trainings by the National platform for women's entrepreneurship,¹⁸² and strengthening human resources management focusing on women and youth implemented by the Increase market employability program of SDC¹⁸³ are just some of the steps done in this direction last year by the CSOs/donor community. Private coaching and mentorship agencies also offer similar service, but for a commercial purposes.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁷ Strategy on gender equality 2022-2027

¹⁷⁸ <http://apprm.gov.mk/content/Documents/lzveshtaj%20ednakvi%20moznosti%202021%20APPRSM.pdf>

¹⁷⁹ <https://chamber.mk/centar-za-pretpriemnistvo-i-inovacii/>

¹⁸⁰ <https://www.mchamber.mk/Default.aspx?mld=33&lng=1>

¹⁸¹ Training women's leadership and entrepreneurship in rural areas, National farmers' federation

¹⁸² <https://weplatform.mk/blog/2021/07/16/razvoj-na-liderski-veshtini-da-se-bide-mudar-vnimatelel-praveden-vozdrzan/>

¹⁸³ <https://24hr.mk/learn2ghrow-rast-na-biznisot-preku-razvoj-na-vrbotenite/>

¹⁸⁴ <https://coaching.inspirit.mk/programa-za-zhensko-liderstvo/>

Introduce a certification for gender equality in the public and private sectors

Macedonia is completely lacking behind on this driver. No comprehensive or systematic gender certification is in place, neither in the public, nor in the private sector. The Strategy on gender equality 2022-2027 when it comes to the “certification” does not foresee any specific activity or initiative in regards to enhancing the gender machinery on central and local level.¹⁸⁵ The expired National Action Plan on Gender Equality 2018-2020 projected only “*Certification of national GRB trainers*” - an activity initially planned to be budget by key stakeholders such as MLSP, MF and UN Women.¹⁸⁶ According to the shadowing reports conducted by national CSOs on the implementation status of the respective action plan, these trainings have been initialized, but not from national certificated trainers, yet from certified external experts.¹⁸⁷ The available data show that after continuous trainings, the Ministry of Defense now has a pool of 18 certified trainers on gender equality, but there is no data about the issuer of these certificates, nor data on the number of such certificates in the rest of the ministries / institutions.¹⁸⁸ The new National Action Plan for the next period is expected in duly time having in mind that the Strategy was recently adopted. CSOs take sporadic initiatives in providing trainings on different topics related to gender, such as the last one on Gender and Climate delivered from CRPM Consulting in collaboration with UNDP when 200 representatives from almost all municipalities in Macedonia got certificates for being trained on the respective theme.

Serbia

Accelerate women's entrepreneurship

Women entrepreneurs are making 31 % of all enterprises in the Republic of Serbia according to the data published in the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2026, based on the study conducted in 2014 (Babovic, 2014) The composite percent is 31%, while the participation of women in companies is 24% and among registered entrepreneurs 32%. According to the data of the Agency for Business Registers, there are currently 32,733 companies whose founders are women and 96,949 female entrepreneurs are operating in Serbia.

One of the biggest changes in development of policies that will accelerate women's entrepreneurship is the lack of sex disaggregated data and gender statistics in the sector. From June 1, 2022, data on business owners, directors and entrepreneurs will

¹⁸⁵ https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/strategija_/D0%A1D1%82D1%80D0%B0D1%82D0%B5D0%B3D0%B8D1%98D0%B0_D0%B7D0%B0_D1%80D0%BE%0%B4D0%BE%0%B2D0%B0_D0%B5D0%B4D0%BD0D0%B0D0%BA%0%B2D0%BE%D1%81D1%82_2022_2027.pdf

¹⁸⁶ [https://www.globalwps.org/data/MKD/files/National%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Gender%20Equality%202018-2020%20\(MK\).pdf](https://www.globalwps.org/data/MKD/files/National%20Action%20Plan%20for%20Gender%20Equality%202018-2020%20(MK).pdf)

¹⁸⁷ <https://reactor.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/REAKTOR-lzvestaj-vo-senka-za-WEB-FINAL-so-linkovi.pdf>

¹⁸⁸ Strategy 2022-2027

be sex disaggregated and entered in the Register of Business Entities as a subject of registration, which will enable a precise insight into the number of companies whose owners are women, better statistics and more efficient formulation of state support programs aimed at businesswomen. This amendment to the Law on Business Companies is the result of a successful initiative by the Serbian Chamber of Commerce towards the Ministry of Economy.

The Strategy for supporting the development of small and medium-sized enterprises, entrepreneurship, and competitiveness for the period from 2015 to 2020 has included support to women's entrepreneurship as one of the thematic pillars. The Strategic Objective 6. Development and promotion of entrepreneurship included two specific objectives: 6.1 Improvement of statistical monitoring and research of entrepreneurship of women, youth and social entrepreneurship, and 6.2 Policy and instruments to support female entrepreneurship, youth entrepreneurship and social entrepreneurship spirit and encouraging entrepreneurship of women, young people and social entrepreneurship. It included actions related to the legal and policy framework, increase of the participation of women in the support programmes and measures, support to the networking and learning and development of specific programmes aimed to women, youth and social entrepreneurship.

There is no data and publicly available comprehensive report on the results of the Strategy implementation. The planning of the new Strategy for the period from 2022 – 2027 has started in February 2022 and according to the news published by the Ministry of Economy, "the strategy will include improvement of the business environment and access to sources of financing and new markets, continuous development of human resources, strengthening the competitiveness of the sector, development of entrepreneurial spirit and encouragement of entrepreneurship of women, youth and social entrepreneurship, as well as digitization and greening of SMEs"¹⁸⁹.

The Strategy on Gender Equality contains measures for the support to women entrepreneurship: 1.4. Establishing system support for start-up, development and growth of businesses owned by women and increasing their profitability entrepreneurial activities.

Increase women's access to finance, especially in rural areas, through grant schemes and training programmes

There are several programmes aimed to enable access to finance for women entrepreneurs. All the programmes have been financed by the government and implemented in cooperation with the Fund for Development of the Republic of Serbia and Development Agency of the Republic of Serbia. There is a programme for support of women' and youth entrepreneurship in the total amount 859 000 EUR (1 million

¹⁸⁹ <https://www.srbija.gov.rs/vest/626551/strategija-za-razvoj-malih-i-srednjih-preduzeca-do-kraja-godine-2020>

RSD). of Business entities that meet the conditions of the Program can exercise the right to financial support in the form of grants in the amount of up to 35% of the investment value. The remaining amount of the investment will be financed from the Fund's loan with a repayment period of up to 5 years, within which there is a grace period of up to one year, and an interest rate of 1% per year with a bank guarantee or 2% per year with other means of security, with the application of the currency clause. The total amount of funds approved per request cannot be less than 3500 EUR nor more than 50000 EUR (6,000,000.00 RSD).

Investments that can be financed under this Program include:

- purchase of equipment, delivery vehicles (including electric mopeds) that are used to transport own products, raw materials and other means of transport included in the production process (new or used, not older than five years);
- ongoing maintenance of business and/or production space up to the amount of 350,000.00 dinars;
- operating costs, which can take up to 20% of the structure of the total investment, for which Program funds are requested.

Ministry of Economy stated in the Budget Performance Report that in 2020 375 business have been used the starting business funds, out of which 142 or 37% are women.¹⁹⁰

The Un Women in cooperation with NALED conducted gender analysis of the available programmed of the Development agency. Gender analysis of programs implemented in 2018 through the Development Agency of Serbia indicate that the share of women in entrepreneurship support programs (22.7% and 17.9%) was below the level of their participation in entrepreneurship (31.7%).

UN Women, in cooperation with Coordination Body for Gender Equality supported numerous projects aimed to the economic empowerment of rural women, by the purchase of the equipment for agricultural production, mentoring support, networking and other mean of support. The support is provided within the project "Key steps towards gender equality" funded by EU (IPA).

At the provincial level, in Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, are also available subsidies for women entrepreneurs, for the purchase of the equipment. In addition to the public calls of the provincial government, support for women's entrepreneurship is also provided through the Guarantee Fund of AP Vojvodina, which has a special line for supporting women's entrepreneurship. The amount of the approved loan is from a minimum of EUR 2,000.00 to a maximum of EUR 20,000.00 in the dinar equivalent of EUR at the official mid-rate of the NBS on the day the loan is put into

¹⁹⁰ National Strategy on Gender Equality of the Republic of Serbia, pg. 35

use, with the fact that for participants who do not have a single financial report, the maximum loan amount is EUR 10,000 in to the dinar equivalent of EUR at the official mid-rate of the NBS on the day the loan is put into use

The loan repayment term is up to 6 years from the day the loan is put into use. A grace period of up to 12 months, which is included in the loan repayment term.

Create gender-sensitive business training and entrepreneurship upskilling programmes

The Development Agency of Serbia has announced a public call for the implementation of a package of services for young and female entrepreneurs published in accordance with the Program of a standardized set of services for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and entrepreneurs in 2022. The programme consists of the assistance of an expert to a business entity whose founder or owner is a woman, or a woman is one of the owners with a majority share in ownership (minimum 51%). Support is provided in the form of available standardized advisory services, one or more specialized training and mentoring services lasting up to 40 hours. Business training encompasses 10 modules: training for beginners in business; preparation of a business plan and business with banks and investment readiness; financial management; export – for those who export for the first time; marketing and sales; electronic business and information technologies in business; review of quality standards and environmental protection important for business; innovations; preparation for the Single European Market; participation of SMEs in public procurement.

The National Employment Agency also offers the training for self – employment, as the condition for the subsidies provides for self-employment. The trainees are obliged to prepare the business plan as the result of the training. There is no training aimed particularly at women, but there are subsidies aimed to women who want to start business. They are also funded from the several local governments.

There are also trainings organized by civil society organizations and associations, including the Union of the Business Women. They also provide e-Mentoring program has been created as a part of the project „DEA – Digital Entrepreneurship Awakening: From new vulnerabilities to economic empowerment of women in Serbia”. The project is supported by the UN Women – United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women within the project “Key steps toward gender equality”, which is financed by the European Union.

Boost networking opportunities for businesswomen across the Western Balkans and with the European Union

The Chamber of Commerce of the Republic of Serbia has the section of entrepreneurship, part of which is also the section for women' entrepreneurship. The fo-

cus is on the networking and the presentation of entrepreneurs from Serbia at the global and EU market. There is also, already mentioned Union of Business Women and the network "Business of Heals" situated in Novi Sad, that implement IPA funded project related to the networking and cooperation of women from Serbia, Croatia and other EU countries.

Encourage innovation investments and support women owned businesses

This is one of the objectives of the National Strategy on Gender Equality and also objective of the Section of Women Entrepreneurship of the Chambre of Commerce and project implemented by the Union of Business women. UN Women in cooperation with NALED also conducted analysis of the Innovation Fund of the Republic of Serbia. It showed that male business received 9 times more funds than women, because the support is aimed dominantly to the production, more than to the services or sectors where women are more active in. Support for innovation should be focus on other sectors in which women make up a large majority: education, health, services in the field of social protection, especially in the care economy.

National Strategy on Gender Equality includes measure 1.5 Establishing systemic support for encouraging women's participation in social and technological innovations and increasing benefits from innovation activities.

