

# **SOCIAL ENTERPRISE FOR EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN FROM ETHNIC MINORITY: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES**

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**Abstract.** *The empowerment of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important and is one of the Global Sustainable Goals. Gender Equality index 2020 of EU-28 is 67.9, slowly increasing (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021). Although there are some researches related to women empowerment and economic development (Siba, 2019, Hemalatha, 2020, Doss, Malapit, & Comstock, 2020, etc.) or social entrepreneurship (Biggeri, Testi, Bellucci, Doring, & Persson, 2018; Briar-Lawson, Miesing, & Ram, 2020, etc.), combining these two fields and especially adding women from ethnic minority is very rare in scientific researches.*

*The aim of the paper is to highlight challenges and possibilities of social entrepreneurship for empowerment of women from ethnic minority.*

*This paper is based on Erasmus+ project “Empowering Women from Ethnic Minorities Through Social Enterprises” (abbrev. EMwoSE) analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data retrieved in Ireland, United Kingdom, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania and Turkey. International data gives to the paper additional value in picturing the bigger picture of the situation in European countries.*

*However, women starting a social enterprise is itself contributing to women’s empowerment, assuming that social enterprise can be culturally more acceptable for women from ethnic minorities.*

**Keywords:** *empowerment, entrepreneurship, ethnic minority, social enterprise, women.*

## **Introduction**

The empowerment of women and the improvement of their political, social, economic and health status is a highly important and is one of the Global Sustainable Goals (United Nations, 2015). Gender Equality index 2020 of EU-28 is 67.9, slowly increasing (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021).

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### **Social Entrepreneurship as Tool for Empowerment of Women from Ethnic Minority: Theoretical Background**

Empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes (Petesch, Smulovitz, & Walton, 2005). Mandal (2013) distinguishes five types of empowerment: social, educational, economic, political and psychological.

Referring to European Commission (2021), work is the best way to empower women economically. Unfortunately, women still remain underrepresented in the labour market. 67% of women are currently in employment, whereas men's employment stands at 79%. Gender employment gap is 12%. Moreover, the burden of private and care responsibilities, the unpaid work, still rests largely on women's backs.

Women constitute only 34.4 % of the self-employed in the EU and 30 % of start-up entrepreneurs (European Parliament, 2020). Social entrepreneurship has been key in promoting women empowerment. Although there are some researches related to women empowerment and economic development (Siba, 2019, Hemalatha, 2020; Doss, Malapit, & Comstock, 2020, etc.) or social entrepreneurship (Biggeri, Testi, Bellucci, During, & Persson, 2018; Briar-Lawson, Miesing, & Ram, 2020, etc.), combining these two fields and especially adding women from ethnic minority is very rare in scientific researches.

However, women starting a social enterprise is itself contributing to women's empowerment, assuming that social enterprise can be culturally more acceptable for women from ethnic minorities.

Europe hosts the largest number of international migrants (82 million), followed by Northern America (59 million) and Northern Africa and Western Asia (49 million). Moreover, women represented 51.4% of migrants in Europe (United Nations, 2019).

Therefore, women from ethnic minorities is large enough part in Europe, therefore, the scientists should pay more attention to these women issues in order to provide recommendations for practitioners in order to ensure more effective ways to overcome the problems.

Beside this, while focusing on the lack of scientific researches combining fields such as women empowerment and economic development, social

entrepreneurship as well ethnic minorities, the paper is based on empirical research in order to fill these gaps.

### **Methodology of the Research**

As lack of the scientific researches was determined while analysing previous findings, empirical research was made in the framework of two-year Erasmus+ project EMwoSE. The research provides both quantitative and qualitative data by women from ethnic minorities and experts in the field (providing education and training, business consulting, supporting immigrant women refugees, legal support, etc.). The research was aimed to reveal challenges and possibilities of social entrepreneurship for empowerment of women from ethnic minority.

*Research sample.* The survey results from 105 women from ethnic minorities working in social enterprises and survey results from 79 expert agencies or organisations that support women in social enterprises have been collected. The survey results are from seven European countries (Ireland, UK, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, and Turkey).

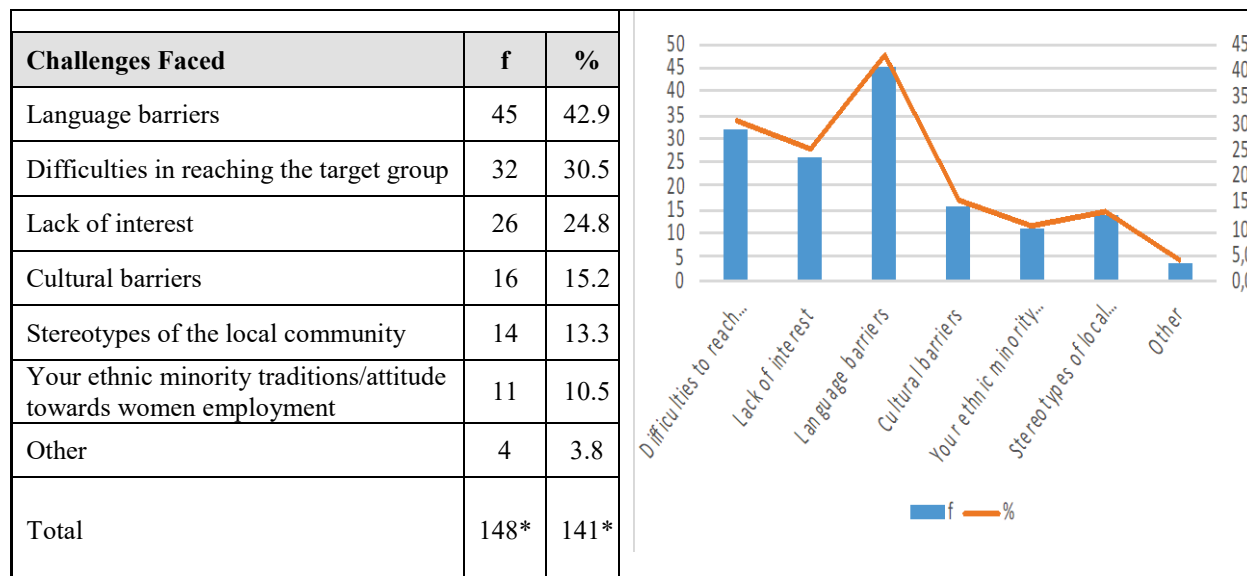
*Research instrument and procedure.* A questionnaire “Empowering Women from Ethnic Minorities Through Social Enterprise” was designed and developed by partners of the project EMwoSE. The questionnaire mainly focused on understanding of women from ethnic minorities, regarding the existing knowledge, practical skills that they needed, challenges and obstacles in order to get engaged to the social enterprise world. Here, in the paper, only part of the received data will be analysed.

*Data analysis.* The quantitative data was analysed through descriptive statistical analysis techniques. The frequencies, percentages, and average/mean scores are calculated and presented in figures.

### **Findings of the Research**

*Revealing challenges.* The participants were asked to describe the challenges women from ethnic minorities face working in their business. The results are presented in Figure 1 below.

According to findings in Figure 1, the biggest part of women has faced language barriers throughout their business life, following by difficulties reaching the target groups, and lack of interest. The number of women facing cultural barriers, stereotypes of the local community, their own ethnic minority traditions/attitude towards women employment.



\*: Participants was able to respond with multiple answers. Hence total frequency (148) is more than the number of participants (105). Thus, the total response is more than 100%.

**Figure 1 The Challenges Women from Ethnic Minorities Face Working in their Business (EMWOSE, 2020)**

**Table 1 To What Extent Women Agree with the Challenges They Face in Their Organization (EMWOSE, 2020)**

Barriers and Obstacles	Disagree Strongly f (%)	Disagree f (%)	Indifferent f (%)	Agree f (%)	Agree Strongly f (%)	Total f (%)
Social (low public awareness, social integration etc.)	10(10.8%)	10(10.8%)	21(22.6%)	31(33.3%)	21(22.6%)	93(100%)
Financial (business plan/model, financial literacy etc.)	7(7.7%)	12(13.2%)	15(16.5%)	35(38.5%)	22(24.2%)	91(100%)
Cultural (market attitudes, beliefs and expectations etc.)	10(11.1%)	9(10%)	20(22.2%)	31(34.4%)	20(22.2%)	90(100%)
Psychological (Lack of self-confidence, lack of self-esteem etc.)	11(12.4%)	16(18%)	11(12.4%)	22(24.7%)	29(32.6%)	89(100%)
Entry into the business sector	11(12.5%)	15(17%)	7(8%)	33(37.5%)	22(25%)	88(100%)
Institutional (lack of personnel with commercial acumen)	11(12.9%)	15(17.6%)	17(20%)	28(32.9%)	14(16.5%)	85(100%)

The individuals who took part in the survey were mostly either agreed or strongly agreed, that the above-mentioned challenges are truly faced by the women from ethnic minorities. Among the listed challenges, social (low public awareness, social integration etc.) 93%, financial (business plan/model, financial literacy etc.) 91%, and cultural (market attitudes, beliefs and expectations etc.) 90% found to be the mostly frequent by the women form ethnic minorities.

The survey has revealed that most of women do not feel any barriers regarding the fact they belong to ethnic minority, but others feel to be discriminated comparing with locals, have language barrier. So, communication problems/language barriers, financial issues, childcare provision, cultural barriers and housing issues are on the top of issues faced by women from ethnic minority (Table 2).

*Table 2 To What Extent Women Agree with the Issues They Face When Working in Business (EMWOSE, 2020)*

Issues and Challenges	Disagree Strongly		Disagree		Indifferent		Agree		Agree Strongly		Total	Avg.
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%		
Communication problems / Language barriers	15	17	11	12.5	9	10.2	25	28.4	28	31.8	88 (%100)	<b>3.45</b>
Financial issues	15	15	10	10.4	17	17.7	25	26	29	30.2	96 (%100)	<b>3.44</b>
Childcare provision	17	17	18	18	15	15	23	23	24	24	97 (%100)	3.19
Cultural barriers	15	15	17	17	13	13	37	37	18	18	100 (%100)	3.16
Housing issues	17	17.5	11	11.3	24	24.7	30	30.9	15	15.5	97 (%100)	3.15

As can be seen from Table 2 above, together with the “Communication Problems / Language Barrier (avg.=3.45)” and the “Financial issues (avg.=3.44)” found to be the more challenging issues for the women from ethnic minorities in SEs. Moreover, the majority of the women agreed that they have faced challenges and barriers in all areas in the given list.

While entering the market, women form ethnic minorities have faced such problems and challenges as lack of financial resources (f=38; 57.6 %), human resources (f=17; 25.8 %), lack of contacts/networking (f=17; 25.8%), etc. (Figure 2).

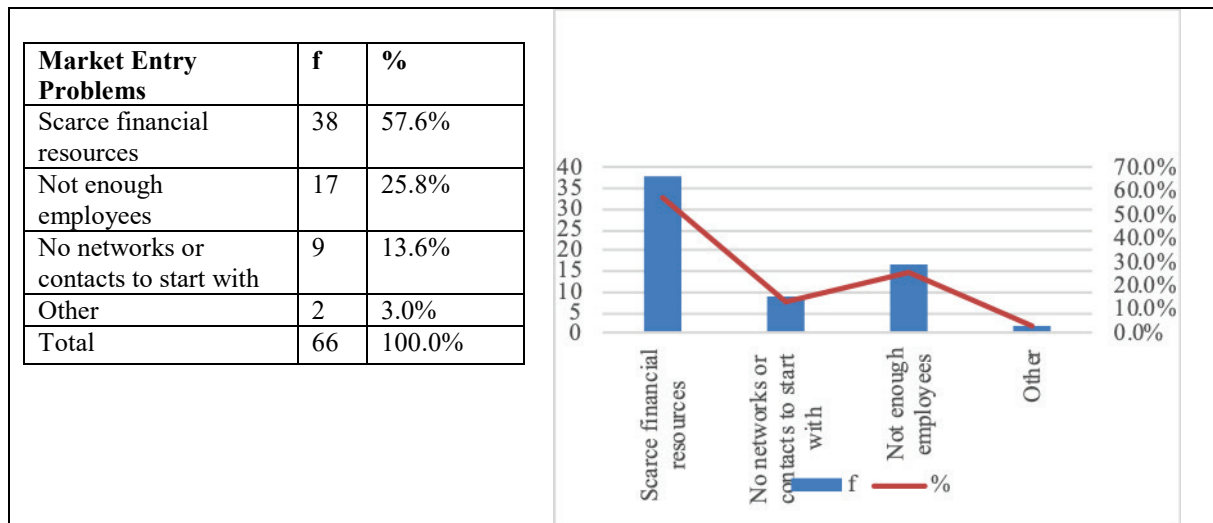
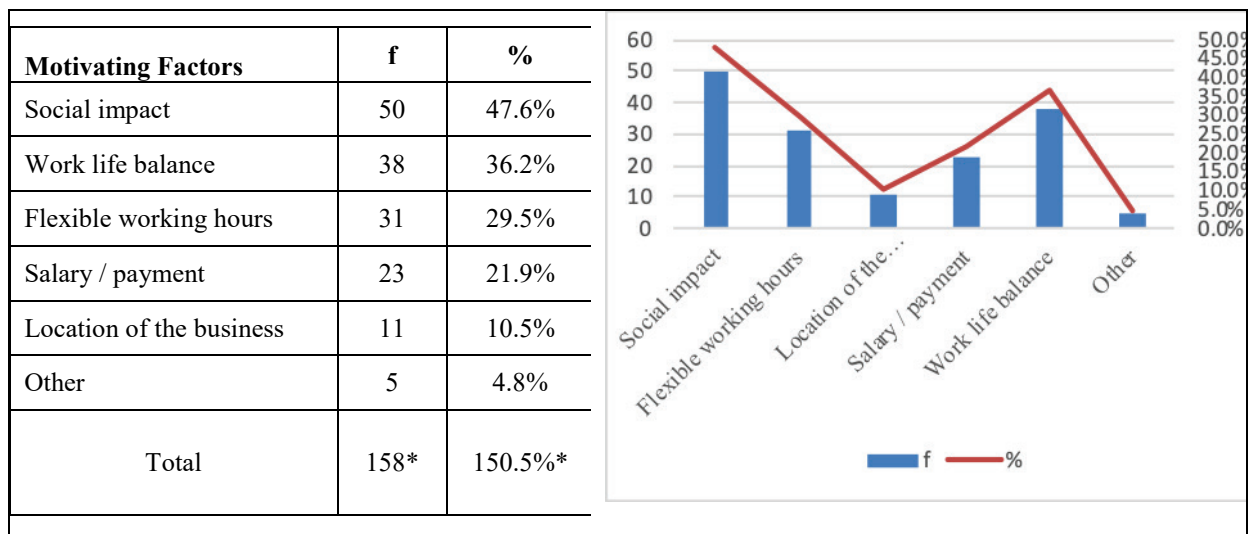


Figure 2 *The Problems and Challenges Faced by Women from Ethnic Minorities When Entering the Market (EMWOSE, 2020)*

However, the survey showed that the biggest challenge for women from ethnic minorities is language of the country they live. And it could influence other challenges as communication problems, problems of socialisation with locals, lack of contacts/networking.



\*: Participants can respond with multiple answers. Hence total frequency (158) is more than the number of participants (105). Thus, the total response is more than 100%.

Figure 3 *The Motivating Factors for You to Start or to Work in Social Business (EMWOSE, 2020)*

*Finding opportunities.* The research has identified motivation as a factor to overcome the challenges and problems. The most frequent factor of motivation to work in social enterprise is social impact by 47.6%. The following factor is

work-life- balance by 36.2%. The next one is flexible working hours by 29.5%, which also can be related to work-life balance. Salary/payment, location of the business, and the others are the least motivational factors (Figure 3).

The participants were also asked whether they have been offered any supports/guidance by intuitions regarding funding their business. 27 (26.7%) of the participants marked “yes”, while, 47 participants (44.8%) marked “no”.

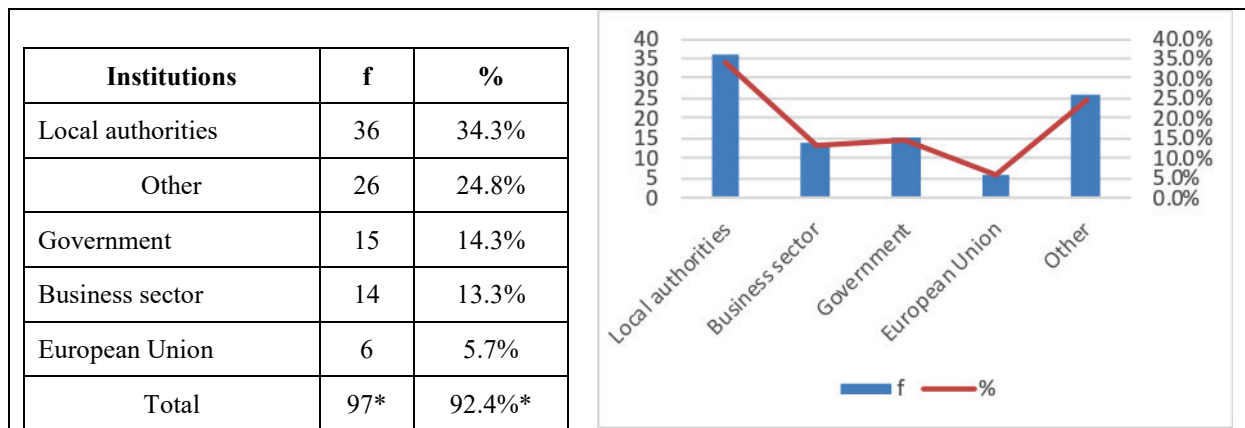


Figure 4 Institutions Have Offered Support to Women from Ethnic Minorities in Founding Business (EMWOSE, 2020)

The respondents mentioned that almost the one-third (1/3) of them (36 participants) answered that local authorities helped them. They also got help from the government (f=15), the business sector (f=14), and European Union (f=6). Some participants (f=26) also received help from other institutions (Figure 4).



Figure 5 Support Has Got by Women from Ethnic Minorities (EMWOSE, 2020)

When looked at the type of the support institutions offered to the women from ethnic minorities: 42.9 % (f=45) financial support, and 39% (f=41) mentoring and coaching; 39% (f=41) training, 23.8% (f=25) have received other type of support. The supports offered are several, but the most offered one is job training/seminars. The next one is by family members. It is followed by banks and other social enterprises.

In the survey, the experts were also asked the advice they would offer to other women who want to return to the workplace/ to start their own business/ to get a job.

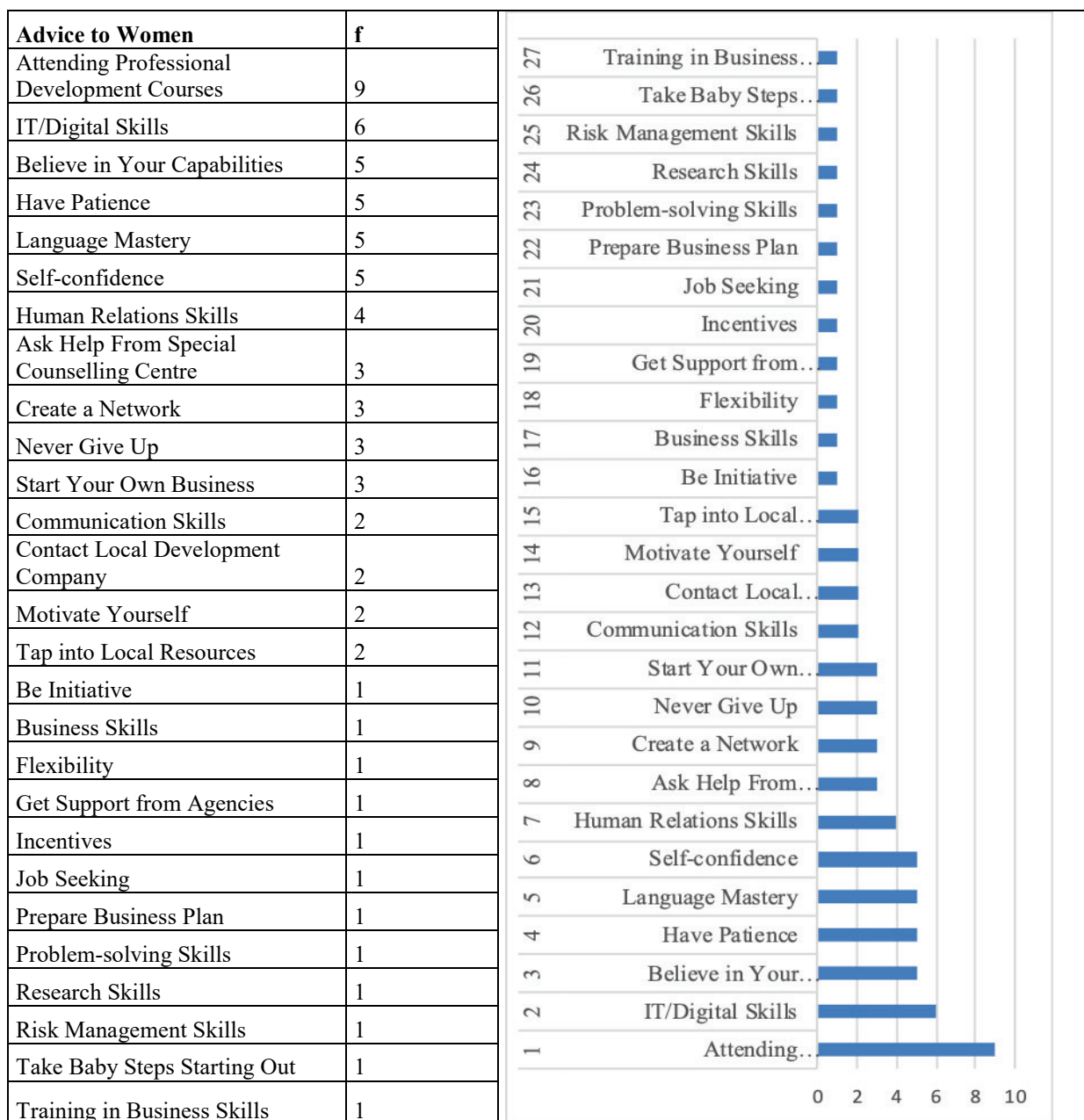


Figure 6 Experts' Advises to Women from Ethnic Minorities Who Want to Return to the Workplace/ to Start Their Own Business/ to Get a Job (EMWOSE, 2020)



The most popular advice given was attending professional development courses. It was also advised to have developed IT/digital skills. Believing in one's capabilities, having patience, mastering language, and self-confidence follows them. The next one is human relations skills which also does not share the same number of advisers with other suggestions (Figure 6).

The research showed that women from ethnic minorities are not alone with challenges of business, they can get support either from local authorities or government. The most frequent answer to overcome issues was provided as educational offer to develop necessary competencies.

## Conclusions

Work is considered the best way to empower women economically. Analysis of scientific literature highlighted that social entrepreneurship has been key in promoting women empowerment.

Survey results of quantitative and qualitative data revealed challenges that women from ethnic minorities have faced and what opportunities they have while working in social enterprise.

Referring to survey results, more than 50% of women from ethnic minorities faced communication problems/language barriers (avg. 3.45) while developing social business. Moreover, it may be assumed that it also influences other challenges as communication problems, problems of socialisation with locals, lack of contacts/networking.

The results of the study revealed that almost 60% of women from ethnic minorities complain about the lack of financial resources while entering the market of social business. After summarising the results of the survey results, lack of human resources (more than 25%) could be also considered as a reason of the lacking financial resources.

After analysis of the obtained results, it was found that women from ethnic minorities are able to overcome these challenges with the help of their motivation (social impact: almost 50%, work life balance: almost 40%, flexible working hours: almost 30%, which also can be related to work-life balance) and support of others: mostly by local authorities (more than 30%). The survey has especially highlighted the need to develop lacking competencies by women from ethnic minorities in order to run social business.

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