

PRESS RELEASE

USAID AND IMPACT HUB PARTNER TO EMPOWER WOMEN TO PLAY A GREATER ROLE IN SERBIA'S ECONOMY

Belgrade, June 20, 2024 - Today, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Impact Hub launched the four-year 'She Knows' Economic Empowerment of Women project, that works to economically empower women - in particular young women and women in NEETs, starting from Jablanica and Pčinja districts.

Research conducted by the SeConS Development Initiative, show that unemployment rates among women (aged 15 and older) in the Jablanica and Pčinja districts were high. Data from 2022 showed that 29.6% of women in the Jablanica district and 35.3% in the Pčinja district were unemployed, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. In the total number of long-term unemployed registered by the National Employment Service in the Jablanica district, about 53% are women, and in Pčinja district, women make up about 58% of long-term unemployed.

"For the next four years, USAID will fund this project to empower women to play a greater role in Serbia's economic development – particularly in locations outside of Serbia's biggest cities. We believe that women in Serbia have so much potential to contribute more to the economy. But this potential can only be fully realized when barriers that prevent many women from entering and staying in the workforce are removed," said Brooke Isham, USAID Serbia Mission Director.

"There is no doubt that the Law on Gender Equality significantly improved the national legal framework and harmonized it with EU's acquis, especially in the field of labor, employment, and self-employment, which created normative conditions for the equal treatment of female entrepreneurs in our society and increased the employability of women. On the other hand, according to data by the Agency for Business Registers (APR) in 2023, of the total number of registered companies, 74.5 percent of company representatives were men and only 25.5 percent were women. Not in any of the registers maintained by the APR are there more women than men, including the registers of associations, endowments and foundations. This is why it is very important to deal with this topic today", emphasized **Tomislav Žigmanov, Minister for human and minority rights and social dialogue**.

The "She Knows" project will also promote and improve diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in the business community. "A nationwide baseline assessment on employment gender gaps that we carried out, shows that despite companies promoting gender equality, challenges persist, and implementing measures do not guarantee effectiveness. To benefit both women and companies, companies need to continuously monitor gender equality indicators and provide stronger leadership for inclusive and diverse working environments and work-life balance initiatives", said **Stefan Lazarević, President of AmCham**.

In Serbia, more than 51% of the population are women, many of whom have not realized their full economic potential. The statistics are not encouraging, but that must not stop us. While rules and regulations exist, they do not suffice. It is extremely important to change the business and corporate culture towards greater gender equality and create an inclusive work environment, which is a long-term process that must include efforts to break down stereotypes and prejudices", said **Brankica Janković, Commissioner for the protection of equality**.



At the event, participants discussed the employment challenges that women, particularly from rural areas, face in finding jobs, developing careers, starting businesses, and securing funding. “The project will develop and implement a comprehensive pilot employability support package, comprised of upskilling, reskilling, and providing career guidance services for women, in collaboration with the Center for Development of Jablanica and Pčinja districts. The package will also include financial literacy support, entrepreneurial training, and peer to peer mentoring. The pilot support package will then be replicated in two additional regions of Serbia in collaboration with two accredited regional development agencies,” said **Gaia Montelatici, Chief of Party of the "She Knows" project.**

The “She Knows” project is funded by USAID and implemented by the Impact Hub. Other project partners are AmCham Serbia, the Center for Development of Jablanica and Pčinja Districts, and the Erste bank.

For more information about the “She Knows” project or this event, please contact Svetlana Kijevčanin at svetlana.kijevcanin@impacthub.net or 063 632 576. For more information about USAID, please contact Mirjana Vukša-Zavišić at mvuksa@usaid.gov or 065 316 4530.