

ANNOTATION

For the dissertation work of Mussabekova Ainash Orikbaevna on the topic “Women entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan: methodological basics, trends and development prospects” submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the educational program 8D04101 – Economics.

Relevance of the research topic. At present, in the strategy for the socio-economic development of the Republic of Kazakhstan, ensuring gender equality and increasing the economic activity of women are identified as one of the key priorities. This process is closely linked to the global agenda within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Active participation of women in entrepreneurial activities is an important mechanism for diversifying the economy, increasing employment, reducing poverty, and ensuring regional balance. International experience shows that women’s entrepreneurial activity contributes not only to qualitative growth of the national economy but also to enhancing social stability and the inclusiveness of society. In Kazakhstan, the number of women exceeds the number of men by 51%, which indicates the necessity of maximizing women’s effective involvement in economic processes, including entrepreneurship.

In recent years, the country has experienced a rise in divorce rates and an increase in the number of single mothers, which has strengthened women’s desire for financial independence. Balancing childcare and family support, many women turn to entrepreneurship as an additional or primary source of income. Entrepreneurial activity provides them with a flexible work schedule, the opportunity to combine family responsibilities, and the ability to realize their professional potential.

Women-led enterprises are predominantly concentrated in the small and medium-sized business sector. The advantages of such businesses lie in their high market adaptability, compatibility with family structures, and focus on social responsibility. Women’s activity is particularly noticeable in socially significant areas such as education, healthcare, services, and handicrafts, which align with their traditional social roles and meet the everyday needs of the population.

The modern development of the digital economy opens new opportunities for women. Online trade, internet marketing, social media, and electronic payment systems are particularly important for women from remote rural areas, enabling them to start and grow businesses. This process expands women’s participation in entrepreneurial activities and emphasizes the need to enhance their digital literacy.

Moreover, the state implements specific programs to support women’s entrepreneurship. Initiatives such as “Women in Business,” the financial instruments of the Damu Fund, as well as joint projects with international organizations (United Nations Development Programme, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, etc.) provide women entrepreneurs with opportunities to start, develop, and manage their own businesses. Within these programs, women receive low-interest loans, enhanced financial and legal literacy, and consultations on business plan preparation and market analysis.

However, despite the progress achieved, systemic obstacles remain that slow the development of women's entrepreneurship. These include limited access to financial resources, insufficient entrepreneurial knowledge and experience, gender stereotypes, as well as low availability of infrastructure and market information. These challenges are particularly pronounced in rural and remote regions. Therefore, state support measures should be comprehensive, covering not only financial resources but also education, infrastructure access, and informational support.

Moreover, Kazakhstan has joined the United Nations initiative "Generation Equality," adopting international commitments to prevent gender-based violence, protect women's rights, and expand their economic opportunities. This underscores the relevance of the research topic not only at the national but also at the international level.

Thus, the topic of the dissertation is both scientifically and practically significant. Considering the need to implement national projects aimed at developing women's entrepreneurship, this research is highly relevant and corresponds to contemporary requirements.

The degree of scientific development of the research problem. The issue of developing the necessary skills and competencies has been studied at various stages, influencing the development of the market economy and labor relations. In this context, the works of both foreign and domestic scholars have played a significant role, including A. Smith, J. Bodo, J.-B. Say, J. Schumpeter, P. Drucker, F. Hayek, R. Cantillon, and others.

Issues of women's employment and gender aspects in the economy have been extensively studied by foreign economists in the analysis of labor market structures. A significant contribution to this area has been made by scholars such as T.A. Korsun, B.J. Parker, A.M. Pines, M. Lerner, D. Schwartz, I.G. Andreeva, K.V. Pavlov, M. Vaněk, M. Mikoláš, K. Žváková, E. Rosca, N. Agarwal, A. Brem, L. Sarfaraz, N. Faghih, A.A. Majd, G.M. Cardella, B.R. Hernández-Sánchez, J.C. Sánchez-García, A. DeBruin, C.G. Brush, F. Welter, Q. Wang, N. Gupta, M. Setini, Moreira J.T.P., Drakh Z.A., E. Borisova, S.Yu. Barsukova, L.V. Babaeva, A.E. Chirikova, T.I. Zaslavskaya, and others. Their works hold high scientific value.

It is particularly important to highlight Kazakhstani scholars who have made a significant contribution to the in-depth scientific analysis of this problem. Among them are N.U. Shedenova, G.A. Nizamova, N.T. Smagulova, S.M. Shakirova, R. Sarsembaeva, Zh.A. Nurbekova, M. Kazbekova, Z. Satpaeva, Z. Dzhubalieva, S. Seilbekova, and other researchers. The works of these scholars constitute important scientific studies that contribute to a comprehensive theoretical understanding of women's entrepreneurship issues in Kazakhstan.

Improving the socio-economic conditions for the development of women's entrepreneurship remains a relevant task, as the advancement of this sector requires continuous renewal and adaptation in light of new challenges, as well as successful international experiences.

The aim of the dissertation is to identify the methodological foundations of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan, analyze the trends in its development and current state, and scientifically substantiate promising directions and effective mechanisms for improving women's entrepreneurship.

Objectives of the Dissertation Research:

- To systematize the theoretical foundations of women's entrepreneurship and reveal its socio-economic essence;
- To study international experience in implementing socio-economic mechanisms for the development of women's entrepreneurship;
- To analyze the main directions of women's entrepreneurship development in Kazakhstan and identify the key institutional, regional, and social factors influencing this process;
- Based on empirical data and the results of a sociological survey, to characterize the main barriers to the development of women's entrepreneurship;
- To investigate ways to improve institutional mechanisms for the development of women's entrepreneurship and develop corresponding proposals;
- To determine directions for enhancing the effectiveness of financial support mechanisms for women's entrepreneurship and develop practical recommendations.

The object of the dissertation research is women's entrepreneurship as practiced in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The subject of the dissertation research is the set of theoretical and methodological principles, as well as the practical aspects of women's entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the research includes system and structural-functional analysis, methods of economic modeling and forecasting, social surveys, questionnaire studies, as well as interviews conducted with targeted focus groups. The results of social surveys and statistical data were processed using economic and statistical methods based on factor and cluster analysis, as well as expert assessment methods. Electronic resources were also utilized within the framework of the study.

Scientific novelty of the dissertation research results:

- A new theoretical approach has been proposed based on the systematization of the evolution of women's entrepreneurship and its conceptual-methodological constructs;
- A typology of institutional models of women's entrepreneurship and international experience has been developed, and directions for their adaptation to the conditions of the Republic of Kazakhstan have been identified;
- The methodology for assessing socio-economic indicators of women's entrepreneurship has been improved based on bibliometric analysis;
- Methodological and institutional factors determining the competitiveness of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan have been systematized;
- A comprehensive model for improving institutional and financial support mechanisms for women's entrepreneurship has been developed.

Key provisions of the dissertation research submitted for defense:

- The conceptual and methodological foundations and stages of the evolutionary development of women's entrepreneurship have been systematized, and a new theoretical-conceptual approach has been proposed, revealing the interconnection between gender economics and innovation management;

- Based on international experience, a typology of institutional models of women's entrepreneurship has been developed, and directions for their adaptation and transformation in the context of the Republic of Kazakhstan have been scientifically substantiated;

- Using bibliometric analysis of socio-economic indicators of women's entrepreneurship, a bibliometric scientific map has been presented;

- Methodological and institutional factors determining the competitiveness of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan have been systematized, and their mutual influence has been demonstrated using econometric modeling;

- A comprehensive model for improving institutional and financial support mechanisms for women's entrepreneurship has been developed, based on the synergy of state policy, financial institutions, and the private sector, aimed at ensuring the sustainable development of women's entrepreneurship.

The practical significance of the dissertation research also lies in the development of tools aimed at improving women's entrepreneurship, including the identification of the characteristics of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan based on economic and statistical analysis, both at the regional and sectoral levels, as well as the analysis of women's economic opportunities in business in Kazakhstan through a comparison of various global indices.

The theoretical significance of the dissertation research lies in the fact that the approaches and theoretical concepts proposed in the study can be used as a scientific framework for assessing the development of women's entrepreneurship. In addition, the work provides new insights into research in the fields of gender economics, entrepreneurship theory, structural changes in the labor market, and social innovations. The theoretical reflections on the social role of women's entrepreneurship and its place in society can serve as a basis for improving gender policy. In this regard, the study justifies the need to consider gender entrepreneurship as an independent object of study within the social sciences.

Testing and Implementation of the Results

The main results and recommendations of the dissertation research are an integral part of applied scientific research projects carried out within the framework of grants from the Science Committee of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Grant of the Science Committee of the MES RK: "Activation of the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship and Development of Mechanisms to Enhance Its Competitiveness in the Context of Modernization of Kazakhstan's Socio-Economic System," 2021–2024, registration number: AP14871920.

On the topic of the dissertation, 12 (twelve) scientific works have been published, of which 4 were in journals recommended by the Committee for Quality Assurance in the Field of Science and Higher Education of the MES RK, 7 were in

the proceedings of international conferences, including 4 in the proceedings of foreign conferences, and 1 was in an international scientific publication indexed in the Scopus database.

The main research results were presented in the form of scientific reports at scientific and practical conferences: "Digital Economy: New Business Architecture and Transformation of the Concept" (Karaganda, 2021, 2022), in the scientific journal *Universum: Economics and Jurisprudence* (Moscow, 2023), as well as at the international scientific and practical conference "Digital Economy: New Business Architecture and Transformation of Competencies" (Karaganda, 2024).

Structure and Volume of the Dissertation

The dissertation consists of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a list of references, and appendices. The main text of the dissertation is presented on 229 pages.

A description of the doctoral student's contribution to the preparation of each publication.

1. The impact of female entrepreneurship on economic growth in developing and developed economies // *Innovative and Economics Research Journal Economics* Volume 12, No. 2, 2024. - P. 145-162. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 51%.

2. Analysis of Women's Economic Opportunities in the Field of Entrepreneurship // *Bulletin of Karaganda University. Series: Economics.* – No. 1(105), 2022. – Pp. 184–194. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 50%.

3. Objective and Subjective Features of Women's Entrepreneurship and Its Development Advantages // *Bulletin of Karaganda University. Series: Economics.* – No. 3(107), 2022. – Pp. 228–236. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 50%.

4. Women's entrepreneurship – a promising potential for economic development // *Bulletin of the Karaganda university. Economy Series.* – №1(109). – 2023. P. 28-35. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 50%.

5. The priorities of women-led businesses in the economy of Kazakhstan: gender aspects in the labor market // *Bulletin of the Toraighyrov university. Economy Series.* – №1. – 2024. P. 31-45. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 50%.

6. Socio-Economic Features of the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan // *Digital Economy: New Business Architecture and Transformation of Competencies: Proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference: Scientific Electronic Publication.* – Karaganda: Karaganda University named after E.A. Buketov, 2021. – Pp. 66–70. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 70%.

7. Socio-Economic Factors in the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship // *Digital Economy: New Business Architecture and Transformation of Competencies: Proceedings of the Scientific and Practical Conference: Scientific Electronic Publication.* – Karaganda: Karaganda University named after E.A. Buketov, 2022. – Pp. 401–405. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 60%.

8. The relationship between women's entrepreneurship and gender equality // V international scientific conference. "Development of science in the XXI century". Dortmund, Germany. 2023. 12-15 p. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 60%.

9. Factors Influencing Women's Participation in the Workforce in Kazakhstan // *Universum: Economics and Jurisprudence: Scientific Journal*. – No. 4(103), Moscow, 2023. – Pp. 35–38. – Electronic version of the printed publication. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 60%.

10. Women's Business in Kazakhstan: Challenges and Growth Points // *Digital Economy: New Business Architecture and Transformation of Competencies: Proceedings of the International Scientific and Practical Conference: Scientific Electronic Publication*. – Karaganda: Karaganda University named after E.A. Buketov, 2023. – Pp. 462–466. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 60%.

11. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls on the example of Canada // VI International Scientific and Practical Conference «Current questions of modern science», 2023, Tallinn, Estonia. 31-34 p. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 50%.

12. Gender equality in the implementation of women's political rights in the republic of Kazakhstan // II International Scientific and Practical Conference «Questions. hypotheses. answers: science XXI century», 2023, Toronto. Canada. 18-27 p. Doctoral candidate's contribution – 50%.

Chapter 1. The chapter titled "Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Study of Women's Entrepreneurship" examines the development of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan and the relevance of its study. It analyzes the socio-economic, cultural, and gender factors influencing women's active involvement in entrepreneurial activity. Based on a review of the scientific literature, it is shown that the study of women's entrepreneurship has developed intensively over the past decades; however, this field is still at a formative stage. In addition, the influence of gender stereotypes, labor market inequality, and family responsibilities on women's entrepreneurship is identified. The study substantiates the importance of supporting women's entrepreneurship and strengthening gender equality.

This study analyzes the evolution of women's participation in entrepreneurial activity from the mid-19th century to the present period from historical-gender and institutional perspectives. The research examines changes in women's legal status, legal and social barriers that restricted access to education and professional activity, as well as the impact of structural transformations in the labor market on the development of women's entrepreneurship. The research findings provide a comprehensive understanding of the socio-economic nature of women's entrepreneurship, identify the role of gender stereotypes and institutional barriers, and serve as a basis for developing scientific and practical recommendations to improve public policies aimed at ensuring gender equality.

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the formation and development of women's non-governmental organizations in Kazakhstan, as well as their evolution from a state-paternalistic model to institutions of civil society. The research identifies the role of public policy, the legislative framework, and

cooperation with international organizations in supporting the women's movement and women's entrepreneurship. In addition, it substantiates the significance of international documents and programs within the framework of the United Nations and the International Labour Organization, including the Beijing Platform for Action, in promoting women's entrepreneurship. The study examines the legal foundations of state support for women's entrepreneurship in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the criteria for identifying eligible entities, and the support mechanisms in place. It also analyzes the contribution of women's entrepreneurship to economic growth, poverty reduction, and the promotion of gender equality, including adaptation features under the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Support for women's entrepreneurship is substantiated as an important factor of sustainable socio-economic development at both national and international levels.

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the scientific, legal, and institutional aspects of developing women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. A bibliometric analysis (Web of Science, 2000–2024) identified the main research topics and scientific clusters in the study of women's entrepreneurship, demonstrating its socio-economic impact in developing countries. The normative-legal framework in Kazakhstan has evolved from the equality principle enshrined in the Constitution to entrepreneurship-regulating laws developed during the post-independence period (1991–2015), alongside the introduction of state programs and institutional mechanisms supporting women's entrepreneurship.

The ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 1998 laid the foundation for institutional support, while between 1998 and 2016, state strategies and socio-economic plans were aimed at developing women's entrepreneurship. Since 2022, financial, advisory, and educational support has been provided through joint projects with UN Women, the "Business Roadmap" program, JSC "Damu," and the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs "Atameken."

At present, Kazakhstan has systematically developed a normative-legal and institutional framework to support women's entrepreneurship, providing grants, concessional loans, and training programs (such as "Umai," "Umit," IT-Aiel, Tomiris, TalpynUp, Business-Aru, Re.Women) aimed at enhancing women's entrepreneurial and managerial potential. These measures strengthen women's economic activity and contribute to the sustainable development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Thus, the first chapter establishes the theoretical and methodological foundation of the study, demonstrating that the development of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is closely linked to socio-economic and gender-related factors, and that systematic state and institutional support is a crucial condition for ensuring sustainable development and gender equality.

Chapter 2, "Analysis and Assessment of the Development of Women's Entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan" shows that women actively manage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the country: 49.2% of all SME entities are owned by women, including 58.6% of individual entrepreneurs, 29.4% of legal

entities, and 28.2% of peasant/farm households. Companies led by women provide employment for 34% of the workforce. Women's economic activity rate is 66.7%, the unemployment rate is 5.3%, and long-term unemployment is 1.5%. In 2024, the gender pay gap reached 25.7%, women held 41.2% of managerial positions, and their representation in Parliament was 20.9%. Through cooperation with international organizations (UN Women, the World Bank, ADB), Kazakhstan is implementing programs aimed at expanding women's economic rights and increasing their participation in entrepreneurship.

Between 2014 and 2023, the participation of women in Kazakhstan's labor market remained stable at approximately 49%. Women are active in sectors beyond agriculture; however, the gender pay gap of 25.7% highlights the ongoing relevance of inequality issues. The majority of women in small and medium-sized enterprises are concentrated in major cities: 151,138 entrepreneurs in the Almaty region and 279,854 in Astana. In recent years, women have increasingly shown interest in projects with ecological sustainability and social significance, reflecting international trends and aligning with Kazakhstan's sustainable development policies.

As of January 1, 2024, a comprehensive analysis of women's entrepreneurship was conducted across the 20 regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The study assessed the share of women entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized enterprises, their contribution to regional GDP, the density of entrepreneurs per 1,000 women, and an integrated index. The regions with the highest concentration of women entrepreneurs were Almaty city (174.9 thousand), Astana city (121.2 thousand), and Turkistan region (90.9 thousand), while the lowest figures were observed in Ulytau (10.8 thousand) and North Kazakhstan (15.7 thousand), reflecting regional differences in economic potential and entrepreneurial infrastructure.

This chapter provides an econometric analysis of the impact of socio-economic factors on the competitiveness of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. The aim of the study is to assess the development level of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan in both regional and international contexts, to identify its competitive advantages and challenges, and to propose directions for improving public policy. For the analysis, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Poland, Turkey, and South Korea were selected. The objectives included calculating key indicators of women's entrepreneurship (share in SME entities, density, contribution to GDP), developing an integrated Women Entrepreneurship Competitiveness Index (WEI) that combines economic, institutional, and demographic factors, and determining Kazakhstan's position in the international system through a comparative analysis. The socio-economic determinants of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan were examined. The study analyzed how access to financing, family responsibilities, employment status, technology adoption, and education level affect the number of women-led SMEs across different regions. An Autoregressive Distributed Lag (ARDL) model was applied, allowing the identification of factors influencing women's participation in entrepreneurship through the assessment of both short- and long-term trends.

Based on a complete dataset for the period 2014–2023, the study allows for the evaluation of the effectiveness of state programs supporting women's entrepreneurship and provides a basis for developing recommendations to improve policies that ensure inclusive economic growth.

Within the framework of the study, a social program was developed, and the research object and subject, objectives, tasks, hypotheses, and sampling framework were defined. An online survey was conducted using a 30-question questionnaire on the Google Forms platform. Data from 1,000 respondents were processed and anonymized in Excel, and subsequently imported into IBM SPSS STATISTICS 27.0 for analysis. The coding scheme allowed for the identification of variables corresponding to each question, enabling statistical analysis of the data. All respondents were women, selected as individuals who are engaged in entrepreneurship or aspire to develop it, which ensured the accuracy and relevance of the data for analyzing the gender aspects of the study.

The results of the second section form the empirical basis of the dissertation study, highlighting that women's entrepreneurship plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of Kazakhstan. However, regional disparities and the need to strengthen policies aimed at reducing gender inequality are identified as critical factors for ensuring its sustainable and competitive growth.

The third chapter is devoted to the issue of improving the mechanisms for further development of women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan and is aimed at a comprehensive analysis of institutional factors influencing the formation and development of women's entrepreneurship. The study examines social norms and traditions, the economic structure, the level of scientific, technical, and technological development, production potential, as well as the interaction between formal and informal institutions as the main institutional mechanisms influencing women's entrepreneurship. In the context of Kazakhstan, identifying internal and external factors that support women's entrepreneurship forms the scientific basis for developing stimulation strategies and improving institutional support mechanisms.

The strategic initiative proposed in the study encompasses three interrelated directions for the development of women's entrepreneurship: strengthening women's positions in the business sector and expanding export opportunities through the effective use of their economic potential; attracting external resources through the introduction of high technologies and the development of social infrastructure, including mechanisms to support motherhood; as well as reducing risks inherent in entrepreneurial activity through preventive measures. These directions are based on expanding women's economic opportunities through enhancing their entrepreneurial competencies and improving entrepreneurial infrastructure.

The EBRD Women in Business Programme II, as well as the IFC and Arnur Credit programmes, have significantly increased lending to women-led small and medium-sized enterprises. At the national level, the Damu Fund expands access to bank financing through subsidy and guarantee mechanisms, acting as an institutional intermediary between public policy and market operators. The Uly

Dala Foundation for rural women and regional programmes implemented by local executive authorities contribute to balanced regional development and to unlocking the potential of women entrepreneurs.

The key factor in supporting women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is financial accessibility. A blended finance model involving international development banks, national development institutions, and the private sector reduces credit risks and enables the expansion of small and medium-sized enterprises. The expansion of coverage, the increase in funding volumes, as well as the combination of financial, advisory, and educational support enable the sustainable development of women-led businesses and enhance their contribution to the national economy.

This section provides a scholarly systematization of a comprehensive model for improving the programmatic and legal framework and financial mechanisms for supporting women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan. The National Project "Entrepreneurship Development" for 2021–2025 ensures equal access for women entrepreneurs to state support instruments by integrating the areas of business regulation, financing, infrastructure, and human capital development. From a gender perspective, a significant proportion of participants in state programs are women, and the additional allocated financial resources are aimed at expanding their credit opportunities.

The public procurement reform implemented in 2024–2025 creates new opportunities for women-led small and medium-sized enterprises by digitizing procedures, increasing transparency, and reducing transactional costs. In addition, regulatory simplification initiatives based on the "regulation from scratch" principle are aimed at reducing the administrative burden on micro and small enterprises, including businesses founded by women.

Within the framework of improving financial mechanisms, it is proposed to introduce a blended finance fund and a state guarantee mechanism to support women-led startups, develop alternative financing sources (crowdfunding, ESG and gender bonds, Islamic financial instruments), and integrate financial and educational support. These measures, combined with digitization and simplified procedures, make it possible to shorten lending terms, reduce discriminatory risks, and increase access to finance.

The economic impact assessment was conducted using an aggregated computable general equilibrium model, showing that increased financing of women's entrepreneurship contributes to growth in domestic demand and investment, enhanced productivity and capital deepening, as well as expansion of employment and tax revenues. As an additional institutional measure, it is proposed to introduce an interactive "Women's Entrepreneurship" module on the eGov.kz portal, which, in addition to enhancing informational accessibility, will enable the creation of an analytical database.

Based on the conclusion of the third chapter, the author demonstrates that improving the institutional and financial mechanisms for supporting women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is a key condition for its sustainable development and increased economic efficiency.

In conclusion, the strategic plan for supporting women's entrepreneurship promotes sustainable and inclusive economic development, job creation, improved regional balance, and increased innovation activity by expanding access to financial resources, developing human capital, and enhancing the institutional environment.

Dissertation candidate



A.O. Mussabekova