

Mind the entrepreneurial gap - how can we develop women's entrepreneurship in Skåne? -

Integrated Action Plan for the URBACT FEMACT Cities project

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The County
Administrative
Board of Skåne

URBACT



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Interreg

Background

The County Administrative Board of Skåne (Länsstyrelsen Skåne), together with 7 other parties in Europe, have been granted funds for the implementation of the project "FEMACT-Cities", within the framework of the EU program URBACT. The project started in 2023 and will end in December 2025. The project is led by the city of Clermont Auvergne Metropole in France.

The project focuses on gender equality in a wide sense. Its aim is to build the gender and governance capacity of the partners and to incorporate gender equality into the processes of preparing integrated and sustainable development strategies and actions.

For our part in Sweden, we have put a particular focus on female entrepreneurship and access to venture capital as a prerequisite for being able to develop ideas and create innovation.

Sweden is one of the world's most equal countries if we base our assessment on the opportunities and rights of women and men in terms of education and labor market conditions. Sweden is always at the top of both the EU and UN gender equality indices; even though our gender equality development has stalled in recent years compared to many other countries and we now see that economic equality is even receding.

One area of gender equality where Sweden has consistently performed negatively over time is the so-called "entrepreneurship gap"; that is, the difference between the number of women and men running businesses.

Within the EU, one in three entrepreneurs is a woman. In Sweden, it is just over one in four. In the EU, only Slovakia, Malta and Romania have a greater difference in entrepreneurship. The picture is no better when we study women among entrepreneurs with employees, where we rank second to last among the countries in the EU. Another fact is that fewer and fewer companies in Sweden, started by women, are older than 3.5 years.

At the current rate of development (just under +0.25%/year), this means that it will take around 100 years before entrepreneurship in Sweden is gender-equal.

10% of all employed people in Skåne are entrepreneurs. Two-thirds of all newly started companies in Skåne are started by men; where most entrepreneurs in Skåne are men with a Swedish background.

Approximately twice as many men as women own companies. The difference between women and men is greater than the difference between domestically and foreign-born business owners. Gender is thus more decisive than background in terms of entrepreneurship in Skåne.

If women, for various reasons, refrain from starting and running companies, or do not have the conditions to run their companies further, the entrepreneurship gap means that Sweden misses out on innovation development, growth, competitiveness and jobs.

Reducing the differences in entrepreneurship between women and men is crucial to promoting more gender-equal and inclusive economic growth in Sweden and in Skåne.

In the URBACT project FEMACT-Cities we have established a regional reference group consisting of a broad and representative composition of participants from different sectors.

The group includes actors from academia, industry, business incubators, municipalities and business advisors; which ensures a multifaceted and cross-sectoral dialogue around FEMACT-Cities' focus areas.

The aim of the reference group is to gather different perspectives, experiences and expertise to create as comprehensive and relevant a dialogue on women's entrepreneurship as possible.

The group has contributed to our work in the FEMACT project through valuable thoughts, ideas and input into the project's work. The group has actively and generously shared its insights on the challenges and opportunities that exist to strengthen women's entrepreneurship and reduce the entrepreneurship gap.

Permanent members of our Urbact Local Group:

- *Katarina Carlsson*, CEO, Unica Kulturkonsult, Malmö
- *Anne Marbrandt*, CEO, Nyföretagarcentrum Öresund (Centre for New Business), Malmö
- *Josefine Bladh*, head of culture and leisure department, Svedala Municipality
- *Frida Westerberg*, CEO, P&P AB, Landskrona
- *Genti Cifliku*, business advisor, MINC Business Incubator, Malmö

- *Helena Stavreski*, university lecturer, Malmö University
- *Leif Wennerberg*, CEO, Wennerberg Kreativ4you, Hyllinge
- *Andreas Andersson Kurdve*, project administrator, Länsstyrelsen Skåne
- *Marianne Östlihn*, gender expert, Länsstyrelsen Skåne
- *Jörgen Dehlin*, project curator Länsstyrelsen, Skåne

What is the County Administrative Board of Skåne?

The County Administrative Board of Skåne, in the very south of Sweden, is a regional management and development authority working directly under the Swedish government. There is one county board in every one of the 21 regions in Sweden and the organization of the county administrative boards dates its history back to the year 1634 and we have a broad area of responsibility.

We are an important link between the people and the municipal authorities on the one hand and the government, parliament and central authorities on the other.

The work of the County Administrative Board is led by the County Governor, who is commissioned to monitor developments and inform the government of the county's needs.

The Board works on issues concerning the environment, urban development, the labour market, cultural heritage, competence sourcing, the business community, social development, regional growth, gender equality, democracy, human rights, integration and migration, transport, infrastructure, housing and spatial planning.

The County Administrative Board's task is to coordinate these and other areas of public responsibility to achieve efficient solutions for a sustainable society in which economic development, the environment and social welfare are interlinked.

The County Administrative Board also has the task of ensuring that the county's citizens receive the level of service that the Government has decided on, that municipalities and companies comply with laws and regulations and that nationwide objectives adopted by the Government are achieved in Skåne county.

Together with the 33 local selfgoverning municipalities in Skåne, the academia, large and small companies, civil society, national governmental agencies, regional agencies and the inhabitants in our region we work very hard to find ways to boost the innovation and development process in Skåne.

The County Administrative Board in Skåne have offices in Malmö and Kristianstad and we are 450 employees.

County Administrative Board of Skåne and gender equality

The County Administrative Board supports regional actors in gender equality issues. We work to ensure that the entire county becomes equal.

Gender equality is about girls and boys, women and men having the same opportunity to shape society and their own lives. Gender equality is created where decisions are made, resources are distributed and norms arise. Therefore, the gender equality perspective must be included in all daily work in municipalities, authorities, companies, associations and other organizations. Gender equality is a clear political goal in Sweden and public organizations must work towards achieving the gender equality policy goals.

For those who do not identify as either a man or a woman, such a division may be perceived as problematic. Gender should not be of importance to individuals' opportunities to shape society and their own lives. However, in practical work, gender-disaggregated statistics, surveys and gender equality analyses constitute a constitutionally required prerequisite for making inequality visible and conducting effective change work.

The County Administrative Board works from a so-called intersectional perspective. This means that we try to make visible how more power structures and grounds for discrimination than gender (such as gender identity, sexuality, ethnicity, socioeconomic status or disability) are intertwined and can reinforce each other.

The County Administrative Board is tasked, among other things, with:

- ✓ supporting the work on gender mainstreaming in state authorities at regional and local level
- ✓ coordinating, supporting and following up on the regional work on achieving the gender equality policy goals
- ✓ working for the impact of the gender equality policy goals in the county
- ✓ integrating a gender equality perspective into the County Administrative Board's operations

The County Administrative Board is also tasked with developing strategies for the regional work on gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is the strategy used to achieve the gender equality policy goals. This means that operations in the county must have a gender equality perspective in their regular work and in all decision-making, from the development of proposals to implementation and then evaluation.

The strategies for gender mainstreaming must be based on regional conditions. It is also important that the strategies are based on an analysis of how different power structures and grounds for discrimination influence and reinforce each other, a so-called intersectional analysis.

We work based on the government's national gender equality policy. The goal is that women and men should have the same power to shape society and their own lives. To achieve this, we work towards six national targets. The targets are interdependent. They reinforce and require each other, and together they form a whole.

An equal distribution of power and influence

Women and men should have the same right and opportunity to be active citizens of society and shape the conditions for decision-making.

Economic equality

Women and men should have the same opportunities in terms of paid work that provides financial independence for life.

Equal education

Women and men, girls and boys, should have the same opportunities and conditions in terms of education, choice of study and personal development.

An equal distribution of unpaid home and care work

Women and men should take equal responsibility for home work and have the opportunity to give and receive care on equal terms.

Equal health

Women and men, girls and boys, should have the same conditions for good health and be offered care and welfare on equal terms.

Men's violence against women should end

Women and men, girls and boys, should have the same right and opportunity to bodily integrity.

In Skåne, our gender equality work is based on the strategy "An Equal Skåne". The objectives in the strategy are based on the national goals and have been developed in consultation with authorities, municipalities and the idea-driven sector in Skåne based on the conditions in Skåne.

What is Skåne?¹

Population development

The population of Skåne at the end of 2024 was just over 1.42 million inhabitants. During the refugee crisis in 2015 and the following years, Skåne experienced record-high population growth driven by positive net migration from abroad.

This trend slowed down during the corona pandemic and population growth in recent years has been more moderate. The natural population increase in 2023 was the lowest in almost 20 years.

The county consists of 33 independent municipalities, with Malmö being the largest with 362,000 inhabitants and Perstorp the smallest with 7,300 residents.

¹ "Hur har det gått i Skåne?", Region Skåne, April 2025.

Regional economy

The county's ambition is to be a strong and sustainable growth engine with an economy that is globally competitive and that ensures high productivity in the public sector and business.

In recent years, Skåne has had economic growth that is somewhat lower than in the rest of Sweden, regardless of whether it is measured in absolute numbers or relative to the size of the population.

Skåne also has lower productivity than the rest of the country, largely because the loss that occurred in connection with the financial crisis of 2008-2009 has not been recovered.

The median income in Skåne is slightly below the national equivalent. The municipalities with the highest median income are found around the major cities.

Education

Education is a cornerstone of the county's development. By offering a good education for everyone, regardless of living conditions, the individual's freedom and ability to influence their life situation is strengthened.

The level of education in Skåne is high and the region has the third largest proportion of residents aged 25-64 with post-secondary education.

However, the differences within the county are large, and women consistently have a higher level of education than men. The proportion of the population with upper secondary education qualifications in Skåne is at the same level as the national average and the proportion of people with completed upper secondary education differs depending on background.

The lowest proportion with completed upper secondary education are foreign-born people. The transition rate from upper secondary school to university is high, but varies between municipalities.

Labour market

To achieve the vision of Skåne as a region characterised by innovation and strong growth, an efficient labour market is required. Skåne has had lower employment and higher unemployment than the rest of the country for some time, but there is great variation between municipalities.

Skåne has the lowest employment rate of the country's counties. The development follows the country as a whole, but has been a few percentage points lower since the 1990s. The employment rate varies within the region, with the lowest proportion of employed people in the south-western part of Skåne and is lower for women than for men.

The employment rate is defined as the proportion of gainfully employed people of working age, which in the rest of this chapter is defined as 20–64 years. Skåne's employment rate is the lowest in the country at 76.0 percent in 2024, compared with 79.4 percent in the country. The development of Skåne's employment rate follows the national development, but has been slightly lower by 3 percentage points since the mid-1990s.

Skåne's low employment rate has several explanations, and is not primarily due to a decrease in employment. Both the number of employed and the working-age population are increasing, but since the population tends to increase almost as fast or even faster than the labor market has time to scale up, the proportion of employed people increases only slowly. The gap to the national employment rate then remains relatively constant.

Business

Skåne's vision is to be a globally competitive economy where actors develop a strong knowledge region with both breadth and cutting edge. In order to create innovative power and increase a region's competitiveness, the ability to translate research and development together with knowledge and ideas into new products and processes is important.

In the measures of innovative power, the region ranks high compared to the rest of the EU, and Sweden ranks high compared to the rest of the world. Skåne also has high investments in research and development in relation to GDP in a European perspective. Together with the rest of the country, Skåne had a decline in the number of new companies compared to the high levels of 2021.

Skåne's industry structure is similar in many respects to that of the country. However, there are several specializations both at regional and sub-regional level compared to the country and the other metropolitan counties.

Skåne's business sector has a broad industry structure that is in many ways reminiscent of the country as a whole. However, at a detailed industry level, a number of specializations are visible compared to the country and the other metropolitan counties. These include areas such as telecom, food, packaging, computer games, pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical technology and the chemical industry.

However, the proportion of people employed in the manufacturing industry, information and communication, finance and insurance activities, public administration and defence is lower in Skåne compared to the country as a whole.

The business structure differs significantly between different sub-regions in Skåne. For example, in northern Skåne there is more manufacturing industry and in southwestern Skåne more service industries.

The differences between men and women in terms of the industry structure of those employed are large in the region. The largest proportion of men is in the construction sector and the largest proportion of women is in the healthcare sector.

New business activity increased after the pandemic in 2020, but has decreased again since 2022. However, the level remains higher than in the years immediately before the pandemic.

In 2022, a previous upward trend in new business activity was broken. This pattern is visible in all counties except in the very north. In the country as a whole, the decrease was 7 percent.

However, the decreases should be put in context. In 2021, new business activity increased questionably. This is likely due to cyclical effects resulting from the corona pandemic. New business activity usually increases when the economy is weak because the opportunities for employment deteriorate. The level of new business activity in 2022 is comparable to the level for 2019 for Stockholm County, and 2020 for the rest, including Skåne.

In 2022, the most new companies in Skåne were started in the construction and civil engineering industry, albeit at a lower level than in 2021. Unlike the other metropolitan counties, there were two industries in Skåne where new entrepreneurship increased, namely in healthcare and social care and in programming and information services.

There is a skewed gender distribution in terms of new entrepreneurship throughout the country, a pattern that is also visible in Skåne and has been constant since 2010. In 2022, 66 percent of the new companies in the region were started by men and 32 percent by women (data missing for the remaining 2 percent).

Sweden has been named the second most innovative country in the EU in 2023, and was the most innovative in 2022. As a region, Skåne ranks high compared to the rest of the EU.

In the 2023 “European Innovation Scoreboard” (EIS), produced by the European Commission, Sweden was ranked as the second most innovative country in the EU after Denmark, and just ahead of Finland. The Swedish index position has been relatively stable since 2021 and has been high relative to the rest of the EU in all reference years since 2016.

Measuring innovative power is difficult, which is partly due to the lack of standardized data at the regional level. An attempt to measure innovative capacity is made within the EU through “The Regional Innovation Scoreboard” (RIS). The report is published every two years and was last updated in 2023. The survey is based on 21 weighted indicators and provides a result for 240 regions in 22 EU countries as well as Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

In RIS 2023, Skåne is ranked as a region in the group considered to have the highest innovative power in the EU. The group consists of 36 of the total 240 regions. Skåne is in fourteenth place in 2023, slightly down from ninth place in 2021. However, since there is variation in the size of the regions and a lack of data for certain indicators, the survey should be interpreted with some caution. In Skåne's vicinity, the Danish Capital Region is considered to be the most innovative region in the EU since 2019.

Housing and housing construction

A functioning housing market is an important basis for achieving several of the vision goals in Skåne's regional development strategy. It should be possible to live, work and survive throughout Skåne – something that requires a balance between construction and population, as well as a balance between need and demand for different types of housing.

In Skåne, the number of newly built homes has increased sharply since 2015, but in 2022 the trend turned downward. The newly built housing stock consists mainly of residential and rental apartments.

However, there is still a shortage of housing in many municipalities, and housing construction has not kept pace with the sharp increase in population. This has led to an increase in the proportion of overcrowded households in Skåne over time.

Accessibility and infrastructure

Skåne should take advantage of its multi-core nature and use all parts of the region to strengthen the whole. The actors in Skåne should join forces to develop accessibility and connect the region with both digital infrastructure and transport infrastructure.

Development trends show, among other things, that access to broadband via fiber is insufficient and unevenly distributed in Skåne. Capacity is increasingly strained on both roads and railways.

A large number of jobs can be reached by public transport within a reasonable time interval, but there are still differences between different places in the region. It is mainly in Malmö, Lund and Helsingborg that the most jobs are found. The number of trips by public transport increased sharply in the years before the pandemic but fell drastically in 2020. It has since recovered.

Women entrepreneurs for societal development

Entrepreneurship is a driving force behind economic growth and societal progress. When women participate equally in business, they contribute not only to financial prosperity but also to the development of a more just and balanced society. Encouraging and supporting women entrepreneurs is therefore essential for sustainable growth and social advancement.

One of the key reasons why women in business are vital to societal development is economic empowerment. Women-owned businesses create jobs, stimulate innovation, and contribute to GDP growth. This creates a multiplier effect that strengthens the foundation of society.

Furthermore, women entrepreneurs bring diverse perspectives and leadership styles to the business world. Their inclusion fosters creativity and innovation, leading to more comprehensive solutions to global challenges. Research indicates that gender-diverse teams perform better, as they incorporate different viewpoints, experiences, and problem-solving approaches.

A society that embraces women's contributions in entrepreneurship benefits from a richer and more dynamic economic landscape.

Another significant factor is social equality. A fair and just society requires equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender. When women are empowered to start and grow businesses, they challenge traditional gender norms and pave the way for future generations. Representation matters, and having successful female entrepreneurs serves as an inspiration for young girls, showing them that they too can achieve leadership roles in business and beyond.

Government policies and corporate initiatives play a crucial role in fostering female entrepreneurship. Providing access to funding, mentorship, and networking opportunities helps women overcome the barriers they often face in business. Societal attitudes must also evolve to support a culture where women's entrepreneurial ambitions are encouraged rather than restricted.

In conclusion, the active participation of women in entrepreneurship is not just a matter of gender equality but a crucial component of societal development. By fostering an environment where women can thrive as business leaders, we unlock economic potential, drive innovation, and build a more inclusive and prosperous world for everyone.

Why have we chosen to focus on women's entrepreneurship?

Increasing the proportion of female entrepreneurs in Skåne and improving their access to venture capital is of great importance from a gender perspective. Despite Sweden's reputation as a gender-equal country, there are still significant gender gaps in entrepreneurship and access to financing.

In 2023, 3,653 companies were started by women and 7,447 by men in Skåne. In 2022, there were 8,753 female entrepreneurs compared to 25,437 male entrepreneurs in the county. The proportion of female entrepreneurs varied between municipalities, with the lowest proportion in Åstorp municipality (25.7%) and the highest in Lund municipality (34.9%).²

² Statistics Sweden (SCB).

A higher proportion of female entrepreneurs contributes to increased diversity in the business community, which promotes innovation and creativity.

Diversity in entrepreneurship leads to a wider variety of products and services, which benefits both the economy and society at large. In addition, a more even gender distribution in entrepreneurship can help to break traditional gender roles and norms, which promotes gender equality in the labor market.

Women often face stereotypes that they are more cautious and less inclined to take risks, which can affect their opportunities to obtain financing. According to the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Development's study "Under the Surface", these stereotypes negatively affect access to financing for female entrepreneurs.

In addition, women are underrepresented in company management positions. In Skåne, women only make up 16.5% of company managers, despite this being the fourth highest proportion among Sweden's counties.

Access to venture capital is crucial for the growth and development of companies. However, female entrepreneurs often have more difficulty accessing venture capital compared to male entrepreneurs. This may be due to several factors, including network structures, investor biases, and a lack of female role models in the investment sector.

The difference between female and male entrepreneurship

Examining the distinctions between female and male entrepreneurship in Skåne reveals notable differences in industry structures, risk-taking behaviours, and social governance mechanisms.

Industry structures

In Sweden, approximately 30% of business owners are women, while 70% are men. This disparity is also evident in Skåne. Women entrepreneurs predominantly operate in sectors such as services, healthcare, and education, where they constitute over 50% of the entrepreneurs. These industries align with traditional female-dominated fields in both education and employment. Conversely, male entrepreneurs are more prevalent in sectors like manufacturing and technology.

Risk-taking behaviours

Research indicates that women generally exhibit higher risk aversion compared to men, which influences their entrepreneurial decisions. A study focusing on German entrepreneurs found that women's higher risk aversion accounts for a significant portion of their higher exit rates from self-employment but only a small part of their lower entry rates.

This heightened risk aversion may lead women to prefer stable sectors and adopt more cautious business strategies.

Social governance mechanisms

Female entrepreneurs often face unique social challenges. For instance, in Sweden's retail sector, nearly half of female entrepreneurs report high levels of burnout, compared to one-third of male entrepreneurs. This disparity is attributed to factors such as perceived workload and the dual responsibilities of managing business and household duties. Despite advancements in gender equality, women frequently bear the primary responsibility for household management, adding to their stress levels.

Additionally, societal expectations and traditional gender roles can influence women's entrepreneurial motivations. Women often prioritize self-fulfilment, work-life balance, and professional development, whereas men are more driven by financial success and profit. These differing motivations can affect business growth trajectories and governance approaches.

In summary, the differences between female and male entrepreneurship in Skåne are shaped by industry preferences, risk tolerance, and societal roles.

Addressing these disparities requires targeted support mechanisms, including mentorship programs, access to venture capital, and policies promoting work-life balance, to foster a more inclusive entrepreneurial environment.

The distribution of venture capital

An analysis of venture capital distribution between female and male entrepreneurs in Sweden, including the Skåne region, reveals significant disparities influenced by various factors, particularly the composition and biases of financiers.

Current distribution of venture capital (VC)

In Sweden, women own approximately 30% of businesses, while men own 70%. Despite this, female entrepreneurs receive a disproportionately small share of venture capital funding.

A study from Luleå Technical University highlighted that women entrepreneurs were granted, on average, 25% of the amount they applied for, whereas men received about 52%. Additionally, nearly 53% of women's applications were dismissed, compared to 38% of men's.³

In the broader Nordic context, all-female startup founding teams received just 1.3% of the available capital in 2019, while all-male teams secured 93%.

Factors contributing to the disparity

The venture capital industry is predominantly male. A study from Harvard Business School found that 72.1% of VC firms had never had a female investor, and only 19.2% had exactly one female investor. On average, women comprised just 8% of new hires in VC firms.⁴

This lack of diversity can lead to homophily, where individuals prefer to associate and collaborate with those similar to themselves, potentially resulting in male investors favoring male entrepreneurs.

Research indicates that venture capitalists may be influenced by gender stereotypes, perceiving men as having higher entrepreneurial potential. This bias affects funding decisions, with women entrepreneurs often receiving less favorable evaluations.

Female entrepreneurs often operate in sectors such as services, healthcare, and education, which may be perceived as less scalable or profitable by traditional VC standards. Male entrepreneurs are more prevalent in industries like technology and manufacturing, which typically attract more venture capital due to their high growth potential.

³ Luleå Technical University: reports "VC stereotypes about men and women aren't supported by performance data" and "How women can improve their venture pitch outcomes", 2020.

⁴ Paul A. Gompers and Sophie Q. Wang, Harvard Business School: "And the Children Shall Lead: Gender Diversity and Performance in Venture Capital", 2017.

The role of financiers

The composition of investment committees significantly impacts funding distribution. A report from The British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association (BVCA) in February 2025 highlighted a "major gender imbalance" in private equity firms' investment committees, with only 16% being women. The same situation can be considered to prevail in Sweden and in Skåne.

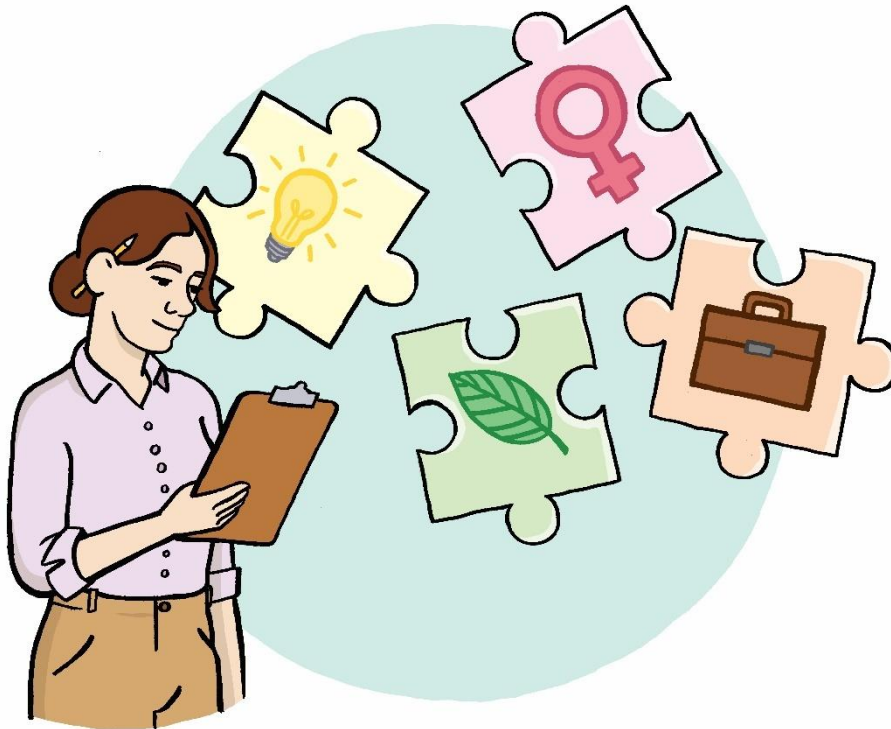
This imbalance can perpetuate existing biases, as decision-makers may unconsciously favor entrepreneurs who mirror their own demographics or experiences.

The underrepresentation of female entrepreneurs in venture capital funding in Sweden and Skåne is influenced by a combination of investor demographics, inherent biases, and industry focus. Addressing these disparities requires concerted efforts to diversify investment teams, implement bias training, and reassess evaluation criteria to create a more equitable funding landscape.

The year 2025 - the conditions for women's entrepreneurship in Skåne

So what are the conditions for women's entrepreneurship in Skåne? Let's look at a number of key variables and conditions.

Regulations and policies



There are a number of national and regional policy documents that have an impact on women's entrepreneurship in terms of startups, innovation, growth, sustainability and access to capital.

National policy documents (Sweden)

1. National Strategy for Sustainable Regional Development 2021–2030

Publisher: Government Offices / Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth

Purpose: Support regional development with a focus on equality, sustainability and innovation.

Relevant sections:

- Under the heading "Equal regional development", the need to remove structural barriers to women's entrepreneurship is highlighted, especially within innovation systems.
- The strategy calls on regions to ensure that women have equal access to capital, networks and business support.

- Promotes gender-disaggregated statistics and evaluation of regional business promotion efforts.

2. *Innovation Strategy for Sweden (2012–2020)* + subsequent initiatives

Publisher: Government

Purpose: Create an innovation-driven society.

Relevant sections:

- The chapter on “Innovation climate and gender equality” emphasizes that women are underrepresented in the innovation system.
- Proposes that more women should be included in innovation clusters, incubators and research environments.
- Forms the basis for initiatives from national authorities that require gender analysis in project applications.

3. *National Gender Equality Strategy (2016–ongoing)*

Publisher: Government Offices

Purpose: An equal society where women and men have the same power to shape society and their lives.

Relevant sections:

- Focuses on economic gender equality, where women’s entrepreneurship is seen as a key factor.
- Stresses the importance of increasing women’s access to risk capital and innovation financing.
- Has led to specific initiatives via the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth (e.g. the “Promoting Women’s Entrepreneurship” program).

4. *Strategy for Sustainable Business (2022)*

Publisher: Ministry of Enterprise, Industry and Trade

Purpose: A competitive and sustainable business sector.

Relevant sections:

- Gender equality is mentioned as a basic prerequisite for sustainable growth.
- Women's entrepreneurship in green industries and technological innovation is highlighted as underutilized potential.
- The strategy calls on authorities to develop targeted business support and credit opportunities for women.

Regional steering documents (Skåne)

1. Regional development strategy for Skåne – Open Skåne 2030

Publisher: Region Skåne

Purpose: To steer long-term regional development.

Relevant sections:

- The chapter on "An inclusive Skåne" emphasizes equal opportunities for entrepreneurship regardless of gender.
- The strategy highlights gender equality as a growth factor – particularly relevant for business initiatives.
- Calls for collaboration between the public sector, academia and business to promote women's participation in innovation environments.

2. Skåne's innovation strategy (2012–2020)

Publisher: Region Skåne

Purpose: Strengthen Skåne's innovation capacity.

Relevant sections:

- Includes goals to increase diversity among entrepreneurs in the innovation system.
- Addresses the importance of more women participating in incubators, accelerator programs and clusters.

- Has inspired programs from Innovation Skåne with a focus on health, welfare and female entrepreneurship.

3. *Growth strategy for Skåne*

Publisher: Region Skåne

Purpose: Promote sustainable growth and business development.

Relevant sections:

- Equal access to business support and financing is highlighted as a priority.
- Identifies the need to direct support to industries where many female entrepreneurs operate - for example, care, health, culture, education and sustainable services.
- Emphasizes the importance of strengthening women's networks, mentoring and access to capital.

4. *Structural Funds Programme Skåne-Blekinge (ERDF)*

Publisher: European Regional Development Fund / Region Skåne

Purpose: Supporting regional growth through EU funds.

Relevant requirements and sections:

- All projects applying for funding must integrate a gender perspective.
- Project assessment takes into account whether women and men receive equal support, training and business coaching.
- Several ERDF-funded projects in Skåne have had women's entrepreneurship as their main focus, for example in green industries and digitalization.

The national and regional policy documents can be summarized as follows:

Focus Area	Policy Aim
Innovation	Increase women's participation in innovation systems, clusters, research, and technology development
Growth	Identify and support female entrepreneurs in emerging and growing sectors
Sustainability	Promote women's role in the transition to a green economy
Access to capital	Targeted efforts for gender-equal financing, venture capital, and business support

Support systems, networks and mentoring programs



There are a number of different support systems that aim to make it easier for women to run businesses. The more important ones are:

- Almi Företagspartner: Offers advice, loans and venture capital to companies with growth potential, with special efforts to support female entrepreneurship.
- Vinnova: Sweden's innovation agency that finances innovation projects and research initiatives, including those led by women.

These initiatives, together with the national and regional strategies, create a platform to support and promote women's opportunities to run and develop businesses in Skåne. What could be improved and developed with the support systems is to integrate them into the regional strategies and to link them to concrete gender equality goals for the region.

According to the Swedish Agency for Economic and Social Development's report from 2023 "Women's Entrepreneurship - Mapping of State Measures Implemented to Promote Women's Entrepreneurship from 2006 and Forward", the difference between male and female support structures is that male support structures are often built for rapid expansion, capital-intensive industries and traditional business models.

Female support structures are more focused on security, small-scale growth, cooperation and social sustainability and are significantly weaker and less extensive.

In Skåne, there are many different networks for women entrepreneurs. These networks can be based on a geographical location, be focused on specific industries or completely cross-border in terms of location, professional orientation, etc.

The networks offer various forms of support, including mentoring, training, networking meetings and access to resources, to facilitate and promote women's entrepreneurship in Skåne.

In the report "Women's Entrepreneurship - Three Decades of Progress and Challenges" from 2023, the Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth states that the male networks in Skåne are often linked to greater capital and business opportunities, while they are difficult to enter. All the while the female networks offer security, community and inspiration but often lack a structure for business growth.

There are differences between male and female mentoring programs that are of great importance to the entrepreneurship of each gender. Male mentoring programs are often directly linked to business power, capital and growth but tend to exclude women who do not follow that norm. Female mentoring programs are often inclusive, empowering and inspiring, but often lack direct links to capital, expansion and strategic positioning in the market.

Access to capital



The distribution of capital between female and male entrepreneurs in Skåne shows significant differences, especially when it comes to access to venture capital and public business support.

Within the framework of the County Administrative Board of Skåne's work with the FEMACT Cities project, we have been able to establish that only around 2 percent of venture capital in Skåne is allocated to companies founded by women, while 98 percent goes to companies founded by men.

This imbalance is particularly noticeable in the technology sector, where men dominate, compared to the service sector where women's entrepreneurship is more common. Based on national statistics from Sweden⁵ most female entrepreneurs belong to the "personal and cultural services" industry (59%). The construction industry is the industry with the fewest number of female entrepreneurs (4%), which shows that the industries/professions of the business community reflect traditional gender norms.

To get venture capitalists (including female venture capitalists) to actively support female entrepreneurship, they must be invited as co-creators and not just as financiers. It is about creating business-driven contexts where they see both return potential and the opportunity for impact. By highlighting data that shows that female-led companies are profitable, offering matchmaking platforms, co-investment models and working with awareness around unconscious bias, we can build engagement and long-term impact. The important thing is not to see them as a target group that should influence, but as a strategic partner in the change.

The male entrepreneurs have a turnover of 805,517,222 thousand SEK, which corresponds to 88% of the total turnover of all entrepreneurs in Skåne. Female entrepreneurs in Skåne have a turnover of 108,446,185 thousand SEK (12%), which can be explained by the fact that the majority of female entrepreneurs belong to service and care industries that, for natural reasons, have lower investment levels.

The explanation for why more investors choose to invest in companies that are controlled and led by men has to do with the fact that they invest in companies that they recognize, which usually belong to the tech or innovation industry.

Based on the statistics above, we can see that women entrepreneurs are a minority in these industries, which explains the distribution linked to the entrepreneurs' turnover.

The women-led companies are overrepresented in service and care industries, where profitability is often lower, scalability is less and investment levels are lower. This is at the same time that men are overrepresented in capital-intensive sectors such as IT, technology, construction and industry where access to capital is greater.

⁵ Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth's report "Women's Entrepreneurship, Three Decades of Progress and Challenges", 2023.

Other reasons why women entrepreneurs have less capital assets than men are due to society's structural norms and expectations of women and men. Women still take greater responsibility for home and family, which can limit the time and risk they are willing to take as entrepreneurs.

In addition, women have historically had worse conditions for capital accumulation (inheritance, salary, pension) and this has affected the possibility of investing in their own companies.

In Skåne, more funds and investment programs that are specifically aimed at women, or require gender-separated reporting of investments, would have been needed. This would have contributed to more entrepreneurial women receiving support in their businesses, while increasing their capital assets.

In addition, investors could have been educated about unconscious bias, when making assessments or decisions based on previous experience.

Obstacles and social and cultural norms



There are some barriers on the way to your own business.

Women's opportunities to start, run and further develop entrepreneurship and innovation in Skåne, as in many other parts of Sweden, are affected by several structural, social and cultural barriers.

Here is an overview of the most significant ones:

Gender stereotypes and norms

- Traditional gender roles affect which industries women are "expected" to start businesses in. Women tend to run businesses in the healthcare, education and service sectors, which often have lower growth potential and receive less investment.
- Innovation is still largely linked to technology and IT sectors, where men are overrepresented. This means that women's innovations in other sectors are not always recognized as innovation.

Access to funding

- As we noted above, women generally receive less venture capital and investment than men, despite having comparable business plans. Potential investors ask different types of questions to women (risk-focused) than to men (growth-focused).
- The networks that connect with investors are often male-dominated, making it harder for women to get "warm introductions" and social capital.

Lack of role models and mentorship

- There are fewer visible female entrepreneurs, especially in tech and innovation, which may reduce young women's propensity to venture out on their own.
- The lack of mentors in some industries and a lack of inclusive business networks make it more difficult to take the next step in entrepreneurship.

Imbalance in responsibilities for home and family

- Women still take on a greater share of responsibility for children and households, which affects the ability to spend time developing a business, networking or participating in accelerator programs.
- Many support programs are not tailored to people with care responsibilities.

Insufficient gender focus in business support systems

- Public and private actors that offer support to entrepreneurs (incubators, science parks, business coaches) sometimes have unconscious bias in their selection and processes.
- Some programs and events are not designed to be inclusive or attract women – neither in language, representation nor format.

Rural and urban issues in Skåne

- Despite the relatively small size of Skåne, there is a strong urban–rural divide. Women in rural areas often have less access to networks, capital and innovation support than those in cities.

Undervaluation of women's innovation

- Many women's innovation takes the form of social innovation, service innovation or process improvements; which is rarely rewarded in innovation systems that focus on technical and product-based innovation.

Conclusions:

1. **Structural and cultural barriers persist:** Women in Skåne face systemic obstacles similar to those in the rest of Sweden, which hinder their ability to start and grow innovative businesses.
2. **Gender norms limit entrepreneurial scope:** Traditional expectations about gender influence the types of industries women enter, often steering them toward lower-growth sectors that receive less recognition and investment.

3. **Access to funding is unequal:** Women receive significantly less venture capital than men, partly due to biased investor questioning and male-dominated funding networks.
4. **Lack of role models and mentorship creates a gap:** The scarcity of visible female entrepreneurs and mentors, especially in tech and innovation, discourages women from pursuing entrepreneurship.
5. **Family responsibilities create practical limitations:** Unequal distribution of care duties limits women's availability to engage fully in entrepreneurial activities, a gap that support systems often fail to address.
6. **Support systems lack inclusivity:** Many entrepreneurial support programs are not gender-sensitive, with unconscious bias and non-inclusive formats that disadvantage women.
7. **Rural women face additional barriers:** In Skåne, women in rural areas have less access to the resources and networks needed for innovation, intensifying urban-rural disparities.
8. **Women's innovation is undervalued:** Innovations by women, especially in social and service sectors, are often overlooked because they do not fit traditional, tech-focused definitions of innovation.

Education and skills development



There are a few training and skills development initiatives in Skåne that are specifically aimed at female entrepreneurship; however, the majority are gender neutral.

Skills development initiatives linked to female entrepreneurship in Skåne are often fragmented, project-based and not always long-term or gender mainstreamed.

To improve and expand educational and competence development initiatives aimed specifically at women entrepreneurs in Skåne, several key actions are needed.

First, a thorough and continuous mapping of the needs of women entrepreneurs is essential, ensuring that future programs are relevant and targeted. This should be complemented by increased collaboration between municipalities, regional authorities, business organizations, and the nonprofit sector to avoid fragmentation and create a more cohesive support system.

Moreover, there is a need for more funding opportunities specifically directed toward women-led businesses, including educational vouchers and growth-oriented grants. Tailored training programs should be developed that address the specific challenges women face, such as access to capital, work-life balance, and leadership in male-dominated sectors.

These programs should offer flexible formats, including digital and hybrid learning, and include content on scaling businesses, strategic leadership, and personal branding.

Additionally, structured mentorship programs and increased visibility of successful female role models are crucial for building confidence and expanding networks. Support efforts must also be extended beyond the major cities to ensure that women in rural or smaller municipalities have equal access to resources.

Finally, long-term political commitment and strategic investment are necessary to ensure sustainability. Women's entrepreneurship must be prioritized in regional development strategies, with clear goals, allocated funding, and gender-disaggregated impact assessments.

These steps will collectively strengthen the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women in Skåne and contribute to greater gender equality in business.

Industries and sectors



The gender distribution across different industries and types of businesses in Skåne reflects broader national trends in Sweden, where the labor market is notably gender-segregated. This means that women and men tend to work in different sectors and occupations, which affects wages and career opportunities.

According to Statistics Sweden (SCB), many occupations are heavily gender-dominated. For example, “assistant nurses in home care and eldercare” is the most common occupation for women (88% women), while “software developers” is most common among men (79% men). Only four of Sweden’s 30 largest occupations have a gender-balanced distribution (defined as 40–60% of each gender).

Women are overrepresented in care, social work, and education, while men dominate in technology, construction, and transportation. This pattern is also seen in Skåne, where Malmö, the region's largest city, has many companies in transport, construction, and tech sectors, all traditionally male-dominated.

In Skåne, women accounted for 33.9% of newly registered entrepreneurs in 2023, close to the national average of 33%. Women are more likely to start businesses in personal services, healthcare, and social work, while men dominate in construction, transport, and motor trade.

While Skåne shows some positive trends, such as higher female entrepreneurship rates in certain municipalities (Lund ranks fourth among Swedish municipalities with the highest proportion of female entrepreneurs at 35%) and growth in sectors where women are more active, significant gender disparities remain. Addressing these imbalances requires targeted initiatives to support and encourage female entrepreneurship across the region.

Statistics and gender equality data



Every year, the number of new businesses in Skåne increases, regardless of gender, which shows that Skåne has healthy growth.

This despite a troubled global situation that affects entrepreneurship regionally, nationally and globally.

The survival rate of newly established businesses in Sweden shows noticeable differences when examined through the lens of gender. According to data from the Swedish Agency for Growth Policy Analysis, businesses founded in 2005 had an average three-year survival rate of 65% in Skåne. When broken down by gender, a national comparison reveals that businesses started by women had a slightly lower survival rate, at 61%, compared to 69% for those started by men.

This discrepancy in business longevity between male and female entrepreneurs can be attributed to several interconnected factors. One key element is the type of industry in which women are more likely to start businesses.

As mentioned before female entrepreneurs in Sweden are disproportionately represented in sectors such as healthcare, education, and personal services—areas that often have lower margins, are more labor-intensive, and can be more vulnerable to shifts in demand or public funding. In contrast, men are more likely to start businesses in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as construction, manufacturing, and transportation, which may offer different risk profiles and growth opportunities.

Another contributing factor is business size and structure. Women are more likely to start sole proprietorships and micro-enterprises, which, while agile, may also be more susceptible to economic fluctuations and have limited access to capital or economies of scale. Additionally, structural challenges such as limited access to financing, smaller professional networks, and lower levels of initial capital can pose significant barriers to long-term sustainability for women-led businesses.

Despite these challenges, it is important to note that the difference in survival rates is not extreme, and there is a growing recognition of the importance of supporting women entrepreneurs through targeted initiatives, mentorship programs, and improved access to funding. Closing the gap in business survival rates between men and women not only promotes gender equality but also enhances the overall resilience and diversity of the regional and national economies.

Based on available statistics, we can also note a number of interesting facts:

- Women are more likely to start sole proprietorships than men. It is the most common form of business among female entrepreneurs in Sweden and in Skåne.
- Women's businesses tend to grow more slowly, partly due to less access to capital, networks and mentoring.
- In Skåne, 12% of the population is entrepreneurial, which means that they have an F-tax ID, are partners in an active partnership or are CEO/board member of an active limited company. Among women, the proportion is only 7.8%, indicating a significant gender gap in entrepreneurship.
- Men own on average 2.5 times more than women in assets such as real estate, land, cars and capital. Women own only 4% of the privately owned share capital in Sweden.
- Only 19% of limited liability companies (aktiebolag AB) in Skåne had a female CEO at the turn of the year 2023/2024. This means that there are four male CEOs for every female CEO in the county.

Conclusions from this:

1. **Skåne shows strong entrepreneurial growth**, with an increasing number of new businesses annually, despite global economic challenges.
2. **There is a gender gap in business survival rates**, with businesses started by women having slightly lower three-year survival rates compared to those started by men.
3. **Industry type and business structure contribute to this gap**, as women often start businesses in lower-margin sectors and smaller-scale enterprises.
4. **Women face structural barriers**, including limited access to capital, networks, and mentorship, which affect business growth and sustainability.

5. **Entrepreneurship among women is significantly lower** than among men in Skåne, highlighting a need for targeted support and gender-equality initiatives.
6. **Asset and leadership disparities remain stark**, with women owning less capital and holding fewer leadership positions in limited liability companies.

Role models



Something we have discussed a lot in our ULG in the FEMACT-Cities project is the need for female role models when it comes to entrepreneurship in Skåne.

Female role models play a crucial role in inspiring and empowering young girls and women to pursue entrepreneurship. In Skåne, as in many other regions, women are still underrepresented among business founders.

One key reason for this is the lack of visible examples of successful women entrepreneurs. When young women see others like themselves starting and running successful businesses, it becomes easier to imagine themselves doing the same.

Role models help break down stereotypes about who can be an entrepreneur. They show that success in business is not limited by gender, and they provide tangible proof that women can thrive in a variety of industries; including those traditionally dominated by men.

In addition to inspiration, female role models often provide guidance, mentorship, and networks, which are critical for building confidence and navigating challenges in the early stages of starting a company. This support can make a real difference in whether a young woman decides to take the leap into entrepreneurship.

In Skåne, promoting diverse and relatable role models is especially important in creating an inclusive startup ecosystem where everyone feels they belong and have the potential to succeed. By highlighting the stories of local women entrepreneurs, the region can encourage a new generation of founders who reflect the full diversity and talent of the population.

To inspire more young women to become entrepreneurs in Skåne, we need to more actively highlight female role models. This can be done by featuring them in media, podcasts, and social media campaigns; inviting them to speak at events, schools, and startup forums; and creating mentorship programs and networks where they can connect with the next generation.

We should also promote their stories through regional channels, celebrate them through awards, and ensure they are present in educational environments. Visibility leads to inspiration; and ultimately to action.

How do we go from here?

Now we have given you the background on where we stand today. How do we move forward to develop women's entrepreneurship and innovative power in Skåne?

Connecting women's entrepreneurship in Skåne to the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Let's start with Agenda 2030 and sustainability.

Supporting women's entrepreneurship in Skåne aligns with several UN Sustainable Development Goals, especially:

- **SDG 5 (Gender Equality)** – promoting equal opportunities and leadership for women.
- **SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth)** – encouraging entrepreneurship, innovation, and fair employment.
- **SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure)** – supporting innovation and access to infrastructure.
- **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities)** – ensuring inclusive economic participation.
- **SDG 4 (Quality Education)** – building relevant skills for entrepreneurship.

Linking business development to the SDGs ensures that entrepreneurship contributes to a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable society. It strengthens long-term impact by addressing global challenges such as gender inequality, economic disparity, and innovation gaps.

This approach not only benefits individual entrepreneurs but also supports regional development and resilience.

This must be the core value in the continued work on women's entrepreneurship in Skåne.

Framework: Strategy for Advancing Women's Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Skåne

After carrying out the analysis above and after interesting and creative discussions in our ULG, we can conclude that the next logical step in the process of developing women's entrepreneurship in Skåne is to develop an implementation strategy.

This can have the following structure and content:

1. Introduction

- **Purpose:** Define the aim of the strategy—to strengthen the role of women in entrepreneurship and innovation across Skåne.
- **Context:** Provide background on gender equality in Sweden, regional economic goals, and EU/international commitments relevant to inclusive innovation.

- **Scope:** Clarify the geographic focus, target groups (e.g., new entrepreneurs, innovators, marginalized women), and timeframe of the strategy.

2. Vision and Strategic Goals

- **Vision Statement:** A clear and aspirational statement about the future Skåne wants to achieve for women entrepreneurs.
- **Strategic Goals:** Broad goals such as increasing the number of women-led businesses, improving access to innovation ecosystems, and reducing structural barriers.
- **Guiding Principles:** Core values guiding the strategy—e.g., inclusion, equity, sustainability, innovation

3. Situational Analysis

- **Current State:** Statistical overview of women's entrepreneurship and innovation activity in the region.
- **Barriers and Challenges:** Identification of key obstacles—e.g., lack of funding, limited networks, gender bias in innovation sectors.
- **Opportunities:** Highlight emerging sectors and trends where women's participation can grow.
- **Stakeholder Mapping:** Overview of existing support actors—public agencies, incubators, finance providers, networks.
- **Intersectional Lens:** Consider how gender interacts with migration status, age, disability, and other factors.

4. Priority Areas / Strategic Focus Areas

1. **Access to Finance**
 - Tackle gender gaps in investment and venture capital.
 - Develop targeted funding instruments for women-led businesses.
2. **Innovation and Technology**
 - Support women in entering and leading tech-based and R&D-intensive sectors.
 - Foster gender-inclusive innovation environments.
3. **Business Support and Development Services**
 - Ensure that incubators, accelerators, and advisory services are gender-sensitive and accessible.
 - Create tailored programs for scaling and internationalization.
4. **Education, Skills, and Talent Pipeline**
 - Promote entrepreneurial and innovation skills among girls and women at all education levels.
 - Offer reskilling/upskilling, especially in digital and green sectors.

5. **Representation, Visibility, and Role Models**
 - Increase media visibility of successful women entrepreneurs and innovators.
 - Encourage mentoring, storytelling, and peer-to-peer learning.
6. **Inclusive Policy and Regulation**
 - Review and adapt public procurement and innovation funding criteria with a gender lens.
 - Push for inclusive practices in investment and corporate governance.
7. **Networks and Collaboration Platforms**
 - Strengthen local and cross-sectoral networks for women entrepreneurs.
 - Facilitate partnerships between women-led businesses and research institutions, investors, or corporations.

5. Stakeholders and Governance Structure

- **Key Stakeholders:** Identify and describe roles of regional government, municipalities, academia, private sector, civil society, and international actors.
- **Governance Model:** Propose a steering committee or advisory board to guide strategy implementation and coordination.
- **Collaboration Mechanisms:** Describe how cross-sector partnerships will be formed and maintained.

6. Strategic Actions and Initiatives

- **Flagship Programs:** Propose new or enhanced initiatives (e.g., women-focused innovation labs, business accelerators).
- **Policy Interventions:** Recommend regulatory changes, procurement models, or tax incentives.
- **Pilot Projects:** Identify possible demonstration projects to test new approaches.
- **Scaling Plans:** Outline how successful initiatives can be expanded or institutionalized.

7. Communication and Outreach

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Strategies to shift public perceptions and promote inclusive entrepreneurship.
- **Role Model Promotion:** Highlight women innovators through events, media, and education.
- **Targeted Outreach:** Communication approaches to reach underserved or marginalized groups.

8. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

- **Key Indicators:** Define how success will be measured (e.g., number of women-led startups, access to funding, innovation output).
- **Follow-up Mechanisms:** Describe how progress will be monitored regularly.
- **Learning Processes:** Include stakeholder feedback loops, annual strategy reviews, and open data publication.

9. Funding and Resources

- **Funding Sources:** Identify public (regional/national/EU), private, and philanthropic funding options.
- **Resource Allocation:** Define how resources will be prioritized and distributed.
- **Sustainability:** Consider long-term financing mechanisms and cost-sharing models.

10. Alignment and Integration

- **Policy Integration:** Ensure alignment with regional development strategies, innovation agendas, and gender equality policies.
- **EU and International Links:** Identify relevant programs (e.g., Horizon Europe, EIT, Interreg) for co-funding or cooperation.
- **Systemic Approach:** Highlight how this strategy complements broader efforts in climate transition, digitalization, and social inclusion.

11 Summary of the strategy concept

Section	Content Summary
1. Introduction	Defines the strategy's purpose, its context in Skåne and Sweden, and outlines the geographic and demographic scope.
2. Vision and Strategic Goals	Presents a future vision, sets strategic goals (e.g., inclusion, innovation, equality), and outlines guiding values.
3. Situational Analysis	Provides data on current conditions, identifies key challenges and opportunities, maps stakeholders, and applies an intersectional gender analysis.
4. Priority Areas	Seven strategic focus areas: 1. Access to Finance

	2. Innovation and Technology 3. Business Support 4. Education and Skills 5. Representation and Role Models 6. Inclusive Policy 7. Networks and Collaboration
5. Stakeholders and Governance	Defines key actors and their roles, coordination structures, and the governance model for implementation and oversight.
6. Strategic Actions and Initiatives	Suggests specific programs, policy measures, and pilot projects, and outlines pathways for scaling successful initiatives.
7. Communication and Outreach	Describes awareness campaigns, media engagement, promotion of role models, and outreach to underrepresented groups.
8. Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning	Sets indicators, describes reporting and evaluation mechanisms, and includes stakeholder feedback loops.
9. Funding and Resources	Identifies funding sources (public, private, EU), outlines resource allocation strategies, and addresses sustainability.
10. Alignment and Integration	Ensures consistency with other regional/national strategies, EU programs, and broader development and innovation agendas.

How do we plan to develop a strategy?

In order to build on our work in FEMACT-Cities, we have been granted funding from the European Regional Development Fund for the Skåne and Blekinge counties to develop a strategy for continued work. This work will be finalized in 2026.

Key risks and challenges in developing the strategy

When developing a strategy to promote women's entrepreneurship and innovation, several risks and challenges may arise. Recognizing and proactively addressing these risks is essential for ensuring that the strategy is both effective and sustainable. Below are key categories of risks:

1. Lack of Stakeholder Buy-In

- **Risk:** Key stakeholders (e.g., municipalities, private sector, business support organizations) may not engage fully.
- **Impact:** Weak implementation, lack of coordination, and missed opportunities for collaboration.
- **Mitigation:** Involve stakeholders early, build trust, and ensure shared ownership.

2. Insufficient Data and Gender Analysis

- **Risk:** Strategy is based on incomplete, outdated, or gender-neutral data.
- **Impact:** Misaligned priorities and ineffective interventions.
- **Mitigation:** Invest in robust, disaggregated data collection and conduct a thorough gender and intersectional analysis.

3. Political or Institutional Resistance

- **Risk:** Political shifts or institutional reluctance to prioritize gender-focused initiatives.
- **Impact:** Strategy may lose support, be delayed, or become symbolic without real action.
- **Mitigation:** Anchor the strategy in legal frameworks, policy commitments, and align it with broader development goals.

4. Underfunding or Resource Constraints

- **Risk:** Lack of financial or human resources to implement key actions.
- **Impact:** Reduced impact, delayed implementation, or failure to launch flagship initiatives.
- **Mitigation:** Secure funding early, explore public-private partnerships, and align with EU or national funding programs.

5. Tokenism or Superficial Inclusion

- **Risk:** Women are included in consultation processes without real influence or follow-through.
- **Impact:** Loss of credibility, reduced trust from target groups, and ineffective outcomes.
- **Mitigation:** Ensure meaningful participation, transparent decision-making, and follow-up actions.

6. Fragmentation and Duplication

- **Risk:** The strategy duplicates existing efforts or competes with parallel initiatives.
- **Impact:** Inefficiencies, stakeholder fatigue, and confusion in the ecosystem.
- **Mitigation:** Map existing programs thoroughly and design the strategy to complement and integrate them.

7. Short-Termism

- **Risk:** Strategy focuses on quick wins or is not embedded in long-term planning.
- **Impact:** Unsustainable results and limited structural impact.
- **Mitigation:** Link the strategy to long-term regional plans, include evaluation cycles, and plan for institutional anchoring.

8. Lack of Inclusion of Marginalized Groups

- **Risk:** Women from minority, rural, or low-income backgrounds are overlooked.
- **Impact:** Reinforcement of existing inequalities and limited systemic change.
- **Mitigation:** Apply an intersectional lens and tailor outreach and support mechanisms.

9. Weak Monitoring and Accountability

- **Risk:** No clear mechanisms to track progress or hold actors accountable.
- **Impact:** Drift from goals, low transparency, and limited learning.
- **Mitigation:** Define clear indicators, roles, and review processes from the outset.

Conclusions from our Integrated Action Plan

What conclusions can we then draw from our IAP?

1. **Sweden's gender equality reputation masks persistent gaps**
Although Sweden is internationally recognized for gender equality, there remains a significant gender gap in entrepreneurship. Women in Skåne are underrepresented as business owners, leaders, and recipients of venture capital.

2. **Structural and social barriers limit women's entrepreneurial potential**

Traditional gender norms, unequal access to funding, limited networks, lack of visible role models, and care responsibilities continue to hinder women from starting, growing, or scaling their businesses.

3. **Female entrepreneurs operate in undervalued sectors**

Women are concentrated in industries such as healthcare, education, and services—sectors often perceived as lower in profitability and innovation potential. As a result, their contributions are frequently overlooked by the broader innovation ecosystem.

4. **Access to capital is critically unequal**

Only around 2% of venture capital in Skåne goes to female-founded businesses. Investor bias, male-dominated networks, and industry preferences heavily disadvantage women.

5. **Support systems are fragmented and gendered**

While various networks and support organizations exist, female-focused structures are less growth-oriented and less connected to capital. Male networks are more established and linked to power, resources, and influence.

6. **National and regional policies provide a framework—but not yet equity**

Several Swedish and Skåne-specific strategies acknowledge the importance of gender equality in entrepreneurship. However, implementation gaps and weak integration of gender analysis remain challenges.

7. **Role models and mentorship are essential yet underutilized**

Visible female entrepreneurs are rare, especially in male-dominated sectors. Their presence is vital to inspire and guide the next generation of women business leaders.

8. **Targeted and inclusive strategies are needed**

A well-coordinated strategy is essential to address disparities and enable systemic change. Key priorities include improving access to capital, enhancing support systems, promoting inclusive innovation, increasing visibility, and fostering cross-sector collaboration.

9. **Aligning with the UN SDGs can drive sustainable progress**
Promoting women's entrepreneurship contributes directly to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to equality, economic growth, innovation, and reduced inequalities.
10. **The region's future growth depends on gender inclusion**
Closing the entrepreneurship gap is not just a gender issue—it is an economic imperative. Enabling more women to succeed in business will enhance innovation, create jobs, and foster a more resilient and equitable regional economy.

An URBACT spin off to FEMACT Cities

Within the framework of the EU programme URBACT Transfer Networks, we have been granted participation in the project Entrepreneurial Cities.

Together with partners in, among others, Portugal, Italy, Finland, Bosnia and Ukraine, we will work over a three-year period starting in November 2025 to inspire young people to start their own businesses and thereby contribute to increased innovation, growth and competitiveness in Skåne and across Europe.

Through practical learning and collaboration between schools, businesses and civil society, young people will be given the tools to shape their future, while the region's innovative capacity is strengthened.

In Skåne, we will focus on encouraging more young women to want, and dare, to start their own businesses, which is an important step toward a more gender-equal business sector in the region.

In Entrepreneurial Cities we will build on the positive experiences we gained from FEMACT Cities.

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