

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITY IN POLAND

Joanna Malecka¹, Natalia Kapielska²

Abstract

Background and Objective: When examining women's economic activity, it should be emphasised that related issues are a relatively new research direction, and an understanding of the specifics of the subject seems particularly important given that the number of women starting businesses in recent decades has been characterised by a permanent upward trend. The aim of this article is to present – against the background of the literature on the subject and empirical data collected by governmental institutions operating in the European Union – the entrepreneurial activity rate of women in Poland over a ten-year period (2012–2021).

Materials and Methods: The article is based on reports and working papers published by Eurostat and the Central Statistical Office (CSO). To calculate the data presented in the publication, mathematical analysis tools were used in the field of comparative research, the occurrence of trends and the indication of existing trends and noticeable increases.

Results: Poland's twenty-first position compared to other EU Member States points to unlimited development opportunities and the need to support this economic space at every level of economic activity. This conclusion is reinforced by the statistics achieved by the opposite sex - men - which showed an upward trend over the period studied (2012–2021). This is also confirmed by the value of the calculated median female gross salary, which is lower by EUR 126.2 than the median male gross salary in Poland.

Practical implications: A defined indicator of female entrepreneurship will allow recommendations to be tailored for state bodies and local government institutions supporting women's economic activity in Poland as well as in other EU countries with a similar economic structure.

Conclusion and summary: Visible discrimination against women appears in the analysis of the average gross salary at different organisational levels in Poland, which can be used as an argument to support and create additional aid programmes to support women's economic activity.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, economic activity, women's activity, European Union

¹ Poznan University of Technology, Faculty of Management Engineering, joanna.malecka@put.poznan.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-5017-0417;

² Poznan University of Technology, Faculty of Management Engineering, natalia.kapielska@doctorete.put.poznan.pl, ORCID: 0000-0002-8733-2395.

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1. Introduction

Women's economic activity plays an important role in social awareness both for running enterprises and for the entire state economy. Economic activity is treated as a determinant of the economic growth of countries, which results in the emergence of competitiveness and opportunities to gain market advantage (Gaweł, 2007). According to the American economist Baumol, the share of people running a business in the entire population and in a given society is an explanatory variable that depends on time, and their professional activity takes a productive, unproductive or destructive form, depending on the environment. The decision to start a business is influenced not only by inborn predispositions, but also by external factors. Particularly important factors resulting from the observation of the market situation are those related to the economic environment. They determine the determinants of economic activity, such as: access to financial capital, relations between financial instruments, risk-taking, profitability or the situation on the labour market (Baumol, 1990).

Observations of the modern market economy confirm that the development of countries in the European Union is conditioned by the dynamisation of the sector of small and medium-sized enterprises. Particular attention in the literature on the subject is paid to the resources of an economically active person and to environmental factors specific to a given geographical area (Siemeniak, 2015). There is a practice that replaces geopolitics with geoeconomics in order to determine the economic activities of states, because using the term *geoeconomics* is helpful in specifying the level of development of countries striving to maximise their wealth (Kopińska & Małecka, 2022). This upward trend – particularly visible in the forum of international activities – requires a new approach. Attempts to define criteria related to production, trade, finance and technology refer to the geo-economic characteristics of countries. It is primarily about a state constructing geo-economic space in order to provide it with better development conditions (Halizak, 2012). An important stimulus for the development of research on entrepreneurship in Europe was the introduction of the Lisbon Strategy, which became the most important economic and social programme of the European Union (Budzyńska et al., 2002). One of the four main development pillars until 2010 was to facilitate setting up and running a business. The reason for the decision to develop entrepreneurship was the constantly growing unemployment rate, especially among women and youth, in all European countries (Mażewska, 2010). The strengthening of economic activity in European Union countries continues in every development programme. The pursuit of high employment rates became one of the objectives of the Europe 2020 strategy,

in which one of the three top priorities was to support the economy through a high level of economic activity (to be precise: the employment rate of people aged 20–64 should be 75%) (Communication from the Europe 2020 Commission, 2010).

The aim of this article is to present – against the background of the literature on the subject and empirical data collected by governmental institutions operating in the European Union – the entrepreneurial activity rate of women in Poland over a ten-year period (2012–2021).

2. Research methods

In order to achieve the main objective, secondary data from Eurostat and the Central Statistical Office (GUS) were analysed, detailing the employment rate by gender and working age in Poland, taking into account the division into administrative regions. Indicators of average gross wages and their valorisation in 2012–2021 were analysed, followed by the calculation and analysis of median wages in industries with the highest employment, while taking into account different organisational levels and corresponding salary positions. Then, the main entrepreneurship barriers found in the relevant literature were analysed and compared with the results of own research conducted on a sample of $N=300$ active women in Greater Poland (pol. Wielkopolska). To calculate the data presented in the publication, mathematical analysis tools were used in the field of comparative research, the occurrence of tendencies and the indication of occurring trends and noticeable increases, to determine the individual sensitivity ranges of the published results.

3. Results

The aim of this article is to present – against the background of the literature on the subject and empirical data collected by governmental institutions operating in the European Union – the entrepreneurial activity rate of women in Poland over a ten-year period (2012–2021).

When examining women's economic activity, it should be emphasised that related issues are a relatively new research direction, and an understanding of the specifics of the subject seems particularly important given that the number of women starting businesses in recent decades has been characterised by a permanent upward trend. The role of economically active women assumes particular importance in contemporary economic processes, as their presence on the labour market and in the public sphere is one of the greatest achievements of the 20th century. Women's professional activity became a phenomenon on a social scale in the 1960s and 1970s, while the number of women working in Poland and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe has been increasing dynamically since the end of the Second World War.

When analysing the female employment rate in Poland, attention should be paid to the country's position in relation to other EU Member States. The twenty-first position points to unlimited development opportunities and the need to support this economic space at every level of economic activity. This conclusion is reinforced by the statistics achieved by the opposite sex – men – which showed an upward trend over the period studied (2012–2021). This is also confirmed by the value of the calculated median female salary, which is lower by EUR 126.2 than the median male gross salary in Poland.

An analysis of individual indicators relating to the participation of women in the labour force in Poland has made it possible to provide answers to questions regarding what the current state of affairs is and what its determinants are. First, thanks to the published results of the aforementioned study on the employment rate by gender in European Union countries, the different situation of women and men can be seen. On the other hand, visible discrimination against women appears in the analysis of the average gross salary at different organisational levels in Poland, which can be used as an argument to support and create additional aid programmes to support women's economic activity.

The actual definition of the female entrepreneurship indicator will allow for the adaptation of recommendations for state and local government institutions supporting women's professional activity in Poland, which may also support the development of similar female entrepreneurship support programmes in EU countries with a similar economic structure.

The findings on the employment rate by gender in European Union countries do not show a consistent trend over the nine years studied. However, taking 2012 as the base year, it should be noted that among the entire population analysed, 72.8% of men were economically active. Data published in 2023 allows for a comparison to 2021 and shows an increase in male activity of 5.7 percentage points over the nine-year period analysed (Table 1).

Table 1. Economic activity of men in the European Union

European Union	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Tendency 2012/2021
	[%]										
	61.0	↑0.1	↑0.9	↑1.0	↑1.1	↑1.1	↑1.1	↑0.8	↓1.0	↑1.6	↑6.7

Source: own study based on Eurostat, 2023.

The male employment rate in Poland has significantly increased by 12.7 percentage points compared to other European Union countries and is ranked eighth in the ranking of member countries (Table 2).

Table 2. Economic activity of men in the European Union

Country	2012	2021	Tendency 2012/2021	Ranking 2021
	[%]			
Austria	79.3	79.9	↑ 0.6	12
Belgium	73.5	74.5	↑ 1.0	23
Bulgaria	72.7	77.3	↑ 4.6	20
Croatia	63.7	73.4	↑ 9.7	24
Czech Republic	80.2	87.5	↑ 7.3	1
Cyprus	76.1	82.2	↑ 6.1	9
Denmark	77.5	82.5	↑ 5.0	7
Estonia	75.2	81.2	↑ 6.0	10
Finland	74.6	77.8	↑ 3.2	17
France	73.6	76.4	↑ 2.8	22
Greece	64.7	72.5	↑ 7.8	26
Spain	64.6	73.0	↑ 8.4	25
Netherlands	82.8	85.7	↑ 2.9	3
Ireland	68.8	80.0	↑ 11.2	11
Lithuania	69.1	78.1	↑ 9.0	16
Luxembourg	78.5	77.7	↓ 0.8	18
Latvia	69.8	77.7	↑ 7.9	18
Malta	79.4	86.7	↑ 7.3	2
Germany	81.0	83.2	↑ 2.2	6
Poland	69.7	82.4	↑ 12.7	8
Portugal	67.5	79.0	↑ 11.5	14
Romania	65.4	77.0	↑ 11.6	21
Slovakia	72.4	78.9	↑ 6.5	15
Slovenia	71.1	79.3	↑ 8.2	13
Sweden	81.6	83.3	↑ 1.7	5
Hungary	67.3	84.1	↑ 16.8	4
Italy	70.6	72.4	↑ 1.8	27

Source: own study based on Eurostat, 2023.

Similarly, for the female population, taking 2012 as the base year, it was noted that 61.0 per cent of women were economically active in the study population. Thus, calculating the trends over the same period as before, it was found that female activity increased by 6.7 percentage points over the nine study periods (Table 3).

Table 3. Economic activity of women in the European Union

European Union	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	Tendency 2012/2021
	[%]										
	61.0	↑0.1	↑0.9	↑1.0	↑1.1	↑1.1	↑1.1	↑0.8	↓1.0	↑1.6	

Source: own study based on Eurostat, 2023.

When analysing the female employment rate in the EU, it should be noted that in relation to other Member States, Poland ranks twenty-first. When making specific calculations for Poland, it should be noted that when analysing the years 2012–2021, the achieved trend is characterised by an increase of 12.2 percentage points (Table 4).

Table 4. Economic activity of women in the European Union

Country	2012	2021	Tendency 2012/2021	Ranking 2021
	[%]			
Austria	69.6	71.3	↑ 1.7	13
Belgium	61.7	66.8	↑ 5.1	22
Bulgaria	59.8	68.9	↑ 9.1	20
Croatia	52.6	62.9	↑ 10.3	23
Czech Republic	62.5	72.1	↑ 9.6	12
Cyprus	64.8	70.0	↑ 5.2	18
Denmark	71.1	75.6	↑ 4.5	7
Estonia	71.1	77.5	↑ 6.4	2
Finland	71.3	75.8	↑ 4.5	6
France	66.0	70.2	↑ 4.2	17
Greece	44.6	52.7	↑ 8.1	27
Spain	54.6	62.4	↑ 7.8	24
Netherlands	72.0	77.5	↑ 5.5	2
Ireland	60.2	70.0	↑ 9.8	18
Lithuania	67.9	76.7	↑ 8.8	4
Luxembourg	64.1	70.3	↑ 6.2	15
Latvia	66.2	72.9	↑ 6.7	10
Malta	48.0	70.3	↑ 22.3	15
Germany	70.7	75.9	↑ 5.2	5
Poland	56.2	68.4	↑ 12.2	21

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Portugal	60.8	73.1	↑ 12.3	9
Romania	48.2	56.9	↑ 8.7	25
Slovakia	61.5	70.4	↑ 8.9	14
Slovenia	64.2	72.7	↑ 8.5	11
Sweden	76.1	78.0	↑ 1.9	1
Hungary	60.4	73.5	↑ 13.1	8
Italy	50.1	53.2	↑ 3.1	26

Source: own study based on Eurostat, 2023.

The employment rate of women in the European Union (67.7%) is 10.8 percentage points lower than that of men (78.5%) in 2021 (Figure 1).

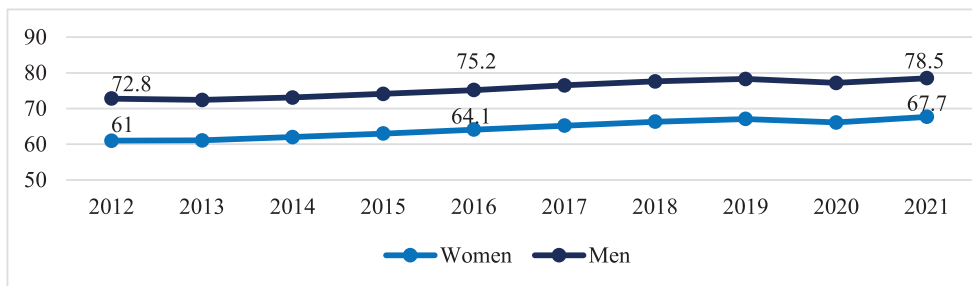


Figure 1. Employment rate of women and men in European Union countries

Source: own study based on Eurostat, 2023.

Further analysis revealed that the employment rate of both women and men showed a uniform upward trend. On the other hand, women's employment in Poland is lower compared to men's, and this difference in 2021 is 14.0 percentage points of the entire population (Figure 2).

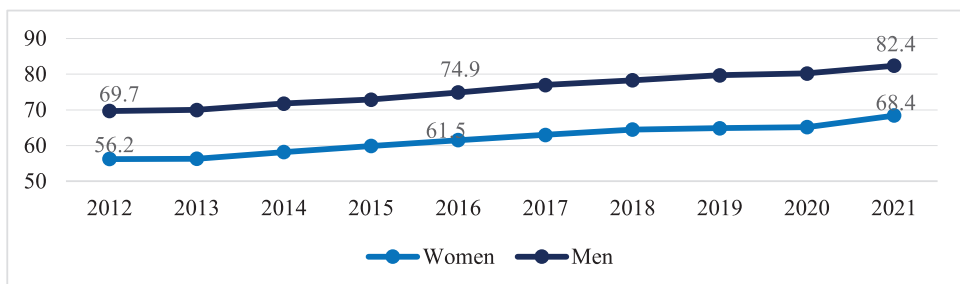


Figure 2. Employment rate of women and men in Poland

Source: own study based on Central Statistical Office, 2023.

Over the past ten years, there has been an upward trend in the median gross salary in Poland, regardless of gender, which amounted to PLN 3357.75 in 2011 and PLN 5093.08 in 2020, representing an increase of 51.68% of the average monthly gross salary in Poland over the period under study and taking 2011 as the base year (Figure 3).

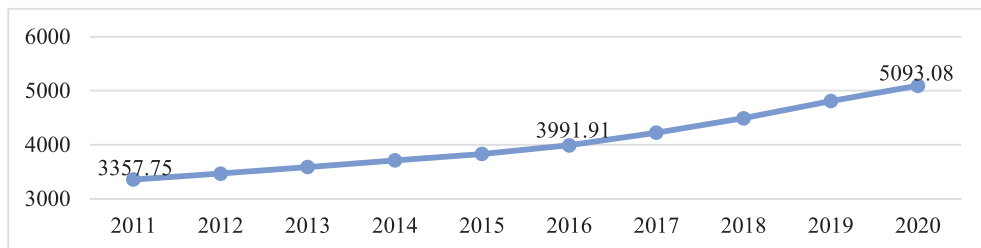


Figure 3. Median of the average gross salary in Poland

Source: own study based on Central Statistical Office, 2023.

Compared to the data from the National Salary Survey, the median gross salary of women in 2020 was 4500.00 PLN, which is 593.08 PLN less than the median average gross salary in Poland (Figure 4).

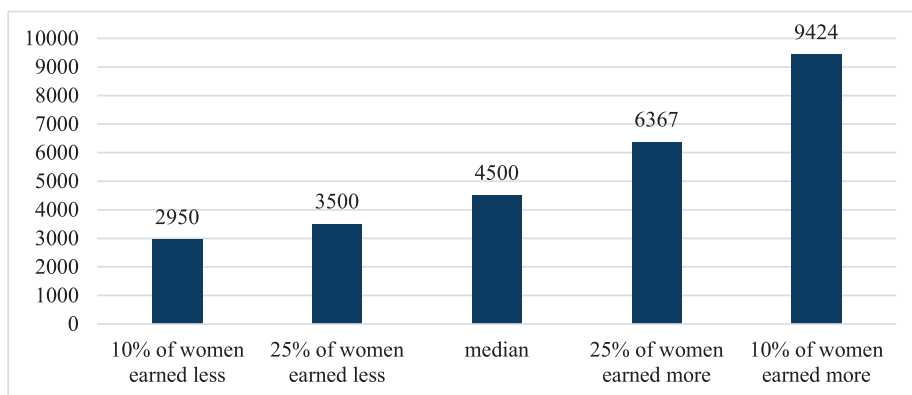


Figure 4. The wages of women in Poland in 2020 [gross]

Source: National Salary Survey Sedlak & Sedlak, 2020.

The decision was made to analyse the extremes of industries, i.e., those sectors in which the level of remuneration is the highest and the lowest. The median salary in the computer software industry was PLN 6367.00, which means that it was 76.86% higher than in the education sector and 41.49% higher than the average gross salary in Poland. The median earnings of women in education amounted to PLN 3600.00, which was about PLN 1500 lower than the median gross salary in Poland (Figure 5).

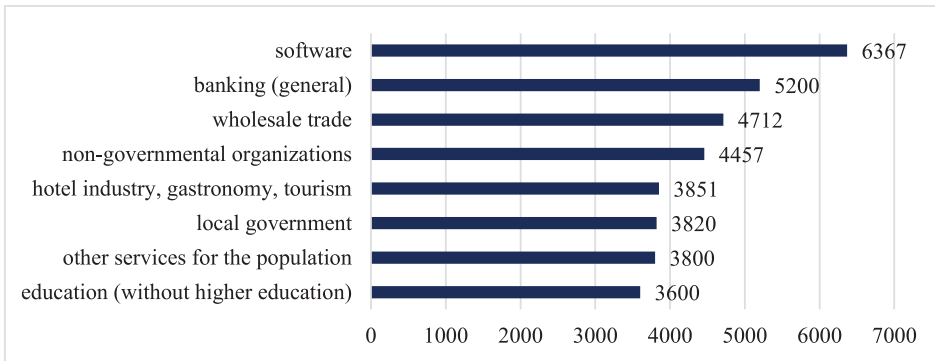


Figure 5. The median of women's wages in industries with the largest number of women employed in Poland in 2020 [gross]

Source: National Salary Survey Sedlak & Sedlak, 2020.

Women working as directors earned an average of 10 952 PLN, while the average salary of women employed in full-time positions was 3350 PLN in 2020. The average earnings of women holding managerial positions oscillated between 6550 PLN and 9576 PLN (Figure 6).

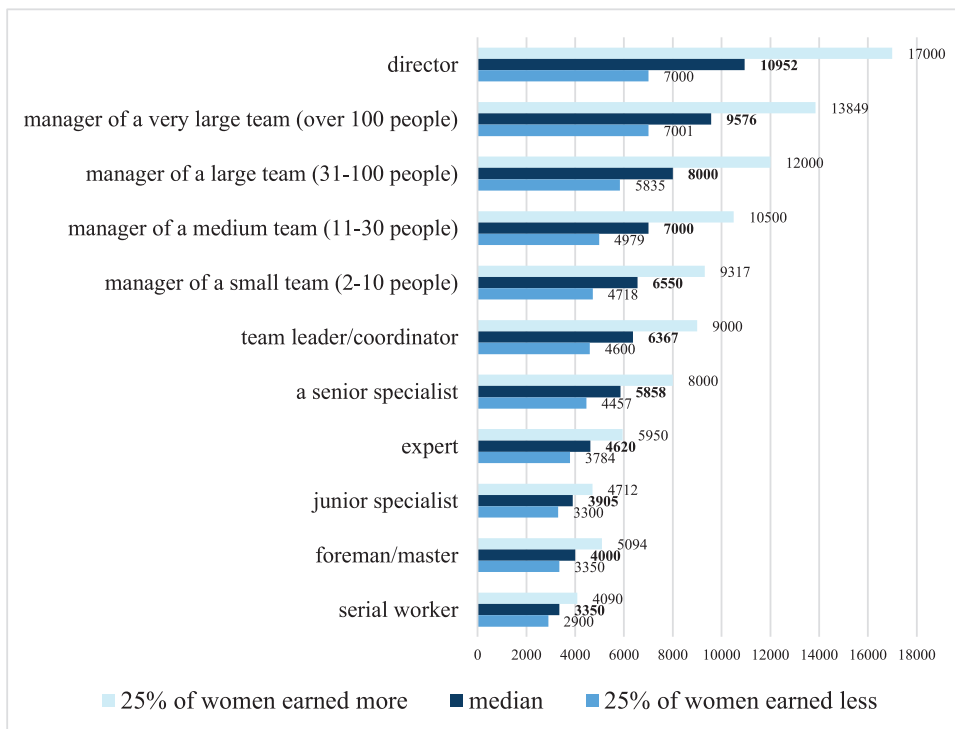


Figure 6. Women's wages at various organisational levels in Poland in 2020

Source: National Salary Survey Sedlak & Sedlak, 2020.

Over the eleven years under study, women's professional activity has systematically increased in Poland. This tendency can be noticed in the following voivodeships: Pomerania (pol. pomorskie), Opole (pol. opolskie), Greater Poland (pol. wielkopolskie) and West Pomerania (pol. zachodniopomorskie). However, this does not apply to the entire country, because in the following voivodeships: Świętokrzyskie (pol. świętokrzyskie), Lublin (pol. lubelskie), Subcarpathia (pol. podkarpackie), Łódź (pol. łódzkie) and Lubusz (pol. lubuskie), this trend was the opposite. The professional activity of women in 2021 was the highest in the following voivodeships: Masovia (pol. mazowieckie), Silesia (pol. śląskie), Greater Poland (pol. wielkopolskie) and Lesser Poland (pol. małopolskie). It should also be emphasised that not in all regions do women show goat activity above the national average (9.1). Such regions include: Podlaskie (pol. Podlasie) (4.2), Silesia (pol. Śląsk) (8.6) and Warmia-Masuria (pol. Warmia i Mazury) (5.8) (Table 5).

Table 5. Statistical data on the professional activity of women in Polish voivodeships

Territorial unit	2010	2021	Tendency 2010/2021	Ranking 2021
Poland	6 908	7 539	↑ 9.1	–
dolnośląskie	505	575	↑ 13.8	5
kujawsko-pomorskie	340	398	↑ 17.0	8
lubelskie	447	397	↓ 11.1	9
lubuskie	190	187	↓ 1.5	16
łódzkie	546	500	↓ 8.4	6
małopolskie	572	651	↑ 13.8	4
mazowieckie	1 066	1 218	↑ 14.2	1
opolskie	154	197	↑ 27.9	15
podkarpackie	376	338	↓ 10.1	10
podlaskie	213	222	↑ 4.2	14
pomorskie	356	467	↑ 31.1	7
śląskie	805	875	↑ 8.6	2
świętokrzyskie	267	229	↓ 14.2	13
warmińsko-mazurskie	238	252	↑ 5.8	12
wielkopolskie	578	730	↑ 26.2	3
zachodniopomorskie	255	322	↑ 26.2	11

Source: own study based on Central Statistical Office, 2023.

The main barriers most often mentioned in the relevant literature include: (1) financial, considered both when acquiring sources for the start, but also when investing and implementing innovations; (2) legal, constituting a complex factor, consisting of, e.g., frequently changing or unclear tax law; (3) administrative and bureaucratic requirements regarding the existing requirements, with the obligation to follow burdensome procedures related to the system of administration, both state

and local government, and often also the local community; (4) social barriers or constraints of any kind that block access to specific social groups; (5) the shadow economy, considered in terms of concealing true information on the employment of employees and not registering their income (Małecka, 2020) (Figure 7).

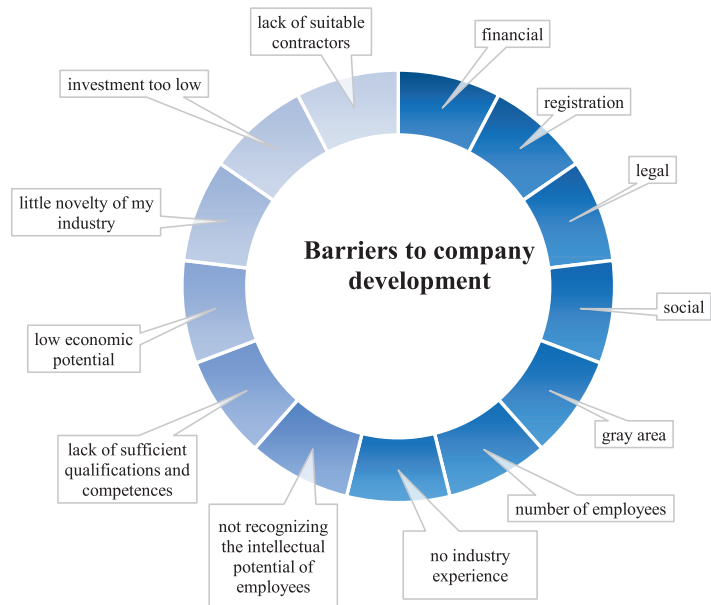


Figure 7. Barriers to company development

Source: Małecka, 2020, p. 48.

Referring to data from the relevant literature, the significance of the barriers identified in the study was diversified (Figure 8).

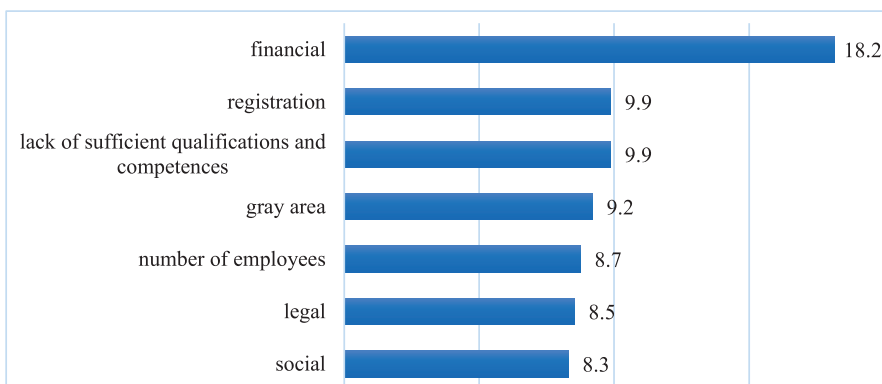


Figure 8. Company development barriers in 2021 – based on own research, where $N=300$ active women from Greater Poland

Source: own study.

Similarly, financial barriers were indicated as the most important for women running a business in Greater Poland (pol. wielkopolskie) (18.2%). The second most important barrier turned out to be the group of registration barriers and the lack of sufficient qualifications and competencies (9.9%). Other limitations, such as the gray zone, the number of employees, legal and social barriers, appear in the range of 8%–9% of the answers of professionally active women surveyed in this study.

4. Conclusions and recommendations

The observation of individual indicators concerning the professional activity of women in Poland allowed questions to be answered regarding the current state of affairs and what its determinants are. Thanks to the published results of the study on the employment rate by gender in European Union countries, the differences in the situation of women and men can be noticed. The same differentiation is also observed in Poland, and clear discrimination against women appears in the study of average gross remuneration.

When analysing the employment rate of women in Poland, attention should be paid to the position of this country in relation to other EU Member States. The twenty-first position indicates unlimited development opportunities and the need to support this economic space at every level of business activity. This conclusion is confirmed by the statistics achieved by the gender opposite to women – men – which in the analysed period (2012–2021) was characterised by an increasing trend and ranks eighth compared to other European Union countries. The employment rate of women in the European Union (67.7%) was 10.8 percentage points lower than that of men (78.5%) in 2021.

The inequality in earnings is particularly noticeable among jobs at the higher levels of the professional career. In October 2020, the average monthly gross salary of men was 14.7% higher than the average monthly gross salary of women. The differentiation in earnings is also confirmed by the value of the calculated median gross remuneration for women, which is lower by PLN 593.08 than the median gross remuneration for men in Poland.

Discrimination against women, visible in the analysis of average gross remuneration, and specific differences in the employment rate based on gender become the basis for creating and adapting recommendations for state and local government institutions to support the economic activity of women in Poland. Particular emphasis should be placed on eliminating financial barriers, which were indicated by the respondents as the most important (18.2%). The results in terms of women's economic activity in Poland should be expanded, especially in those regions of the country where the entrepreneurship rate has shown a negative trend.

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