

## IRANIAN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: GOOD, BAD, UGLY

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### Abstract

Women, like men, have achieved many successes in the field of business. In the following, we intend to introduce Iranian women entrepreneurs. When it comes to business or entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs can show strength on par with men due to the many successes they have achieved in this field. In today's era, we see more desire of Iranian women to participate economically, socially and especially to study for higher scientific degrees, which makes them very active in the field of entrepreneurship. Most of these women are the founders of multinational companies and have reached their maximum goals in today's world and this way continues. Our world has seen many successful leaders and women in various fields including politics, fashion, design, music, entertainment, technology and science. In this article, we are going to introduce some Iranian women entrepreneurs,

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## **Introduction**

Looking at the list of billionaires in the world, one can see the names of many Iranians who are active in the fields of industry, technology and production and have succeeded in achieving great wealth through their efforts and perseverance. Some of these rich Iranians are women who have registered their names among the most successful and richest people in Iran and the world in various fields such as fashion and clothing, technology and industry. In the continuation of this article, we are going to get to know ten cases of Iranian women entrepreneurs who live abroad. This classification is based on the property value of these people (Dana et al., 2021, 2022). In Iran, entrepreneurship is a very new phenomenon and research in this field, especially women's entrepreneurship is very limited. Although in recent years the desire of Iranian women to have economic and social participation and especially in higher education has increased, the optimal use of their participation in economic affairs has not been possible. In recent years, women, who make up half of the country's population, have become more inclined towards university education, and the rate of entry of women and girls into universities is increasing year by year (Dheer & Salamzadeh, 2022; Ebrahimi et al., 2021, 2022; Ed-Dafali et al., 2023; Farsi et al., 2012; Guerrero et al., 2014, 2015). Meanwhile, according to official statistics, the unemployment rate among educated women is increasing significantly. It seems that it is not practical to attract this number of educated personnel in the existing government organizations, which are mostly facing the inflation of human resources. Due to its limited scope in Iran, the private sector has naturally not been able to achieve significant success in attracting these national capitals. Therefore, one of the

important ways to solve this problem is the development of entrepreneurship among women and girls.

### **Entrepreneurship in Iran**

Every year, the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) provides statistics on the state of entrepreneurship in many countries around the world, which has created evidence to confirm assumptions about entrepreneurship. This report shows the state of entrepreneurship in various indicators around the world, but at the same time states that each country will have a certain level of entrepreneurial activity according to the state of its environmental and contextual factors. On the other hand, while common views on entrepreneurship often focus on independent startups, GEM pays attention to stability and ongoing value, as well as the challenges of mature businesses and the need for entrepreneurship in different types of businesses, such as family businesses, organizational entrepreneurship, and solo entrepreneurs. pays attention In the following, we will come across the statistics and figures given in the latest report of the Global Entrepreneurship Watch Center to describe the state of entrepreneurship in Iran: (i) Population (2018): 81.4 million people; (ii) GDP growth (2017, annual percentage change): 3.7%; (iii) World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index (2018): 56.98 out of 100; World rank: 128 out of 190; (iv) World Bank Score in Business Start Index (2018): 67.79 out of 100; Global ranking: 173 out of 190; (v) Global competitiveness ranking according to the World Economic Forum (2018): 89 out of 140; and (vi) Average income group according to the World Economic Forum (2018): Above normal (Hameed et al., 2021; Horst et al., 2021; Hosseini et al., 2022,

Jafari Moghadam et al., 2012, 2014; Kawamorita Kesim, 2013, 2016, 2020, 2021, 2022).

Although the rate of startup activities has decreased from 13% in 2017 to 10% in 2018, Iran's entrepreneurial community is still strong. Also, recently, the rate of entrepreneurial goals among young people, especially those with university education, has increased, which is due to the Iranian government's emphasis on promoting the culture of entrepreneurship in higher education and education. One of the main strategies of the knowledge-based entrepreneurship development program in Iran is the development of innovation centres in universities. For this reason, this country shows an improving rate of general entrepreneurial activities. The rate of business ownership has increased in 2018, which means that Iranian companies have been able to maintain their competitive edge in the market. Based on this, the preparation and approval of the private and public sector partnership law for the optimal use of existing resources has been given much attention (Mirjana et al., 2019, 2021; Moghadam & Salamzadeh, 2018; Moghadamzadeh et al., 2020; Murschetz et al., 2023; Naderibeni et al., 2020; Palalić et al., 2022).

**Entrepreneurial potential and support:** Measures related to social attitudes, self-perception, affiliations and goals can indicate the presence of potential entrepreneurs in a community as well as other people who support their efforts. Entrepreneurs rely on a wide range of stakeholders, including investors, suppliers, customers, employees, and even family and friends. Global Entrepreneurship Monitor examines a wide range of people's attitudes and perceptions about entrepreneurship and its cognitive part. **Social attitudes:** Social attitudes deal with the issue of what vision and attitude people have towards becoming an entrepreneur. Do they think an entrepreneur is

high in their society? Do they believe entrepreneurship is a good career choice? To what extent do the media cover entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs? Also, the degree of difficulty and ease that people assign to starting a business is measured in this part (Romanovich et al., 2022; Salamzadeh, 2012, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2020, 2021; Salamzadeh & Dana, 2021,2022; Salamzadeh & Kawamorita Kesim, 2015, 2017; Salamzadeh & Kirby, 2017; Salamzadeh & Marković, 2016, 2018; Salamzadeh & Ramadani, 2021).

**Self-perception:** To measure self-perception, GEM asks people if they see opportunities around them. This concept can indicate whether there are many opportunities in an environment. Also, to some extent, it recognizes the abilities of a society in recognizing opportunities. There may be opportunities in the environment, but the level of people's awareness of these opportunities is different. **Entrepreneurial intentions:** Perhaps the closest indicator to measure the entrepreneurial potential in society is to examine the intention of people to start a business. Entrepreneurial intentions report the percentage of working adults (ages 18-64) who plan to start their own business in the next three years. Indeed, intention alone is not a reliable indicator of starting a business, but it can be argued that those who started their own businesses were those who had already planned or at least considered becoming entrepreneurs (Paramba et al. 2023; Pereira et al., 2021; Radovic Markovic & Salamzadeh, 2018; Radovic Markovic et al., 2012, 2013, 2016, 2019; Rahman et al. 2021, 2022, 2023; Ramadani et al., 2022).

**Entrepreneurial context:** As this report and previous GEM reports have shown, each economy has its own entrepreneurial profile in terms of the amount of activity in different stages of entrepreneurship, the characteristics of entrepreneurs and their businesses, and the attitudes and perceptions that

people have towards this activity. Likewise, the environment in which it operates is unique in every country and has strengths and weaknesses that entrepreneurs in that region must use to grow or overcome its limitations. Global Monitor (GEM) has long surveyed entrepreneurs and professionals in entrepreneurship-related fields such as entrepreneurship education, government, and finance, asking them questions covering 12 areas that appear to be important factors for Entrepreneurial progress. Also, these 12 conditions have been the subject of scientific research that examines the relationship between entrepreneurship and its environment. These twelve factors are: (i) Entrepreneurial finance: This variable describes the level of entrepreneurs' understanding of sufficient funds to start an entrepreneurial activity. The factor of finance in entrepreneurship evaluates the accessibility and efficient functioning of stock markets as well as access to financing channels for entrepreneurs. This concept includes informal investment, angel investors, private investors, banks, government loans, grants, subsidies as well as fundraising; (ii) Advocacy and communication of government policies: This factor evaluates the extent to which entrepreneurs are satisfied with government policies and support. For example, whether policymakers mention entrepreneurship in public discourse and set specific regulations to improve conditions for the working workforce and small and medium enterprises (SMEs); (iii) Government policies, taxes and bureaucracy: This factor shows whether entrepreneurs and economic activists consider the current taxes affordable and balanced or not. This factor measures the amount of bureaucracy in business processes and facilities for financing entrepreneurial activities; (iv) Government entrepreneurship programs: This factor assesses what specific programs government agencies offer for entrepreneurs and how they do so. This includes grants,

accelerators, growth centres and agencies that advise entrepreneurs; (v) Entrepreneurship education in schools: This factor includes entrepreneurs' assessment of the extent of entering entrepreneurial content into school programs and whether schools introduce students to entrepreneurial values or not; (vi) Entrepreneurship training after school: This factor includes the inclusion of entrepreneurship topics in after-school programs such as universities, business schools, and professional centres. This factor includes the effectiveness of educational systems in creating entrepreneurial skills and values in adults; (vii) Transfer of research and development: This factor considers the transfer of research and development efforts from universities and research centres to industry and business sectors. At the same time, it examines the extent to which engineers and scientists can commercialize and market research findings; (viii) Commercial and professional infrastructure: This factor indicates the supply and price of professional services of people such as accountants, lawyers and consultants who help entrepreneurs at the beginning of their entrepreneurial journey and start their business; (ix) Physical infrastructure: It facilitates communication, transportation, and business activities nationally and internationally through aspects such as high-speed Internet and mobile phone services, real estate (land, buildings), reliable utilities, and advanced highways, railways, ports, and airports. he does; (x) Domestic market dynamics: This factor analyzes whether there is a free market that none of the entities uses to influence or set prices and whether they face changes in supply when demand changes; (xi) Obstacles or regulations to enter the domestic market: This factor shows the general state of the market in terms of entry conditions for entrepreneurs with new and disruptive ideas. In fact, it examines the factors that can facilitate entrepreneurship by weakening them; (xii)

Cultural and social norms: This factor shows whether the society shows focus on entrepreneurship within the culture through behaviour, opinions, language and customs. This issue can encourage entrepreneurs to accept, support and pay much attention to entrepreneurial activities (Salamzadeh & Romanovich, 2022; Salamzadeh & Roshandel Arbatani, 2020; Salamzadeh et al., 2013-2023).

Women make up 49.25 per cent of the country's population. While their economic participation rate is 20%, which is far from the average economic activity rate of women in the world (35%). The desire of women and girls for university education has increased in recent years, and girls account for more than 65% of university admissions. But despite having higher education, they are not in a suitable situation in terms of employment (Arasti & Salamzadeh, 2018; Arbabi et al., 2022; Batrancea et al., 2019, 2022; Bkhandari et al., 2021; Bouzari et al., 2021).

### **Top International Iranian Female Entrepreneurs**

**Anousheh Ansari** is an American engineer living in Iran and the president of Prodea Systems. She has also worked as CEO of Telecom Technologies and Inc. Anusha was also the fourth self-sponsored space traveller and the first woman to fly to the International Space Station with her own funding. she had engraved the two flags of Iran and America on her astronaut suit, which had a lot of positive feedback among the Iranian community. She has always been known as the richest Iranian woman. **Parisa Tabriz** was hired by Google just a few months after graduating in 2007 and worked as a manager and security specialist in this giant of the technology world. The richest Iranian woman who has proudly raised the Iranian flag on Google. She is also

the team leader and most of the time responsible for Chrome security. Parisa Tabriz is now one of the most important and valuable assets of Google. her work is hacking Google services as a "white hat" hacker and she is engaged in cyber warfare against criminal or "black hat" hackers. **Shahrazad Rafati** is the founder of BroadbandTV Corp, a digital broadcasting company that operates the largest multi-platform collection in the world. Shahrazad is known as the founder of the technology and commercial archetype that created the synergy between major show business companies such as the NBA. Shahrazad Rafati, an Iranian girl living in Canada, lived in our country until 2000, then immigrated to Canada and was even once introduced as the best female entrepreneur in this country. Within the first 1,000 days of working at her fledgling company, Rafati partnered with content providers in Canada and other countries, and now the company has 319 million users. Broadband TV is a technology media company that works with network operators and advertisers. **Sahar Hashemi**, the founder of the Republic coffee shop chain in England, is now known as one of the richest Iranian women with a fortune of 35 million dollars. She owns around 110 of these coffee shops across the UK. Sahar is known as the creator of a coffee chain called Coffee Republic and a candy brand called Skinny Candy. She is a regular speaker and important lecturer on topics such as revolution and entrepreneurship. Sahar Hashemi has also written several best-selling books in her field. In 2011, she was invited to the British Entrepreneurs Association to make recommendations to the government on entrepreneurship measures. In June 2012, the entrepreneur was awarded the highest rank in the British Empire for services to the economy and to charity. **Roxanne Varza** was born in the United States and studied French and political economy, but later in life, she was drawn to startups. She

is currently the director of Station F, the world's largest startup campus, and director of Microsoft startups in France. Roxanne is fluent in three living languages of the world, she is also an ambassador for epilepsy. Also, the Business Insider website has named Roxana Varza as the sixth most successful woman under 30 in the field of technology. she was even invited once to meet with the president of France to talk about the problems of start-ups.

### **Top Domestic Iranian Female Entrepreneurs**

**Seyedah Fatemeh Moghimi** is the first Iranian woman who was able to register an international transport company in her name. She is a successful entrepreneur, she is the first woman to get a license for a transport company and she is also mentioned as one of the richest women in Iran in economic circles. The position and work positions she has held so far are 3 terms of membership in the board of directors of the trade association of international transport companies, 12 years of membership and headship of the dispute resolution department and handling complaints of traders, companies and drivers, etc. In this position, she was able to close more than 95% of these cases with peace and compromise between the parties. Moghimi is also a member of the friendship associations of Iran and different countries and the CEO of the National Association of Women Entrepreneurs and a member of the study and research group of the North-South Corridor. Moghimi was recognized as the top entrepreneur in the Islamic world in 2012. Also, Fatemeh Moghimi was a candidate for the parliamentary elections in 1994. she has two citizenships in Iran and Canada and currently lives in Iran with her two children. **Banafshe Sediq** is the founder and manager of Shigal Industrial Production Company. In addition to managing this manufacturing company, she is the

managing director of the National Association of Women Entrepreneurs and has other experiences such as being the chairman of the board of directors of the Mersal Charity Foundation, a member of the board of directors of the Asian Women's Empowerment Institute, a member of the Automobile Parts Manufacturers Association, a member of the Iranian Industry Research and Development Association and a member of the managers of Saveh Industries in her portfolio. Her job creation has caused her to be called the most successful Iranian female entrepreneur. **Azadeh Danandeh**, with a bachelor's degree in engineering and computer science, works in the communications and information technology product group and is the CEO of Baharan Information Technology Company, which was established in 2003 and is a successful and well-known company in this field. Danandeh is a member of the board of directors of the Computer Trade Union Organization of Tehran Province, a member of the Central Council of the Computer Trade Union Organization of the country and a member of the Women Entrepreneurs Association, and in the working environment of the group she manages, female personnel are fully used, which is very successful. **Marzieh Senoui** is a student of chemistry expert and works in the food industry product group. she is also the CEO of Elixir Gol Sorkh Pharmaceutical Company, which was established in 2004. She is an active member of the Association of Medicinal Plants, a member of the Board of Directors of the Entrepreneurs Association of the country, a member of the Association for the Protection of Consumer Rights, a member of the Association of Managers of Khorasan Province, a member of the Board of Directors of the Business Women Association, a member of the Association of Exporters of the Country, and a member of the Association for the

Development and Promotion of Production and Trade of Halal Products. Received the certificate of the title of the best technological unit in the science and technology parks of the country, certificate of appreciation from Khorasan Razavi Governorate, scientific approval from the research institute, certificate of appreciation from the Chamber of Commerce as the top lady of the industry, the title of the exemplary unit from Khorasan Agricultural Jihad, the title of the exemplary unit from the Supervision Department Khorasan and several other plaques and certificates are among her achievements.

### **Challenges Facing Iranian Women's Entrepreneurship**

In addition to the global challenges faced by women in entrepreneurship and setting up businesses for themselves and others, Iranian women face separate obstacles, which according to social and economic experts, some of these obstacles are caused by the environment and the other part is subject to personality bottlenecks. And it is the education of women. Considering the all-round participation of women in higher education and their effective presence in the fields of science and knowledge, which indicates the existence of competence and capability in them, the creation of businesses based on entrepreneurship by women in small and medium scales, whether as work at home or In the form of creating production companies, it will have important achievements. Considering the nascent nature of women's entrepreneurship, there are many problems. The most important of them are cultural/social problems, the solution of which requires the implementation of appropriate policies and mechanisms. Some of the socio-cultural problems facing women's entrepreneurship are: (i) Men's opposition to their wives' activities in eco-

conomic enterprises and creating a profession or job; (ii) Due to cultural restrictions, women are expected to spend their lives in a protected environment to keep them away from confronting stronger people; and (iii) Women are also expected to limit their activities to housekeeping and child care.

In addition to the above, women's entrepreneurship also faces limitations, the most important of which are the following: (i) The prominence of their role in the family, as well as the increasing need of men for their permanent presence in the family; (ii) Existence of negative thoughts and beliefs about the role of women in business; (iii) Relatively lower educational levels for women due to limited access to job training opportunities in most countries; (iv) More limited opportunities in the public sector to develop women's skills; (v) Inadequate access of women entrepreneurs to technology, support services and information; (vi) Women's less access to financial credits due to the weakness of issues related to guarantees and small amounts of credits, as well as the existence of a negative attitude towards the nature and low repayment ability of female entrepreneurs (Salehi et al., 2023; Soleimani et al., 2023; Yakubu et al., 2022; Yazdanpanah et al., 2023; Zarea & Salamzadeh, 2012).

Considering the mentioned obstacles and problems that slow down the growth of entrepreneurship by women, the lack of self-confidence, fear of failure and blame from people around, especially family members, are obstacles. High self-confidence, good thinking and having a positive outlook on life, predicting the future and not being afraid of failure and having a sense of fighting with problems, a sense of helping others, concern for serving others, honesty and balance between one's role at home and outside the family, Defining a clear goal for entrepreneurship, receiving training and having a long-

term plan and goal are among the features that entrepreneurs should consider to enter the market.

### **Towards the Future**

In the world, women play a bigger role in the economy of their country every day, in rich countries, the low rate of population growth along with the ageing of the population has made governments aware of the need for women's economic activity. In the past, the use of women's labour force, as it has been done in the case of men, has not progressed and expanded much, so most women, even educated women, have a high rate of unemployment. But nowadays, the role of women in creating new businesses has been noticed and a large share of women have entered the labour market in this way. In developed and developing countries, women are considered a hope for the advancement of their families and the growth and development of their countries. Meanwhile, women entrepreneurs can turn threats into opportunities by taking advantage of their creativity and risk-taking, and thus communicate with the business market. Governments have also become more sensitive and aware of women's economic activity due to the economic crises that most countries are dealing with, as well as the low population growth rate. Because ignoring this percentage of the population and depriving society of its benefits will result in many losses. Many governments in economic crises have been able to overcome the crises of their society by adopting measures and policies and by benefiting from women's labour force and succeeding in the path of development. Considering that a huge part of society is made up of women, among women, examining the situation of female heads of the household is of particular importance since female heads of the household often suffer

from poor economic conditions, lack of suitable jobs, inadequate pensions, and lack of sources of income. They are considered as the poorest social classes in the society. Also, in the current society of Iran, which is suffering from chronic unemployment and employment crisis, and men are in jobs from which they cannot earn income, there is very little room for the life and work of women who are the breadwinners of the family, so the entrepreneurship of this segment of the society It is of particular importance.

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