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# EMPOWERINCLUSIVE



## NATIONAL PRACTICES



# Introduction



This collaboration between the International Executive Service Corps (IESC) and CEED Hub Skopje highlights the transformative power of targeted initiatives aimed at empowering youth and women entrepreneurs. The USAID Youth Actively Create Opportunities Activity has proven effective in fostering business growth and encouraging gender inclusion, with 60% of the enterprises being woman-led. The fact that four out of seven companies secured investments further underscores the program's impact. Success stories like Badijala.mk and SCOOP Artisan Gelato show how innovation and the right support can lead to impressive outcomes whether it's the top-ranking app or a significant revenue boost. This program stands as a model for future efforts focused on entrepreneurship, gender equality, and economic growth.

# Key factors:

**Gender Inclusion:** The fact that 60% of the new enterprises were founded by women is a testament to the program's focus on promoting gender equality in entrepreneurship. This helps bridge the gender gap in the business world, offering women equal opportunities to lead and grow their businesses.

**Business Development Support:** The program's success in securing €260,000 in investments for participating companies reflects the effectiveness of its tailored support. Entrepreneurs received the mentorship and resources needed to refine their business models and attract funding, which is critical for scaling their operations.

**Success Stories:** Companies like Badiala.mk, a mobile app with over 10,000 downloads, and SCOOP Artisan Gelato, which saw a 40% revenue increase, show that when young and women-led businesses are given the right tools, they can thrive and compete in the market. These success stories are important because they inspire other youth and women to start their own ventures.

**Capacity Building:** The program not only focuses on business growth but also on building the skills of young entrepreneurs, helping them develop the capacity to manage, expand, and sustain their businesses in a competitive environment.



# Growth



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**Enterprise Creation:** The initiative facilitated the launch of 42 new enterprises, providing the necessary infrastructure, mentorship, and resources for young entrepreneurs to establish their businesses. This has directly contributed to economic growth by increasing the number of startups in the region, which, in turn, creates jobs and stimulates local economies.

**Women Entrepreneurship:** With 60% of the businesses being founded by women, the program has significantly contributed to the growth of women entrepreneurs. This fosters inclusivity and taps into an often underutilized potential, promoting a more diverse and balanced entrepreneurial landscape.

**Revenue Growth:** Companies like SCOOP Artisan Gelato experienced a 40% increase in revenue post-participation, indicating how the program's support has enabled businesses to scale and expand. This growth is also reflected in the rise of digital platforms like Badiala.mk, which gained popularity and achieved significant user engagement.

**Investment Attraction:** The program helped four out of seven participating companies secure or negotiate investments totaling €260,000. These funds allowed businesses to fuel their growth, innovate, and scale their operations, ensuring long-term sustainability.



# Impact



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**Economic Impact:** The creation of new enterprises, investment inflows, and revenue increases not only benefits the entrepreneurs directly involved but also has a ripple effect on the local economy. These businesses create jobs, drive innovation, and contribute to the overall economic development of North Macedonia.

**Youth Empowerment:** By providing young entrepreneurs with the tools and support they need, the program has helped empower a new generation of leaders who are capable of driving social and economic change. This aligns with the program's goal of fostering youth involvement in the business sector.

**Gender Equality:** The emphasis on women-led businesses has a long-lasting social impact by challenging gender stereotypes and creating a more equitable business environment.

It serves as a model for other regions, demonstrating how women can excel in entrepreneurship when given the right support.

**Sustainable Development:** With a focus on sustainable business practices and innovation, the program ensures that the enterprises it supports are not just short-term successes but are poised for lasting impact, contributing to the region's sustainable economic development.



# Challenges



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## 1. Limited Access to Funding

While €260,000 in investments were secured for four companies, accessing sufficient and timely funding remains a significant challenge for many young entrepreneurs, especially in emerging markets like North Macedonia. Limited access to venture capital and financing options can hinder growth, despite the availability of mentorship and business development programs.

## 2. Market Entry and Competition

For many of the new businesses, breaking into a competitive market and establishing a customer base can be difficult. Startups often struggle with brand recognition, customer acquisition, and differentiating themselves in crowded sectors. This challenge is particularly pronounced for youth entrepreneurs, who may lack the experience or networks to navigate market dynamics effectively.

## 3. Limited Entrepreneurial Experience

Many of the participants in the program may lack extensive business experience or deep knowledge in specific areas of entrepreneurship. While the mentorship and training provided by the program help address these gaps, the real-world challenges of running a business often require more experience than a short-term program can offer.

## 4. Gender Barriers and Cultural Norms

Although the program has successfully empowered women entrepreneurs, gender biases and cultural norms can still pose challenges. In some regions, there may be resistance to women in leadership roles, or women may face additional barriers when accessing financing or networks. Overcoming these social and cultural barriers requires sustained efforts to challenge stereotypes and promote equality in business.

