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MASTER'S DISSERTATION

«Gender characteristics of entrepreneurial activity in the Republic of Kazakhstan»

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Abstract:

This study presents the findings of an investigation into the development of women's entrepreneurship and gender equality in Kazakhstan. Utilizing official statistical data, the concentration of women's businesses in the service sector and regional disparities in credit funding were identified. The economic opportunities of businesswomen were evaluated using the "5M" theory, highlighting key policy directions and analyzing access to credit resources and entrepreneurial development programs. While Kazakhstan demonstrates interest in supporting women's entrepreneurship, the study reveals that most state-supported programs lack effectiveness assessment. In-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs from diverse industries shed light on gender-specific challenges and opportunities. The SWOT analysis yielded recommendations for successful development, including support for women on maternity leave, digitalization, improved infrastructure for rural businesswomen, monitoring of women's economic contributions, and male engagement in gender equality efforts. Limitations of the study included insufficient quantitative data and data fragmentation. Nonetheless, the study contributes to the development of integrated approaches to gender analysis in entrepreneurship and provides a necessary scientific and methodological foundation. The innovative application of this integrated approach adds to the existing knowledge and sets the stage for future research on gender characteristics in business.

CONTENTS

	Introduction	1
	Literature review	4
	Theoretical framework	5
	Methodology	6
1	Analysis of women's economic opportunities in Kazakhstan	17
2	Characteristics of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan	20
3	Assessment of the business environment for the development of women's entrepreneurship	26
3.1	Macro - environment	26
3.2	Meso - environment	29
3.3	Money	32
3.4	Motherhood	35
4	Data collection	40
5	Interview analysis	41
5.1	A look at the opportunities of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan	41
5.2	Reasons for starting your own business	42
5.3	Barriers to the development of women's business initiatives in Kazakhstan	43
5.4	Experience in using measures to support women's business	44
5.5	The impact of the crisis on the development of women's business	44
6	Discussion	45
7	SWOT matrix and recommendations	45
	Conclusion	50
	References	52
	Appendixes	56

Introduction

Taking into account the gender aspect of entrepreneurship is an important component of the digital society. The issues of involvement of various groups of citizens in entrepreneurship are also extremely relevant from the point of view of state documents – for example, on April 1, 2022, a decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan amended the Concept of Family and Gender Policy, which highlighted the problem of the gender aspect in the allocation of financial resources for business development. The topic of women's entrepreneurship is also reflected in the latest program documents "Strategy Kazakhstan 2050", "Program to increase incomes of the population until 2029", etc. In the XXI century, as the century of global feminism, women's business activity can be considered an indicator of the state of gender in general. The new gender order is determined by a huge social resource for the progressive economic development of Kazakhstan, which comes from maintaining a balance of interests between the sexes on equal terms.

The current state program "Business Roadmap-2025" sets the following tasks:

1. Bringing the share of small and medium-sized businesses in GDP to at least 33.8%.
2. Bringing the share of medium-sized businesses in the economy to at least 13.7%.

Achieving the desired indicator of involvement in entrepreneurial activity requires human resources and coordinated joint actions of the state with civil society. According to the World Economic Forum, Kazakhstan ranks 65th in the gender gap index for 2022 out of 146 countries with an indicator of more than 70% of the level of social parity.

At the current rate of progress, it will take 132 years to achieve full parity worldwide. No country has yet achieved gender equality.

Which confirms the words about women's entrepreneurship as a huge untapped potential. According to the Bureau of National Statistics for 2021, the share of enterprises headed by a woman in Kazakhstan was only 28%. Most of them are represented by small and medium-sized businesses, which provide 31.4% of jobs in this sector and about 14.6% of the country's GDP.

Encouraging women to become more ambitious entrepreneurs can contribute to improving the competitiveness of all countries and regions, which makes it an important state tool for improving the business climate. According to the world development institutes, the growth of the total world gross product by 5.3 trillion dollars by 2025 will be possible if the economic participation of women increases by 25% over the same period.

Research hypothesis: Female entrepreneurs face specific barriers that are not typical for male entrepreneurship.

Purpose: to study the state of women's entrepreneurship and determine strategies for its development

Research question: What obstacles limit the expansion of women's business in the country?

Research objectives:

1. Analysis of theoretical material on women's entrepreneurship;
2. Consider the sectoral and regional map of male/female entrepreneurship. Identify the reasons for the differences;
3. Assessment of the business environment for the development of women's business initiatives in Kazakhstan;
4. Give recommendations on the development of a business headed by women.

The study specifically examines the organizational and economic relations that arise in the process of creating and functioning of these enterprises.

Literature review

In the modern world, entrepreneurship has a huge impact on the development of the economy and society as a whole. In order to ensure the industrial development and economic growth of the country, it is necessary to develop a high-quality entrepreneurial culture and expand the range of business development services. The process of entrepreneurship not only contributes to the accumulation of capital by individuals, but also supports the increase in jobs and economic stability of each country. The development of entrepreneurship contributes to the reduction of global unemployment and poverty. (Investigating the Impact of Entrepreneurship on Economic Development: A Regional Analysis | Emerald Insight, 2016)

As digitalization and automation of business processes began to change the economy and accelerate the pace of its development, women have become a powerful economic force to be reckoned with. Now the modernized world economy depends on the influence of women. (Hietala, 2023)

At the moment, women own about 25% of all enterprises located in developed countries. In developing regions that have moved to a market economy, women's entrepreneurship is becoming an increasingly common trend. In some other third world countries, women are still not given human rights to realize their potential. They do not have such simple rights as owning property, having their own account, negotiating with men. All this is due to the predominance of social customs over the economic structure.

In addition to similar problems that hinder the entrepreneurship of both men and women, there are a number of barriers inherent only to women entrepreneurs: lack of education, an obstacle to the legal or banking system of the country, etc.

Next, we will take a closer look at the factors influencing the development of women's business initiatives in countries with different levels of development.

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor publishes periodic reports on the state of women's entrepreneurship in more than 70 countries (Terjesen S., & Lloyd A., 2015). The assessment is

made taking into account the women's entrepreneurship development index, initially formed on the basis of the main characteristics for its growth and development: the entrepreneurial environment, ecosystem and aspirations. According to this indicator, women's entrepreneurship is most widely used in countries with developed economies.

The scaling method was used in the work. The points are distributed according to the following indicators: access to education, access to business support programs, access to equal legal rights.

The disadvantage is the subjectivity of the chosen method, the role of the researcher conducting the assessment is of great importance.

The advantage is the scale of the study, its global significance.

The OECD study (2004) analyzed the best foreign experience in the development of women's entrepreneurial initiative and identified growth factors. Using the example of the Austrian economic model, the problems of women's entrepreneurship, its differences and features are analyzed.

Differences between countries have a huge impact on the identification of development factors and the main barriers to women's entrepreneurship.

For example, the lack of appropriate connections and lack of wealth, the difference in social status in developed countries are the result of the fact that women on average earn less than men, even with other things being equal. For comparison, in developing countries, women cannot even control the money they earn, so they have no opportunity to start a business with their accumulated capital or reinvest it in growth, since a male relative can confiscate finances at any time. Women cannot protect their property.

The author examines empirical data on the relationship of women's entrepreneurial activity with indicators of economic growth, determining the role of women in business.

The study showed that many countries do not pay due attention to the collection and processing of statistical data, which makes it impossible to conduct specific analyses. Longitudinal data is necessary to obtain information about changes over time.

A comparative study of the country conducted by Colette Henry and Barbara Orser (2017) was supposed to map and critically compare government policy in the field of women's entrepreneurship, identify gaps in policy enforcement and highlight best practices in supporting women's entrepreneurship.

GEM data from 13 countries participating in the Diana International Research Symposium (Stockholm, June 2014) were taken for the project: Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Pakistan, Spain, Sweden, Tanzania, the United Kingdom and the United States. In the course of the study, the existing program documents were examined.

The study highlights the importance of a cross-country study of women's business support policy. The authors studied the program documents of each of the countries, empirical works related to the entrepreneurial ecosystem. To facilitate the analysis, all the data were combined into a single Excel spreadsheet and a comparative content analysis was carried out. According to the authors, less than half of these documents corresponded to modern realities. Women, despite their growing contribution to the development of the country, are still not recognized as part of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The disadvantage of the chosen methodology is that the data for analysis were incomplete, and the personal preferences and values of the author could influence the choice of documents for consideration.

Among the advantages is the scale of the research and its innovative value.

Kantor P. (2001) in his work explores existing programs to support women's business in developed countries in order to form recommendations for developing countries. The document describes well the methods of supporting women's business and clearly defines the barriers to the success of enterprises created by women. The author also assesses the effectiveness of the adopted

programs and the reality of their reproduction in the conditions of developing economies. The analysis focuses on the activities of organizations that empower women.

The author explores various industry programs, methods of providing services, ways of promoting enterprises, determines the types and role of organizations supporting small and medium-sized businesses. During the analysis, the table "Small and medium-sized business support services" was created, one of the criteria of which is the gender issue. This table is also useful for comparative content analysis.

The study concludes that group programs are most effective where women can communicate and get acquainted. The key industry for consideration was the field of information technology, since this industry is the most relevant and is traditionally considered male, although it carries the least risks for women. Among the best practices in the analysis, general business training was noted, where women are taught marketing methods, accounting, and also instill the necessary skills to an entrepreneur. Among the author's recommendations is "the development of programs aimed at establishing direct and reverse relationships between clients", i.e. creating a network of favorable contacts (suppliers, buyers) for women entrepreneurs will help them enter traditionally male industries.

The disadvantage of the study is that access to credit resources was not considered in detail, more attention was paid to business support methods.

Let's take a closer look at the situation with women's entrepreneurship in developed countries.

A survey conducted by Robb, Alicia and Coleman (2014) on the gender identity of American entrepreneurs showed their motivation and pointed to factors hindering the growth of the number of entrepreneurs, namely the lack of mentoring. Women entrepreneurs in the United States are more guided by their own experience than by the help of investors or the state. The analysis showed that men borrow much more money and adhere to a different financial strategy than that offered to women. The recommendations are formulated in the form of a family-oriented

policy to give women the flexibility to work outside the home and plan family commitments. It is also recommended to take steps to overcome the gender imbalance in funding.

The survey was conducted among 350 respondents. Women entrepreneurs were employed in various fields of activity and had enterprises at different stages of development. The age range was also wide – from 20 to 50 years. All entrepreneurs were engaged in small and medium-sized businesses. The advantage of this study is the large sample size and representative integrity. The main attention was paid to high-tech industries.

Among the obstacles for women in business, the authors highlight: lack of mentoring, lack of funding.

In the work of the Turkish specialist Choban Asla M.S. (2006), in-depth interviews were conducted with 17 representatives of organizations related to the development of women's entrepreneurship in Turkey. In addition to these interviews, the author participated in meetings, seminars and program presentations; and had the opportunity to conduct informal (unwritten) conversations with the same and different representatives of state and public organizations.

The author adheres to the feminist theory that business support is possible only under the condition of progress, empowerment of women in Turkish society, therefore, several chapters are devoted to the development of this approach.

This document examines the approach of Meiu L. (2001) "Jobs, gender and small enterprises: the right political environment", ILO Working Paper SEED No. 15. Its concept is to divide the actions of the state into 3 types of economic efficiency:

1. Actions to combat poverty.
2. Actions to empower women entrepreneurs.
3. Support for entrepreneurship.

The work is based on the analysis of the results of projects and organizations known for their contribution to the development of women's entrepreneurship. The analysis could not cover micro and small organizations. The document does not contain a sufficient list of measures to

support women's entrepreneurship. There is no documented information about the projects and efforts themselves.

The striking advantage of the work is that it contains 17 semi-structured interviews with employees of organizations supporting women's entrepreneurship in Turkey. This allows us to take into account the direct opinions of those involved in policy development.

The questions mainly concerned what women's entrepreneurship is in the understanding of the Turkish authorities, its differences and peculiarities, the necessary conditions for supporting women's business and already existing political efforts.

The questions mainly concerned what women's entrepreneurship is in the understanding of the Turkish authorities, its differences and peculiarities, the necessary conditions for supporting women's business and already existing political efforts.

The document highlights the efforts to support entrepreneurship and the expected needs in this area.

The study identifies the following necessary directions for improving the policy in the field of women's business development:

- more effective reorganization of women's labor,
- Reducing women's dependence on social benefits,
- Improving the efficiency of the market by expanding the entrepreneurial culture and business support mechanisms, including for socially unprotected categories such as women,
- Expansion of the sphere of flexible work and labor relations.

Consider the work of specialists in developing countries.

In the working report on the state of women's entrepreneurship in the Kyrgyz Republic, a survey of 110 women entrepreneurs was conducted, and conclusions were drawn about the conditions for supporting women's entrepreneurship in the Kyrgyz Republic. The study analyzes the difference in rights between men and women, as well as barriers to the development of women's entrepreneurship. The analysis also covers entrepreneurial activity, business conditions, the profile

of women entrepreneurs and recommendations for the further development of state support. Failures in financing and constitutional rights, an aspect of mentality are highlighted as barriers.

The authors use both quantitative analysis of statistical data and qualitative analysis of the business environment and legislative documents. Focus groups with women entrepreneurs were held, as well as consultations with experts from credit organizations and business associations. This method has been used in similar studies in the CIS countries, which makes the material useful for a comparative base and further development of consolidated recommendations.

The sample for the study was made up of women doing business both in the capital and in cities and suburban areas remote from the capital. The task of the sample was to select representatives of different sizes and business lines. Among the advantages are the representativeness of the sample, recommendations for the development of women's entrepreneurship: both organizational and recommendations on financing and development of institutional infrastructure.

A study of microcredit in Serbia (Yuricin Sonja, 2015) shows that the human resources of women and the development of tools and ways to encourage their wider participation in entrepreneurship are the main factors of balanced economic development and improvement of the socio-economic status of women in society. In addition to women's direct participation in the market economy, improving their socio-economic situation also requires constant training and education. According to the authors, the driving forces of women's entrepreneurship are social contacts, skills and economic resources.

The author relies on the results of a survey conducted by the Ministry of Economy and Regional Development with the support of the National Agency for Regional Development.

The survey questions concerned the awareness of the population about microfinance lending. The business mainly uses leasing and loans from state funds for development.

When granting loans, Serbian banks faced the fact that among the clients of small and medium-sized businesses there was a low level of education, they did not have proper collateral and there was a large tax burden.

When obtaining a loan, representatives of small and medium-sized businesses faced the fact that interest rates were unbearably high, they could not provide collateral for the loan, paid high bank fees. It is difficult for new enterprises to obtain external financing because they do not have financial stability. Rural women are in the worst situation, because they have practically no assets for which they could take out a loan for business development.

The analysis of the article allows us to conclude that the number of women employed in business depends on the number of organizations providing micro-loans. Microcredit will allow women to reduce gender inequality in employment and improve the economic status of women in society.

Sriram v. 2014 revealed marketing and technical shortcomings in a group of rural women entrepreneurs. The study was conducted by conducting in-depth interviews with 75 women. The information obtained was analyzed and conclusions were drawn using the Friedman rank criterion. In rural areas, women additionally face a lack of capital and other production problems.

The interviews were conducted by women from the small Indian town of Polakki with a population of 90,000 people. This sample does not correspond to reality. The article is valuable for backward areas of India.

The study concluded that the main problem faced by entrepreneurs is a lack of knowledge about marketing, as well as financial and production problems. Financial problems – lack of liquidity, lack of loans, high cost of raising capital. Production problems are also associated with the high cost of equipment, the lack of research centers.

Syed Mudud-Ui-Huq (2013) used both primary and secondary data in his work. 50 women entrepreneurs of different ages and classes were randomly selected to collect data.

Among the advantages of the work: the article contains a comprehensive review of the literature, the study includes both qualitative and quantitative data that can provide a more complete understanding of the problems and prospects for the development of women's entrepreneurship in Bangladesh.

The author suggests the need for a multi-pronged approach, which includes the elimination of socio-cultural attitudes towards women, improving access to finance and markets, ensuring proper training and mentoring, as well as optimizing the regulatory framework.

For example, let's also consider countries where women's rights are restricted — the UAE and South Africa.

Madici, Nnamdi (2012) used a mixed method combining secondary data analysis with 10 detailed interviews. The document relies heavily on the well-established Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) entrepreneurship research database. In recent years, women entrepreneurs here have made great strides in overcoming social and cultural barriers. However, the situation of women's business has not improved much. Although there is no religious law prohibiting women from managing money or running their own business, social customs, such as unwillingness to allow women to interact closely with men who are not related, can create serious problems for starting a business.

In fact, the main obstacles are institutional barriers and an established lifestyle.

The sample consisted of women aged 22 to 32 years from various fields of activity. One disadvantage is the limited sample size due to the more stringent business conditions.

A gender analysis of entrepreneurship in South African countries was carried out in a study by Colletta Cicike (2000). It is revealed that barriers to the development of women's business in the third world countries are complemented by a general unfavorable social environment, lack of women's access to education and finance. Women entrepreneurs here lack leadership experience due to the low level of leadership experience at the community level as a whole. Rural women come to study entrepreneurship at the village level, while men can migrate and look for lucrative

jobs in cities. The state itself imposes restrictions on the role of women in production, and the policy is formed in such a way that women's work is only auxiliary to men's.

The author was one of the participants of the "Start Your Own Business" program with the support of the International Labor Organization in Zimbabwe. The program consisted of training mentors who will teach women entrepreneurship. To write the article, the author used his direct experience of living in culture and communicating with local residents, observations. In fact, the ethnographic method was used to determine the degree of group experience and to prepare detailed reports on a deep understanding of culture.

At the same time, the main disadvantage of the ethnographic method is its complexity, since it takes some time to gain the trust of the observed persons, strict observance of ethics is required, etc. The ethnographer must be careful not to bring his experience and prejudices into the culture he is studying.

Women in African culture are forbidden to wish for success and big money. Women's business is not developed here, and if it exists, it is inextricably linked with family life. Basically, it is the sale of small crafts. Women's business in Zimbabwe is not supported by a legal system based on male standards and language. By expanding a business, a woman can put herself at great risk. The document points to the need to train local women and change the macroeconomic policy of the region.

Thus, it can be concluded that the works mainly apply a qualitative approach to the study of problems and driving factors in the development of women's entrepreneurship.

However, no work has been identified that contains a holistic and detailed up-to-date assessment of the state of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. Based on this, there is a need to fill this gap in research. The study will benefit financial regulators and the financial market. The use of the results of this study will contribute to increasing the financial and innovative potential of the entire national financial system.

Theoretical framework

There are a number of approaches to the problem of taking into account the peculiarities of gender entrepreneurship.

It can be noted that there is an approach of the Organization for Economic Cooperation, which divides the theory into 3 components (3 "E"): education, employment and entrepreneurship. The "5Ms" approach is known: market, money, management, maternity, meso/macro environment. Also known are such approaches as radical: patriarchy and oppression of women (Yadav V., & Unni J., 2016); liberal: men and women have an equal capacity for rationality (Moses C., & Amalu R., 2010); social: emphasizes individual differences. (Yordanova D. I., & Tarrazon M. A. 2010); feminist: the gender of an entrepreneur directly affects his opportunities, ways of doing business and limitations (Sospeter N. G., Rwelamila P. D., Nchimbi M., & Masoud M, 2014).

Of all the models considered, the provisions of the institutional concept of 5M are taken as the basis for this study. (See Appendix. 1)

The theory includes the "motherhood" factor, since family conditions can affect a woman more than a man. This assumption shows the importance of studying gender discrimination when considering business issues, since men and women initially have unequal access to resources and conditions for realizing their entrepreneurial potential. The "motherhood" factor plays a significant role in determining various other important aspects of the model, including the availability of funds for women's entrepreneurship, their management style, opportunities for women in the market and the conditions necessary for the development of women's entrepreneurship.

Using the Venn diagram, it is possible to distinguish interdependent relationships and overlapping boundaries between various factors. The diagram used in this study puts "Motherhood" at the center, which not only emphasizes the importance of considering the role of women in the family, but also indicates the crucial role of gender awareness and analysis for the entire structure.

The three main components of the 3M model - market, money and management - are depicted as three intersecting circles on the Venn diagram. The "market" is located at the top and is also presented as a packaging component, since it serves as the main source of all entrepreneurial opportunities. The bottom two circles represent the importance of money and management for entering the market and surviving on it, which can be seen as a means of exploiting opportunities. All-encompassing influences are located around circles that mediate and form other components.

To assess the "monetary" factor, the conditions and execution of subsidizing programs for women entrepreneurs are considered. In order to determine the "management" factor, business consulting programs for women on the development of managerial skills, mentoring programs where mentors can share their accumulated experience were also analyzed.

The factor of "macro-environment" and "meso-environment" is a reflection of how the cultural norms of society affect the activity of women in the entrepreneurial sphere. The "macro environment" factor also reflects government policy in general, the economy and the legal capabilities of women. To assess this factor, legal and policy documents on the development of women's business in the Republic of Kazakhstan are considered. The "meso-environment" is rather a regional factor and determines relations with institutional structures in business and economics, as well as with professional associations. The analysis examines the activities of various women's entrepreneurship support centers in the regions.

In the course of the work, data from the Statistics Committee of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, reports and reports of the DAMU Foundation, as well as research by the World Bank and the International Labor Organization were used. In the course of the study, scientific articles, reports of Global Entrepreneurship Monitoring, as well as conference materials were studied.

Since the analysis focuses primarily on women's entrepreneurship, I define entrepreneurs as all women who are either individual entrepreneurs or managers and at least majority owners of small and medium-sized enterprises.

Methodology

The following approaches were used for the study:

1. Study of existing research, publications, literature, etc. Selected studies in the field of women's entrepreneurship: the role of gender in entrepreneurship, factors of development of women's entrepreneurship, assessment of the state of women's entrepreneurship. Content analysis was used, which can be combined with an interview.

2. Collection of statistical information. It includes a desk analysis of the country's administrative data and various international ratings and indices. Statistical data were used for descriptive analysis of the state of entrepreneurship by gender, regional and sectoral characteristics; for comparison and example, economic conditions and business opportunities for the female half of Kazakhstan were analyzed. The Microsoft Excel program was used to process statistical data.

3. In-depth interviews. (audio and text transcription). It was planned to conduct interviews as part of 5-6 focus group conversations with women entrepreneurs in Astana, Almaty, Pavlodar and Karaganda, but due to the tight schedule of respondents, interviews were conducted with each participant individually through the ZOOM communication program. A semi-structured interview was used.

A qualitative study was developed and conducted using in-depth narration as a method of data collection. A semi-structured approach to the interview was also used and the inclusion of various cross-cutting topics, such as general information about the respondent, features of women's entrepreneurship, assessment of the business environment and obstacles for women entrepreneurs, as well as Covid-19 (see Appendix 2). The sample consisted of 10 representatives of women's entrepreneurship in different cities of Kazakhstan, and the respondents were selected voluntarily through groups in social networks. Respondents of various age categories (from 25 to 45 years old) from various fields of employment were selected. The interview was recorded on audio, and the consent forms were signed.

The interviewer made efforts to encourage informants to speak in their own words and avoid closed questions. The interview was planned so that it was more like a conversation, so that the interviewee felt comfortable and encouraged to give more detailed answers. Appropriate steps have been taken to ensure ethical compliance and rigor in my research.

Respondents were happy to tell stories from their lives. The interview was scheduled for only 30 minutes - 1 hour.

The NVivo program was used to analyze qualitative data.

The interviews were transcribed in such a way that qualitative narratives could be presented for further comparative analysis. The transcript includes the respondent's own words and the interviewer's words.

4. SWOT analysis of women's business activity in Kazakhstan. I use the synthesis method to describe recommendations for the development of women in business. The selection and evaluation of its development strategy is carried out in two stages: 1) studying the business environment both internally and externally, and the information collected determines the advantages and disadvantages of the environment (internal factors), risks and opportunities (external factors). These data, which were collected as a result of the analysis of scientific sources, software literature and statistical research, will also serve as a basis for research in this work.; 2) Identification of potential development directions using the SWOT matrix.

The main limitation of this study may be the lack of indicators of the development of large-scale entrepreneurship, the volume of products produced, as well as the lack of data breakdown by age, insufficient sample size during interviews to create statistical data.

In the future, with an increase in the number of statistical and historical data, it is possible to conduct in-depth quantitative analysis using regression construction.

1. Analysis of women's economic opportunities in Kazakhstan

According to the World Economic Forum report on the global gender gap, Kazakhstan ranks 29th in terms of "Economic participation and opportunities", which includes indicators such as the level of labor force participation, equal pay for similar work, estimated earned income, percentage of senior officials and managers, as well as professional and technical workers.

Let's evaluate the contribution of women to the economically active population.

Table 1. Labor force share in the population (working age), by gender, in %, 2015-2021

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Male	84.2	85.1	85.0	85.4	86.0	85.2	85.7
Female	78.1	78.4	78.5	80.3	80.2	78.6	79.2

Source: Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan

As can be seen from the table, the level of women's participation in the economy increased until 2018 and after the outbreak of the pandemic, began to decline. This dynamic indicates a significant shock of women during the economic crisis, compared with men, whose share remains more stable despite the shocks and shocks in the world. (Okolneva E.V, 2020)

Consider the percentage of women in leadership positions in large corporations.

In 2020, KPMG audit company analyzed the gender diversity of 66 large enterprises of the republic. As part of this review, quantitative indicators of the total number of employees by gender were studied first of all. The total number of employees in the selected companies is ranked from 91 to 135,952 employees, respectively, the total survey coverage is 551,893 employees for 66 companies. By gender, the average proportion of men out of the total number of employees is 72%, and women - 28%

According to the results of the study, only 10% of women in Kazakhstan are members of the boards of directors of various companies. In 60% of the companies represented, the board of directors consists only of men. Quantitative indicators of the executive body of companies by

gender were also studied. The total share of men in the executive body is 85%, and women - 15%.

In 59% of the companies represented, the executive body consists only of men.

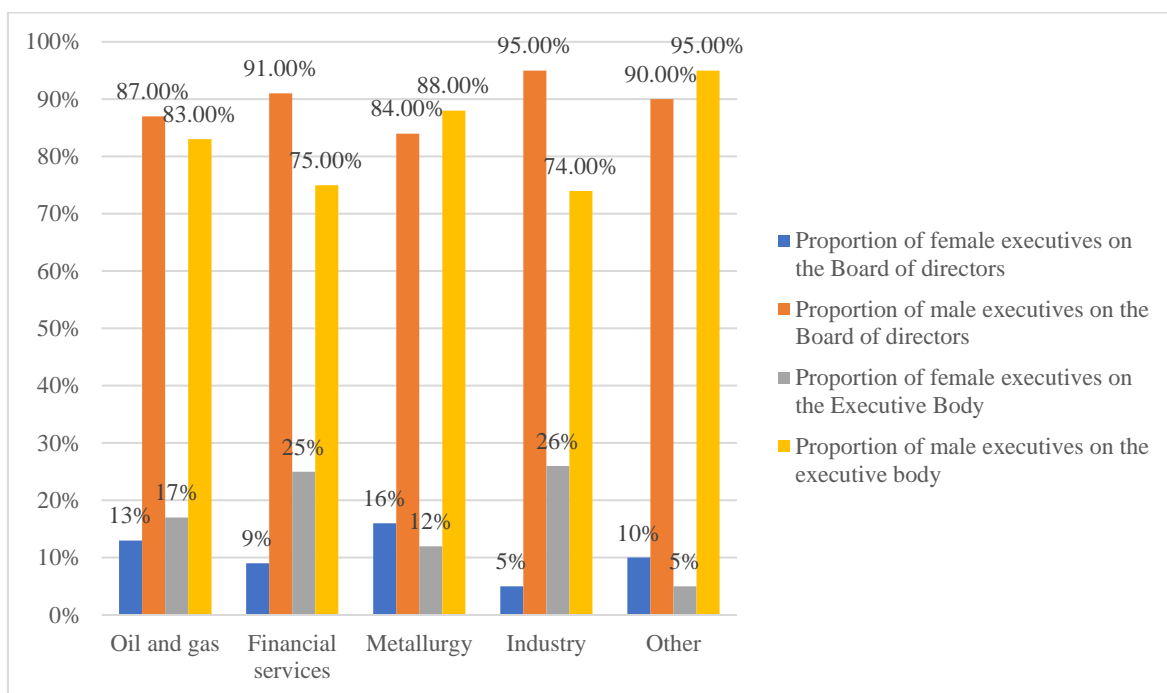


Figure 1 - Gender ratio in senior positions in large companies in Kazakhstan

Source: KPMG Analytical Materials

Consider the situation with the salary of an average Kazakh woman.

Gender statistics on wages were published in the collection "Men and Women of Kazakhstan" for 2017-2021. The report of the National Tax Service of the Republic of Kazakhstan indicates that the average monthly salary for men in 2021 was equal to 281.2 thousand tenge, and for women – 220.1 thousand tenge. The difference is 21.7%.

This is the average for Kazakhstan, it is not applicable to many regions of the country. For example, in Atyrau region women earn 45% less than men, in Mangystau region – 44%. The closest to gender parity in income are the North Kazakhstan (0.2% difference) and Turkestan regions (4.8%).

Table 2. The ratio of wages of women and men for 2015-2021

Indicator	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
average monthly salary of men, tenge	151,694	169,352	179 575	195 959	222 514	243 524	281 239
average monthly salary of women, tenge	99,911	116,108	121 793	129 039	150 779	182 679	220 160
the ratio of the average monthly salary of women to men, %	34.1	31.4	32.2	34.2	32.2	25.0	21.7

Source: Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan

When comparing the wages of men and women in some professions, where the gender of the employee does not have a fundamental difference. For example, a male accountant of average qualification in 2021 had a nominal salary of 184.8 thousand tenge, and a woman had 21% less - 144.9 thousand tenge. Male translators in Kazakhstan earned 432.5 thousand tenge, and their female colleagues - 407.5 thousand tenge (5.7% less).

All these facts point to the still low competitiveness of women in the labor market, the incomplete use of the potential of women as an economically active group.

Gender differences in wages are also explained by the sectoral and professional gender asymmetry of employment. The existing differences between men and women, especially with regard to employment and unpaid housework, are not only unfair, but also damage the economy. These differences often lead to poverty and social exclusion, when it is difficult for women to find work, despite their contribution to the welfare of households. Thus, the priority of the policy is to increase the competitiveness of women in the labor market by developing mechanisms that allow them to combine motherhood and work, as well as expanding part-time employment opportunities. (Y. Amireev , A. Daurenbekov , J. Beisekova, 2020)

Moreover, encouraging women to participate in entrepreneurship can provide new opportunities to address gender inequality, promote employment and improve the socio-economic status of women.

2. Characteristics of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan

Modern women's entrepreneurship is a special type of economic activity carried out by women. Entrepreneurship is a form of self-employment, which involves the realization of one's socio-economic qualities, self-affirmation in society and the use of labor abilities to create new and improve traditional forms of production. This is often accompanied by a certain level of risk-taking, the presence of power, capital and education, as well as the preservation of specific female family and household functional responsibilities. In Kazakhstan, women's entrepreneurship is at the stage of development. (T. Belyalov, V. Vakhlakova, 2022)

Table 3. Dynamics of the number of registered small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) as of 2015-2021 by gender

	Number of SMEs - total	Number of SMEs headed by women	Increase by last year - total	Increase by last year - SMEs headed by women	Share of SMEs headed by women
2015	1,530,258	647,082	-7.01%	-7.21%	42.29%
2016	1,501,156	630,919	-1.90%	-2.50%	42.03%
2017	1,540,592	648,128	2.63%	2.73%	42.07%
2018	1,577,747	665,973	2.41%	2.75%	42.21%
2019	1,603,839	677,390	1.65%	1.71%	42.24%
2020	1,610,496	680,897	0.42%	0.52%	42.28%
2021	1,694,672	737,653	5.23%	8.34%	43.53%

Source: Compiled by the author according to the data of the Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Recent data show that women in Kazakhstan are increasingly involved in the small and medium-sized business sector: more than 737,563 enterprises are headed by women, which is 43.5% of the total number of small and medium-sized enterprises. Although this is better than if we compare the data from last year, when the percentage was slightly lower, there have been no

significant structural changes over the past five years. In fact, from 2015 to 2020, the share of active SMEs headed by women remained at 42%, which indicates a persistent gender gap in entrepreneurship in the country. It is important to continue to monitor and address this issue to promote gender equality and inclusive economic growth.

As can be seen from table 3, in 2015-2016 there was a decrease in the number of SMEs in the country as a whole, which coincides with the period of the consequences of the sanctions crisis, during which inflation increased from 7.4% in 2014 to 13.6% in 2015. Prices for food products increased by 10.9%, non-food products - by 22.6%, paid services – by 8.1%.

A significant event during this period was the departure of tenge for free swimming. This caused the third devaluation in Kazakhstan. Then the exchange rate increased from 179.19 tenge to 255.26 tenge for 1 dollar. (The standard of living of the population in Kazakhstan, 2020)

Although it was a big shock, women's entrepreneurship coped with the consequences and began to gain momentum again in 2017. At that time, the state provided support to women's entrepreneurship in the form of preferential loans under the program from the EBRD with the support of the Damu Foundation.

With the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020, the growth rate began to slow down significantly.

According to a study by the United Nations and the World Bank, women entrepreneurs in the segment of small and medium-sized businesses suffer more serious damage from the crisis caused by the coronavirus and suffer more than men. The previous problems only worsened during the crisis: women entrepreneurs are forced to spend more time with children while schools are closed, face domestic violence more often and endure the abrupt transition of business to online harder. (G.V. Semeko, 2021)

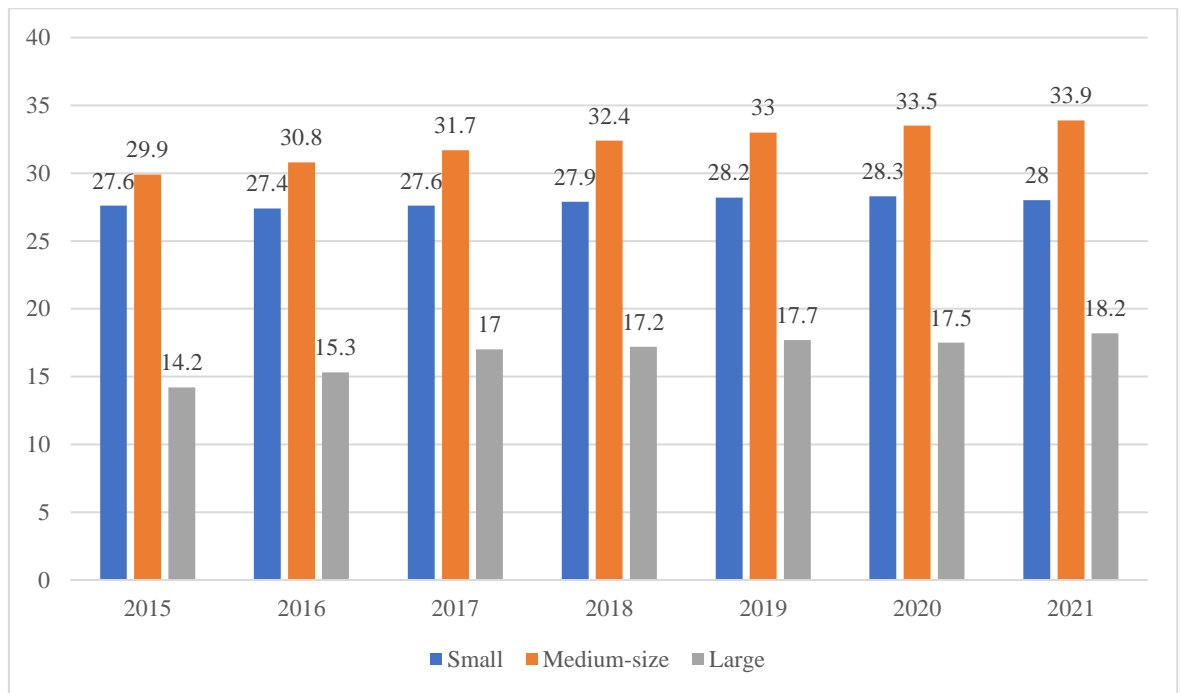


Figure 2 - Percentage of enterprises run by a woman in Kazakhstan, 2015-2021, %

Source: Compiled by the author according to the data of the Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan

Based on the information provided, it seems that, despite a slight increase in the share of enterprises headed by women in Kazakhstan from 2015 to 2021, there is still a significant underrepresentation of women in large companies. This may indicate a lack of opportunities and support for women to access larger enterprises and highlights the need for additional initiatives to promote and support women's entrepreneurship in these areas.

In addition, the fact that women tend to dominate certain sectors, such as education, real estate, housing and catering, wholesale and retail, health and social services, suggests that there may be social and cultural factors influencing the types of businesses that women are likely to engage in. It is important for policy makers and organizations to take this into account when developing initiatives and programs to support women's entrepreneurship to ensure that they are relevant and effective for all women, regardless of their cultural background or society's expectations. Such a model of gender specialization in certain industries can contribute to the gender gap in leadership positions in large enterprises.

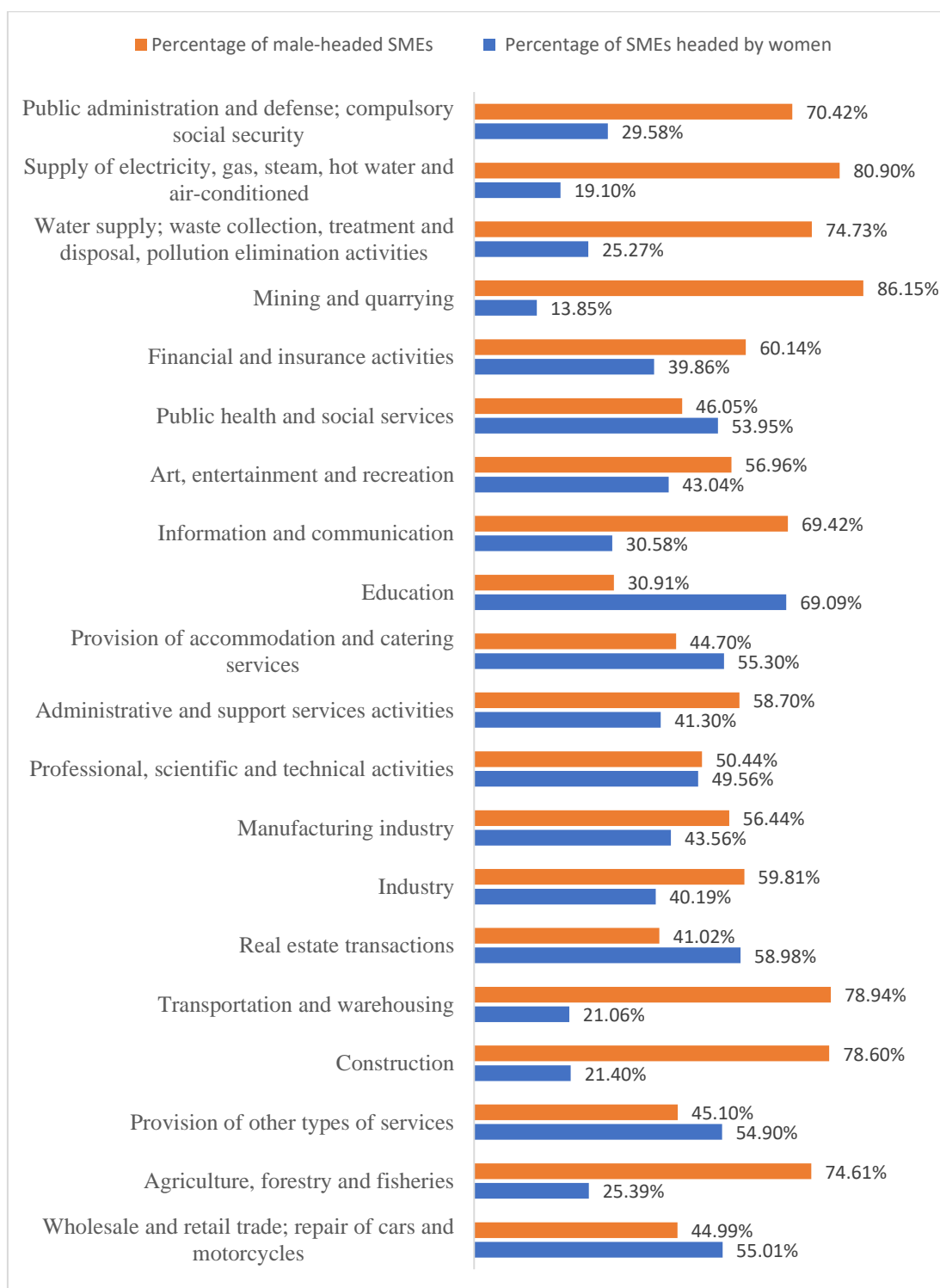


Figure 3 - Share of SMEs by industry and gender for 2021

Source: Compiled by the author according to the data of the Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan

The data show that the wholesale and retail trade sector accounts for the highest percentage (37.9%) of female-headed SMEs, followed by other service sectors (16.9%), agriculture, forestry and fisheries (9.8%), real estate (6.8%) and only a small share (3.9%) in industrial sector. On the

contrary, male-owned SMEs are more likely to work in sectors such as "mining", "electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning", "construction", "transport and warehousing" and similar areas where there are fewer women entrepreneurs.

The study showed that women's entrepreneurship is more noticeable in industries that solve social problems that women usually face in their daily lives. These sectors do not necessarily require technical expertise, a large workforce, or significant capital. In addition, the study shows that the social and ethnic characteristics of Kazakhstan also affect the progress of women's enterprises. Since they are primarily responsible for household life and farms, as well as caring for children/husband/and other household members, this may affect their ability to create and manage enterprises.

Due to the lack of both financial, labor and other working resources, women's business is not growing. In turn, this creates a vicious circle: a small company cannot scale up and increase its staff along with the volume of production with its own funds. As a result, the overall economic growth rate of the country suffers.

Next, consider the regional differentiation of women's entrepreneurship.

Table 4. The share of economic entities headed by women, as of January 1, 2022, by size of the enterprise

Region	Small	Medium-sized	Large
Republic of Kazakhstan	27.96%	33.90%	18.16%
Akmola	26.66%	28.35%	8.08%
Aktobe	26.18%	36.99%	11.43%
Almaty	28.70%	46.48%	16.31%
Atyrau	27.90%	37.97%	20.13%
West Kazakhstan	25.70%	34.20%	18.37%
Zhambyl	30.06%	45.06%	20.39%
Karaganda	27.49%	35.34%	16.14%
Kostanay	28.03%	30.23%	13.71%
Kyzylorda	28.96%	36.67%	19.00%
Mangystau	27.36%	37.12%	24.81%
Pavlodar	28.37%	34.72%	10.17%
North Kazakhstan	26.46%	23.77%	16.42%
Turkestan	23.89%	28.54%	20.97%
East Kazakhstan	27.84%	31.33%	17.28%

Astana city	29.47%	25.09%	15.29%
Almaty city	28.55%	31.09%	22.59%
Shymkent city	24.95%	38.42%	25.49%

Source: Compiled by the author according to the data of the Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan

In 2021, the highest percentage of enterprises headed by women is observed in Zhambyl (30.3%), Astana (29.4%), Kyzylorda (29.1%) regions and Almaty (29%), the lowest - in Shymkent (25.1%) and Turkestan region (24%). At the same time, a high percentage of medium-sized enterprises headed by women is observed in Zhambyl (45.1%) and Almaty (46.5%) regions, low - in Astana (25.1%) and North Kazakhstan region (23.8%). The largest percentage of large enterprises headed by women is in Shymkent – 25.5%, the smallest – 8.1% - in Akmola region

It is noted that residents of Zhambyl region are more active than others in taking micro-loans and using state support tools when they are engaged in their own business.

Here, almost half of the medium-sized businesses are owned by women (45.06%).

Astana and Almaty region are the most populated and developed regions. Most of the major events to promote women's business are held in these places. The lowest proportion of women's enterprises is located in the south of the country, where patriarchal ideas about the role of women prevail.

There is an increase in the number of enterprises owned by women in Kazakhstan. However, these enterprises are usually small or medium-sized and provide only a third of the jobs in the country. Women's entrepreneurship is mainly concentrated in the service sector. The study notes that for the formation of women's business in our country, it is necessary to change the "concentration" of entrepreneurship among the female sex and thereby shift the priority to large enterprises and with high profitability. This would require the expansion of economic opportunities for women, especially in the field of entrepreneurship. Thus, it is important to identify priority areas for the development of women's entrepreneurship and develop recommendations to support the economic participation of women in the country.

3. Assessment of the business environment for the development of women's entrepreneurship

3.1 Macro environment

During the formation of the independent Republic of Kazakhstan, a package of legislative and regulatory acts aimed at stimulating the development of women's entrepreneurship was adopted. Legislation is regularly improved in accordance with the requirements of the time. Currently, there are many government programs in the country aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship among women. State support measures are aimed at creating favorable conditions for small and medium-sized women's businesses.

In 1995, a specialized national-level Commission on women's affairs and family and demographic policy was established. The presidential decree states that one of the tasks of the commission is to promote equality of opportunities for women and men in the economic sphere, further development of entrepreneurship among women, increasing the competitiveness of women in the labor market, creating conditions for family members to combine work with household duties and raising children

In 1998, the Message of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the main directions of domestic and foreign policy was published. The society was tasked with raising the status of women, expanding their presence in the Government and combating domestic violence, as well as encouraging banks to provide loans to women.

25 years ago in 1998, our country joined the UN Agreement "On the Elimination of Discrimination against the Female Sex in All Forms. In 1999, in a message to the people, President Nursultan Nazarbayev approved a National Action Plan to improve the status of women in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

In a Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated September 5, 2000, a proposal for lending to women's business initiatives in the amount of 4,500,000 US dollars was approved.

In the Concept of Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan, developed in 2003, the main tasks are assigned to ensuring equal opportunities for economic independence, business development and promotion, creating conditions for equal exercise of rights and responsibilities in the family.

In 2005, the Strategy for Ensuring Gender Equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006-2016 was approved. Each section of the Strategy included indicators developed jointly with the regional office of the United Nations Women's Fund (UNIFEM) to achieve gender equality in politics, economics, education, family, health issues and the prevention of violence against women and children.

In 2009, the laws "On State guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women" were adopted. The Law defines the tasks in the field of ensuring gender equality.

When approving the document "Strategy "Kazakhstan-2050", attention was paid to supporting motherhood, creating conditions for favorable business development by women. The Head of State outlined a course to support the aspirations of Kazakhstani women to realize themselves in their careers. In his message, the President instructs the Government to ensure equal rights and opportunities for women.

In the Concept of Family and Gender Policy until 2030, the target indicator for the full achievement of 30% representation of women "in executive, representative and judicial authorities, state, quasi-public and corporate sectors at the decision-making level" is defined as 2030.

But equal access is determined by what positions in the government are held by women, what degree of power and prestige is associated with these positions.

In general, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan attempts to draw attention to such a side of the issue as ensuring state control and supervision over compliance with gender legislation, which are carried out in the form of inspections by state bodies operating in this area of relations

and contacting public organizations. But, being stated in a general non-concretized form, this prescription bears the stamp of declarativeness and is carried out on a case-by-case basis.

Various initiatives have been implemented in Kazakhstan to support entrepreneurship and stimulate economic growth. Among them are the "Business Roadmap 2020" and "Employment Roadmap 2020". However, there are no gender-specific measures in these programs.

In 2008, Kazakhstan approved a Program for the development of women's entrepreneurship for 2009-2015 and a micro-credit program for women's entrepreneurship for 2009-2015. Despite these initiatives, there is no information available on the results, performance and effectiveness of these programs.

In March 2020, Presidential Decrees "On measures to ensure socio-economic stability" and "On further measures to stabilize the economy" were adopted, thanks to which measures to support SMEs during the coronavirus crisis were developed. Tax benefits and measures to establish stability in the market were determined.

Table 5. The main state-political events in the development of women's business initiatives in the Republic of Kazakhstan

Year	Event
1995	Establishment of the Council for Family Affairs, Women and Demographic Policy (National Commission for Family Affairs and Gender)
1997	Creation of the AO «Entrepreneurship Development Fund «Damu»
1998	Accession to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW or Geneva Convention, 1979)
1999	National Action Plan for the advancement of women in the Republic
2000	Kazakhstan Resolution of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On measures to support women's entrepreneurship»
2003	The concept of gender policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan
2005	Strategy of Gender Equality in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2006 - 2016
2008	Microcredit program for women's entrepreneurship for 2009-2015
2009	The Law "On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men"
2013	Creation of the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan Atameken
2014	Raising funds from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Program «Women in Business»
2015	Mentoring Program of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
2016	The concept of family and Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030
2018	Creation of the Women's Entrepreneurship Support Fund of the Business Council women of NCE RK "Atameken"

2020	Presidential Decrees "On measures to ensure socio-economic stability", "On further measures to stabilize the economy"
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Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of open data

3.2 Meso - environment

Specialized information centers have been established in Kazakhstan to support women's entrepreneurship. Such centers can play an important role in providing women entrepreneurs with access to the necessary resources, networks and knowledge to create and develop a successful business. The dissemination of public information about women entrepreneurs and the specifics of doing business from a gender perspective is an important function that these centers can perform.

In addition to disseminating information, these centers may also offer training programs, mentoring opportunities, and access to financing options tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs. By providing such support, these centers can help solve some common problems faced by women entrepreneurs, such as limited access to capital, networks and business knowledge.

It is important to evaluate the effectiveness of these centers over time to ensure that they fulfill their intended role in promoting women's entrepreneurship. Monitoring and assessing their impact will help identify areas for improvement and serve as a basis for future policies and activities aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan.

In general, creating an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship requires a multi-pronged approach, including policy and regulatory reforms, institutional support and targeted measures aimed at solving specific problems faced by women entrepreneurs. The creation of specialized information centers is a positive step towards promoting women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, and it will be important to continue to increase these efforts in the coming years.



Figure 4 – The main institutions supporting women's entrepreneurship

Source: Compiled by the author on the basis of open data

Several specialized financial institutions have been established in Kazakhstan to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). For almost 25 years, the Damu Foundation has been providing financial and non-financial support to businesses, managing various government programs through commercial banks and microfinance organizations. Another institute, NCE "Atameken", strives to protect the interests of businesses of all sizes and encourages their participation in the development of legislative and regulatory acts. The Chamber has also established departments of mass entrepreneurship and microfinance, which provide financial support and stimulate entrepreneurial initiatives, especially in rural areas, within the framework of the Bastau project. It is extremely important to support women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan through various initiatives and programs to achieve greater gender equality in the country's economy. The Government of Kazakhstan has committed itself to increasing women's participation in sectors traditionally dominated by men, as well as in new areas. Financial institutions, such as Damu Entrepreneurship Development Fund JSC, provide financial support, consulting services and dissemination of information to entrepreneurs, including women, which deserves praise.

KazAgro is a state structure that unites seven entities, including the Agrarian Credit Corporation and the Fund for Financial Support of Agriculture. They provide financial assistance to small and medium-sized businesses in agriculture and processing of agricultural products. Among these organizations, KazAgroFinance JSC is a notable financial institution that manages the state equipment leasing program.

In 2013, the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs "Atameken" was also established in the republic. The body was created so that entrepreneurs could effectively communicate with the Government of Kazakhstan. An offshoot, the Council of Business Women of Kazakhstan, was also created at the Chamber. These councils aim to support women in districts and regions, strengthen women's participation in business activities.

The Coca-Cola Foundation, on the initiative of the Social Dynamics Public Foundation, developed the Coca-Cola Belesteri project, which started in 2012. Since 2013, the project has been joined by a partner – the Coalition for a "Green" Economy and Development of G-Global. By combining the efforts of the parties, the project expanded opportunities thanks to the support of the National Commission on Women's Affairs and Family and Demographic Policy under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection of the Population of the Republic of Kazakhstan, involving unemployed women from all regions of Kazakhstan in entrepreneurship training programs.

The Coca-Cola Belesteri project was created in order to develop productive employment of women and provides women with the opportunity to participate in educational programs on the basics of business and farming, a competition for the best business idea with the possibility of obtaining financial assistance to open or develop their small business, support from like-minded people and curators. Since the start of the project in 2013, more than 50 thousand women have been trained, more than half of them have been trained in the last two pandemic years. To date, more than 80 businesses have been created and are successfully functioning, which have created over 300 jobs.

The active involvement of women managers in professional organizations and the wide dissemination of information about their activities among women play a vital role in the development of women's entrepreneurship. It is extremely important to create a reliable institutional base for rural women, which can be achieved by creating specialized information centers. These centers should help with business mentoring (support) services, inform women entrepreneurs about various projects in which they can participate to expand economic opportunities and awareness, organize consultations about manufacturers of equipment for SMEs and the self-employed.

3.3 Money

Support for women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan through access to financial resources is carried out within the framework of various programs, for example, the Business Roadmap 2020 and the lending program from the Asian Development Bank.

The Damu Foundation has been offering micro-loans to Kazakhstani business women on preferential terms through partner banks since 2010. In 2014, the Damu Foundation acted as a guarantor of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development's "Women in Business" program, which provides loans for the renewal or purchase of fixed assets, as well as an increase in working capital and refinancing of obligations to women's entrepreneurship entities that meet environmental and social requirements. EBRD criteria.

As of 01.01.2022, 43,492 borrowers of women entrepreneurs for a total amount of 321,892 million tenge were financed within the framework of conditional placement of funds. In general, 75,031 borrowers were financed under conditional placement programs for 01.01.2022 for a total amount of KZT 2,610,149 million.

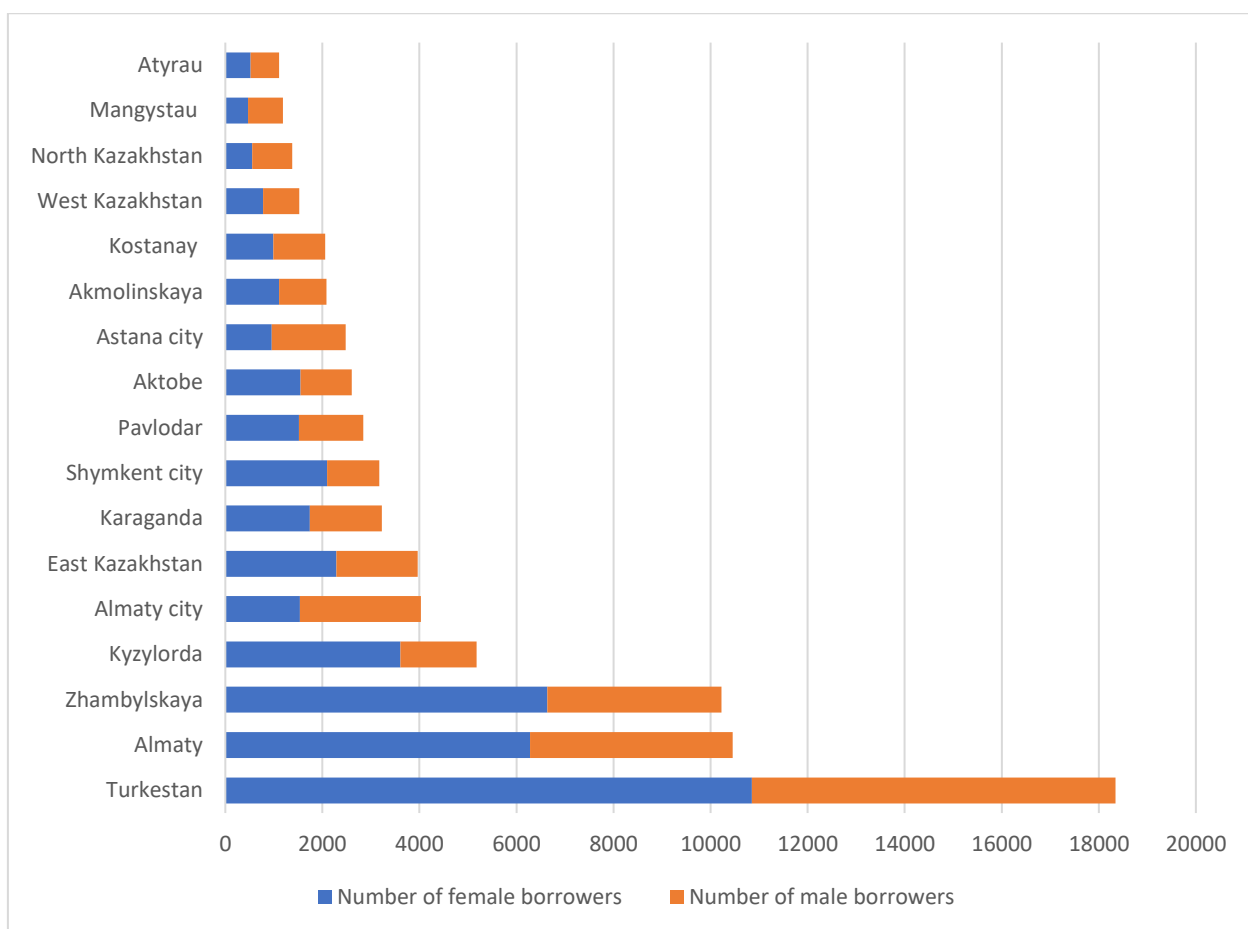


Figure 5 - The number of borrowers-entrepreneurs in the regional and gender section as of 01.01.2022, units.

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the Damu Foundation

As can be seen from the diagram, the largest number of female borrowers is in the Turkestan region (59% of the total number of borrowers in the region). Next comes Zhambyl region – 65%, and Almaty – 60%. The same regions are leading in the number of SMEs. In general, we can consider a positive trend, since the number of female borrowers is greater than men. This allows us to conclude that credit resources are in great demand among women.

But from year to year, the same regions are leading in the same industries in terms of number. These are services and manufacturing industries.

At the same time, if we consider the amount of loans, there is a tendency of unequal distribution of funds. Men's entrepreneurship develops most of the allocated funds, despite the abundance of programs aimed at women. Only 12% of the disbursed funds fall on businesswomen,

the largest amount falls on Kyzylorda (22% of the total amount of funds allocated to the region) and Zhambyl region (21%).

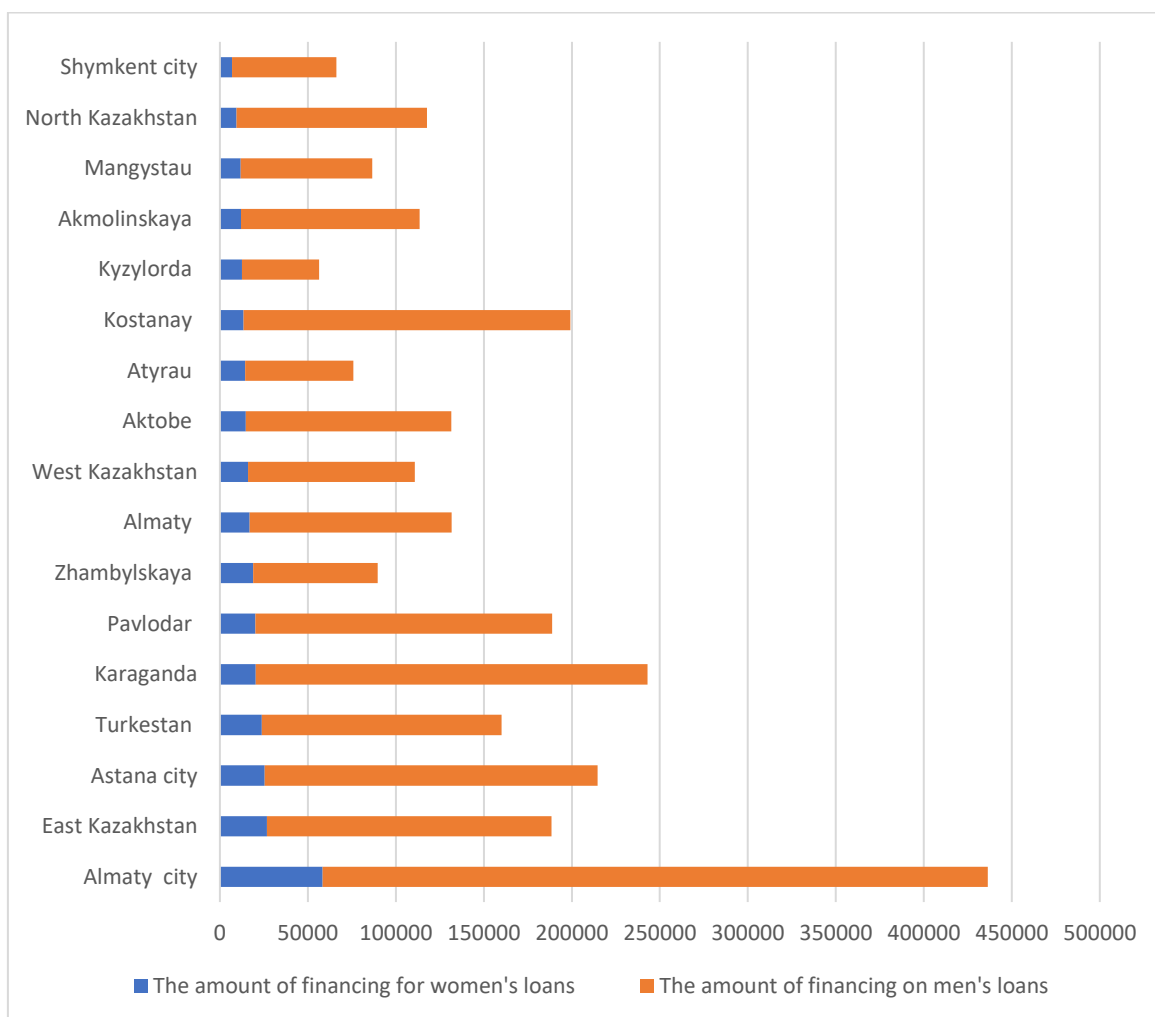


Figure 6 - The amount of financing on loans of entrepreneurs in the regional and gender section as of 01.01.2022, million tenge

Source: Compiled by the author based on data from the Damu Foundation

The average loan amount for women entrepreneurs is 7.4 million tenge, while for men this number is an order of magnitude higher - 70.6 million tenge. Men are more likely than women to borrow funds for development in banks, while women go for microloans to microfinance organizations. Thus, the main client of KMF MFOs are women entrepreneurs (63%).

In general, the situation with capital confirms the judgment about the gender gap between entrepreneurs of different sexes. The state should focus on increasing women's confidence so that they are not afraid to borrow large sums, involve them in large projects, allocate more funds.

3.4 Motherhood

It is important to recognize the unique challenges that Kazakhstani women face in their pursuit of entrepreneurship, including society's expectations and traditional gender roles. Women are often burdened with household responsibilities in addition to their work or business responsibilities.

The system associated with the roles and behavior of women in society tends to assign responsibilities related to the household and family disproportionately to women compared to men and underestimate the role of women in the economy and leadership. This can make entrepreneurship a less attractive and feasible career choice, as well as make it much more difficult for women to create and run a business (Bullow et al., 2017).

Women on average spend significantly more time on unpaid housework. (Women in Business and Management, 2018)

The time spent by women on unpaid care and housework is 76.2% — three times more than men.

In 2018, the Statistics Committee under the Ministry of National Economy provided data on the average number of hours spent on unpaid housework in the country. The study was conducted among people aged 15 years and older. It turned out that working men spend an average of 1 hour 09 minutes a day on unpaid household management services and its members, and working women - 3 hours 36 minutes. Unemployed men spend a little more time on household chores — 1 hour 24 minutes, and unemployed women — 4 hours 05 minutes.

Table 6. Average number of hours spent on unpaid housework in Kazakhstan, by gender (2018)

	Employed		Unemployed	
	By gender		By gender	
	male	female	male	female
Daily fund of time	24-00	24-00	24-00	24-00
including by type of occupation:				
Employment and other employment-related activities	05-29	04-34	00-26	00-13
Production of goods for own use	00-29	00-11	00-28	00-11
Unpaid household services for the household and its members	01-09	03-36	01-24	04-05
Unpaid household care services	00-19	00-38	00-10	00-50
Unpaid volunteer and other unpaid work	00-01	00-01	00-02	00-01
Training	00-02	00-04	01-46	00-53
Socialization and communication, participation in associations and religious practice	00-49	00-41	01-07	00-57
Culture, leisure, mass media and sports events	03-16	02-03	04-59	03-27
Personal hygiene and self-care	12-27	12-12	13-39	13-22

Source: Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan

133 is the average length of time in minutes per day that a woman in Kazakhstan spends in a paid job. 246 is the average length of time in minutes per day that she devotes to unpaid care and housework. For comparison: one day in the life of an ordinary citizen of Kazakhstan — 203 minutes – for paid work, and 110 minutes – for housework.

Early marriages and bride kidnapping are also issues that affect some women in Kazakhstan. Despite these difficulties, Kazakhstani women are known for their courage and ability

to multitask in managing various roles in their lives. To support women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, it is important to provide women with resources and opportunities to develop their skills and knowledge, including access to business consultants and training programs that can help them overcome these problems.

This highlights a common problem faced by female entrepreneurs trying to balance their family responsibilities with running a business. As a result, many women may prefer smaller-scale enterprises that require significant time and resources, which may limit their growth potential and profitability. In addition, women may be more likely to choose industries or sectors that provide more flexibility in their work schedule and are less capital intensive. However, it is important to note that this is not necessarily a reflection of the lack of ambitions or abilities of women entrepreneurs, but rather a reflection of the systemic problems they face when combining work and family responsibilities in a patriarchal society.

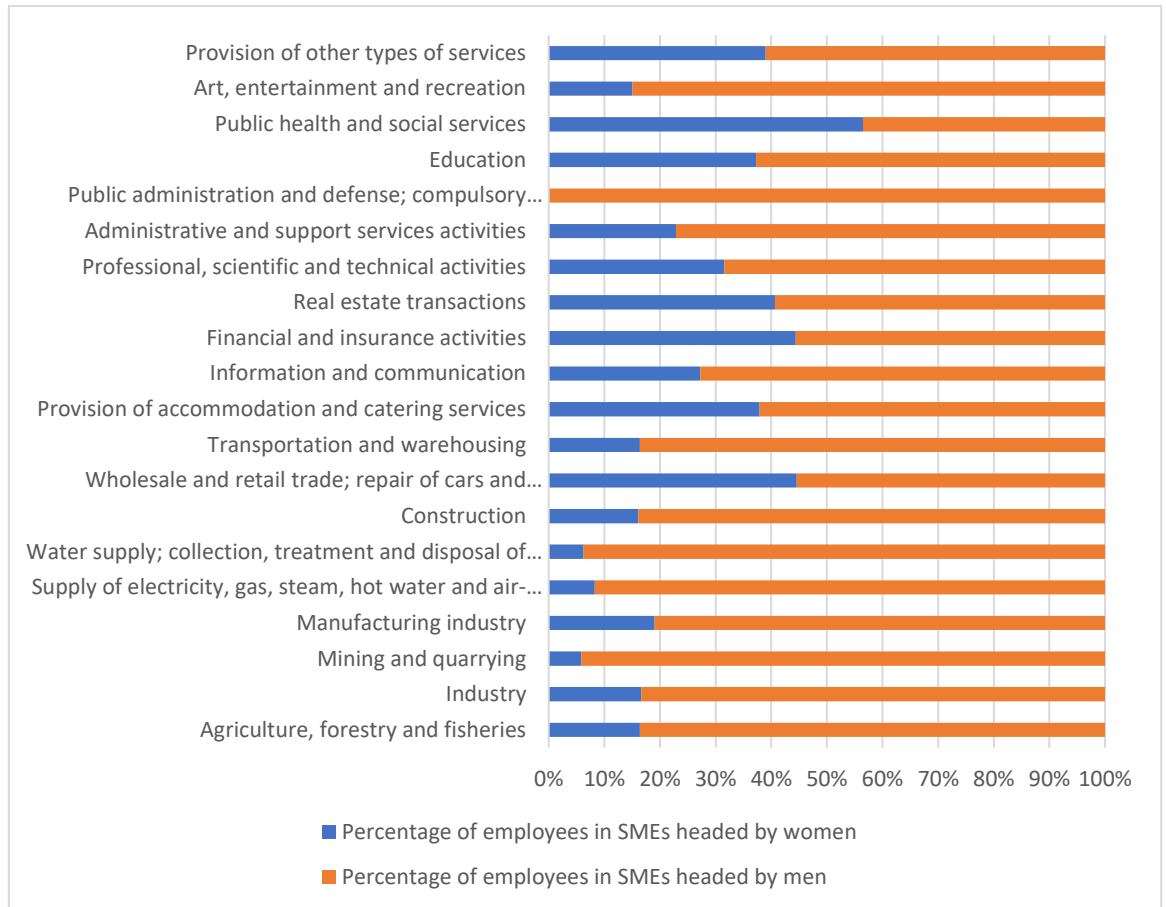
Men need to be told about the role of women in business, to involve them in gender initiatives, such as business forums of the women's business community. There are quite a lot of them held in Kazakhstan, but there is no significant effect from them, since only women participate in them. As a result, these forums turn into a "heart-to-heart conversation" from women to women. Therefore, it is important to involve men as actively as possible in activities to support women, so that they understand all the features of gender equality.

3.5 Management

Considering the management abilities of women entrepreneurs, it can be highlighted that women mainly occupy industries that do not require a large staff. Men are absolutely in the lead in the number of people employed at their enterprises. It is also related to management abilities and opportunities to learn these skills.

The image in Figure 7 confirms the words that women's enterprises employ less than 1/3 of the total number of people employed at SME facilities. Women use human resources management to a lesser extent compared to men.

Figure 7 - Number of employees at SMEs, 2021



Source: Compiled by the author according to the data of the Committee on Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan

According to one of the respondents of the study, women entrepreneurs cannot independently improve their understanding of business strategy and develop skills for its effective application in their own enterprises. Business consultants can help identify the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the business, as well as help develop a strategic plan to overcome difficulties and seize opportunities. Training programs can provide women entrepreneurs with practical knowledge and tools to implement strategic planning in their business. In addition, it is important to promote the value of strategic planning and management among women entrepreneurs and encourage them to implement this as a regular practice in their business. This can be done through information campaigns, networking events, and partnerships with business organizations and government agencies.

At the moment, there are several programs to develop the necessary skills for women entrepreneurs.

The mentoring program was launched in 2015. The essence of the program is that the owners and managers of leading enterprises in Kazakhstan share their experience, give advice, helping women entrepreneurs in doing business.

The EBRD has implemented 138 mentoring projects in the republic, 16 business coaching projects in 6 regions. 17 trainings were organized on the territory of the country, more than 250 women entrepreneurs became participants, 115 businesswomen became part of the mentoring program and showed positive results.

The EBRD also offers grants in the amount of 60% of the consulting cost for the following projects:

- strategy development
- marketing and digital technologies
- organizational structure
- construction of operational activities
- introduction of new technologies
- automation
- quality management
- financial management
- preparation for certification
- many other types of consulting, except legal and tax.

Proven consulting companies with many years of experience are recommended for the implementation of such projects. The maximum grant amount is 10,000 euros.

For longer support — from 8 to 12 months — and to study the selected areas of business development, businesswomen can connect a business coach. At the same time, 60% of the costs of its services are paid by the EBRD. The maximum amount of expenses is also 10,000 euros.

Within the framework of the Program, about 300 consulting projects are launched annually with Kazakhstani enterprises, more than 1,500 representatives of small and medium-sized enterprises improve their skills through various trainings and seminars.

The most popular types of consulting services are marketing, information and communication technologies, strategy and organization.

According to the OECD, small businesses, which are represented by a large number of female actors, are particularly in need of advice and support during a crisis. Most of all, during the immediate phase of the crisis, SMEs are engaged in crisis management and often do not have the capabilities and knowledge to determine the sources of financing and support available to them, as well as to manage often complex application processes.

4. Data collection

During December 2022-March 2023, 10 interviews were conducted with participants of various programs to support women's entrepreneurship. Announcements about the interview were sent to several groups on social networks. There was a targeted selection for the sample so that the respondents were of different ages and from different industries. They were mostly women who run small businesses from the cities of Astana, Almaty, Pavlodar and Karaganda. Businesswomen also have different marital status. In order to preserve anonymity, it was decided to change the names to numbering. The interview was conducted in Russian.

Data on respondents are presented in the following table 7.

Table 7. Data on interview respondents

Name	City	Age	Industry	Marital status
Respondent 1	Astana	26	Construction	Not married
Respondent 2	Astana	34	Logistics	Married, 3 children
Respondent 3	Astana	39	Medical services	Married, 2 children
Respondent 4	Astana	32	Audit services	Married, 1 child
Respondent 5	Almaty	29	Advertising services	Married, 1 child
Respondent 6	Almaty	40	Services of a psychologist	Not married

Respondent 7	Almaty	35	Jewelry making	Married, 3 children
Respondent 8	Pavlodar	33	Business consultant services	Not married
Respondent 9	Pavlodar	31	Provision of beauty services	Married, 2 children
Respondent 10	Karagandy	28	Retail trade	Married, 1 child

Source: Compiled by the author based on an interview

Before the interview, the respondents were familiarized with the topic of the dissertation and sample questions, consent forms were signed, agreed with the supervisor.

The interview was semi-structured so that informants would be more willing to share their experiences, interview questions contain mostly open-ended questions. In the course of the interview, new questions were included.

The interview was conducted via the ZOOM platform, due to the very busy schedule of respondents. The interview was of varying duration from 40 minutes to 1 hour and was recorded in video format. All records were transcribed in the proverbial style. The materials were uploaded to the Invivo program for ease of analysis. Then thematic coding was used, each interview was divided into mini-interviews depending on the topic of the question for further inductive analysis. Scientific articles and publications were also used for deductive analysis.

5. Interview analysis

As an example, consider 5 main topics.

5.1 A look at the opportunities of women entrepreneurs in Kazakhstan

During the interview, it was revealed that young businesswomen (up to 30 years old) they look very positively at the situation of women in the country and the opportunities open to them.

One of the respondents notes:

"Now we have all the rights, if you want, you can be a housewife, if you want, you can open your own business, now this is especially common among women on maternity leave" – Respondent 1.

In fact, for 2021, the gender equality index in Kazakhstan, according to the Bureau of National Statistics, is 0.441 compared to 0.35 five years earlier in 2017. Kazakhstan is actively involved in the development of women's rights and opportunities, and even occupies a leading position among the CIS countries.

All informants have a legally registered business and higher education, which indicates the freedom of law in Kazakhstan compared to the countries of the Middle East, where religion dominates.

In her research, L.V. Orlova (2022) also notes that an increase in the level of education among women has a positive effect on entrepreneurial activity among women entrepreneurs.

100% of respondents initially had a stable job and later came to open their own business. To the question of whether past experience helped them when running their own business, many answered positively.

6 out of 10 respondents changed their job profile when starting a business.

Respondent 2 claimed:

"In Kazakhstan, there are all conditions and opportunities for a woman to develop her own business, the main thing is just to have the desire and courage."

5.2 Reasons for starting your own business

The motives of the female respondents to start their business were:

1. Flexible schedule (3 out of 10)
2. Financial situation (3 out of 10)
3. Self-realization (2 out of 10)
4. Helping the family (2 out of 10)

"Since I have my own business, I have begun to feel free, I no longer count the days until I receive my salary, and I provide my children with everything they need. I am sure that I will be able to give them a good education, get them into a private school, and ensure a bright future." - Respondent 3.

According to the classification of motives for entrepreneurship by Alimzhanovna & Turarbekovna (2019), the majority of respondents can be attributed to the group of "entrepreneurs on occasion", that is, women whose business opening was a coincidence. A very small number of respondents dreamed of entrepreneurship from the very beginning.

5.3 Barriers to the development of women's business initiatives in Kazakhstan

When asked about the specifics of women's business, all respondents note that women have more specific barriers.

"It seems to me that in general business has no gender, but at the same time I see that men and women approach their work differently and we have more barriers than men." - Respondent 6

"Even at trainings, many women talked about their business as a child, I think that this has a bad effect on the management of their enterprise" - Respondent 3.

Barriers to women 's entrepreneurship were highlighted:

1. Lack of business education (4 out of 10)
2. Not being able to delegate your activities (2 out of 10)
3. Combining family and business responsibilities (1 out of 10)
4. Problems with access to capital (1 out of 10)
5. Fear of expansion (1 out of 10)
6. Vulnerability of motherhood (1 out of 10)

"Women who work for hire can rely on the capital that the employer pays for maternity leave and child care, in this regard, a businesswoman is much harder, we do not have such support. Payments that are provided to everyone without exception for child care cannot repay these expenses, besides, a business woman has absolutely no standardized schedule, there are no weekends where she could rest" - Respondent 9.

Many of the informants note that it is important to support the family in the distribution of household responsibilities.

"You need to be able to find a balance, you don't need to get too immersed in your family or work. Where possible, my husband supports me, can pick up the children, feed them." - Respondent 2.

5.4 Experience in using measures to support women's business

The majority of respondents started a business from their own capital and are afraid of attracting borrowed capital due to high interest rates. But more than half are considering its involvement in the future.

Only 2 out of 10 respondents raised funds from microfinance organizations. 1 out of 10 respondents used the services of the EBRD Bank to provide financial support when receiving advice on digitalization of processes.

All informants are participants of the Mentoring program for women entrepreneurs. Many of them also attended trainings from Umay boost. All respondents note the positive impact of the program. Many of them have achieved the goals set at the beginning of the trainings. But most of all, women note the influence of networking, where it is possible to share similar experiences with other participants.

5.5 The impact of the crisis on the development of women's business

When asked about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesswomen noted a decrease in demand and supply problems.

"At first it was a shock, but the state provided timely support, tax benefits and deferred payments. But it was still very difficult, I saw how many businesses are closing." - Respondent 7.

"It seems that many women were very much affected by isolation, the household workload increased, someone even had to suspend their activities. I was probably lucky, my husband was also at home." - Respondent 10.

The service and retail industries were mainly affected. The purchasing power of the population has fallen, respectively, this has led to a decrease in demand. Less than half of the

respondents have reduced the number of staff, mostly women tend to retain employees and try to support them.

70% of informants note that after the pandemic, they had to change their business model and adapt to the crisis. Almost all respondents noted the importance of digital presence.

A.A. Kireeva and G.K. Kenzhegulova (2022) note in their work that the transition to digitalization of most processes contributes to the expansion of women's economic participation and the reduction of women's specialization in domestic employment.

At the same time, the pandemic has revealed problems with the lack of knowledge and the acquisition of new skills for women. An increase in the time spent doing unpaid domestic work has a negative impact on women's economic activity.

6. Discussion

In conclusion, it can be noted that respondents positively assess their capabilities and state support, since they were beneficiaries of many programs and were able to survive the COVID-19 crisis (survival bias), but also note the difference in business style, the impact of the crisis and the specificity of obstacles in the way of a female entrepreneur.

During the analysis, the hypothesis of the study on the influence of gender on the nature of obstacles faced by entrepreneurs was confirmed. Women are more susceptible to the family factor when determining the field of activity, working hours, etc.

The conclusions made during the interview are of a pilot nature. The limitations of the interview were the small sample size, low involvement among rural women, and the unconscious exclusion from the sample of women who had to close their businesses after the crisis.

7. SWOT matrix and recommendations

As we found out from the literature analysis, factors specific to each country, such as norms, traditions, economy and institutional framework, significantly affect women's entrepreneurial activity. To analyze the strategy for the development of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, a SWOT analysis was conducted in two stages. Firstly, both internal and external

aspects of the environment for the development of women's entrepreneurship were analyzed to determine its advantages and disadvantages, risks and opportunities. This analysis was based on data collected from various sources, such as scientific literature, interviews with respondents, policy documents and statistics. Secondly, possible strategies were formulated using a SWOT matrix.

Step-by-step consideration of various environmental factors and internal properties of women's business in our country contributes to the justification of the choice of strategic steps for further development (Table 8).

Table 8. Matrix of SWOT aspects of women's business development in Kazakhstan

	Strengths	Weaknesses
Internal factors	<p>S1. The young generation of innovative entrepreneurs;</p> <p>S2. High level of women to participate in the economy;</p> <p>S3. The presence of independent organizations, associations to support women's entrepreneurship;</p> <p>S4. Infrastructure development for the city</p>	<p>W1. Focus on micro and small entrepreneurship;</p> <p>W2. High concentration of women in the service sector;</p> <p>W3. The dual role of a woman (Taking care of the home, business activities);</p> <p>W4. Low level of tracking the development of women's entrepreneurship</p> <p>W5. Low level of involvement of regions and villages</p>
External factors		
Opportunities	SO strategies	WO strategies
<p>O1. The focus of political aspirations on the development of women's initiatives;</p> <p>O2. The potential of economically inactive women;</p> <p>O3. The focus of the policy on innovative and industrial development;</p> <p>O4. International economic relations</p>	SO1. (S1, S3, O1, O4)	<p>WO1. (W1, W2, O1, O3)</p> <p>WO2. (W3, O1, O2)</p>

Threats	ST strategies	WT strategies
T1. Persistence of discrimination against women;	ST1. (S1, S2, T1, T3)	WT1. (W4, T1, T2)
T2. Vulnerability in a crisis;	ST2. (S3, T4)	WT2. (W5, T3)
T3. Undeveloped entrepreneurial education, low level of innovation;		
T4. Ineffective policy		

Source: Compiled by the author, according to the results of interviews and open data

A SWOT analysis conducted on women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan revealed potential directions for its development.

Firstly, it is necessary to maximize the existing strengths of women's entrepreneurship in order to take advantage of the available opportunities. This includes supporting women entrepreneurs in entering the international export and import market (SO1).

Secondly, it is necessary to use the opportunities of the external environment to eliminate the shortcomings of women's entrepreneurship. This can be achieved through the development of the digital technology sector in women's business (WO1), as well as the introduction of a social support system during maternity leave (WO2).

Thirdly, to minimize potential threats and prevent negative consequences, the strengths of women's entrepreneurship should be used. This includes the development of business education for women (coaching, trainings on development in a crisis) and the involvement of men in gender inequality issues (ST1) and the creation of a monitoring system to support women's entrepreneurship to identify the most effective methods of supporting and adjusting programs (ST2).

Finally, in order to fully prevent potential threats, the weaknesses of women's entrepreneurship should be eliminated, including the development of necessary metrics for assessing the contribution of women's entrepreneurship to economic development (WT1), as well as the development of infrastructure and support measures for rural women (WT2).

Potential indicators may include:

1. The share of goods and services sold by business entities, broken down by gender and age of the head, industry and region of the enterprise.
2. The share of exported goods and services by business entities, broken down by gender and age of the head, industry and region of the enterprise.
3. The number and share of grants granted to business entities, broken down by gender and age of the head, industry and region of the enterprise.
4. The number and proportion of women entrepreneurs who own land, by type of land use and size of the enterprise
5. The number and proportion of women entrepreneurs who own real estate, by type of real estate and size of the enterprise
6. The educational level of entrepreneurs, broken down by gender and age, the size of the enterprise
7. The number and proportion of entrepreneurs who are members of industry business associations, broken down by gender and age of the head, the size of the industry, the region of the enterprise.
8. The share of business entities equipped with the necessary equipment and machines, broken down by gender, size, industry and region of the enterprise
9. The share of business entities holding certificates of use of international standards of quality and safety of products, broken down by gender, size, industry and region of the enterprise
10. The share of business entities owning the company's current website, broken down by gender and age of the head, size, industry and region
11. The share of business entities owning and using e-mail, broken down by gender and age of the head, size, industry and region of the enterprise
12. The share of business entities covered by mobile and Internet communications, broken down by gender and age of the head, size, industry and region of the enterprise

It is expected that due to the implementation of the recommended actions, the entrepreneurial landscape in Kazakhstan will turn into a more effective tool of socio-economic policy, especially in the field of promoting women's entrepreneurship and overall domestic economic growth. However, it is important to note that while the proposed strategies require priority attention, this should not detract from the importance of other areas.

Nevertheless, the recommendations can be used to determine the current status and key directions of the formation of women's business in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Conclusion

In the course of the study , the following results were obtained:

1) On the basis of official statistical data in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the development of entrepreneurship in the context of regions and industries was characterized. The conclusion was made about the concentration of women's business in the service sector, the predominant development of the regions in which the largest amount of credit funds for women entrepreneurs is issued.

2) The economic opportunities of businesswomen of Kazakhstan were evaluated within the framework of the theory of 5 "M". The key policy directions were identified, the work of women's entrepreneurship support bodies was characterized, the state of access to credit resources and programs for the development of entrepreneurial abilities among women were analyzed. In general, as the analysis showed, Kazakhstan is interested in the development of women's entrepreneurship. There are many laws that raise questions about the potential of businesswomen and the methods of their support.

Most of the programs supported by the state are declarative in nature, there is practically no information about the effectiveness of the implementation of these programs.

In addition, women themselves are actively involved in ensuring equality, but nothing can be achieved without the active involvement of men.

Despite the large number of business development loans granted to women, there is a gap in the amounts that can be approved for businesswomen.

3) In-depth interviews were conducted with women entrepreneurs from various regions of Kazakhstan. Women with businesses from various industries were selected. A qualitative interview revealed a number of features that respondents face based on the prism of gender. In general, women positively assess the opportunities for the development of women's business initiatives in Kazakhstan.

4) During the SWOT analysis, key directions were noted and recommendations were given for the successful development of women's entrepreneurial activity in Kazakhstan. The main points of growth were identified as support for women entrepreneurs on maternity and pregnancy leave, digitalization, improvement of support infrastructure conditions for rural businesswomen, development of a system for monitoring and evaluating women's contribution to the economy, support for export-import, improvement of business education, active involvement of men in gender equality issues.

The main limitations of the study were the insufficient database of statistical data for quantitative analysis, the fragmentation of existing data.

The results of the study led to the development of new integrated approaches to gender analysis in entrepreneurship and the definition of policy directions for the development of women's entrepreneurship and the promotion of gender equality in this area. The study also revealed the absence of domestic studies using the chosen methodology, and this study is designed to fill this gap by providing a sufficient scientific and methodological base.

In addition, the scientific significance of this study is evident in its innovative application of an integrated approach to the analysis of women's entrepreneurship. Using a new perspective and methodology, this study complements the existing body of knowledge in this area and offers valuable information for future research and policy development. The results obtained in the course of this study, although they are pilot in nature, but they are important for the development of methodology and theoretical foundations for further study of gender characteristics of business.

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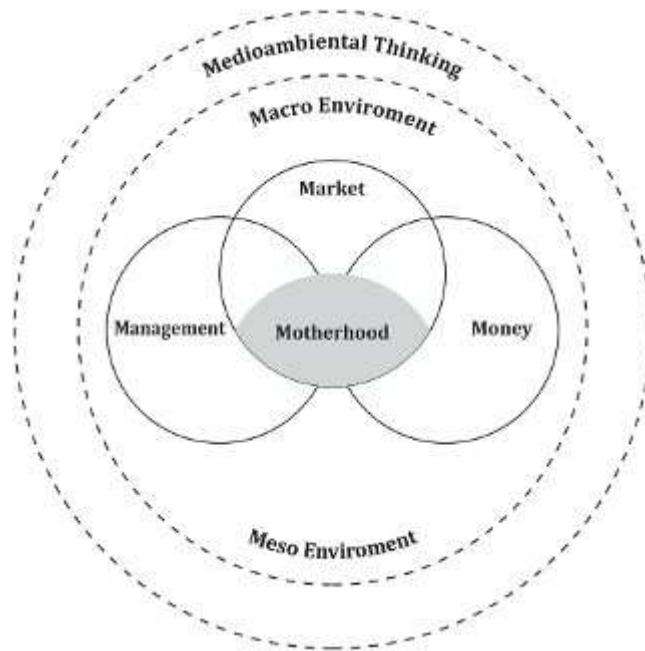
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Women's Entrepreneurship '5M' Framework



From: Brush, de Bruin & Welter, 2009

1. ФИО
2. Возраст, образование
3. Место жительства
4. Есть ли семья
5. Сфера деятельности, сколько существует организация
6. Почему именно данное направление?
7. Удастся ли совмещать с домашним бытом?
8. Есть ли проблемы с финансированием, поставками или рабочим процессом, какие они
9. Барьеры с призмы женского опыта
10. Есть ли проблемы с менталитетом
11. Есть ли преимущества перед мужчинами из этой же сферы? А в чем слабая сторона?
12. Есть ли партнер в организации или советник мужского пола? Нужен ли он в организации?
13. Как думаете, добились ли бы вы большего успеха в своем деле, если бы были мужчиной?
14. Существует ли гендерная дискриминация? Улучшилось ли положение женщин в последние? С чем это связано?
15. Знаете ли вы о программах поддержки женщин-предпринимателей, если знаете, то откуда? Обращались ли?
16. Как программа повлияла на ваше предприятие? В чем видите недостатки?
17. Знаете ли вы о сообществах женщин-предпринимателей? Как поддерживаете нетворкинг?
18. Считаете ли вы что у мужчин и женщин в Казахстане равные права и ресурсы? Почему?
19. Всегда ли вы присутствуете на предприятии? Руководящий состав мужчины или женщины?
20. Какова ваш рабочий график? Сколько времени в день занимает активная работа?
21. Преимущества ведения бизнеса женщинами.
22. Слабые стороны ведения бизнеса женщинами.
23. Оценка возможностей для женщин-предпринимателей в Казахстане.
24. Угрозы женскому бизнесу.
25. Основные проблемы казахстанских ММСП во время пандемии
26. Заинтересованность в получении кредита