

FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP

PP TCP SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY PARK OF BNTU “POLYTECHNIC” (BY), BELARUS

Business Support for Women

For many employers in our country, unfortunately, woman is always potentially pregnant. So it is a point when a woman's desire to start her own business begins. It is a matter of fact that there is no such thing as gender discrimination for businesswomen in Belarus nowadays. If a woman wants to start up her own business, she can use the same opportunities as man. If there is some problem that may lie not in the terms and barriers or environment but in female nature itself and prevailing social practice in the Belarusian society.

According to a survey made in 2018, among all those employed in the country's economy, 54.7% are women; around 30% of companies in Belarus are ruled by women; in public service – 70%; women occupy about 30% in the Belarusian parliament (on average in the world – 22.2%). Women are more likely to choose a path that is connected with providing services, sales, hotel industry as well as social and medicine sector. It's a matter of fact that they choose less profitable sectors as they give them an opportunity to be more flexible so as to be able to fulfill many social roles at the same time (to do things about the house, to take care of children because only the minority of men consider taking care of children as an equal duty). According to the data, the main barrier that was unequally considered by both genders – corruption (more than 50% of women state this as a problem while only 12% of men regard it so). Men are considered to be more risky by their nature, they are more confident while taking serious decisions, while women could be more afraid to take risks or give bribes. Besides, women are less disappointed when due to some factors they lose an opportunity to continue being busy with their previous activity, for example, to take care of their family. In Belarus there are many programs that can help women to feel more confident as business partners. These programs help to develop to be able to struggle on the same arena with business sharks of both genders.

1. ProWomen By is a community for female entrepreneurs and everyone who wants to develop and change the world around them. Useful business tools, training, expert assistance, productive networking – anyone can get the necessary practical knowledge to start and develop their business as well as to establish the necessary business connections. Prowomen.by regularly holds various conferences, workshops and master classes.

In addition, the World Women's Day (WED) is held under ProWomen By project in Belarus. The mission of this day is to help women become active participants in the economy, create a community of women leaders, innovators and entrepreneurs, initiate startups and stimulate economic expansion. To achieve this mission, WED ambassadors create like-minded communities in their countries that help women realize their potential. More than 40 events in different destinations are held annually for more than 1,000 women all over the country who open and develop their business.

2. The “Women in Business” program includes seminars dedicated to the development of women's leadership skills, disclosure of managerial potential as well as financing, business development, etc. Women can get technical advice on lending as well as on personal brand development. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development already has enough successful examples when female entrepreneurs, having become

participants of the program “Women in business”, eliminated current mistakes and were able to take the business to a new level with the help of international consultants and financial support from Belinvestbank, EBRD and Belarusian Development Bank. Within the framework of the “Women in Business” program, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development has developed a non-financial product – an online tool for financing and doing business. There, every entrepreneur can register and fill out a questionnaire about his business, the results of which will be summed up and they will be offered advice on the development and elimination of inaccuracies. This resource works for free and for everyone.

3. Happywoman.by – enterprising women's community in Minsk. Meetings, workshops, business breakfasts, work on projects, etc. The community even has its own female chat room which can be accessed by visiting at least one of the events held.

4. The Activia Company regularly gives its own grants to support the implementation of the ideas of enterprising women. Grants are given in various fields: art, business, technology, media, active life, urban planning, social projects. In addition to money, girls are offered training and mentoring.

5. The “SuccessfulMe” project is a joint initiative to develop and support women's entrepreneurship by Belinvestbank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The project format is a series of business meetings where women entrepreneurs learn about financial and non-financial opportunities to improve their own business.

6. Mentoring program for women in leadership is aimed at developing leadership qualities and strengthening the influence of women, forming a community of women experts and leaders who are ready to support each other. The program is free, lasts a year, participation in the competitive selection.

7. Women IT Week is a series of events dedicated to women's leadership, business and IT-technologies. Weekly intensive course, consisting of master classes, lectures and discussions in various formats, including TED.

To sum it all up, we can observe that today the average female business is lagging behind in size and growth compared with male competitors. In terms of innovation activity, no gender differences were identified, however, the degree of monetization of introduced innovative products is more successful among companies with a male proprietor. Current barriers to women's business in Belarus are not only related to the functioning of the business ecosystem. Existing barriers, such as excessive control, various contradictory rules and procedures, the level of human capital, undoubtedly, have a negative impact on the quality and dynamics of women's business development. However, preserving the traditional division of social roles is equally important. In fact, the latter entails an additional burden in the form of performing most of the household duties and childcare, which, according to the survey results, is no longer perceived as the norm for the majority of women owners. The results confirm the need to participate in business support programs as this will give impetus to new gender initiatives and will contribute to economic growth and innovative perspectives of Belarus.

What we can do for women-entrepreneurs – everything that we are doing now for everyone: we provide a platform, technology/prototype development facilities, necessary research support, consulting, information and marketing services, business plan development, marketing and sales strategy. But the main circumstance is connection and interaction with our university (usage technologies and equipment; involvement of students, graduates and young scientists).

For more information on Business Support for Women, BNTU

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