

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion in Sustainable Development Practices

PPSE project's systemic response to Gender Equality and Social Inclusion



Authors: Stefan Stojanović and Alida Muhaxhiri

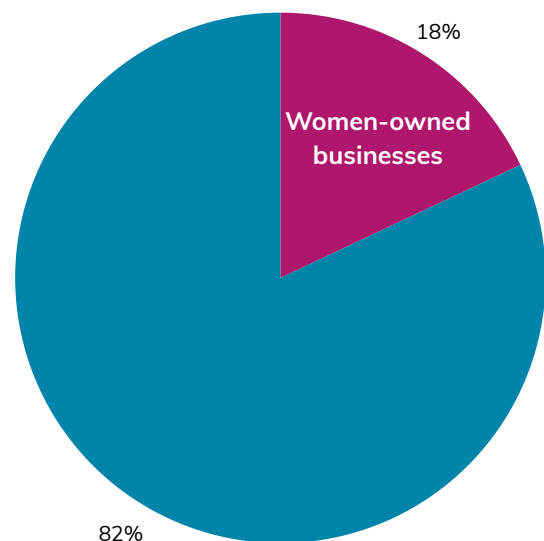
1. Brief Sector Description

Kosovo's confectionery sector, comprising small-scale producers, bakeries, and local distributors, is embedded in a steadily expanding food and beverage industry. Over the past decade, the sector has shown notable momentum, marked by increased domestic demand, modest export growth, and rising numbers of active enterprises. Yet despite this progress, much of the industry remains informal, with women primarily engaged in small-scale, home-based production. Formal businesses are predominantly male-owned, limiting women's access, especially those from non-majority communities, to training, finance, and formal employment opportunities. Only 18% of registered businesses in Kosovo are female-owned, and these tend to be smaller in both size and revenue. Women's participation is largely concentrated in informal activities like food preparation and artisanal goods, where access to markets and institutional support

remains constrained.

These dynamics underscore both the sector's economic potential and the persistent gap in social inclusion, highlighting the need for targeted interventions that unlock opportunities for excluded groups, particularly women from Serbian, Bosniak, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian (R/A/E) communities.

Business ownership in Kosovo



2. The Intervention

In partnership with the LB Group, the Promoting Private Sector Employment (PPSE) program launched a training initiative aimed at empowering women through confectionery entrepreneurship. The initiative began three years ago as a pilot project targeting women from Kosovo. The program later expanded, targeting women from non-majority communities and other marginalized groups.

Over time, the program evolved into a broader, more inclusive strategy, training around 200 women in confectionery production, business skills, and entrepreneurship. Training was hands-on, practical, and tailored to participants' local contexts.



Women were supported not only in gaining technical skills but also in building confidence, developing business plans, and accessing mentorship.

The initiative culminated in the “Sweet Success: Empowering Women, Building Futures in the Confectionery Sector” event. This celebratory gathering featured the stories of three successful women entrepreneurs who launched small confectionery businesses, transforming skills into income and inspiration for their communities.

3. Constraints Addressed

Before the intervention, women from non-majority communities faced multiple barriers:

- ▶ Limited access to training and mentorship in rural and minority-dominated areas.
- ▶ Social and cultural restrictions limiting mobility and economic independence.
- ▶ Low participation in formal employment and entrepreneurship ecosystems.
- ▶ A lack of engagement with Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian women, who face heightened marginalization due to intersecting economic and ethnic barriers.

These constraints reinforced cycles of dependency, isolation, and economic vulnerability among women in these groups.

4. Business Model and Intended Change

Using a **Market Systems Development (MSD)** approach, PPSE and LB Group co-developed a model that paired private-sector training with a socially inclusive mission. LB Group led a confectionery training academy, with PPSE offering strategic support and monitoring. The model focused on:



Workforce development through skills training.



Business incubation, including mentoring and exposure.



Market Access, via event and industry networking



Post-training incentives, including preferential access to products and resources, to support trainees in launching their own ventures.

The intended outcome was multifold: promote women's economic empowerment, create new microenterprises, and foster inclusive growth in the confectionery value chain.

4. Partners and Their Incentives

LB Group, as a key industry player, saw value in cultivating a skilled labor pool and enhancing its corporate reputation as a socially responsible employer and trainer. Beyond social impact, the company recognized long-term business benefits: by supporting new entrepreneurs and microenterprises, LB Group positioned itself as a trusted supplier and potential partner for emerging businesses, expanding its customer base and market reach within underserved communities.

Promoting Private Sector Employment, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), aimed to achieve inclusive market growth by promoting employment and self-employment among marginalized groups.

Participants gained confidence, marketable skills, and, most importantly, a pathway to income generation and social recognition.



5. Outreach Through VORAE

To deepen its inclusive impact, PPSE partnered with **VORAE**, a civil society organization with established community networks among **Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian populations**. Through door-to-door outreach, peer referral, and trust-building, VORAE helped identify and recruit women who would otherwise remain excluded.

This partnership was critical to diversifying participation and ensuring that inclusion extended beyond ethnicity to address structural social exclusion.

6. From Women-Centered to Inclusive

The shift in the intervention's focus, from women in the Albanian community to a wider group including Serbian, Roma, Bosniak, Ashkali, and Egyptian women, was a strategic and adaptive response to early successes. By expanding its scope, the initiative became a **model of intersectional inclusion**, recognizing and addressing multiple, overlapping barriers to participation.

The **Sweet Success** event not only celebrated three new women-led businesses but also:



Facilitated **networking between entrepreneurs, mentors, and policymakers.**



Raised awareness about **social inclusion and economic empowerment.**



Demonstrated the tangible results of targeted **capacity-building.**

This shift also helped build cross-community ties, foster social cohesion, and inspire replication in other sectors and regions.

7. Conclusion

This intervention with LB Group stands as a successful example of how MSD principles can be applied through inclusive business models to transform marginalized women into entrepreneurs and agents of change. Its evolution, from a women-centered project to an inclusive, community-embedded program, underscores the power of adaptive strategies, strong local partnerships, and a shared vision of empowerment.

This case serves as a valuable reference for future programs seeking to combine **economic development with social inclusion**, particularly in fragile, multi-ethnic contexts.