

POLICY BRIEF

UN WOMEN FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES IN CHILE:

EVIDENCE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO STRENGTHEN CAPACITIES, ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND MARKET PARTICIPATION

Women-owned businesses in Chile: Evidence and Policy Recommendations to Strengthen Capacities, Access to Resources and Participation in Markets

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This publication was developed within the framework of the UN Women–Government of the United Arab Emirates SPF.

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Acknowledgements
We would like to thank Pri Bruna, business adviser specialising in entrepreneurship and capital raising, BAILAB AI; Marcia Machado, engineer and MBA; Vilma Magnata Abarzúa, Project Manager, I&M Ingeniería Ltda.; Bernardita José Díaz Soto, Co-founder of T-Phite; Daniela Retamales, Co-founder of Casku and Fundación Prótesis 3D; Daniela Baytelman, CEO and Co-founder of Easycancha; Montserrat Cáceres, technology entrepreneur and mentor; Geraldine Huerta González, CEO of Match Emprendedor and business adviser; and Nicole Verdugo, President of Women Economic Forum, for participating in the qualitative interviews conducted as part of this study.

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Suggested citation
UN Women (2026) Women-Owned Businesses in Chile: Evidence and Policy Recommendations to Strengthen Capacities, Access to Resources and Participation in Markets.

Contents

Foreword 4

Key Messages 5

1. Introduction 6

2. Historical Overview and Current Situation of WOBs in Chile 8

2.1 Women's Participation in Entrepreneurship and Microentrepreneurship 8

2.2 Formal Enterprises, Size and Scale 10

2.3 Contribution to Employment and Economic Autonomy 12

2.4 Access to Finance and Productive Resources 13

2.5 Sectors, Innovation and Digitalisation 14

2.6 Internationalisation and Exports 15

2.7 Gender-Responsive Public Procurement: Lessons for Expanding Market Access 17

3. Barriers Limiting the Growth of WOBs 18

3.1 Finance and Working Capital 18

3.2 Business Capabilities, Management and Digitalisatio 19

3.3 Networks, Mentoring and Strategic Information 20

3.4 Care Responsibilities and Time Poverty 21

3.5 Gender Bias and Business Validation 22

3.6 Access to Information, Market Opportunities and Entry Requirements 23

4. Conclusions 24

5. Recommendations 25

References 28

Annex 1. Scope and Sources of the Assessment 30

Foreword

Women's economic empowerment is an enabling condition for advancing towards fairer, more inclusive, and more sustainable economies. From UN Women's perspective, this entails expanding women's access to productive resources, income, assets, time, networks, information, markets, and decision-making power, while transforming the norms, institutions and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities in the economy.

In Chile, women-owned businesses have gained visibility in recent years through new measurement frameworks, public policy instruments, business support programmes, and coordination platforms. However, the available evidence shows that disparities do not end once an economic activity has been launched. On the contrary, they arise throughout the entire business lifecycle: formalisation, consolidation, access to finance, hiring workers, innovation, digitalisation, internationalisation, and participation in higher-value markets.

This document contributes to the discussion by providing a strategic assessment of the development and current situation of women-owned businesses in Chile. Its purpose is not to provide a comprehensive inventory of the support ecosystem, but rather to systematise evidence on women's participation in entrepreneurship and business, the progress made, persistent disparities and the conditions needed to strengthen their growth trajectories.

Key Messages

- Women have a significant presence in microentrepreneurship in Chile, but this participation does not automatically translate into larger-scale enterprises.
- Women's representation decreases as enterprise size increases: women account for 28 per cent of the highest-ranking executives in formal microenterprises, 21 per cent in small enterprises, 14 per cent in medium-sized enterprises and 9 per cent in large enterprises.
- WOBs face cumulative barriers relating to formalisation, access to finance, working capital, networks, care responsibilities, innovation, digitalisation, and market access.
- Exporting WOBs demonstrate significant economic potential in terms of sales, formal employment, and international market integration, although challenges remain in relation to diversification, sustained export activity and maintaining a presence in foreign markets.
- Strengthening WOBs requires moving beyond a training-focused approach towards an integrated strategy encompassing capacity development, finance, networks, and effective links to public- and private-sector demand.

1. Introduction

Women-owned businesses (WOBs) in Chile play an important economic role in advancing economic autonomy, job creation, innovation, internationalisation, and inclusive productive development. Analysing their evolution sheds light not only on their participation in the economy, but also on the conditions that enable or constrain their growth trajectories.

This document analyses the situation of WOBs in Chile, with an emphasis on their recent evolution, the disparities affecting their consolidation and scaling up, and opportunities for public policy and public–private action to strengthen their development. For this purpose, it uses women-owned businesses as a broad category, recognising that the available sources employ different definitions and units of analysis.[1]

The available evidence reveals both progress and the persistence of disparities. Women have a significant presence in microentrepreneurship, but are more heavily concentrated in self-employment, experience relatively higher levels of informality, are more likely to become entrepreneurs out of necessity and bear a greater burden of unpaid domestic and care work. These conditions directly affect their ability to consolidate their businesses, access finance, expand their networks, invest in digitalisation, hire workers, maintain working capital, and participate in higher-value markets (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026).

The analysis proposes understanding these disparities from a business lifecycle perspective. This entails looking beyond the question of women's participation in entrepreneurship and examining the conditions under which WOBs start, sustain, consolidate, and plan the future development of their businesses. From this perspective, it is essential to identify the resources they require in order to grow, the business capabilities they need to strengthen, the structural barriers that constrain their development and the opportunities available to connect their products and services with actual market demand in private-sector value chains, export markets, and other institutional procurement settings.

This perspective is consistent with international evidence showing that the constraints faced by women-owned businesses span multiple dimensions, including finance, networks, business experience, sectoral segregation, market access, innovation and scaling up (OECD/GWEP, 2025; Ubfal, 2024; UN Women, 2024). Within this framework, the document presents gender-responsive public procurement as a relevant institutional experience within a broader market access agenda, the lessons from which can inform other procurement and contracting settings, including private-sector value chains.

The assessment is based on a review and systematisation of national and international secondary sources, official statistics and programme documents produced by UN Women Chile.

These sources provide insights into different dimensions of the business lifecycle of WOBs in Chile, including microentrepreneurship, formalisation, enterprise size, access to

1. For the purposes of this document, the term women-owned businesses is used as a broad category encompassing economic units, formal enterprises, suppliers, exporters, and dynamic ventures in which women have a significant ownership, leadership, control, or senior decision-making role. However, there is no single statistical definition applicable to all the sources used. The assessment therefore distinguishes between women microentrepreneurs in the EME; formal enterprises in which a woman is the highest-ranking executive in the ELE-7; enterprises holding the *"Sello Empresa Mujer"* (Women-Owned Business Seal) on *Mercado Público* (Public Marketplace); women-led exporting enterprises in the *Radiografía Mujer Exportadora* (Women Exporters Profile); and women-led start-ups in Start-Up Chile data. This approach makes it possible to integrate complementary evidence without automatically treating non-equivalent statistical populations as comparable.

finance, employment, leadership, internationalisation, and market participation. Details of the sources used, as well as their scope and limitations, are provided in Annex 1.

The assessment also incorporates qualitative evidence collected by UN Women Chile in 2024 through nine semi-structured interviews with women experts in entrepreneurship, innovation, finance, mentoring, and gender equality, as well as women founders and co-founders with experience in start-ups, technology-based enterprises and traditionally male-dominated industries. These interviews were used as interpretative input rather than as statistically representative evidence. They provided deeper insight into dimensions that quantitative sources do not always capture in sufficient detail, such as the processes involved in establishing business credibility, barriers to accessing finance, the importance of networks, the disproportionate burden of care responsibilities, gender bias and the strategies women use to sustain and scale up their businesses.

Box 1.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF THE SELLO EMPRESA MUJER (WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSS SEAL) ON MERCADO PÚBLICO



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ChileCompra (2025).

This instrument was created by ChileCompra in 2016 to identify and promote the participation of women-owned businesses on Mercado Público. For natural persons, the Seal is assigned to individuals identified as women on the basis of information from the Chilean Civil Registry. For legal entities, it is assigned when the enterprise meets at least one condition relating to ownership, leadership or control by a woman: women hold more than 50 per cent of the ownership; the general manager or general administrator is a woman; women account for more than 50 per cent of its legal representatives; or a woman exercises control over the company. Since 2022, the Seal has been assigned automatically and on a large scale using information from the Chilean Civil Registry and the Internal Revenue Service. In 2025, control of the company by a woman was added as an eligibility criterion. This definition makes it possible to identify WOBs in the public procurement market, although it does not replace other definitions used by sources such as EME, ELE-7, SUBREI/ ProChile or GEM Chile.

2. Historical Overview and Current Situation of WOBs in Chile

This section aims to describe the evolution and current situation of women-owned businesses in Chile by examining their presence at different stages of the business lifecycle: microentrepreneurship, formal enterprise development, business leadership, innovation, internationalisation, and market access. The analysis seeks to show not only how many women become entrepreneurs, but also the conditions under which they do so, the barriers they face in consolidating and scaling up their businesses, and their economic potential in terms of employment, productivity, exports, and participation in value chains.

The section organises the available evidence from a business lifecycle perspective, distinguishing between participation in microentrepreneurship, formalisation, enterprise size and scale, contribution to employment, access to finance, sectoral participation, innovation, internationalisation, and participation in institutional markets.

2.1 Women's Participation in Entrepreneurship and Microentrepreneurship

The *Encuesta de Microemprendimiento* (Microentrepreneurship Survey, EME) provides insights into women's participation in smaller-scale economic units and some of the conditions under which they operate. In 2025, the microentrepreneur population stood at 1,998,426 people, comprising 1,185,294 men and 812,884 women, equivalent to 59.3 per cent and 40.7 per cent of the total, respectively. Although women account for a significant proportion of microentrepreneurs in Chile, the available time series indicates that their participation has remained relatively stable over the past decade: 38.1 per cent in 2015, 39.2 per cent in 2017, 38.6 per cent in 2019, 40.7 per cent in 2022 and 40.7 per cent in 2025 (INE, 2016; Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2018, 2021, 2026; INE, 2023).

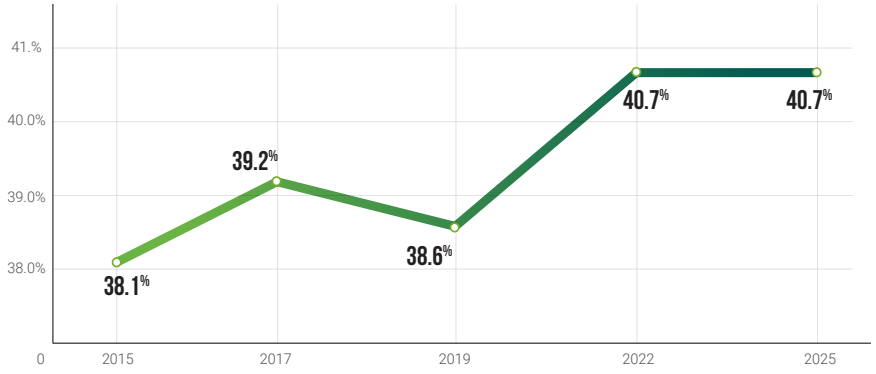
This trend suggests progress in women's presence and visibility, but not a rapid expansion of their participation within the microentrepreneur population. The assessment should therefore look beyond aggregate participation and examine the conditions under which women become entrepreneurs, their position within the enterprise structure and their prospects of progressing towards larger-scale economic units.

A key distinction is that between own-account workers and employers. In 2025, most microentrepreneurs were own-account workers, with women accounting for 43.1 per cent of this group. By contrast, women represented only 25.0 per cent of employers.

This difference points to a disparity in scale: women have a significant presence in microentrepreneurship, but lower

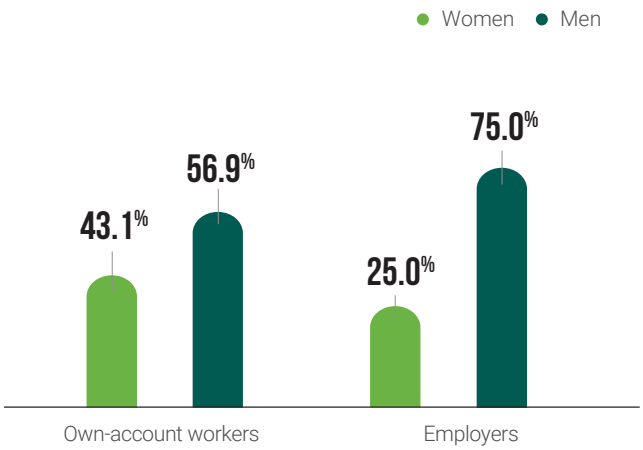
Figure 1.

Women's Participation in Microentrepreneurship, 2015–2025.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the 2015–2025 EME series.

Figure 2.
Distribution by Sex and Employment Category, 2025.



Source: Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026.

relative participation in economic units with the capacity to employ workers on a permanent basis (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026).

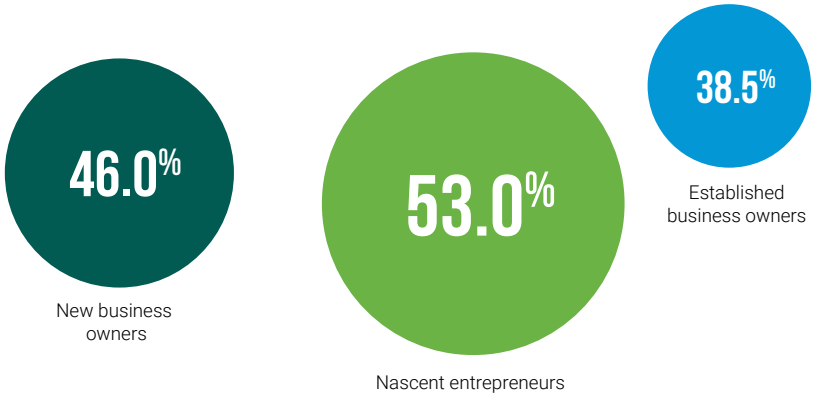
Evidence from the EME can be complemented by the *Reporte Nacional GEM Chile 2025* (GEM Chile 2025 National Report), which provides insights into dimensions of the entrepreneurial process relating to public perceptions, motivations for entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial activity at its different stages and ecosystem conditions. In 2025, 42.5 per cent of people not currently engaged in entrepreneurial activity reported that they intended to start a business within the next three years. This represented an increase of 3.5 percentage points from 2024. Meanwhile, the Total Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) rate rose from 27 per cent in 2024 to 29.4 per cent in 2025. In other words, 29.4 per cent of adults aged 18–64 were either nascent entrepreneurs (22.9 per cent) or new business owners (6.5 per cent) (Leitch Barra & Martínez Camara, 2026).

From a gender perspective, a lack of employment opportunities remains the main motivation for engaging in early-stage entrepreneurial activity, cited by 79.7 per cent of women and 73.4 per cent of men. Although this difference is not statistically significant, it confirms the importance of labour market constraints in driving a substantial proportion of entrepreneurial activity.

The other motivations reveal differences by sex. Among women, the second most frequently cited motivation was to make a difference in the world, at 58.8 per cent, followed by earning a high income or building wealth, at 56.7 per cent. Among men, by contrast, earning a high income or building wealth ranked second, at 65.5 per cent, followed by making a difference in the world, at 64.2 per cent (Leitch Barra & Martínez Camara, 2026).

GEM Chile also reveals a significant shift in gender composition over the course of the entrepreneurial process. In 2025, women represented 53 per cent of nascent entrepreneurs, 46 per cent of new business owners and 38.5 per cent of established business owners, as shown in Figure 3. Women's Total Early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity rate reached 29.6 per cent, slightly above the 29.1 per cent recorded among men. However, this relationship is reversed among established businesses: the established business ownership rate was 5.3 per cent among women and 8.9 per cent among men. This decline in women's participation as the business lifecycle progresses reinforces a central finding of the assessment: disparities are not confined to entry into entrepreneurship, but also affect business survival, consolidation and scaling up (Leitch Barra & Martínez Camara, 2026).

Figure 3.
Women's Participation by Stage of the Entrepreneurial Process, 2025.

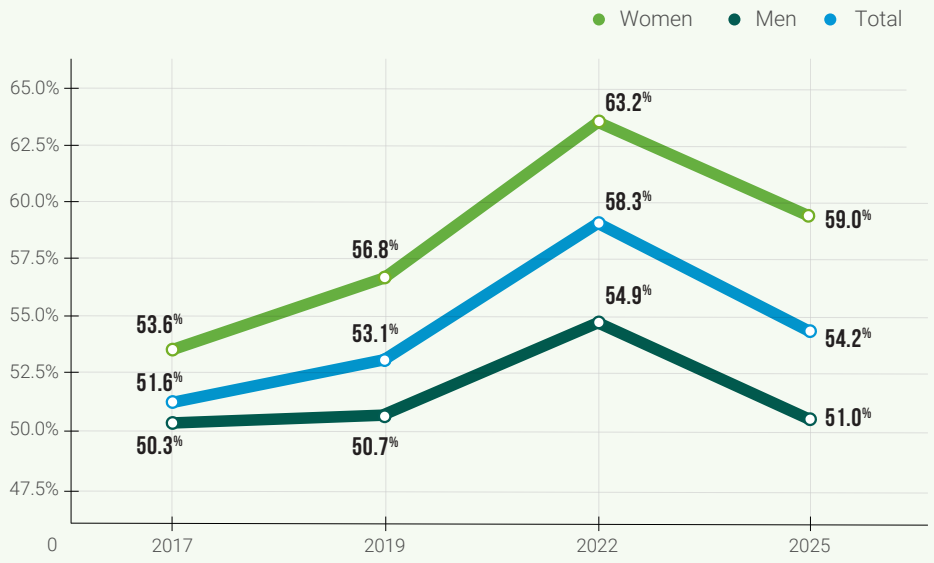


Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Leitch Barra and Martínez Camara, 2026, APS 2025 data.

2.2 Formal Enterprises, Size and Scale

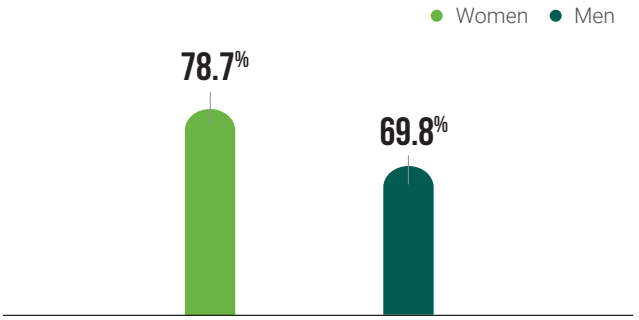
Formalisation is an enabling condition for accessing finance, business support programmes, institutional procurement opportunities, business networks, and higher-value markets. According to the Eighth Microentrepreneurship Survey, informality among microentrepreneurs stood at 54.2 per cent in 2025, representing a significant decrease of 4.1 percentage points compared with 2022. This reduction was observed among both women and men; nevertheless, the disparity by sex persists. In 2025, 59.0 per cent of women microentrepreneurs operated informally, compared with 51.0 per cent of men. The official time series shows that informality among women has consistently remained higher than among men in every measurement conducted between 2017 and 2025 (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026).

Figure 4.
Percentage of Informal Microentrepreneurs by Sex and Year, 2017–2025.



Source: Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026.

Figure 5.
Microenterprises with No Workers, by Sex, 2025.



Source: Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026.

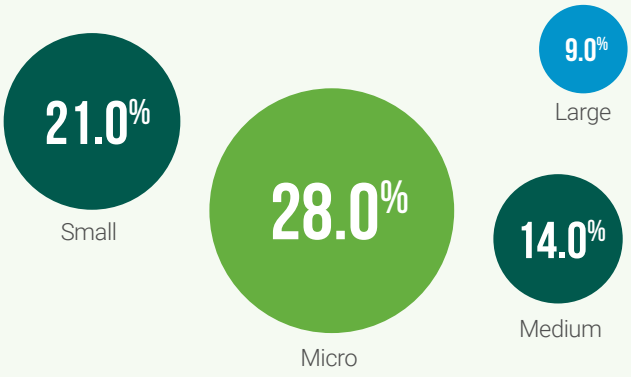
Business size is also important for understanding the development of WOBs. In 2025, 78.7 per cent of women microentrepreneurs did not employ any workers, compared with 69.8 per cent of men. This finding reinforces the idea that gender disparities are evident not only in participation, but also in the ability to scale up, hire workers, sustain operations, and respond to more demanding commercial requirements (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026).

Beyond microentrepreneurship, it is necessary to incorporate evidence on formal enterprises of different sizes. The *Séptima Encuesta Longitudinal de Empresas* (Seventh Longitudinal Survey of Enterprises, ELE-7) provides insights into this population. According to the *Estudio de Economía y Género* (Gender and Economy Study), produced using ELE-7 data, of the 409,300 enterprises represented by the survey, 23.2 per cent—equivalent to 95,027 enterprises—have a woman as their highest-ranking executive. Furthermore, among enterprises with a board of directors, women account for 26.3 per cent of board members (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2025).

Women's representation among the highest-ranking executives decreases as enterprise size increases. Women account for 28 per cent of the highest-ranking executives in formal microenterprises, 21 per cent in small enterprises, 14 per cent in medium-sized enterprises and only 9 per cent in large enterprises. This gradient by enterprise size is central to the assessment because it shows that the disparity is not confined to initial entry into entrepreneurship, but becomes more pronounced among larger enterprises, where higher sales, employment, investment capacity and opportunities for integration into value chains are concentrated (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2025).

IN 2025, 78.7 PER CENT OF WOMEN MICROENTREPRENEURS DID NOT EMPLOY ANY WORKERS, COMPARED WITH 69.8 PER CENT OF MEN.

Figure 6.
Women as Highest-Ranking Executives, by Enterprise Size, 2022.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2025.

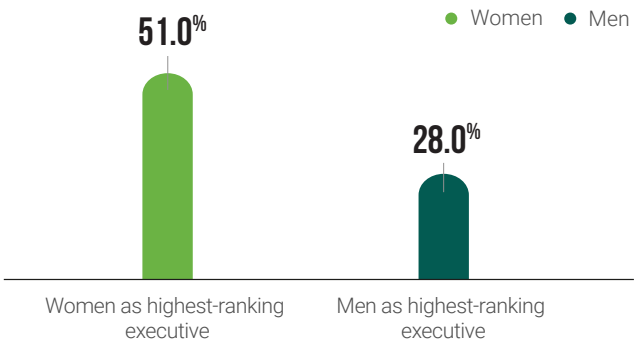
This evidence provides a more nuanced picture. WOBs should not be understood solely as microenterprises or subsistence-level economic units. WOBs are also found among formal enterprises, including small, medium-sized, and large enterprises. However, the likelihood of a woman occupying the highest-ranking executive position falls substantially as enterprise size increases, suggesting barriers to growth, capital accumulation, business ownership, access to networks and progression into economic decision-making positions.

2.3 Contribution to Employment and Economic Autonomy

The assessment of WOBs must be situated within the broader labour market context. In 2024, women's labour force participation rate in Chile stood at 52.6 per cent, compared with 71.8 per cent for men. Furthermore, the rate of informal employment was 29.2 per cent among employed women and 26.1 per cent among employed men (INE, UN Women & ECLAC, 2025). These structural disparities shape women's business trajectories, as many women enter entrepreneurship from segmented or unstable labour markets or under constraints relating to time and care responsibilities.

The ELE-7 shows that women's leadership in formal enterprises is associated with higher levels of women's employment. In enterprises where the highest-ranking executive is a woman, women account for an average of 51 per cent of the workforce, compared with 28 per cent in enterprises where the highest-ranking executive is a man. Furthermore, the study's inferential analysis indicates that having a woman as the highest-ranking executive increases the proportion of women employed by approximately 23 percentage points; when enterprise size and sector are controlled for, the difference stands at 19.1 percentage points (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2025).

Figure 7.
Microenterprises with No Workers, by Sex, 2025.



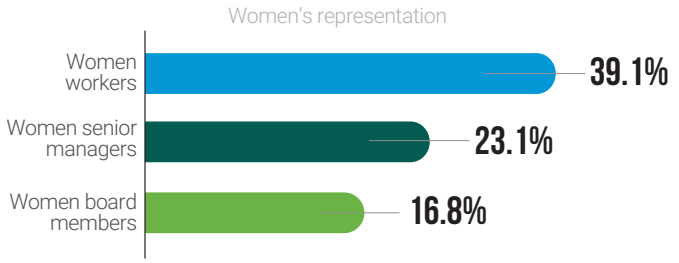
Source: Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026.

This finding is significant because it shows that strengthening WOBs affects not only women entrepreneurs, but also the composition of employment. From this perspective, women-owned businesses can help expand employment opportunities for other women, particularly when women's leadership is reflected in positions with effective decision-making authority, such as the highest-ranking executive position or boards with significant representation of women.

The relationship between women's leadership and economic autonomy must also be examined among larger enterprises. The *Séptimo Reporte de Indicadores de Género en las Empresas en Chile 2025* (Seventh Report on Gender Indicators in Enterprises in Chile 2025) covers 479 entities that report information to the Chilean Financial Market Commission. In 2025, women accounted for 39.1 per cent of all workers in the enterprises analysed, 23.1 per cent of senior managers and 16.8 per cent of board members. This progressive decline as the level of seniority increases places WOBs within a business structure in which women's access to economic decision-making positions remains limited (Chilean Ministry of Finance, Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, Fundación ChileMujeres & Chilean Financial Market Commission, 2026).

WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES CAN HELP EXPAND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR OTHER WOMEN, ESPECIALLY WHEN THEIR LEADERSHIP IS REFLECTED IN POSITIONS WITH EFFECTIVE DECISION-MAKING

Figure 8.
Women's Representation by Level of Seniority within Enterprises, 2025.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Séptimo Reporte de Indicadores de Género en las Empresas en Chile 2025 (Seventh Report on Gender Indicators in Enterprises in Chile 2025).

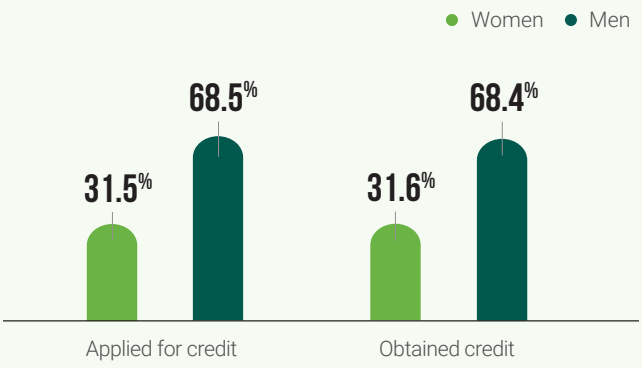
2.4 Access to Finance and Productive Resources

Access to finance must be a central focus of the assessment. The financial inclusion of WOBs cannot be measured solely in terms of access to financial products; the amounts obtained, financing terms, timeliness of funding and ability to sustain growth cycles must also be considered. This distinction is crucial because many enterprises may have access to a financial product but lack the working capital, guarantees or sufficient credit needed to fulfil purchase orders, invest in certifications, improve processes, hire staff, or expand internationally.

The Eighth Microentrepreneurship Survey shows that 65 per cent of microentrepreneurs reported using savings as their main source of finance when starting their economic activity. Among those who used savings, 39.5 per cent were women and 60.5 per cent were men. In addition, 238,768 microentrepreneurs had applied for credit from banks, retailers, cooperatives, family allowance funds, and/or suppliers during the previous two years; of these, 31.5 per cent were women and 68.5 per cent were men. The distribution among those who obtained credit was similar: 31.6 per cent were women and 68.4 per cent were men (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026).

Evidence from formal enterprises introduces an important nuance. After accounting for enterprise size and sector, the study based on the ELE-7 finds no statistically significant differences in access to finance between enterprises whose highest-ranking executive is a man and those whose highest-ranking executive is a woman. More specifically, the report notes that differences in credit applications decrease and cease to be significant when controls for enterprise size and sector are included. It also reports that the average interest rate on the largest loan in 2022 was 12.2 per cent for enterprises whose highest-ranking executive was a man and 12.6 per cent for those whose highest-ranking executive was a woman, a difference that is not statistically significant (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2025).

Figure 9.
Distribution by Sex among Those Who Applied for or Obtained Credit, 2025.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2025. Note: The figure shows the distribution by sex within each group, rather than the application or approval rate within each sex.

This evidence does not mean that financial barriers affecting WOBs should be disregarded. A significant proportion of the disparities are structural: women are overrepresented in smaller enterprises, less capital-intensive sectors and activities offering fewer opportunities for capital accumulation. This limits their effective demand for finance, their ability to provide guarantees and their opportunities to access financial instruments suited to business growth.

2.5 Sectors, Innovation and Digitalisation

The sectoral concentration of WOBs must be analysed as a factor affecting productivity, profitability, and growth potential. The ELE-7 reveals significant differences in the presence of women as the highest-ranking executive by economic activity. The highest proportions are found in "Entertainment and other services" (38 per cent), "Hotels and food services" (35 per cent) and "Commerce" (29 per cent). By contrast, the lowest proportions are recorded in "Construction" (11 per cent), "Mining" (9 per cent) and "Finance" (7 per cent) (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2025).

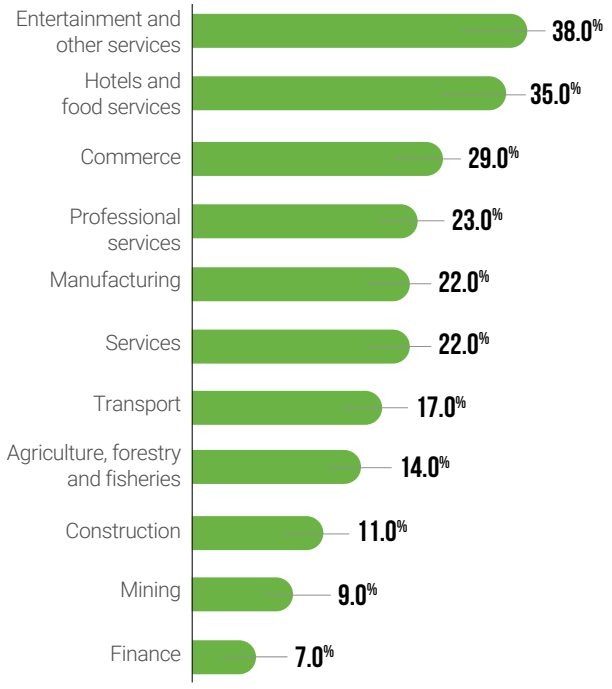
This sectoral distribution shows that the disparity in enterprise scale intersects with a disparity in productive participation. Women have a greater relative presence in the service and commerce sectors, but a lower presence in capital-intensive, historically male-dominated sectors or those with higher barriers to entry. This segmentation shapes opportunities for growth, innovation, and productivity, as well as access to finance and participation in more complex value chains.

The ELE-7 productivity analysis is also important in avoiding biased interpretations. The study finds no statistically significant differences in labour productivity or total factor productivity between enterprises whose highest-ranking executive is a woman and those whose highest-ranking executive is a man. Furthermore, the observed differences decrease when enterprise size and economic sector are controlled for. The lower presence of women in larger enterprises should therefore not be interpreted as evidence of poorer business performance, but rather as the result of differentiated participation according to enterprise size, sector, capital, networks and

The innovation dimension also requires attention. GEM Chile 2024 reports a low level of international orientation and a considerable decline in innovation orientation, in terms of both products and processes, among early-stage ventures and established enterprises. This finding is relevant to WOBs because business growth depends not only on starting an economic activity, but also on developing business models with greater sophistication, differentiation, productivity, and capacity to enter broader markets (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Chile, 2025).

In the field of dynamic entrepreneurship, the experience of Start-Up Chile shows that women are overrepresented in smaller enterprises, less capital-intensive sectors and activities offering fewer opportunities for capital accumulation. It also shows that gender disparities are evident in start-ups, investment networks, mentoring, technology leadership, and access to capital for scaling up. Although this information does not constitute a nationwide measurement of the WLE access to economic decision-making positions (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2025).

Figure 10.
Women as Highest-Ranking Executives by Economic Activity, 2022.



Source: Authors' own elaboration based on the Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2025.

population, it complements the assessment by showing that, even in high-potential business segments, the participation of women founders requires specific instruments providing support, visibility and access to finance and innovation networks[2] (Start-Up Chile, 2026).

2.6 Internationalisation and Exports

Internationalisation demonstrates the potential of WOBs beyond microentrepreneurship, *The Radiografía Mujer Exportadora 2025* (Women Exporters Profile 2025) reports that Chile had 8,567 exporting enterprises in 2024, of which 2,542 were women-led. These enterprises accounted for 29.7 per cent of all exporting enterprises, and their worldwide sales totalled US$23.449 billion, equivalent to 23.2 per cent of the country's total exports, as shown in Figure 11 (SUBREI & ProChile, 2025).

The same report also provides a historical perspective. Within the subset of non-traditional goods and services exports, the number of women-led exporting enterprises grew at an average annual rate of 1.9 per cent between 2019 and 2024, increasing from 1,911 to 2,101 enterprises. Over the same period, the number of men-led enterprises grew at an average annual rate of 0.7 per cent, from 4,755 to 4,912 (see Figure 12). Although WOBs display greater relative dynamism, at current growth rates it would take them 45 years to reach the current number of men-led exporting enterprises (SUBREI & ProChile, 2025).

In addition, ProChile's profile of women-owned businesses using its services provides more detailed insights into certain export sectors. In 2024, the total number of women-owned businesses using ProChile services reached 745, an increase of 56.8 per cent compared with the previous period. Within this group, 255 had export experience and 154 completed export transactions during the year, reaching 83 markets and generating sales of US$288 million (ProChile, 2025a).

WOMEN ARE OVERREPRESENTED IN SMALLER ENTERPRISES, LESS CAPITAL-INTENSIVE SECTORS AND ACTIVITIES OFFERING FEWER OPPORTUNITIES FOR CAPITAL ACCUMULATION.

When these exports are broken down by major sector, agriculture accounted for US$212.5 million, followed by fisheries and aquaculture at US$43 million and manufacturing at US$14 million. At the product level, fresh fruit was the leading export of women-owned businesses using ProChile services, followed by seafood and nuts. Forest products have also become increasingly important, ranking as the fourth-largest export category among these enterprises (ProChile, 2025a).

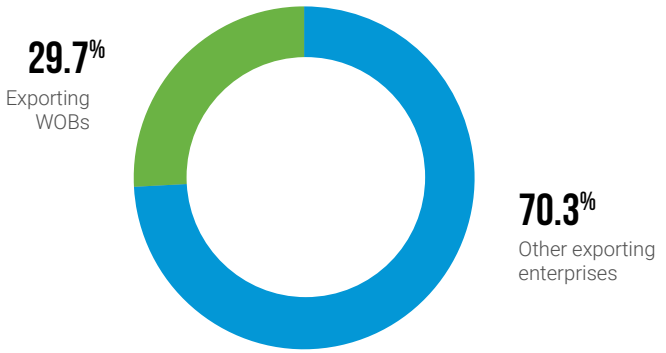
This composition shows that exporting WOBs using ProChile services participate in important sectors of Chile's export base, particularly agri-food, fisheries, aquaculture, and natural resource-based manufacturing. At the same time, it reveals opportunities to pursue greater productive diversification, increase value added and participate in sectors with greater technological sophistication or knowledge intensity. Within this framework, Mujer Exporta (Women Export Programme) is a cross-cutting ProChile instrument aimed at increasing the participation of women-owned businesses in the export process by promoting and facilitating their development and internationalisation (ProChile, 2025b).

Their contribution to employment is also significant. WOBs employed an average of 69 women, compared with an average of 35 women in men-led exporting enterprises.

These data show that exporting WOBs not only participate in international markets but also contribute to formal job creation for women (SUBREI & ProChile, 2025).

2. Start-Up Chile structures its programmes into different tracks according to the stage of development—Build, Ignite and Growth—and incorporates specific measures to strengthen women's participation. These include a target that at least 50 per cent of the projects selected for Build be led by women, a higher co-financing rate for women-led projects under Ignite, and access to the Female Founder Factor for selected women leaders. In addition, Start-Up Chile's 2024 portfolio study shows that women-led start-ups accounted for a minority share of the private capital raised, but a significant share of the portfolio's global sales, revealing persistent disparities in access to investment and in the ability to scale up (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, Corfo, & Start-Up Chile, 2025; Start-Up Chile, 2025).

Figure 11.
Share of WOBs among Chilean Exporting Enterprises, 2024.



Fuente: elaboración propia con base en SUBREI y ProChile, 2025.

Nevertheless, challenges remain in relation to diversification and sustained export activity. According to the same source, 54 per cent of WOBs exported to a single destination, 47 per cent shipped only one product or provided only one service abroad, and the value of their exports was concentrated among a relatively small proportion of all exporting enterprises. In light of these findings, the available evidence points to the need to strengthen the conditions required to sustain the internationalisation of WOBs. These include access to market intelligence, concrete market opportunities, networks, export readiness, and the capacity to diversify products, services, and destinations, in line with the trade promotion and internationalisation objectives pursued by ProChile and SUBREI (SUBREI & ProChile, 2025).

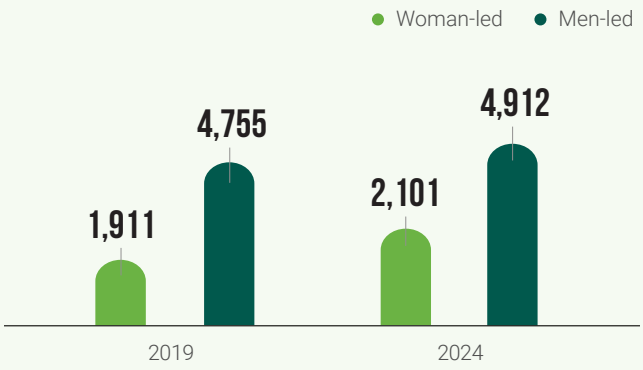
2.7 Gender-Responsive Public Procurement: Lessons for Expanding Market Access

Market access is a cross-cutting dimension of the growth of women-owned businesses. Public procurement provides valuable experience in this area, as it demonstrates how the State's purchasing power can be used to expand economic opportunities, increase the visibility of WOBs, and promote more inclusive procurement processes. Although the public procurement market does not encompass all the growth opportunities available to WOBs, this experience offers valuable lessons for both public institutions and private companies interested in diversifying their supply chains.

Mercado Público, la plataforma nacional a través de la cual los organismos del Estado publican oportunidades, gestionan procesos de contratación y se vinculan con proveedores Mercado Público is the national platform through which government bodies publish procurement opportunities, manage procurement processes and engage with suppliers. The scale of this market makes it a strategic channel: in 2025, US$21.953 billion was transacted through Mercado Público, equivalent to 6.2 per cent of GDP, with the participation of more than 100,000 suppliers and the issuance of approximately 1.86 million purchase orders (ChileCompra, 2026).

The incorporation of a gender perspective into this system has been supported by various institutional instruments. These include the Directiva N° 20 sobre compras públicas con perspectiva de género (Directive No. 20 on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement), the *Sello Empresa Mujer* (Women-Owned Business Seal), the *Guía de Buenas Prácticas para Incorporar la Perspectiva* de Practice Guide for

Figure 12.
Exporting Enterprises by the Sex of Their Leader, 2019 and 2024.



Fuente: elaboración propia con base en SUBREI y ProChile, 2025.

Incorporating a Gender Perspective into Public Procurement), *Compra Ágil* (Streamlined Procurement) and the *Índice de Participación con Perspectiva de Género* (Gender-Responsive Participation Index, IPPG). These mechanisms perform complementary functions: they guide procuring entities, enable women-owned businesses to be identified, increase their visibility within the system, and generate information to monitor their participation in public procurement.

The Women-Owned Business Seal has been particularly important for identifying and monitoring WOBs on Mercado Público. Its automation significantly expanded the instrument's coverage, increasing the number of enterprises holding the Seal from approximately 9,000 to more than 33,000. This improvement reduced administrative barriers and strengthened the system's capacity to track the participation of women-owned businesses in public procurement (UN Women–ChileCompra, 2026).

The results show significant progress, but also disparities in scale. In 2025, enterprises holding the Women-Owned Business Seal represented 29.4 per cent of suppliers on Mercado Público and accounted for 26.1 per cent of purchase orders, but only 18.2 per cent of the total value transacted. Furthermore, the average value per purchase order was US$8,222 for enterprises holding the Seal, compared with US$12,995 for enterprises without it. These data suggest that the challenge is not only to increase the participation of WOBs in the system, but also to improve the conditions that enable them to access higher-value and more frequent opportunities with greater growth potential (UN Women–ChileCompra, 2026).

The experience of public procurement offers valuable lessons for other markets. Identifying WOBs, providing guidance to procurement teams, reviewing participation requirements, generating disaggregated information, and monitoring results are practices that can also be adapted to private-sector procurement processes. From this perspective, advancing gender-responsive procurement does not mean lowering technical standards, but rather designing clearer, more proportionate, and more accessible processes that broaden competition and create more opportunities for women-owned businesses.

Box 2.
Mercado Público as an Institutional Channel for WOBs

Dimension	Strategic interpretation
Scale of the public procurement market	In 2025, US$21.953 billion was transacted through Mercado Público, equivalent to 6.2 per cent of GDP, with more than 100,000 suppliers and approximately 1.86 million purchase orders.
Identification of WOBs	The Women-Owned Business Seal enabled more than 33,000 women-owned businesses to be identified, increasing the visibility and traceability of their participation in the system.
Participation of WOBs	Enterprises holding the Women-Owned Business Seal represented 29.4 per cent of suppliers and accounted for 26.1 per cent of purchase orders.
Gap in contract value awarded	Although they participated actively, these enterprises accounted for 18.2 per cent of the total value transacted and had a lower average order value: US$8,222, compared with US$12,995 for enterprises without the Seal.
Available instruments	Directive No. 20, the Women-Owned Business Seal, the Good Practice Guide, Streamlined Procurement and the Gender-Responsive Participation Index

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ChileCompra (2025).

3. Barriers Limiting the Growth of WOBs

The barriers faced by women-owned businesses do not operate in isolation. Rather, they tend to accumulate throughout the business lifecycle and affect both the conditions under which women enter entrepreneurship and their subsequent prospects for formalisation, consolidation, access to finance, innovation, access to networks, participation in value chains and internationalisation. International evidence shows that women entrepreneurs face mutually reinforcing financial and non-financial constraints, including more limited access to capital, fewer available guarantees, more restricted business networks, sectoral segregation, unequal burdens of domestic and care work, and institutional and cultural biases in markets (OECD/GWEP, 2025; Ubfal, 2024; UN Women, 2024).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, these barriers are particularly significant because of the combination of high informality, the concentration of women in smaller-scale economic units, limited access to productive finance and the unequal distribution of unpaid work. Regional studies on financing for women-led micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) show that the challenges extend beyond increasing access to banking services. They also require improvements in the quality, relevance, and timeliness of financial products, as well as their coordination with training, advisory support, networks, and market access mechanisms (López Mayher, Azar, & Andrade, 2022).

From this perspective, six main barriers to the growth of WOBs are identified: finance and working capital; business capabilities, management, and digitalisation; networks, mentoring, and strategic information; care responsibilities and time poverty; gender bias and sectoral segregation; and access to markets and buyers, and entry requirements. This analysis is complemented by qualitative evidence collected by UN Women Chile in 2024 through nine semi-structured interviews with women experts in entrepreneurship, innovation, finance, mentoring, and gender equality, as well as women founders and co-founders with experience in start-ups, technology-based enterprises and traditionally male-dominated industries. Their testimonies illustrate how these barriers manifest themselves in specific business trajectories and how they affect women's prospects of growing their businesses, accessing resources, establishing business credibility in the market and maintaining support networks.

The quotations included in this section are drawn from these qualitative interviews. They have been anonymised and lightly edited for readability without altering their meaning.

3.1 Finance and Working Capital

Access to finance is one of the most persistent constraints on the consolidation and growth of WOBs. Recent literature emphasises that the problem is not limited to holding financial products, but also encompasses access to sufficient amounts, appropriate terms, suitable instruments and timely financing to sustain business growth cycles. The OECD/GWEP (2025) report concludes that women entrepreneurs face greater difficulties in obtaining finance to establish and expand businesses and that, even when they gain access to loans or investment, they often do so on less favourable terms, including higher collateral requirements and constraints associated with bias in lending and investment processes.

The World Bank has documented that interventions aimed at improving women's access to productive capital must take account of the diversity of enterprises and their stages of development. The experimental evidence reviewed by Tefera, Cassidy and Weis (2025) shows that financial instruments can have different effects depending on the type of enterprise, the context and the intensity of the support provided. Financing mechanisms for WOBs must therefore move beyond grants or initial microcredit towards instruments that address needs relating to working capital,

investment, certifications, logistics, standards compliance, staff recruitment, and internationalisation.

In Chile, this interpretation is consistent with recent evidence from the Chilean Financial Market Commission (CMF). The Informe de Género en el *Sistema Financiero 2026* (2026 Gender Report on the Financial System) shows that disparities in access to financial products have narrowed considerably: the population coverage gap in cash management has virtually closed, and no significant gender disparities are observed in access to credit. However, significant differences persist in the scale at which financial products are used. In the banking sector, for example, there are 103 women borrowers for every 100 men borrowers, but women's average debt amounts to only 62 per cent of men's average debt, representing a gap of 38 percentage points. This difference is particularly persistent in the commercial loan portfolio, where access disparities remain close to those observed in 2010. Women also have lower levels of debt, financial burden, and leverage than men, together with better repayment performance indicators. These findings show that financial inclusion should be assessed not only in terms of coverage or product ownership, but also in terms of the scale, quality, and suitability of the financing available to women and women-owned businesses (Chilean Financial Market Commission, 2026).

The qualitative evidence collected by UN Women Chile in 2024 provides deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying these disparities. Interviewees indicated that access to credit and growth capital is constrained not only by the financing available, but also by women's lower levels of asset ownership, difficulties in providing collateral, the lack of suitable instruments for different stages of business development and more limited access to networks that provide information, build trust and establish credibility with financial institutions or investors.

This testimony reinforces the conclusion that financing disparities cannot be understood solely as a matter of access to banking services or formal access to financial products. They also reflect structural inequalities in asset ownership, the availability of collateral and bargaining power.

Strengthening the growth of WOBs therefore requires a transition from basic financial inclusion towards a gender-responsive productive finance strategy. This entails developing guarantee schemes, factoring, purchase-order financing, instruments tailored to each stage of business development, financing for certifications and logistics, suitable fintech solutions, and financial advisory support to reduce information barriers and strengthen the bargaining power of women-owned businesses.

> *"Assets in Latin America are concentrated in men's hands, and Chile is no exception. When women entrepreneurs are asked to provide collateral, they are unable to do so because they do not hold assets in their own names. Their access to finance is also very limited. Even once they gain access to banking services, the proportion of financing available to women is lower than that available to men.".*
>
> **— Expert in entrepreneurship, innovation and public–private equity issues, 2024 interview.**

THERE ARE 103 WOMEN BORROWERS FOR EVERY 100 MEN BORROWERS, BUT WOMEN'S AVERAGE DEBT AMOUNTS TO ONLY 62 PER CENT OF MEN'S AVERAGE DEBT, REPRESENTING A GAP OF 38 PERCENTAGE POINTS.

3.2 Business Capabilities, Management and Digitalisation

Business capabilities directly affect the ability to consolidate and scale up a business. International evidence shows that many women-owned businesses face gaps in management skills, business experience, planning, negotiation, access to strategic information and the use of digital tools. The World

Bank finds that the most effective interventions for supporting women-led businesses extend beyond the transfer of general knowledge and combine applied business training, advisory support, mentoring, socio-emotional skills development and access to networks or markets (Ubfal, 2024).

Regional evidence also suggests that training must be connected to specific growth needs. The evaluation of the WE3A project, implemented in six countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, shows that digital training models can generate benefits when they incorporate flexibility, local relevance, mentoring and tailored support according to the enterprise's stage of maturity. The study highlights that digital tools can expand reach and continuity but must take account of gaps in connectivity and digital skills, as well as the time constraints faced by women entrepreneurs (Memanova, Proaño, & Sandoval, 2025).

The qualitative evidence collected by UN Women Chile in 2024 reinforces this interpretation. Interviewees emphasised that capacity development must go beyond motivation or general training and focus on addressing specific business management challenges: understanding costs, setting prices, identifying customers, structuring sales processes, planning strategically, and using digital tools to improve efficiency and market positioning.

> *"Success in sales is not simply about selling; it depends on thoroughly understanding costs, setting appropriate prices and, above all, identifying our customers and determining how to reach them efficiently and effectively.".*
>
> **— Social entrepreneur in a STEM field, 2024 interview.**

This testimony shows that capability gaps are reflected not only in a lack of formal training, but also in unequal access to practical tools for making business decisions, planning for growth, and negotiating on better terms.

From a public policy and public–private action perspective, this suggests that programmes aimed at strengthening WOBs should focus on the applied capabilities needed to sell, negotiate, comply with standards, manage costs, calculate prices, digitalise processes, develop value propositions, manage cash flow, and respond to buyer requirements.

Within this framework, digitalisation should not be understood solely as the use of social media or digital payment methods, but as a productive and commercial capability linked to traceability, customer management, e-commerce, market intelligence, standards compliance and scaling up. Training initiatives should combine technical training, personalised advisory support, mentoring, digital tools, and connections to genuine market opportunities.

3.3 Networks, Mentoring and Strategic Information

Business networks are a critical resource for the growth of women-owned businesses, as they facilitate access to information, finance, buyers, partnerships, mentoring, markets, and innovation opportunities. However, the literature shows that women tend to have smaller, less diversified business networks or networks that are less connected to economic decision-making circles. This can limit their access to role models, strategic information, investors, suppliers, buyers, and opportunities for scaling up. OECD/GWEP (2025) identifies business networks and prior experience as relevant factors in explaining differences between women and men entrepreneurs in access to finance and business growth. The World Bank also highlights that interventions combining training, networks, mentoring and advisory support can improve business outcomes, particularly when they are adapted to the specific constraints faced by women (Ubfal, 2024).

Regional evidence also shows that networks of peers, mentors and ecosystem stakeholders foster collaboration, trust, knowledge exchange, and the practical application of new skills. These networks play a particularly important role in value-chain programmes, as they can translate business training into tangible connections with buyers, financial institutions, lead firms, and other commercial opportunities (Memanova et al., 2025).

BUSINESS NETWORKS ARE A CRITICAL RESOURCE FOR THE GROWTH OF WOMEN-OWNED BUSINESSES, AS THEY FACILITATE ACCESS TO INFORMATION, FINANCE, BUYERS, PARTNERSHIPS, MENTORING, MARKETS, AND INNOVATION OPPORTUNITIES.

Interviewees emphasised that networks provide not only business contacts, but also emotional support, practical information, peer learning, and guidance in addressing common challenges encountered throughout the entrepreneurial process. In this sense, networks serve as a strategic resource for reducing uncertainty, validating business decisions, and expanding growth opportunities.

> *"A network, whether a network of contacts, an emotional support network or a network of other entrepreneurs facing the same challenges, makes all the difference. Networks are indispensable."*
>
> **— STEM entrepreneur and mentoring coordinator, 2024 interview.**

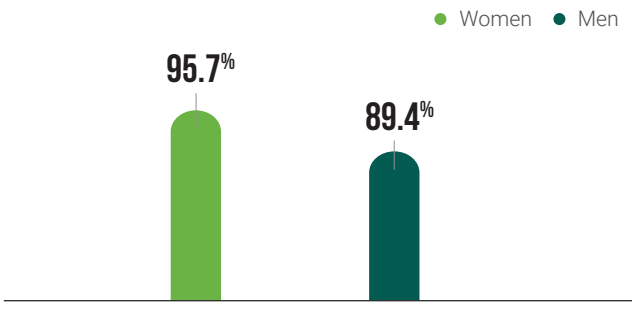
This testimony shows that networks and mentoring should not be treated as ancillary components of support programmes, but as enabling conditions for business growth. To be effective, they must be designed with clear objectives, sectoral relevance, and connections to actual demand. Mentoring should help address specific challenges relating to management, finance, sales, internationalisation, standards compliance, and negotiation. Similarly, networks should connect WOBs with buyers, financial institutions, public agencies, lead firms, business associations, and peers who can expand their opportunities to gain experience, build business credibility, and grow.

3.4 Care Responsibilities and Time Poverty

The unequal distribution of unpaid domestic and care work constitutes a structural barrier to women's economic autonomy and directly affects the trajectories of women-owned businesses. UN Women (2024) identifies time as a central dimension of economic empowerment, alongside access to resources, work, rights, security, and decision-making power. At the regional level, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has identified the unjust social organisation of care as one of the structural challenges of gender inequality, as it limits women's economic participation, reduces their income, restricts their autonomy, and shapes their employment and business trajectories (Vaca Trigo, 2019).

In Chile, this disparity is also observed among microentrepreneurs. The Eighth Microentrepreneurship Survey shows that 95.7 per cent of women microentrepreneurs perform unpaid work, compared with 89.4 per cent of men. Although participation in this type of work is high for both groups, the key difference lies in its intensity and the daily organisation of time. Women microentrepreneurs bear a greater burden of unpaid domestic and care work, which limits their availability to attend training, participate in trade fairs and business matchmaking events, maintain networks, prepare business proposals, travel, apply for business support instruments, respond to buyer requirements or devote strategic time to growing their businesses (Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026). Interviewees indicated

Figure 13.
Microentrepreneurs perform unpaid work, by sex, 2025.



Source: Chilean Ministry of Economy, Development and Tourism, 2026.

TIME POVERTY OPERATES NOT MERELY AS AN INDIVIDUAL CONSTRAINT, BUT AS A STRUCTURAL CONDITION AFFECTING GENUINE OPPORTUNITIES FOR BUSINESS GROWTH.

that care responsibilities not only reduce the time available for entrepreneurship, but also affect investment decisions, the ability to take risks, attendance at in-person activities and continuity in training, mentoring, and business engagement processes.

> *"Having young children is a barrier to entrepreneurship if there is no one to look after them. You cannot invest in your business because you have to spend the money on other things. There is no government support for childcare, no access to nursery care, no allowances or any other kind of assistance. I have to go out and build my business while also caring for my child."*
>
> **— Empresaria y asesora de negocios, entrevista 2024.**

This testimony shows that time poverty operates not merely as an individual constraint, but as a structural condition affecting genuine opportunities for business growth. Incorporating the care dimension into the analysis of WOBs helps avoid an individualised interpretation of these disparities: constraints on growth do not arise solely from management decisions or differences in skills, but also from a social organisation of care that reduces the time, resources and energy available to invest in businesses, build networks, professionalise management, respond to commercial opportunities and sustain scaling-up processes.

3.5 Gender Bias and Business Credibility

Women-owned businesses also face institutional and cultural barriers associated with gender bias, sectoral segregation, and lower levels of recognition in traditionally male-dominated business settings. International literature shows that gender norms can influence decisions to become an entrepreneur, the choice of economic sector, women's perceptions of their own capabilities, and the way in which investors, buyers, financial institutions, and business networks assess women as business owners, suppliers, or business leaders (OECD/GWEP, 2025; UN Women, 2017).

These barriers have tangible economic effects. Women tend to be concentrated in sectors with lower capital intensity, productivity, or export propensity, while facing greater obstacles to entering, remaining in, and growing within high-value or traditionally male-dominated sectors. In this regard, the International Trade Centre (2015) has documented that the participation of women-owned enterprises in international trade is limited by cultural and regulatory barriers, as well as barriers relating to information, finance, and access to networks, thereby restricting their entry into higher-value markets.

The qualitative evidence collected by UN Women Chile in 2024 illustrates how these biases manifest themselves in specific business trajectories. Interviewees with experience in start-ups, technology industries and male-dominated sectors indicated that, in addition to demonstrating the technical and commercial viability of their businesses, they have faced additional scrutiny of their capabilities, leadership and business credibility.

> *"In male-dominated environments, women face additional challenges, from the constant need to prove our abilities to confronting stereotypes and invisible barriers. This is particularly true in STEM fields."*
>
> — **Founder and General Manager of a science and technology laboratory, 2024 interview.**

This testimony shows that disparities in growth are not solely technical or financial. They are also institutional and cultural, as they affect business credibility, access to opportunities, participation in higher-value sectors, confidence in negotiations and the prospect of being recognised as competitive suppliers. Addressing these barriers requires combining business development instruments with measures aimed at changing assessment, selection, mentoring, investment, and procurement practices that reproduce gender bias within business ecosystems.

3.6 Access to Information, Market Opportunities and Entry Requirements

Market access represents a cross-cutting barrier to the growth of WOBs. Literature on gender-responsive procurement shows that women-owned enterprises face obstacles to entering and participating fully in public- and private-sector supply chains. UN Women (2017) notes that women-owned enterprises commonly face barriers relating to access to information, procurement requirements, networks, certifications, finance, scale, and visibility among buyers. Similarly, the International Trade Centre (2015) highlights that women-owned enterprises participate less in international trade and require policies that reduce barriers relating to information, finance, regulatory compliance, and access to business networks.

Market access depends on more than having a product or service to offer. It requires information about opportunities, an understanding of procurement requirements, formalisation, documentation, traceability, the capacity to meet standards, logistics, financing to fulfil purchase orders, and networks that help build trust with buyers. These conditions are particularly important when WOBs seek to enter private-sector value chains, corporate procurement, institutional markets, or export markets.

Within this framework, business matchmaking platforms, B2B meetings, digital portfolios, acceleration programmes, and technical assistance for purchasing companies can be valuable instruments, provided that they are connected to actual demand and include monitoring mechanisms. The value of these interventions should be measured not only by the number of enterprises trained or registered, but also by commercial and business outcomes: meaningful contacts, applications submitted for opportunities, contracts, sales, repeat business, financing obtained, standards compliance, employment created and the sustainability of business relationships.

4. Conclusions

The evidence shows that women-owned businesses play a strategic role in advancing economic autonomy, job creation, innovation, internationalisation, and inclusive productive development in Chile. However, their growth trajectories continue to be shaped by structural disparities that emerge from the outset of economic activity and deepen during the stages of formalisation, consolidation, scaling up and access to higher-value markets.

The assessment supports the conclusion that the challenge does not lie in poorer business performance among women, but in the unequal conditions under which they start, sustain, and grow their enterprises. Women's lower representation in larger enterprises, capital-intensive sectors, sustained export activity, complex value chains, and economic decision-making positions results from a combination of barriers relating to finance, working capital, networks, strategic information, care responsibilities, gender bias, and market entry requirements.

From this perspective, strengthening WOBs should be understood not merely as an entrepreneurship agenda, but as a gender equality and productive development strategy. WOBs contribute to increasing income, expanding formal employment for women, diversifying the business landscape, and facilitating entry into domestic and international markets. For this potential to translate into sustainable growth, fragmented interventions must give way to a comprehensive strategy combining capacity development, finance, networks, care support, digitalisation, and effective links to public, private, and international demand.

Chile has made significant progress on which to build, including improved measurement frameworks, gender-responsive public procurement instruments, export promotion programmes, business development initiatives and public–private coordination mechanisms. The challenge ahead is to consolidate this progress, expand its scale and direct the instruments towards concrete outcomes: greater formalisation, more productive finance, more sales, more contracts, more exports, more employment, and greater representation of women in strategic sectors and high-value markets.

Promoting the growth of women-owned businesses is a prerequisite for advancing towards a more inclusive, sustainable, and dynamic economy. A robust agenda for WOBs must simultaneously address enterprises' capabilities and the institutional, financial, commercial, and social conditions that shape their growth opportunities.

5. Recommendations

- **Consolidate a comprehensive agenda for the growth of women-owned businesses** Develop a coordinated business development strategy that promotes equal opportunities for WOBs and supports them throughout their trajectory: start-up, formalisation, consolidation, scaling up and internationalisation. This agenda must recognise the diversity of WOBs and tailor support according to enterprise size, sector, geographic location, level of formalisation, stage of development and growth potential.
- **Strengthen WOBs' access to productive finance and growth capital.** Expand financial instruments suited to the actual needs of women-owned businesses, including working capital, guarantee schemes, purchase-order financing, investment in technology, certifications, logistics, recruitment, and internationalisation. Financial inclusion must move beyond coverage to ensure that the financing available is sufficient, timely and of appropriate quality.
- **Link business capabilities to concrete market opportunities.** Direct training, technical assistance and mentoring towards capabilities directly associated with growth: financial management, cost and price calculation, negotiation, digitalisation, standards compliance, export readiness, and the ability to respond to buyer requirements. The success of these programmes should be measured by commercial outcomes, sales, contracts, repeat business and the sustainability of market relationships.
- **Expand the participation of WOBs in public procurement, private-sector value chains, and international markets.** Promote mechanisms for identifying women-owned businesses, increasing their visibility, and connecting them with buyers in the public and private sectors, commercial platforms, and export opportunities. Experience from public procurement shows that identifying WOBs, reviewing requirements, generating disaggregated information, and monitoring results can open up markets and inform good practices in the private sector.
- **Incorporate care and time-use considerations into productive development policies**. Recognise that the unequal distribution of domestic and care work limits women's ability to participate in training, networks, trade fairs, business matchmaking events, travel, application processes, and scaling-up strategies. Policies targeting WOBs should incorporate flexible designs and delivery formats compatible with care responsibilities and should be coordinated with a broader agenda on social co-responsibility for care and care systems.
- **Strengthen networks, mentoring and forums that enhance women's business credibility.** Promote strategic networks connecting WOBs with buyers, financial institutions, investors, public agencies, business associations, fellow women entrepreneurs, and stakeholders in the innovation ecosystem. These networks should help reduce information asymmetries, build business trust, facilitate access to opportunities, and increase women's presence in high-value sectors, value chains, and economic decision-making arenas.
- **Improve the measurement, traceability, and strategic use of data on WOBs.** Strengthen information systems capable of profiling women-owned businesses by size, sector, geographic location, formalisation status, sales, employment, finance, exports, participation in public procurement and continued market participation. Given that the available sources use different definitions, it is essential to specify the units of analysis, avoid automatically treating non-equivalent categories as comparable, and work towards interoperable data that enable evidence-based policies to be designed, monitored, and evaluated.
- **Strengthen coordination among ecosystem stakeholders to support the growth of WOBs.** Promote collaboration among public institutions, purchasing companies, financial institutions, business development agencies, international organisations, business associations and organisations of women entrepreneurs in order to align initiatives, share lessons learned and pursue complementary actions that improve access to resources and markets.

Final Box.

UN WOMEN CHILE'S JOURNEY IN ADVANCING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

UN Women Chile's work on women's economic empowerment has developed progressively, bringing together training, evidence generation, digital inclusion, capacity development, access to networks, labour market integration, entrepreneurship, market participation and the transformation of economic norms and institutions. This journey has enabled UN Women Chile to work with women from diverse backgrounds—including rural, Indigenous, and migrant women; entrepreneurs; businesswomen; workers; young women; carers; and women undergoing economic transition or reintegration—moving from individual capacity development towards a broader agenda aimed at transforming the conditions that constrain women's economic autonomy.

Initiative	Focus and contribution to economic empowerment
Tu Oportunidad (Your Opportunity) – Second Chance Education	A global UN Women initiative implemented in Chile with support from the BHP Foundation. It aimed to expand educational, digital, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for women facing barriers to completing their education, accessing employment, generating income, or strengthening their livelihoods. In Chile, it combined flexible learning, digital literacy and digital citizenship, gender-transformative activities, life skills development, tutoring, mentoring, and engagement with stakeholders in the employment and entrepreneurship ecosystem. The initiative reflected the diversity of participants' economic trajectories: 78 per cent chose the entrepreneurship pathway, equivalent to 4,487 of the 5,784 women participating; among them, 21.4 per cent identified as migrants, 51 per cent were heads of household, 18 per cent lived in rural areas and 86 per cent had children. The initiative strengthened capabilities that enable economic autonomy, particularly in relation to digital inclusion, advisory support, networks, entrepreneurship, and income generation.
MPTF Mujeres Emplea (Women's Employment)	A project responding to the socioeconomic effects of the pandemic, implemented between January 2021 and June 2022 by the United Nations system in Chile through the coordinated efforts of UN Women, ILO, ECLAC and FAO, together with national public institutions, local governments, private-sector stakeholders, and civil society organisations. It aimed to increase women's labour market participation and promote access to community-level care services by bringing together employability, entrepreneurship, training, job placement services, care, and co-responsibility. Among its main results, the MujeresEmplea.org platform connected women with more than 100 institutions and services and recorded 26,604 registered women users and 67,269 visits between April 2021 and June 2022. In addition, employment and entrepreneurship fairs offered 24,784 job vacancies and attracted the participation of 17,362 women; digital skills and digital literacy training programmes were implemented; and mentoring, job placement and community-based care pilot programmes were promoted in Renca, Padre Las Casas and San Pedro de Atacama.
Programa Originarias (Originarias Programme)	An initiative aimed at the economic and social empowerment of Indigenous women that recognises their knowledge, productive trajectories, connections to their territories and distinct forms of economic organisation. It has helped broaden the understanding of economic empowerment beyond individual access to income by incorporating dimensions such as identity, territory, collective organisation, sustainability, community networks, and access to markets under culturally appropriate conditions. To date, the programme has contributed to the economic empowerment of more than 1,500 Indigenous women from the Aymara, Chango, Colla, Diaguita, Lickanantay, Mapuche, Quechua and Rapa Nui Peoples across several regions of the country. Its results include support for more than 1,000 individual businesses and 20 organisations or collective enterprises in the Tarapacá Region; capacity development for more than 200 Indigenous women through the Escuelas de Negocios para el Buen Vivir (Business Schools for Good Living); and the mobilisation of USD 200,000 to strengthen businesses run by Indigenous women.

Initiative	Focus and contribution to economic empowerment
Comunidades Conectadas (Connected Communities)	An initiative linked to the Joint SDG Fund that aims to reduce digital and territorial disparities in rural areas of the Ñuble and La Araucanía Regions. Through UN Women's involvement, the project contributes to the economic empowerment of rural and Indigenous women by strengthening digital capabilities and leadership, improving market access, promoting the use of digital social protection services, and developing territorial networks. The components involving UN Women are expected to reach 1,950 women, of whom 850 will participate in economic autonomy initiatives and 1,100 in activities providing access to digital social protection services. To date, more than 530 rural women, girls and young women have participated in training, awareness-raising and capacity development activities delivered through the project.
Gender-Responsive Procurement (GRP) and Market Access	UN Women Chile's most recent agenda has progressed towards transforming markets and institutions through initiatives relating to gender-responsive procurement, inclusive value chains, finance, internationalisation, and business matchmaking platforms. This area of work seeks to strengthen not only the capabilities of women-owned businesses, but also the institutional and commercial conditions that enable them to expand their participation in public, private, and international markets. In Chile, this has included technical assistance and evidence generation in collaboration with ChileCompra; the development of practical tools for procuring entities and women suppliers; analysis of the participation of enterprises holding the Women-Owned Business Seal on Mercado Público; and coordination with Corfo and ProChile to strengthen business capabilities, promote business matchmaking events, develop knowledge products and link the supply of WOBs to public- and private-sector demand.

UN Women Chile's initiatives demonstrate an institutional journey that connects capacity development, care, digital inclusion, territorial and intercultural approaches, networks, employability, entrepreneurship, and market access.

From this perspective, this policy brief forms part of an area of work aimed at generating evidence, highlighting disparities, and proposing recommendations to strengthen the growth trajectories of women-owned businesses in Chile.

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Annex 1. Scope and Sources of the Assessment

The assessment of women-owned businesses in Chile draws on complementary sources that provide insights into different stages of the business lifecycle. WOBs do not constitute a homogeneous group: they include microenterprises, formal enterprises, suppliers, exporters, start-ups, and productive units with varying levels of formalisation, scale, access to finance and market access.

As no single source provides an integrated view of this entire trajectory, the document combines information from national surveys, administrative records, institutional reports, specialised studies, and qualitative evidence collected by UN Women Chile. Each source provides insights into a specific dimension: participation in microentrepreneurship, formalisation, enterprise size, access to finance, contribution to employment, internationalisation, and participation in institutional markets.

Table A1.
Sources Used, Units of Analysis and Scope of the Assessment of WOBs in Chile

Source	Unit of analysis / definition used	Scope of the assessment
EME	Microentrepreneurs, disaggregated by sex.	Provides insights into smaller-scale entrepreneurship, informality, motivations, care responsibilities, and initial financing. It does not directly measure formal women-owned businesses.
ELE-7	Formal enterprises according to the sex of the highest-ranking executive.	Enables analysis of women's leadership in formal enterprises by size, sector, productivity, employment, and access to finance.
Mercado Público / ChileCompra	Enterprises or individual suppliers holding the Women-Owned Business Seal.	Enables the participation of WOBs in public procurement to be identified, including purchase orders, transaction values, and average order value.
SUBREI / ProChile	Women-led exporting enterprises.	Provides insights into international market integration, sales, export-related employment and the diversification of export destinations and products.
GEM Chile	Individuals involved in entrepreneurial activity and enterprises classified by stage of the entrepreneurial process.	Complements the analysis with information on motivations, perceptions of the ecosystem, early-stage entrepreneurship, and established enterprises.
Start-Up Chile	Women-led start-ups within the portfolio or programmes of the dynamic entrepreneurship ecosystem.	Illustrates disparities in innovation, scaling up, investment networks and private capital, without representing the nationwide population of WOBs.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on public information.


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