

# WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN GREECE

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## ŽENSKO PODUZETNIŠTVO U GRČKOJ

### Sažetak

Ovaj rad prikazuje položaj ženskog poduzetništva u Grčkoj koristeći se kombinacijom kvalitativne i kvantitativne analize podataka. Podatci su prikupljeni primarnim istraživanjem (provođenjem ankete putem upitnika i intervjua među poduzetnicama i onima koje će to postati) te sekundarnim istraživanjem (prikupljanjem i analizom izvora: radova, knjiga, anketa, internetskih izvora itd.)

Trenutno je razvoj ženskog poduzetništva iznimno važan za grčko gospodarstvo budući da postoje uvjeti za veću uključenost žena u poduzetništvo. Žene su danas učvrstile svoj položaj u društvu, imaju završene fakultete, oslanjaju se na vlastite snage i sposobnosti, nisu vezane isključivo uz obitelj i kuću, kombiniraju obiteljski i poslovni život i tako maksimalno podržavaju produktivnost grčkog gospodarstva. Iako postoji značajan rast ženskog poduzetništva, položaj žena kao poduzetnica nije ni približno jednak položaju muškaraca. Nažalost, ovo je dugotrajno obilježje grčkog tržišnog gospodarstva koje je počiva na spolnoj diskriminaciji. Nesumnjivo je da žene, a posebice obrazovane, imaju više prilika postati poduzetnice. Čak i u sektorima u kojima dominiraju muškarci, manje je predrasuda prema poduzetnicama. Neka su zanimanja, međutim, i dalje stereotipno povezana s pojmovima muškarac i žena pa je stoga najčešća ženska poduzetnička aktivnost u području usluga i trgovine.

Možemo zaključiti da žene u Grčkoj nose dvostruki teret jer su uglavnom odgovorne za brigu o obitelji te je poduzetnicama jako teško jednako se posvetiti poslovnom i obiteljskom životu.

### Abstract

This paper was prepared to show the position of women entrepreneurship in Greece. The methodology used is a combination of qualitative and quantitative analysis of data. Collection of data was made by primary research (conduct of a survey among women entrepreneurs and women – to – be entrepreneurs with questionnaires and interviews) and by secondary research (collection and analysis of resources; papers, books, surveys, internet resources, etc).

Currently, the development of Women Entrepreneurship holds a significant position for the future of the Greek economy, as the conditions have matured for a more active entrepreneurship involvement of women.

Women today have strengthened their role in society, hold university degrees, count on their own forces and competences, got out from “family” isolation, combine family and working life and thus support to the maximum the productivity of the Greek economy. Even though, there is a significant rise of Women Entrepreneurship rate, still the position of women as entrepreneurs is far from being considered equal to that of men. Unfortunately, this is a persistent feature of the Greek market economy rooted in long-term gender discrimination.

Undoubtedly, there are more opportunities especially for educated women to become entrepreneurs, even in male dominated sectors as prejudices against self-employed women have declined in some level. However, several occupations continue to be stereotypically associated with notions of masculinity and femininity and therefore women entrepreneurial activity is usually in services and trade.

In conclusion, women in Greece experience a double burden because they are mainly responsible for care and domestic work while the renegotiation of gender roles and duties within families has not progressed and women entrepreneurship has a personal cost for businesswomen in their personal life.

## 1. Introduction

Women employment in general, as a notion and as a practice, has been and in some aspects still is a “victim” of contradictions. These contradictions derive from the fact that women employment is examined from various scopes and in relation to diverse and varied factors. For instance, women employment can be examined in relation to the level of social values currently prevailing in a society and to the traditional family patterns and the role of women in it, to the conditions of the economy and so on.

Of great importance and worth mentioning are the myths with which women employment and entrepreneurship is in constant fight; the myth of the family as a single concrete format that remains unchanged in social space and during a persons lifetime, the myth of the defined roles of the two genders and therefore the inevitable conflict for the destination and the nature of each gender as this role is changing and the myth of the incapability and unwillingness of women to operate creatively and successfully outside the private space of home and family. However, in this mythology that discourages women employment, and therefore women entrepreneurship, comes in contrast the reality of the increasing women employment and women entrepreneurship rates.

In Greece, the words women employment and female entrepreneurship are quite often present in recent years in daily life, in the news, in the newspapers, on the internet and so on. This fact basically defines a modern reality in Greek economy and society; the reality of Greek women to become entrepreneurs without much hesitation. The new role of women as entrepreneurs has to a degree been accepted in Greek society (however, there is still a long way to be covered to reach a full acceptance of women entrepreneurs and their importance in the economy) and it has been the subject of several scientific studies and research by organisations, universities and NGOs at a national, European and international level.

Entrepreneurship has returned to the headlines and it is recognized its important contribution to economic development, especially today with the rapid development of knowledge and technology and the economic crisis that Greece faces the past 5 years. Women entrepreneurship is on the forefront as it is understandable that women can contribute to the increase of economic activity, can run a business successfully and are capable through their enterprises to contribute to the reinforcement of the Greek economy.

## 2. First Entrepreneurship Stages of Women

While modern Greek enterprises are treated as the main backbone of economy, until recently entrepreneurship was not investigated from the gender scope. In particular, it did not focus on whether gender was a suspending or enhancing factor to the challenges of the market or affected the production methods selected and the development strategies used.

Entrepreneurship opportunities for women in Greece are relatively in a low rate taking into account the dreadful situation in which the Greek economy is and factors that derive from a sociologic point of view (discussed below in the paper). This becomes obvious from the difference between the women that have an entrepreneurial idea and do not make it a reality and the women that actually take the steps further and establish their enterprise and put their ideas into action.

**In the first entrepreneurship stages of women in Greece, the following facts are usually identified:**

- Family plays a vital role to the primary financing of newly established firms. Except of their contribution to the collection of the needed capital to begin, they hold a primary role to their informal investment,
- Women get involved usually into retail (small retail shops, clothes and cosmetics retail, etc) and into services (hairdressing, makeup artist, etc).
- They still have an increased fear of failure. Even though women enterprises have the element of innovation, sometimes the fear of failure drives them to most known paths such as retail of common goods and services that are considered to be more female. Also, most of them choose to take over and run their family business fact that implies a lower risk level,
- The way Greek society sees women entrepreneurship is contradictory; women entrepreneurship is considered a socially approved and incorporated employment choice, however great pay gaps, holding upscale positions and holding decision making positions are not easily accepted, as well as it is not accepted the elimination of women's primary role into the family.

Most of the women entrepreneurs turn to creating businesses of the services sector as this business choice and the occupations of the services sector are not unfamiliar to women as they are perceived as more feminine.

### 3. Motives of Women Entrepreneurship

Since the '70, women in Greece began leaving home and family framework and started choosing paid employment as an alternative way to money gaining. In the '80 there was a boost of women entrepreneurship in Greece along with the baby boom of this decade. In recent years it is evident an increase of the rate of women participation into business sector which to a point is due to the need of outlets for improving Greek economy.

**According to the survey of British Graduates Society conducted in Greece in 2013 the motives to start a business for a woman are:**

- Taking over of their family business,
- Desire for working independence (to have their own business),
- To put in action of an entrepreneurial idea they had,
- A proposal for a business cooperation,
- To gain more income,
- To go out of unemployment,
- Due to low personal satisfaction from their previous work.



Table 1 Motives of starting a business

According to the survey on Women Entrepreneurship by the British Graduates Society a 54% of the sample stated that before starting their own business they used to work in another firm as employees. This rate indicates that women entrepreneurs gained working experience as employees however did not have enough decision making experience. Also, a 34% declared that before starting their own business they were still university students. Those women are mostly taking over a family business. Taking into account the large number of family businesses that operate in Greece, this rate was expected to occur (Table 2). It is evident that most of the women going into business chose to establish their own business in regard of a better income and to ensure their personal independence.



Table 2 Working Experience of Greek Women Entrepreneurs

#### 4. Obstacles and Difficulties in Developing Women Entrepreneurship

All enterprises are called to overcome a cycle of difficulties and obstacles that have to do both with evident bureaucratic procedures but also with other factors that derive from the position women hold into the society and the roles they are expected to undertake.

According to a survey conducted in Greece between *March and May 2013* by the *British Graduates Society* into a sample of more than 1000 women entrepreneurs, women as entrepreneurs face the following obstacles:

- Marketing and promotion of their companies
- Bureaucracy
- Competition
- Low access to capital and funding
- Lack of institutional/governmental information on entrepreneurial issues



Table 3 Obstacles of Women Entrepreneurship

Moreover, women as entrepreneurs face additional obstacles that derive from their gender. According to the same survey, women face family issues and social perception questions regarding their role as entrepreneurs. 49% of the women participating in this survey replied that they encounter a significant problem regarding time management as they are unable to equilibrate family and business life. Women are devoting more of their time to their working life at the expense of family time which as a result produces dissatisfaction by their family members. In another survey conducted by the *Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs* in March 2012 at a sample of 200 women, it was shown that 42% of the women that were willing to create their company, were at a great percentage discouraged by their husbands who were either unemployed or their income has significantly shrunk. Those husbands saw their wife's imminent employability as a threat to their financial status as they felt a threat that they might gain more money and contribute to the family income in a greater percentage than them.

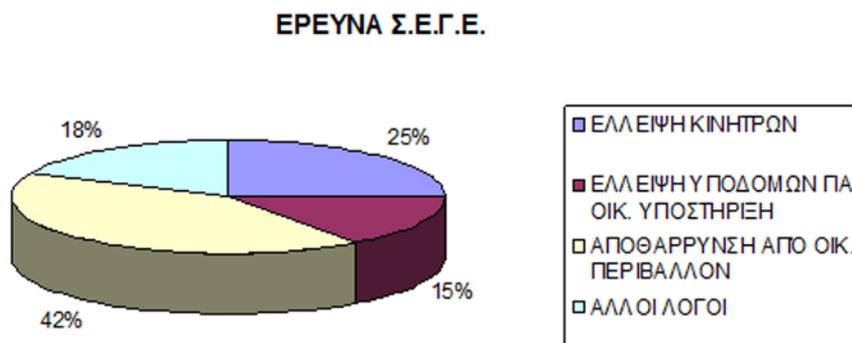


Table 4 Reasons of discouragement of women to be entrepreneurs - SEGE March 2012

Additionally, 25% of them answered that they encounter stereotype behavior and prejudice regarding their role as women and 12% of them have trouble to be accepted by the market and fellow entrepreneurs. Considering the increasing number of women entering the entrepreneurship field these percentages are quite alarming as they show that gender still plays a role regarding how women are perceived in their working life which should have not been the case. The case is to evaluate women for their entrepreneurial and managerial skills and for their ability to produce. The Table below shows the graphic representation of the problems faced because of gender.



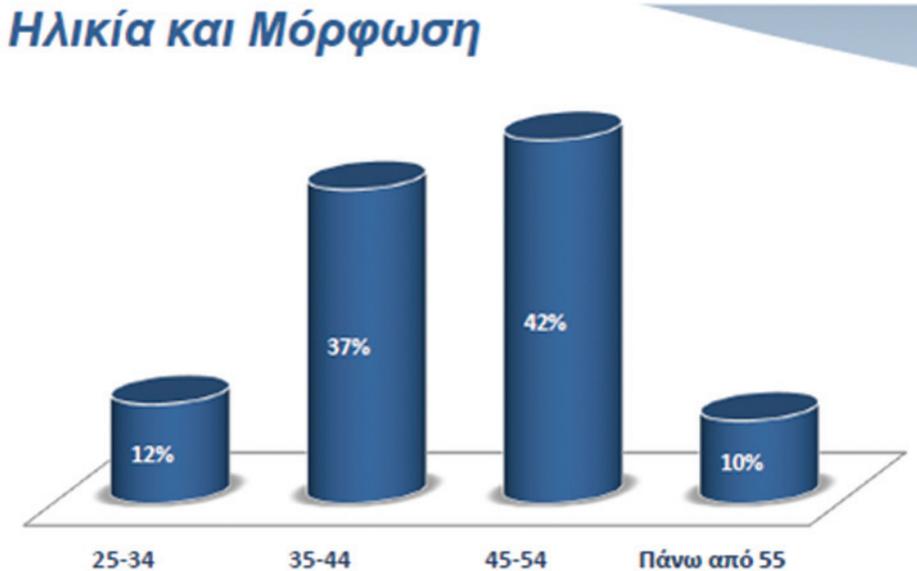
- ❑ 1 στις 2 θεωρεί την ισορροπία μεταξύ της οικογένειας και του «επιχειρείν» ως μείζον πρόβλημα.
- ❑ Σχεδόν 1 στις 3 αναφέρει το ζήτημα των προκαταλήψεων και την αποδοχή της γυναίκας από την αγορά.

Table 5 Problems faced because of gender

What it is encouraging is the fact that women surpass men regarding the use of new technologies and procedures into their business.

## 5. Demographic Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs

In the following graphic it is presented the demographic profile of women entrepreneurs in Greece, as it come out form the survey of BGC.



*Table 6 Age of women entrepreneurs – BGS 2013*

As it is shown 42% of women entrepreneurs belong to the 45 – 54 age group and 37% at the 35 – 44 age group. This indicates that women decide to get into entrepreneurship after they have gained a significant work experience, their entrepreneurship idea has matured enough and they have found the necessary means to a step further. Furthermore, it is evident that women decide to establish their own business in older ages due to their family obligations (children upbringing, home caring, etc). When their children are old enough to take care of themselves without the constant presence of their mother and all family members are able to deal with household issues, it is the right time for women who wish for to start entrepreneurship.

In the age group 25 – 34 we find only 12% of entrepreneurs which shows that the younger in age the more reluctant are to take the risk and become entrepreneurs. The reasons for this fact have already presented in a previous chapter of this paper. Additionally, this low rate is not only an issue of lack of trust to a young person but also to a young woman by their business contacts (contacts, suppliers, associates, etc).

Along with the age factor, it is important to present the educational level of women entrepreneurs. According to the results of the survey by the *British Graduates Society* women entrepreneurs have better education than men as they hold Master degrees, PhDs and Bachelors. This is in fact a contradictory fact in Greece; even though women have better education and they are fond of learning, they do not use this obtained knowledge further to create their own business.

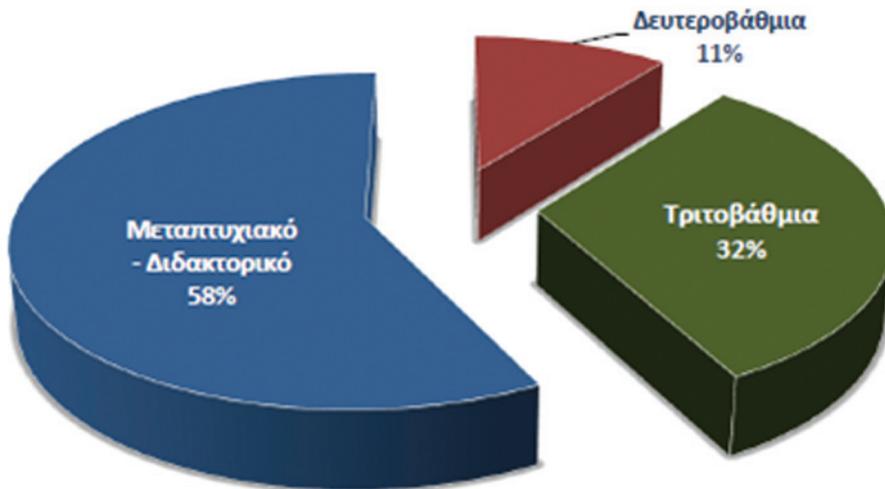


Table 7 Women entrepreneurs' educational level – BGS 2013

Nevertheless, the higher educational level of women entrepreneurs is a hopeful message as it shows that the future generation of women entrepreneurs will include individuals with advanced knowledge, skills and qualifications.

## 6. Qualitative Characteristics of Women Entrepreneurs

As mentioned above, women entrepreneurs indeed face questioning and reluctance regarding their role as business women and regarding their capacity to run a business and be productive. However, through keeping a concrete attitude, be confident, serious and responsible, they are able to cope with that reluctance and eventually win not just impressions but also the confidence and esteem of those with who they interact entrepreneurially.

The quantitative characteristics that women entrepreneurs have are considered to be their assets for a successful career in entrepreneurship. According to the results of the survey the greatest asset of them is their persistence and dedication to work. In particular, according to the diagram below, the qualitative characteristics of women entrepreneurs in Greece are:

- Dedication to work and persistence,
- Creativity and innovation,
- Flexibility,
- Understanding of market needs,
- Optimism,
- Management type,
- Balanced risk taking.



Table 6 Qualitative characteristics of Greek women entrepreneurs

Furthermore, what plays a great role in practicing entrepreneurship is the character of the entrepreneur. It is observed that the stronger the character a woman has and the more concentrated is her job, the more successful she is. The character and personality elements that play an important role to women entrepreneurial qualifications are their insight to foresee situations and changes, their communication skills, their concentration to people and individuals, their capacity to build concrete relations, their sociability and their persuasion.



Table 7 Personality elements of Greek women entrepreneurs

Most female enterprises are active into the services sector (the rate reaches 60%), then into retail (21%) and only 10% is in manufacturing and a 9% into producing.



Table8 Business sector of Greek female enterprises

Also, only 5% of them have a pure export orientation and most of them are circulating their services and products both into the internal market and to foreign markets.

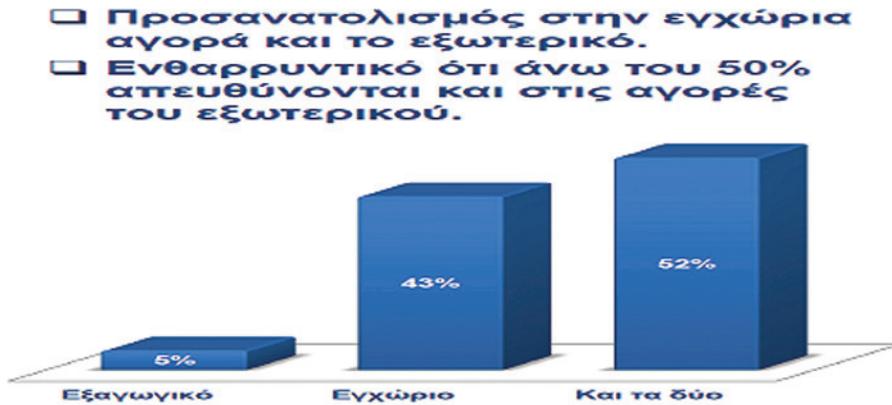


Table 9 Market orientation of Greek female enterprises

## 7. Supporting Associations of Women Entrepreneurship

In recent years there is evident a great step towards promoting female entrepreneurship as an element of promoting equal opportunities in entrepreneurship development and thus in competitiveness increase of the Greek the economy. The Institutions that support female entrepreneurship in Greece are:

Greek Association of Women Entrepreneurs – S.E.G.E.: SEGE is a Pan-Hellenic non-governmental, non-profit making Association and regards women engaged in business activities in Greece. SEGE was founded in 1997 in Thessaloniki and numbers around 700 members. It is governed by a 9-member board. SEGE is a member of the Committee of Trade and Development of the World Trade Organization, the Federation of Industries of Northern Greece, the Association of Organizations of Mediterranean Businesswomen, while several of its members are participating in the administration Boards of Greek Chambers. SEGE collaborates with ministries, social partners, business associations and NGOs at local and European level to promote the interests of women engaged in business.

SEGE provides to women entrepreneurs of Greece the environment to develop their businesses and themselves, it promotes youth entrepreneurship, improves recognition of their achievements in their businesses and promotes the growth of women-owned businesses through research and information. SEGE promotes ethics and morality in women entrepreneurship, while taking initiatives that demonstrate a sense of social responsibility.

SEGE provides, counseling to women entrepreneurs, training of women entrepreneurs and of women working at a woman – owned business, mentoring-coaching to women who are either entrepreneurs or want to become one, business networking at national, European and International level, organization and support of B2B's, in Greece and abroad and provides information on business issues.

SEGEs members can associate with women entrepreneurs who are like-minded and willing to share ideas, information and opportunities, attend events, conferences and all relative events that are related to vital issues of entrepreneurship, expand their business networking and knowledge, gain access to business networks in Greece and abroad to develop partnerships at national and international level, participate and take benefit from SEGE's position as a representative body for the enhancement of social, political and entrepreneurship issues that concern women entrepreneurs, access to training for themselves and their staff in programs and seminars, get information on entrepreneurship and development funds, from national and European bodies and economic issues of direct interest, participate in a community that recognizes the importance of personal growth and change, share experiences, get access to knowledge and seek new partners and maintain and expand communication networks.

*National Network of Women Entrepreneurs Members of Greek Chamber:* The primary goal of the Network is to raise awareness of the Greek Chambers and Greek entrepreneurs about the benefits that will occur from the full integration of women into the business market and the economy.

The aim of the Network is to strengthen and consolidate the existing women's businesses and the development of women entrepreneurship by establishing new enterprises, the promotion of equal opportunities, the elimination of occupational stereotypes and reconciliation between family and professional life.

General Secretariat of Gender Equality: The General Secretariat for Gender Equality is the responsible governmental agency for planning, implementing and monitoring of the governmental equality policies between women and men in all areas. Regarding entrepreneurship, its aim is to promote equal access and the evolution of gender equality in the labor market and entrepreneurship to ensure partly a fairer distribution of wealth, and human resources, while contributing to alleviate social exclusion and poverty of women.

Additionally, its role is to develop policies that facilitate market integration of women belonging to specific cultural or minority groups by respecting diversity and multiculturalism, reducing social exclusion and increasing social cohesion. Social cohesion is perceived as a means of economic growth. Thus, equality obtains also economic and political interest.

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