

Entrepreneurship in Focus

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Content and communication channels for successfully addressing women with the topic of entrepreneurship

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Summary

There is a gender gap regarding entrepreneurship in Germany: women are less likely to start new businesses than men. Addressing women with the topic of entrepreneurship using a gender-specific approach (use of images with women and addressing woman with gender-specific words in the German language) is a success criterion for communication. There are also specific entrepreneurship related topics that are especially interesting for women.

The annual results of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) Germany show that there has been a gender gap among early-stage (TEA)-entrepreneurs since the start of the study in 1999. In 2024, for example, 11% of men in Germany had started a new business or were in the process of starting a new business, compared to 8.5% amongst women (Täube et al., 2025). The indicator for entrepreneurship within a country used by GEM is the TEA rate (Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity). It is defined as the proportion of 18- to 64-year-olds who have started a business in the last 3.5 years and/or are in the process of starting a business. In Germany, there is a wide range of support services for women who want to become self-employed or have already done so. Studies, like by Hentschel et al. (2018), confirm that a gender-specific approach (use of images with women and the feminine version of words) can increase the intention amongst women to use these support services.

The RKW Kompetenzzentrum has conducted research on the question what kind of content and which communication channels are suitable, so that more women can learn about existing support formats for entrepreneurs. A qualitative study was conducted with focus group interviews with experts from the network of the "More female entrepreneurs for our SMEs" action plan of the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy and experts from entrepreneurship organizations. Also questions were derived from the qualitative study and added to the GEM questionnaire. The results were published in the RKW guide "Attracting women to the topic of entrepreneurship - 14 ideas for successful communication" (Gorynia-Pfeffer et al., 2024).

Women specific communication

In the representative GEM population survey in 2024, both female TEA founders and male TEA founders were polled whether woman specific communication (e.g. language, image motifs showing female founders, or topics such as starting a new business as a team) is important to them regarding entrepreneurship. The majority of female TEA founders (84.2 %) – and male TEA

founders (75.2 %) – say that specifically addressing women in the female text form is a success factor for communication. The GEM expert survey in 2024, the second empirical pillar of the GEM, shows a similar result. Of the experts, 75.7 % agree with the statement that in Germany a gender-specific approach for communicating the topic of entrepreneurship to women is important. In the qualitative focus group interviews, the experts had the unanimous view, that the names of entrepreneurship projects or offers should either be gender-neutral or in the female language form, so that women feel more addressed. It was also discussed that the female-specific communication approach regarding the topic of entrepreneurship can be less relevant in some sectors. For example, women who have studied or are studying STEM subjects often do not want to be addressed in a gender-specific way (Gorynia-Pfeffer et al., 2024).

Relevant content for women

The GEM Population Survey 2024 reveals entrepreneurship related topics in which women have a high interest (see figure on the following page). Only 31.3 % of women (age 18 to 64) in Germany say that they have the knowledge, skills and experience to start a business. In other high-income countries surveyed in the GEM, which are comparable to Germany due to their socio-economic structure, the number of women who say that they have this skill is somewhat higher. For example, in Canada and Italy (where the value is the highest), 50.4 % of women make the self-assessment that they have this ability. Regarding Germany this result is reflected in the kind of information regarding entrepreneurship, that is interesting for women, and that is relevant for starting a new business successfully. Female TEA founders – with 64.5 % (multiple answers possible) name the topics of law and taxes as well as accounting as the most relevant and interesting information. The wish to get more information regarding these topics is not woman specific, amongst male TEA founders this aspect also is in first place, with an almost identical result (64.2 %). Information on sideline entre-

preneurship is in second place, which accounted for 61.5% of all mentions. This topic is an information interest that is specific for female TEA founders (male TEA founders are less interested in this topic). This topic was also identified in the qualitative focus groups as a specific information interest of women. Women are generally more likely than men to start a business as a sideline business. Many female founders first start a business as a sideline business and devote their full working hours to the new company at a later stage.

Information requirements for female TEA founders and male TEA founders in percent (multiple answers possible)

	Female TEA-founders	Male TEA-founders
Law, taxes and accounting	64,5	64,2
Setting up a sideline business	61,5	49,0
Personality traits of entrepreneurs	55,9	54,1
Finance for entrepreneurs	52,4	48,1
Non-gender-specific entrepreneurship networks	50,2	47,9
Role-Models	47,7	56,3
Gender-specific entrepreneurship networks	42,7	50,5
Entrepreneurship in the High-tech sector/STEM	41,9	49,5
company succession	37,5	49,7

GEM-adult-population-survey Germany 2024

The topic of financing is another aspect with a high need/desire for information amongst female TEA founders (52.4 %). Information on the personal characteristics of successful female entrepreneurs and how these personality traits can be learned is also an interesting aspect for female TEA founders (55.9%). However, these are two topics (financing and entrepreneurial personality traits) in which male TEA founders also have a comparably high interest (54.1% and 48.1%).

Preferred communication channels of women

Regarding the preferred channels through which female founders frequently obtain information on the topic of entrepreneurship, female TEA founders (multiple answers possible) prefer websites with 80.7%, closely followed by personal contact and personal discussions with experts from entrepreneurship support organizations with 80.2 % and social media channels with 75.7 %. Trade fairs are a relevant information channel for 44.9 % of female TEA founders, so this communication channel achieves a midfield position compared to the other communication channels. In contrast, communication channels such as radio (27.8 %), television (32.5 %) and print media (37.6 %) as well as newsletters (also 37.6 %) were mentioned much

less frequently by the female TEA founders. It is interesting to note that there are generally almost no differences in the responses of female and male TEA founders in regard to their preferred communication channels for obtaining information on the topic of entrepreneurship.

Implications for practice

The results presented show that a gender-specific-approach – using the text form and images that show females – is a success criterion for communicating the topic of entrepreneurship to women from the point of view of the female and male TEA founders. Gender-specific communication is therefore a possible starting point for ensuring that more women make use of the existing support services for entrepreneurs in Germany. This finding is confirmed by the results of the workshops conducted by the RKW Kompetenzzentrum with 75 consultants from regional chambers of industry and commerce in cooperation with the German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK). Potential female founders can be reached in particular via online communication channels or through personal contact. Information on topics that are highly interesting for women regarding entrepreneurship, such as starting a business as a sideline business, personality traits of female founders and female business woman as well as financing for entrepreneurs can also play a crucial role in getting the attention of potential female founders.

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