

# women

in business and in decision-making

**A SURVEY on  
women entrepreneurs**



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# Introduction

The present report is an overview on the results of the survey that was carried out in the frame of the project “Women in Business and in Decision-Making”.

The main aim of the survey was to find out what problems hinder women - in this case women entrepreneurs - from taking part in economic decision making processes in the 25 EU Member countries.

Women entrepreneurs were also questioned about the problems they faced when starting up an enterprise and problems they face in the day-to-day running of their businesses. More general questions about the size of their enterprises, their family background and their qualifications were raised in order to complete the picture.

According to the results of the survey, the typical female entrepreneur is educated (with tertiary education) runs a micro enterprise, has a husband and children but no help at home.

The woman creates her enterprise before the age of 35, after having gained some working experience working for others. The main reason for creating her business is the desire for control and freedom to take own decisions, yet she does not lose the perspective of making money out of sight.

She dedicates over 48 hours (typically around 60 hours) to her business on a weekly basis, and has made it thanks to hard work, perseverance, family support and solid self-confidence.

The main problems she faced when creating her enterprise were financial questions and combining work and family. In the daily running of the businesses, these problems appear to remain, liquidities and financial issues being a major concern, as well as the reconciliation of work and family. There does not appear to be an easy solution to the reconciliation issue, whereas financial issues can be overcome with a loan from the bank or alternative finance sources (family or savings).

With a view to those characteristics, the following points need tackling :

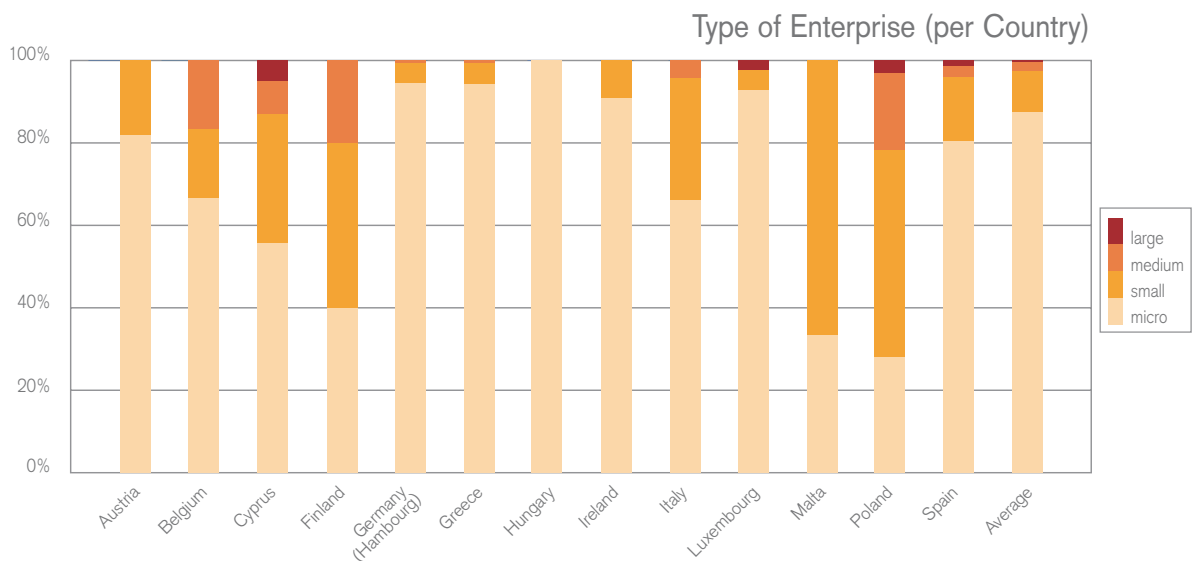
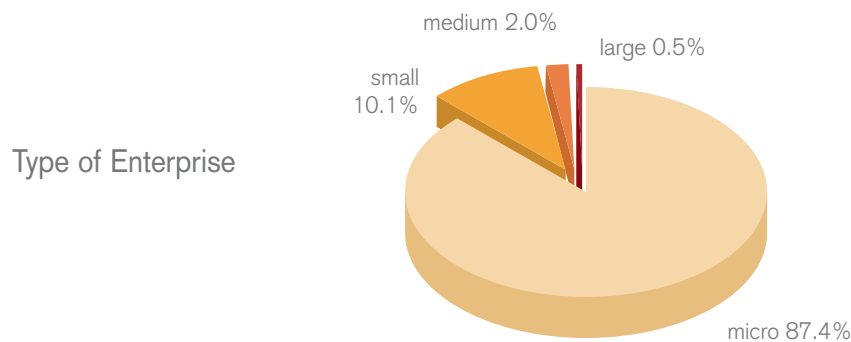
- 1 | Financial aspects :** Studies have shown that women in general request smaller loans from the bank than men when creating an enterprise. Those small loans are usually not attractive to banks, given that they are linked to high administrative costs and low profits for the bank. Special schemes should be implemented whereby women can get bank loans at decent conditions. A guarantee mechanism should be foreseen in these schemes whereby extended credit terms are offered in case the business takes longer than foreseen to take off, or unforeseen events lead to financial pressure.
- 2 | Childcare :** More childcare facilities should be provided to fit women entrepreneurs' needs. This would entail extended opening hours or flexible opening hours according to the woman entrepreneur's needs. Alternatively, measures should be taken for fathers to be in the position to take parental leave, and men should be encouraged to take the leave.
- 3 | Household :** It should be made easier for women entrepreneurs to get help for their households, and initiatives like the “cheques services” implemented by the Belgian government should be copied. This system would alleviate the work load of the female entrepreneurs and at the same time decrease the number of unemployed persons.
- 4 | Working time :** self-employed women should be encouraged to employ on a part-time or full-time basis at least one person so that they have more time for their family and can take interest in other occupations, actively participate in decision-making bodies.

# Analysis of the results

## 1 / THE TYPE OF ENTERPRISES

According to the overall summary of replies received, the large majority (87.4%) of women entrepreneurs across Europe have micro enterprises, with 1 to 9 employees. 10.1% have small companies (10-49 employees), 2.0% medium sized companies (50-249 employees) and 0.5 % large companies (over 250 employees).

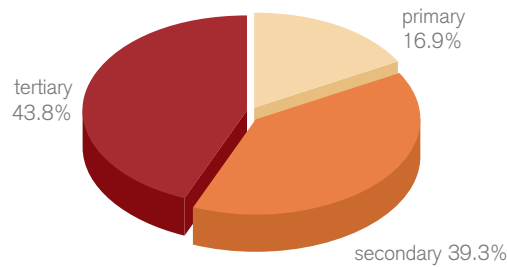
This tendency can be found in all participating countries to a varying degree, apart from Poland, where more women entrepreneurs owning small companies (50%) replied than women entrepreneurs owing micro enterprises (28.13%).



## 2 / PROFILE OF THE BUSINESS WOMAN

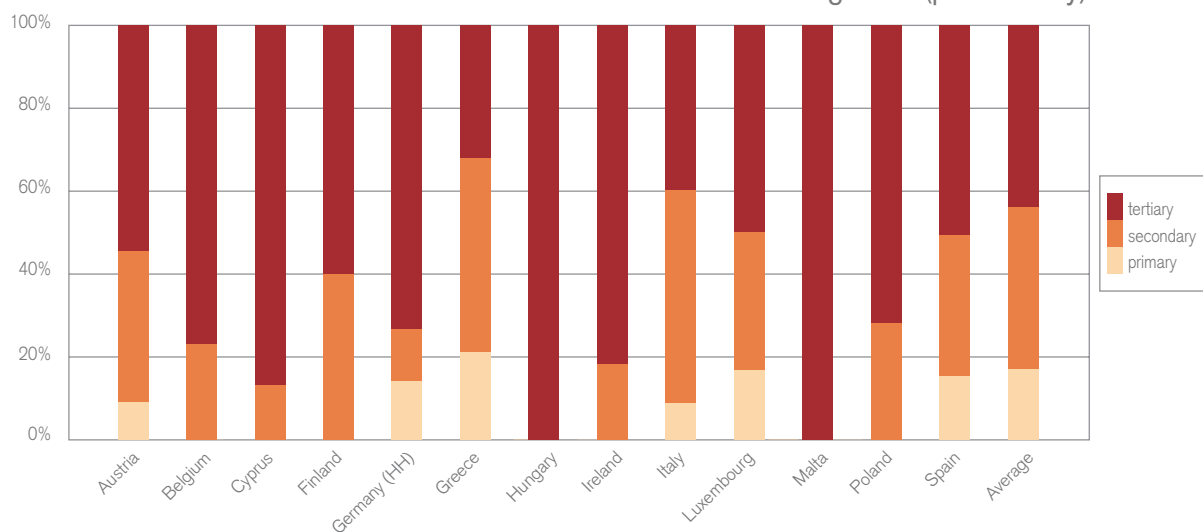
As to the educational background, the average European business woman has a university degree (tertiary education). In fact, 43.8% of women entrepreneurs confirmed to have tertiary education, whereas 39.3% stopped school after secondary school, and 16.9% launched their enterprise with a degree of primary education.

Educational Background



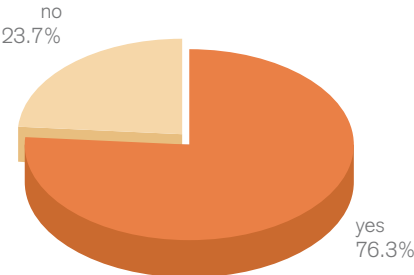
There are large variations in the rate of tertiary education between the different European countries as can be seen on the following graph. In all participating countries, except Italy and Greece, the level of tertiary education exceeds 50.0% of replies received. In Italy, 39.7% of respondents and in Greece 32.0% stated to have a university degree. In both countries women entrepreneurs with secondary school education outweigh the other categories (Italy 51.5% and Greece 47.0%).

Educational Background (per Country)



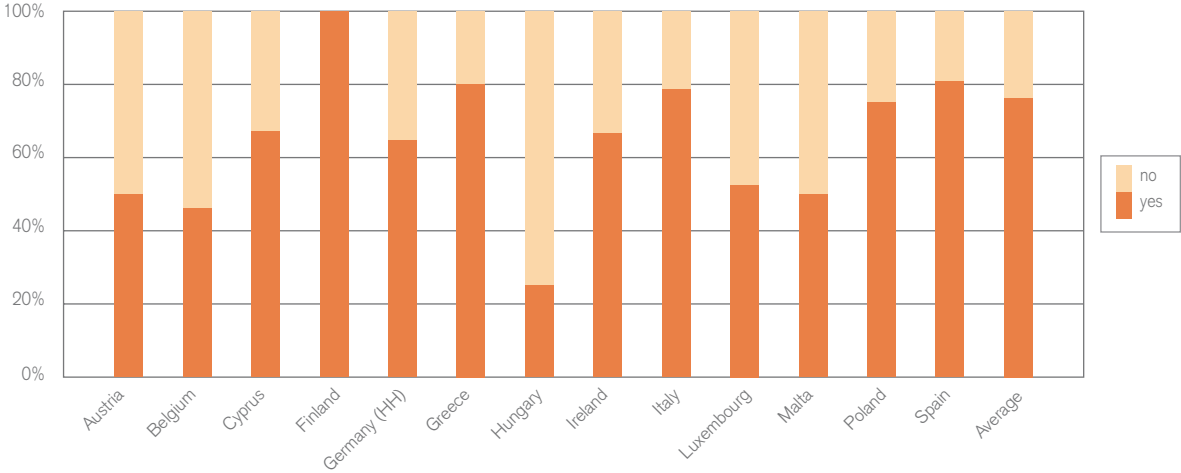
As to the family background, 76.3% of the women entrepreneurs who replied have a partner, and 74.2% also have children.

Family Background - Partner

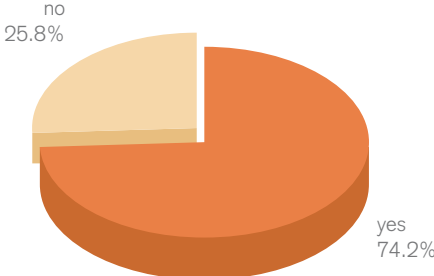


The only countries where a majority of women declared not to have a partner are Belgium and Hungary. In Belgium about 54% declare not to have a husband, and in Hungary the percentage is 75% (however those figures should be reviewed with caution, given that for both countries a limited number of replies was received).

Family Background - Partner (per Country)

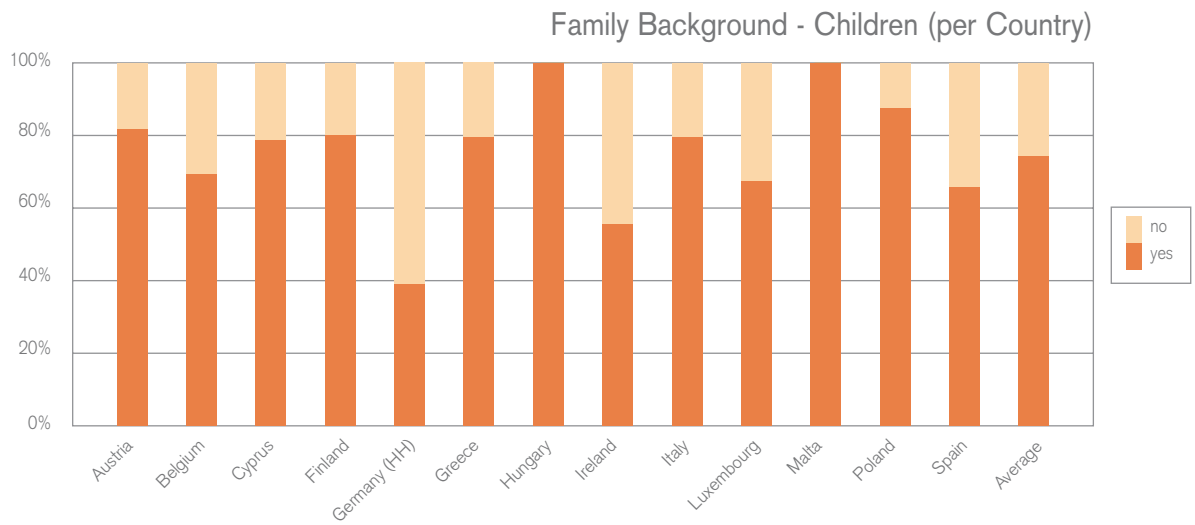


Family Background - Children

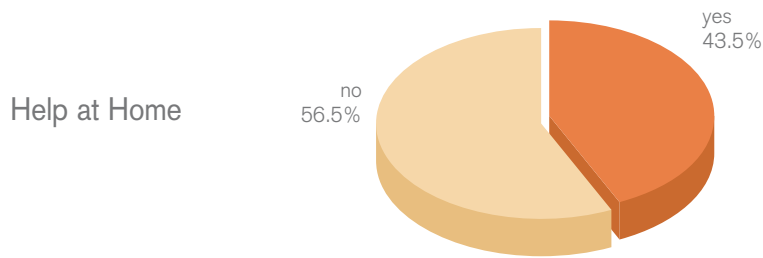


Regarding the question on children, in all responding countries the women entrepreneurs having children outnumber those who declare not to have children, except for the German women entrepreneurs participating in the survey. There, a majority of 60.9% declares not to have children, against 39.1% with children.

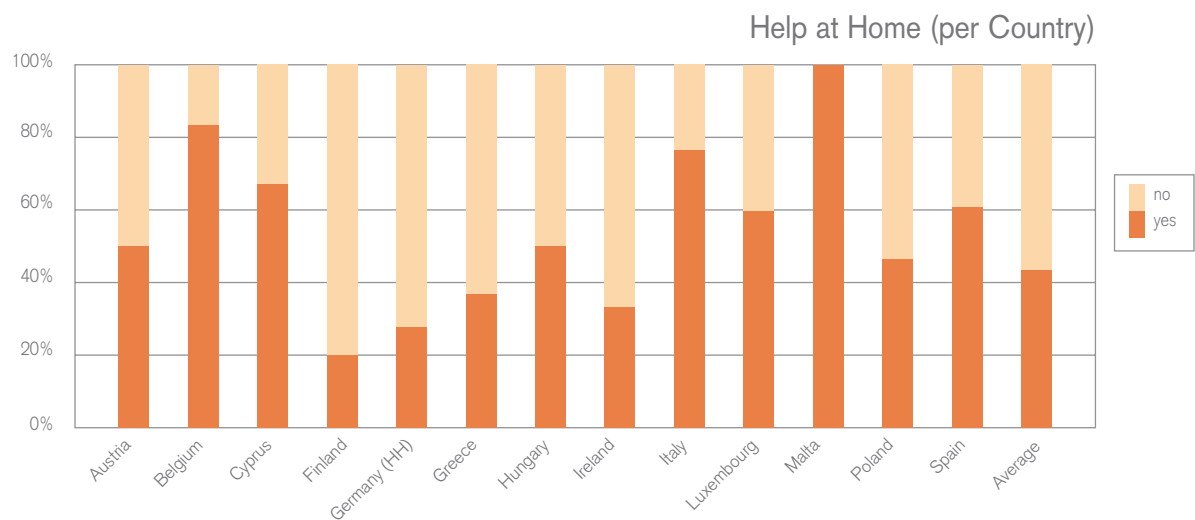




Although around three quarters of women entrepreneurs have a husband and children, most do not have help at home, as the answers to that question show. In fact, over half of the respondents (56.5%) declared not to have help at home.

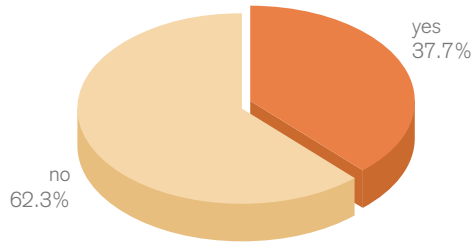


The situation varies a lot from one country to the other, as can be seen on the following graph. The country where the least women entrepreneurs have help at home is Finland with 80% of negative replies. In Malta, strikingly, all respondents declared to have help at home.



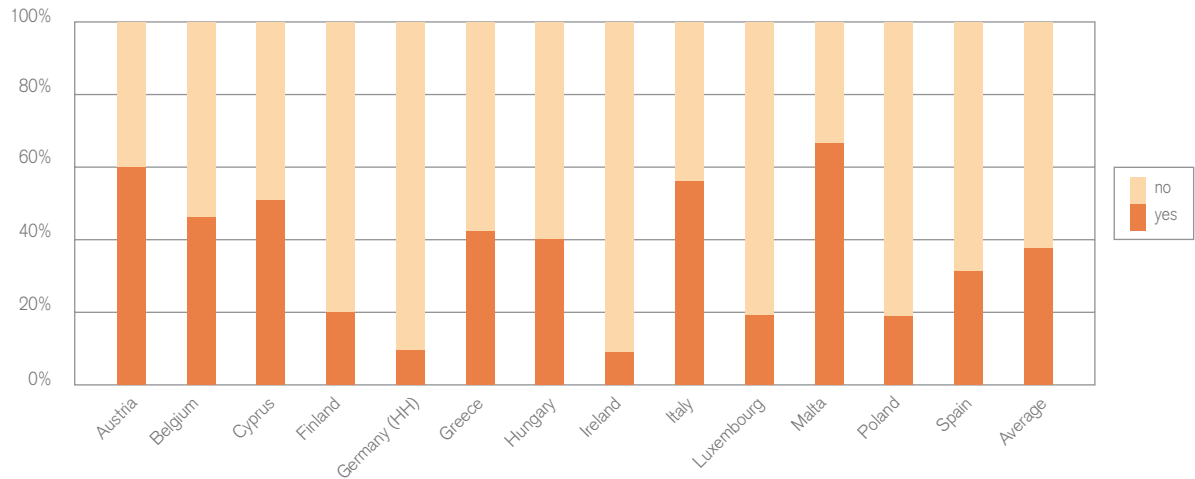
As to the choice of entrepreneurship as the main occupation, 37.7% of women entrepreneurs confirmed that they have always worked for themselves, whereas 62.3% have become entrepreneurs after having occupied various jobs.

Have you always worked for yourself ?



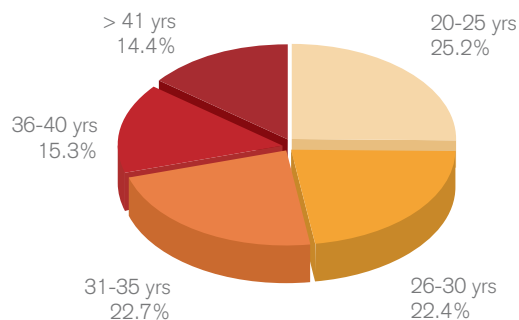
Again, the picture across the participating countries is not a uniform one.

Have you always worked for yourself ? (Per Country)



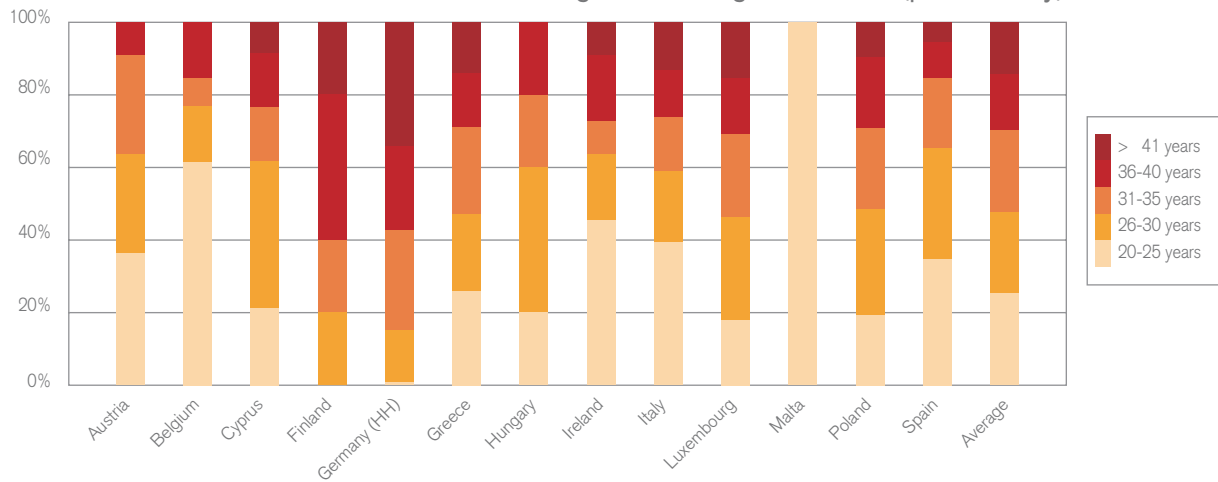
It can also be observed that over 70% of women started their business before the age of 35. Around 15% started their business in the age range of 36-40, whereas 14.4% started business later in life.

Age for starting a Business



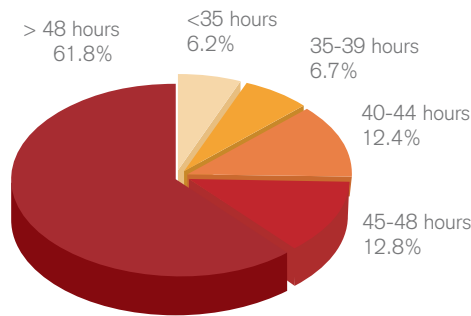
When looking at all countries and age groups, it can be seen that in the three age groups up to 35 years, the numbers are relatively evenly spread.

Age for starting a Business (per Country)



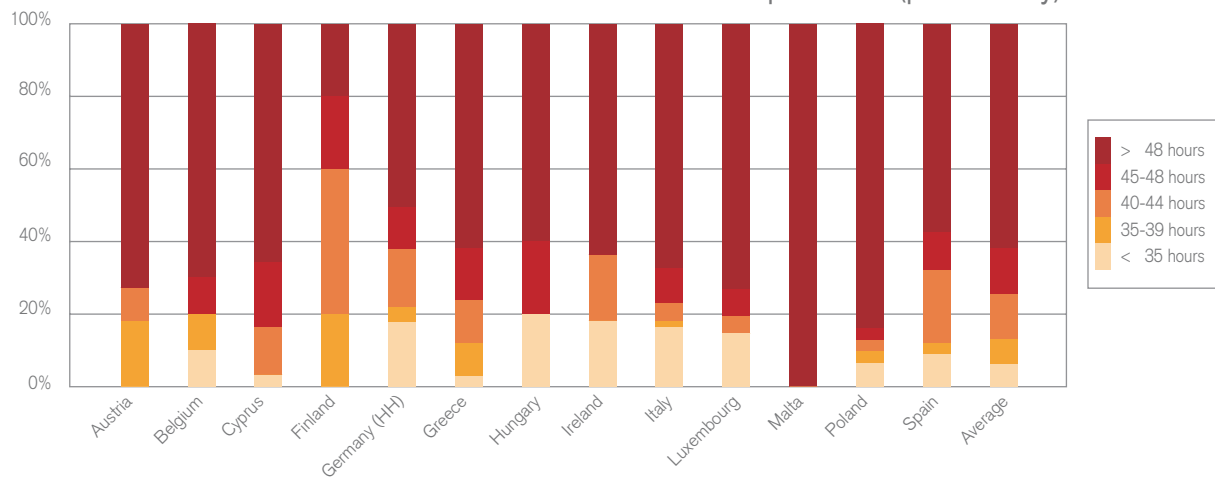
Being an entrepreneur is clearly a lifestyle, as 61.8% of respondents declared to work over 48 hours per week, in comparison to 25.2% who spend 40 to 48 hours at work. 12.9% declared dedicating less than 40 hours a week to their business.

Time dedicated to the Business per Week



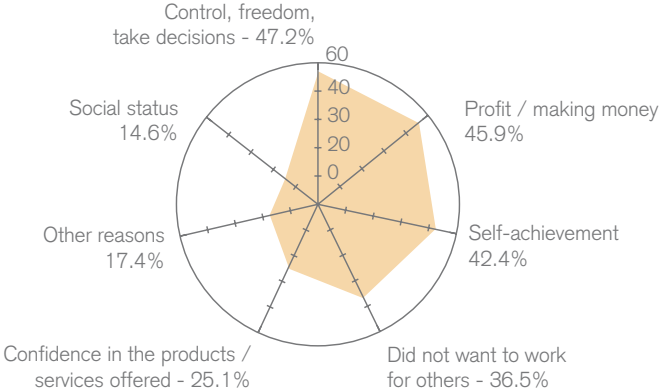
As can be seen on the country overview, from the 12.9% of women entrepreneurs who dedicate less than 40 hours a week to their business, 6.2% dedicate less than 35 hours to it. Most of the women in this category can be found in Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy and Luxemburg. It would be interesting to investigate the reasons why and how these women manage to dedicate less than 35 hours per week to their business. This could be the subject of a different study.

Time dedicated to the Business per Week (per Country)



When questioned about the reasons for starting their business, most women quoted the wish for control and freedom to take their own decisions (47.2%) as being the most important one. In second place comes the making money criterion (45.9%), and on third place with 42.4% ranks the search for self-achievement.

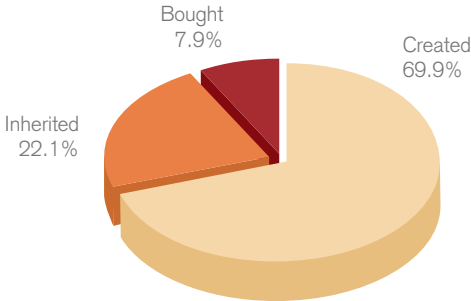
**Reasons for starting the Business**



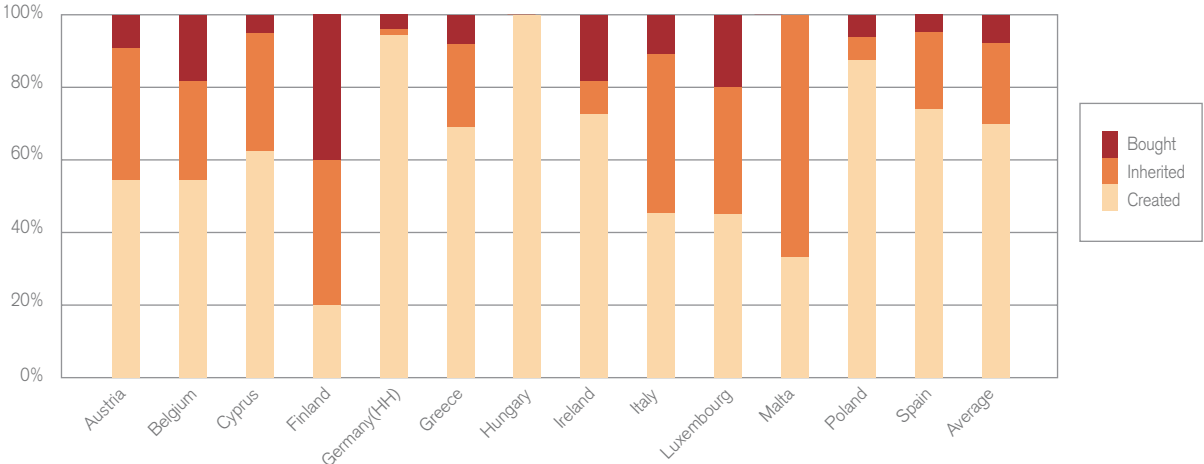
17.4% of business women quoted “other reasons” for starting their business. Among the reasons quoted in this heading, some women wanted to better combine their working and family life, others stated that they had no alternative, given that they could not find a job.

A large majority (69.9%) of women created their enterprise from start-up, while 22.1% declared having inherited the company they own. The remaining number (7.9%) declared that they bought their enterprise.

**Origin of Business**

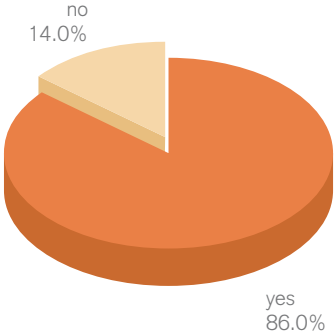


**Origin of Business (per Country)**

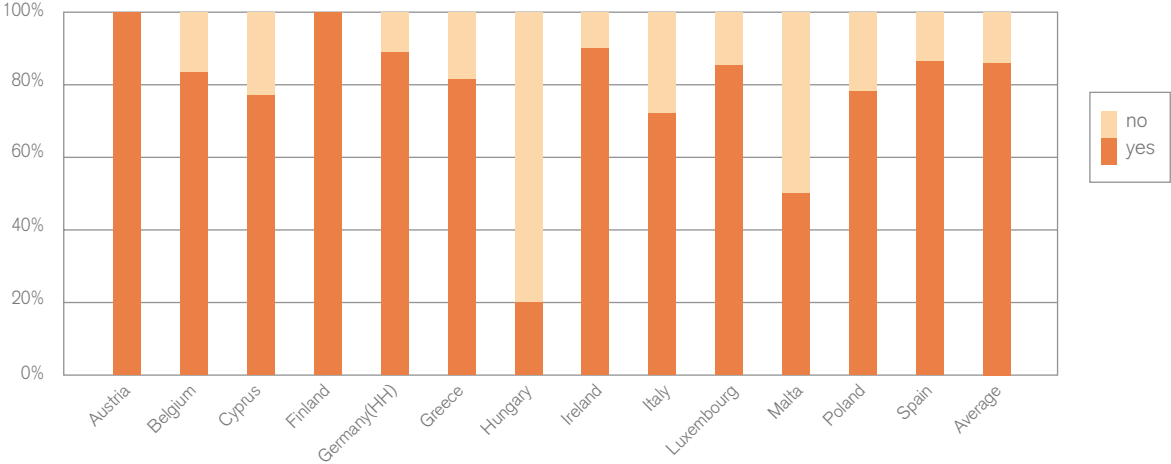


Also, 86.0% of the respondents stated that their current enterprise was the first one they owned, the remaining women stated that they had previous enterprise ownership experience. The countries where this tendency could not be observed are Hungary and Malta. In Hungary, 80% of the respondents stated that their current enterprise was not the first one they own, and in Malta there was an equal spread between respondents regarding this question (50% yes and 50% no). However given the low reply rate from Malta, the result is open to question.

First Enterprise ?



First Enterprise or not? (Per Country)



To the question what happened to businesses previously owned, 47.7% stated that the businesses were still successful. One fifth (21.1%) of respondents did not specify what happened to the business(es) they previously owned, whereas 19.0% declared that it (they) had gone out of business, and 12.2% stated that it (they) had been sold.

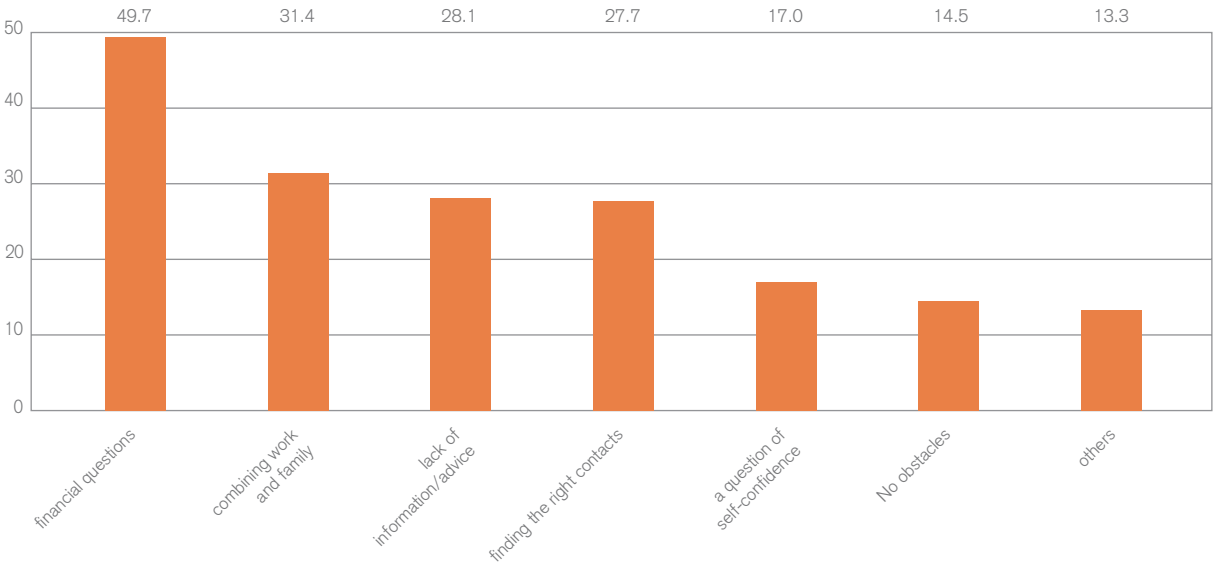
# Obstacles

## 1 / WHEN STARTING BUSINESS

Financial questions came clearly first with 49.7% of respondents quoting this factor as the most important one, followed by the combination of work and family life with 31.4% and the lack of information and advice with 28.1%.

Nearly one fifth (17.0%) stated that they did not experience any problems when starting their business. It may be worthwhile having a closer look at this category of women to investigate their success paths and the possible relationship between educational levels, cultural background and family situations for example. Yet this kind of considerations go beyond the scope of the present study, and would need to be looked at in a separate analysis.

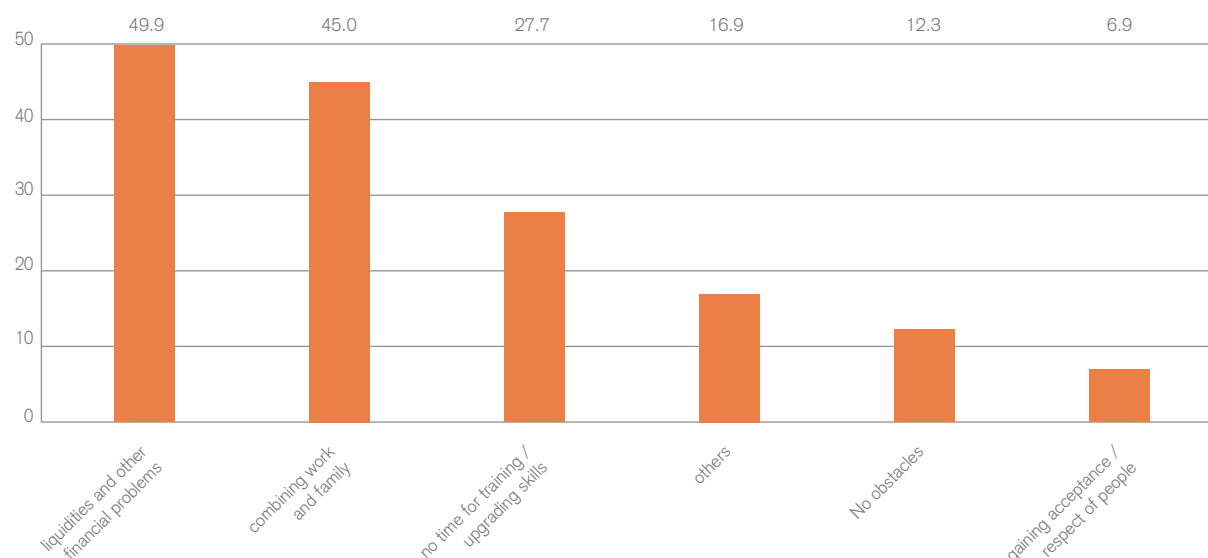
Main obstacles when starting a business



## 2 / DAY TO DAY OPERATIONS

The obstacles that most women face in the day to day running of their business are similar to those they encountered when starting a business. Liquidities and financial questions come first again at 49.9%, closely followed by combining work and family life at 45.0%. The third biggest obstacle for the respondents is the lack of time for training, or upgrading their skills (27.7%). The number of women facing no problems in the daily running of their businesses is lower than for the start up period, as 12.3 % declared not facing any obstacles.

Main obstacles in the running of the business



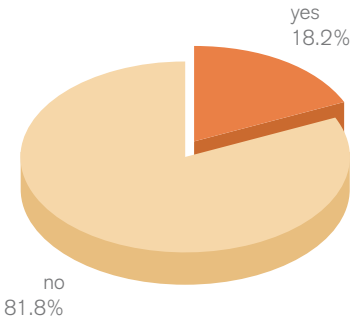
To the questions as to how the obstacles have been overcome, the replies vary, yet some comments were recurrent in all countries. There is no “quick fix” for overcoming obstacles and the creation of an enterprise is a long lasting venture. Hard work, perseverance, family support and solid self-confidence were the most recurrent answers.

On the financial side, the opinions were split. Whereas some had received support from their bankers, others relied on own capital (savings) or family support to cover the financial aspects. Building up a solid knowledge base was also quoted frequently - the knowledge base refers to building management capacities for the business, getting to know customers, suppliers and other entrepreneurs who could assist with information and advice.

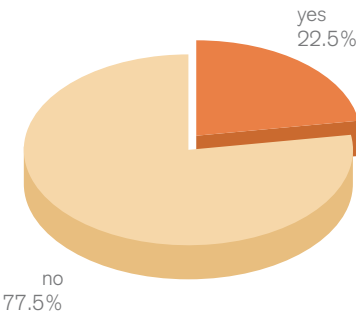
# Participation in decision-making

The last part of the survey covered the aspect of the participation in decision-making bodies of Chambers of Commerce and Industry on one hand, and of other organisations/entities on the other hand. The participation rates for both are quite low: 18.2% of the respondents indicated that they take part in the Chambers' decision-making bodies and 22.5% stated that they take part in the decision-making bodies of other organisations.

Participation in Decision-making in Chambers



Participation in other decision-making bodies



When it comes to defining the decision-making bodies other than Chambers, various clubs and associations are quoted ranging from social/community activities (school, childcare, community welfare, sports) over economic/professional activities (entrepreneurs and/or sectoral associations, or trade unions) to political roles (members of political parties, of town councils).

When considering the main obstacles preventing women from participating in decision-making bodies (Chambers of Commerce or others), lack of time is the most important one. In fact 49.5 % of respondents indicate that too much time is taken up by their business activities. The second reason is "family obligations" with 35.5%, followed by "others" with 14.7%. 14.4% of respondents state that they have no interest in participating, and 14.0% see no obstacles in participating.





# Methodology

The questionnaires were sent electronically to EUROCHAMBRES members in the 25 EU member countries. The national Chamber organisations were asked to distribute the questionnaires to their regional/local Chambers and seek input from at least 5 female entrepreneurs at regional/local level.

The project partners chose the distribution list for the survey independently, each partner consulting a particular group of female entrepreneurs.

52 % of EUROCHAMBRES member organisations carried out the survey in their respective country, with a varying success rate. Some 6000 questionnaires were sent to women entrepreneurs across Europe, and overall 1356 female entrepreneurs replied either via the Chamber organizations or directly to EUROCHAMBRES.

For the purposes of the overall analysis, the results from the different countries were added up to draw an overall view, and if possible, draw the profile of a “European Woman Entrepreneur” if ever it is possible to get this kind of profile.

The present report gives an overview of the evaluation of results according to the type of enterprises, the profile of the business women, and their participation in decision-making bodies.

Considering the varying reply rate from country to country and even within the participating countries, and also with view to the time limits imposed for the survey and its evaluation, the survey results are regarded from a qualitative point of view, statistical aspects being less taken into account.

One of the general aims of the project “Women in Business and in Decision Making” is to raise awareness of the situation with the Chamber network and female entrepreneurs, and from that point of view, the statistical relevance of the survey results is less important than the qualitative aspect.

# Survey questionnaire for Women Entrepreneurs

**1** What is the size of your enterprise?

- a) micro (1- 9 employees)
- b) small (10 - 49 employees)
- c) medium (50-249 employees)
- d) large (250+ employees)

**2** What is the sector of activities?

**3** At what age did you start your own business?

**4** What is your educational background?

- a Primary education
- b Secondary education
- c Tertiary (University or college education)

**5** If tertiary, what course (s) did you follow?

**6** Do you have a family (husband and /or children)? *The reply to this question is optional*

Husband:  Yes  No

Children:  Yes  No

**7** Do you have help at home (e.g. maid, parents, e.t.c.)?

*The reply to this question is optional*

Yes  No

**8** Have you always worked for yourself?

Yes  No

**9** If no, how many employers did you have before starting your own business?

**10** Is your present business the first enterprise that you own?

Yes  No

**11** If no, what happened to the enterprise(s) you have owned previously?

- a went out of business
- b are still successful
- c have been sold
- d other (please specify): .....

**12** Have you created your present enterprise yourself, or is it a family business you have “inherited”, or a business you have bought?

**13** When you started your business, what were the main obstacles you faced?  
(you can check more than one answer)

- a no obstacles
- b a question of self confidence  
(believing in your abilities)
- c financial questions (raising capital)
- d lack of information / advice  
on how to start an enterprise
- e finding the right contacts for  
your business venture
- f combining family and work life
- g others (please specify): .....

**14** State briefly how you have overcome any obstacles:

**15** What made you start your own business? (you can check more than one answer)

- a profit / making money
- b did not want to work for others
- c want for control and freedom  
to make my own decisions
- d social status
- e self - achievement
- f confidence in the products / services offered
- g other reasons (please specify): .....

**16** What are the main obstacles you are facing now in the running of your business?  
(you can check more than one answer)

- a no obstacles
- b combining family and work life
- c liquidity and other financial problems
- d no time for training / upgrading skills
- e gaining the acceptance / respect of people  
(internally and externally)
- f others (please specify): .....

**17** How many hours per week do you dedicate to your business?

**18** Do you actively take part in your Chamber's decision-making bodies?

- Yes  No

**19** If yes in what way?

**20** Do you actively participate in decision - making bodies of other organisations / entities?

- Yes
- No

**21** If yes, which ones? (please describe briefly):

**22** What are the main obstacles that prevent you from taking part in decision - making bodies?

- a** no obstacles
- b** competition
- c** family obligations
- d** too much time taken -  
up by your business activities
- e** no interest in participating
- f** others (please specify): .....

**23** What measures would help you to get more actively involved in the decision making bodies of your Chamber and other organisations/ entities? (please describe briefly)



The present report is published in the frame of the project "Women in Business and in Decision-Making" co-financed by the European Commission in the framework of programmes and actions in the social and employment sectors.

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UHCCI (Union of Hellenic Chambers of Commerce and Industry)

CCCI (Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry)

Hamburg Chamber of Commerce

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