

UNIVERSIDAD DE MÁLAGA
FACULTAD DE TURISMO



TRABAJO FIN DE MÁSTER

MÁSTER UNIVERSITARIO EN
DIRECCIÓN Y PLANIFICACIÓN
DEL TURISMO

Barriers Women Entrepreneurs Face in
The Tourism Industry:
The Case of Iran

Maedeh Bidokhti

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**Barreras Que Enfrentan Las Mujeres Emprendedoras En La
Industria Del Turismo: El Caso De Irán**

**Barriers Women Entrepreneurs Face in The Tourism
Industry: The Case of Iran**

Realizado por
Maedeh Bidokhti

Tutorizado por
Fernando Almeida García
Rafael Cortés Macías

UNIVERSIDAD DE MÁLAGA
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Abstract

Women entrepreneurs are essential drivers of economic growth, innovation, and job creation, particularly in dynamic industries such as tourism. However, in Iran's tourism sector, women face significant challenges that hinder their entrepreneurial success. This study identifies and categorizes these challenges into three key dimensions: intrapersonal barriers, which include psychological traits, demographic limitations, motivational deficits, and educational gaps; external barriers, such as economic limitations, socio-cultural norms, and insufficient institutional support; and workplace barriers, including human resource challenges, operational inefficiencies, marketing difficulties, gender stereotypes, and regulatory frameworks. Using a comprehensive analysis of literature and qualitative data, the findings emphasize the importance of implementing gender-sensitive policies, improved access to financial and training resources, and systemic reforms to create a more inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem. Addressing these systemic barriers is critical to empowering women entrepreneurs, fostering their success, and ensuring the sustainable growth of Iran's tourism industry. The findings provide actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to create an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurs, tourism industry, gender barriers, economic empowerment, Iran.

Resumen

Las mujeres emprendedoras son agentes fundamentales para el crecimiento económico, la innovación y la creación de empleo, especialmente en industrias dinámicas como el turismo. Sin embargo, en el sector turístico de Irán, enfrentan numerosos desafíos que limitan su éxito empresarial. Este estudio identifica y clasifica estos desafíos en tres dimensiones clave: barreras intrapersonales, que incluyen factores psicológicos, limitaciones demográficas, déficits motivacionales y carencias educativas; barreras externas, como limitaciones financieras, normas socioculturales y apoyo institucional insuficiente; y barreras en el lugar de trabajo, que abarcan, desafíos relacionados con los recursos humanos, ineficiencias operativas, dificultades de marketing y estereotipos de género. A través de un análisis exhaustivo de la literatura y datos cualitativos, la investigación subraya la necesidad urgente de implementar políticas con perspectiva de género, mejorar el acceso a recursos financieros y de capacitación, y promover reformas sistémicas para crear un ecosistema empresarial más inclusivo. Empoderar a las mujeres emprendedoras en el sector turístico de Irán no solo es una cuestión de equidad social, sino también un imperativo estratégico para impulsar la innovación, el crecimiento económico y la sostenibilidad. Los hallazgos ofrecen recomendaciones prácticas para responsables políticos, líderes del sector y organizaciones de desarrollo, con el fin de superar estas barreras y liberar el potencial de las mujeres emprendedoras.

Palabras clave: Mujeres emprendedoras, industria turística, barreras de género, empoderamiento económico, limitaciones al emprendimiento, Irán.

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1

Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Entrepreneurs play a crucial role in driving economic development, fostering innovation, and creating employment opportunities across various sectors (Marlow, 2020). Entrepreneurship is often viewed as a pathway to economic empowerment and social mobility, offering individuals the chance to address unmet needs and contribute to societal progress (Panda, 2018). Within this broader context, the tourism industry provides significant opportunities for entrepreneurial growth, particularly due to its dynamic and service-oriented nature. The sector is known for its ability to generate substantial revenue, attract investment, and promote cross-cultural exchange (Li, 2008; UNWTO, 2019). For many countries, including Iran, tourism holds the potential to diversify the economy and support local development, making it a fertile ground for entrepreneurial ventures.

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries worldwide, contributing significantly to global GDP and employment generation (UNWTO, 2019). However, the entrepreneurial landscape is not uniform, and certain groups, particularly women, face systemic barriers that limit their participation and success. Women entrepreneurs are increasingly recognized as key drivers of economic growth and social change, yet they remain underrepresented in many industries, including tourism (Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, & Hart, 2006). In Iran, where cultural, economic, and institutional barriers are particularly pronounced, women entrepreneurs encounter unique challenges that hinder their ability to fully capitalize on the sector's potential.

Socio-cultural barriers, such as traditional gender roles and societal expectations, limit women's participation and mobility within the industry (Gorj et al., 2023; Seyfi et al., 2023). Economic constraints, including restricted access to finance and limited government support, further exacerbate these challenges (Demir & Tabrizy, 2022; Seyfi et al., 2025). Additionally, legal and regulatory frameworks often fail to provide adequate protections or create enabling environments for women entrepreneurs (Hosseini et al., 2023). These issues place women entrepreneurs at a distinct disadvantage compared to their male counterparts, reducing their ability to scale their businesses, secure investments, and compete effectively in the marketplace.

Furthermore, gender biases in market access and networking opportunities create additional obstacles for women entrepreneurs. Research indicates that women in business often have fewer opportunities to build professional relationships, secure partnerships, and expand their enterprises due to exclusion from predominantly male-dominated business networks (AlAmmary, 2022; Braun, 2022). These constraints are particularly pronounced in the Iranian context, where traditional and cultural norms may limit women's ability to engage in business-related travel, participate in networking events, or access mentorship programs.

The challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Iran's tourism sector remain underexplored in the existing literature. While numerous studies address broader entrepreneurial barriers (Marlow, 2020; Panda, 2018) or examine women entrepreneurs in different geographical contexts (AlAmmary, 2022; Braun, 2022), there is a significant lack of research that focuses specifically on the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship within Iran's tourism industry. Moreover, the lack of gender-specific data on socio-cultural, economic, and infrastructural barriers limits the ability to fully understand and address the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. Addressing this research gap is crucial to developing informed policies that can create a more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial environment for women.

This study aims to fill these gaps by examining the socio-cultural, economic, legal, and infrastructural barriers confronting women entrepreneurs in Iran's tourism industry. It seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, as well as the opportunities and strategies that can support their success.

1.2. Research justification

The justification of this project lies in its potential to shed light on the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Iran's tourism industry, a topic that has to be more highlighted in both academic research and policy discussions. Women entrepreneurs play a critical role in driving economic growth, fostering innovation, and promoting social development, yet they continue to face significant barriers that hinder their ability to thrive in the tourism sector.

Moreover, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the importance of promoting gender equality and empowering women as vital steps toward creating a sustainable, just, and prosperous world—making the issue of gender inequality in female tourism entrepreneurship, particularly in developing countries like Iran, a timely and critical area for deeper exploration.

By examining the socio-cultural, economic, legal, and infrastructural obstacles that women encounter, this project seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the systemic issues that limit their entrepreneurial potential. Addressing these challenges is not only essential for achieving gender equality but also for unlocking the full economic potential of the tourism industry in Iran, which has the capacity to contribute significantly to the country's economic diversification and sustainable development.

Moreover, this project has the potential to inform the development of targeted policies and programs that empower women entrepreneurs and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for their success. By advocating for gender-specific interventions, such as improved access to finance, legal protections, and business development services, this research can contribute to the creation of a more equitable entrepreneurial ecosystem. Ultimately, empowering women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector is not just a matter of social justice; it is also a strategic economic imperative. By

enabling women to fully participate in and benefit from the tourism industry, this project can help drive sustainable growth, create employment opportunities, and foster greater social and economic resilience in Iran.

As a woman born and raised in Iran, I have witnessed firsthand the resilience, creativity, and determination of Iranian women who pursue entrepreneurial paths despite significant constraints. My personal experiences and observations have deeply inspired this research. I am passionate about women's empowerment and committed to contributing to a more equitable society where women have the freedom and support to succeed in their chosen fields. Through this study, I seek not only to give voice to the challenges faced by women in the tourism industry but also to highlight their potential and resilience, and to advocate for the changes needed to foster their success.

This research contributes to the limited but growing academic discourse on female entrepreneurship in Iran, with a specific focus on the tourism industry. While many previous studies have explored women's empowerment through tourism, relatively few have directly addressed the distinct barriers that women entrepreneurs face in entering and sustaining businesses within this sector. By filling this gap, this study offers a more focused understanding of the structural and contextual challenges that limit women's entrepreneurial potential. It offers an in-depth, context-specific analysis of the barriers women face and proposes actionable recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers. In doing so, it not only adds to academic understanding but also provides practical insights for creating a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial environment in Iran.

1.3. Research objectives

The primary aim of this study is to explore the challenges and opportunities for women entrepreneurs in Iran's tourism industry. To achieve this, the following objectives will be pursued:

1. To identify the multifaced barriers that hinder women's participation and success in the tourism sector in Iran.
2. To examine how gender-specific challenges impact the entrepreneurial growth of women in the Iranian tourism industry.
3. To propose strategies that could enhance the success and empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry.

1.4. Research questions

In line with the study objectives, the following research questions are posed to guide the investigation:

1. What socio-cultural factors contribute to the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Iran's tourism industry?
2. How do economic constraints impact the ability of women to succeed in the tourism sector in Iran?
3. What legal and regulatory challenges do women entrepreneurs face when establishing and running businesses in Iran's tourism industry?
4. To what extent do government policies and support programs address the specific needs of women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry?
5. What strategies can be recommended to better support women entrepreneurs in overcoming the challenges they face in the Iranian tourism sector?

2

Theoretical Framework

2.1. Entrepreneurship in tourism

Entrepreneurship drives socioeconomic growth by creating jobs and offering diverse goods and services, boosting national prosperity. Tourism entrepreneurship, part of this growth, involves activities related to tourism products and services. The industry includes transportation, lodging, catering, travel agencies, entertainment, and more, ensuring memorable tourist experiences. Collaboration among these sectors is essential for a safe and welcoming environment for travelers worldwide. Entrepreneurship significantly drives socioeconomic growth and development by creating numerous jobs and offering a wide range of goods and services, which enhance national prosperity and competitiveness.

The intersection of entrepreneurship and tourism has gained significant scholarly attention, highlighting both the unique challenges and opportunities faced by entrepreneurs within the tourism sector (Ghaderi et al., 2023). Entrepreneurship in tourism is broadly defined as the process of identifying, developing, and exploiting new business opportunities within the tourism industry, which includes creating experiences, services, and products tailored to the specific needs of travelers and tourists (Hosseini et al., 2022). This field is particularly dynamic because it often intersects with various other domains, such as sustainability, community involvement, and innovation (Bagheri et al., 2023).

Recent studies highlight that entrepreneurship in tourism is often influenced by place-specific factors. These can include cultural heritage, environmental assets, and community engagement, which collectively shape the entrepreneurial landscape of a destination (Dias et al., 2022). Entrepreneurs are encouraged to leverage local resources and collaborate with community stakeholders to create distinctive experiences that reflect the identity of the place, making the destination more attractive to tourists.

Moreover, there is an increasing focus on how entrepreneurial ecosystems, supported by government policies and incubators, can nurture tourism start-ups by providing training, funding, and reduced regulatory burdens. Such support mechanisms are essential in enhancing entrepreneurs' confidence and reducing perceived risks associated with new venture creation (Kadile & Biraglia, 2022).

The COVID-19 pandemic has also influenced entrepreneurship in tourism, prompting a shift toward digital and sustainable business models. Entrepreneurs are now more inclined to adopt innovative practices, such as leveraging digital platforms for marketing and sales, as well as emphasizing eco-friendly initiatives that appeal to a growing demographic of environmentally conscious tourists (Figuerola-Domecq et al., 2020).

2.2. Female entrepreneurship, empowerment, and tourism

In the tourism sector, women's involvement as both employees and entrepreneurs has distinct implications. According to UNWTO (2019), women make up 54% of the tourism workforce and hold about 23% of tourism ministerial positions worldwide (Abou-shouk et al., 2021). However, there is a notable difference between women's employment and entrepreneurship within the industry. Movono and Dahles (2017) argue that while women are widely employed in tourism, they are often in low-skilled, low-wage roles, which limits their potential for economic empowerment.

Tourism plays a crucial role in meeting the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially the commitments to gender equality and empowering women outlined in Sustainable Development Goal 5.

As a specialized UN agency in tourism, UN Tourism is dedicated to enhancing tourism's positive effects on women's lives, thereby supporting the achievement of the Fifth Sustainable Development Goal: "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." Since 2007, UN Tourism, through its Ethics, Culture, and Social Responsibility Department, has collaborated with UN Women and various global partners to prioritize gender issues in the tourism sector, promote gender equality and women's empowerment, and encourage member states to integrate gender considerations into their tourism policies.

The potential of tourism for women's empowerment in local communities through entrepreneurship is a unique field. Tourism can provide opportunities for women entrepreneurs to own businesses, create wealth, and contribute in ways that have a broader impact socially and culturally. Entrepreneurship can offer women a way to challenge traditional narratives, secure financial independence, and contribute meaningfully to their communities (Tajeddini et al., 2017; McCall & Mearns, 2021).

Tourism entrepreneurship is particularly groundbreaking as it can lead to SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) where women can draw upon community resources and cultural knowledge. These endeavors support women in creating tourism products for diverse audiences—including cultural excursions, sustainable travel experiences (e.g., Countoescape and Secret Retreats), and craft enterprises that engage visitors and affirm local identities. Participation in tourism entrepreneurship supports local economies and enables women to gain confidence, leadership skills, financial stability, and personal growth (Movono & Dahles, 2017).

2.3. Global report on women in tourism

The UNWTO collaborated with UN Women, GIZ, the World Bank, and Amadeus to create the "Global Report on Women in Tourism, Second Edition." (UNWTO, 2019) This report gathers current statistics and examples to show how tourism contributes to gender equality and empowering all women and girls.



Figure 2.1 Sustainable Development Goals and women entrepreneurship

The report explores factors promoting gender equality in tourism, identifies challenges, and offers ways to reduce inequality while enhancing tourism's potential to empower women globally. The report also examines women's status in tourism across five themes: employment, entrepreneurship, education and training, leadership and policy-making, and community engagement. These themes help define gender equality and women's empowerment in tourism.

Using quantitative analysis, literature reviews, and 25 detailed case studies from 18 countries, the report examines trends in four regions—Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Europe—and four key tourism sectors: digital platforms and technology, hotels and accommodation, tour operators, and community-based tourism.

The report highlights seven crucial findings, each paired with specific recommendations:

1. **Targeted interventions** by public, private, and civil society sectors, such as addressing wage gaps, preventing sexual harassment, and advancing women into higher-level roles, promote fair employment opportunities for women in tourism.
2. **Gender-sensitive legal and macroeconomic frameworks** at national levels boost women's financial empowerment within the tourism industry, provided they are effectively enforced.
3. **Investing in training programs for women**, especially soft skills and gender equality awareness, significantly enhances gender parity in the sector.
4. **Gender equality strategies** for tourism are essential for women's empowerment and must be backed by adequate institutional and financial support to be effective.
5. Tourism can empower women **politically and socially** by linking them with broader community and civil society networks, fostering greater inclusion.
6. **Digitalization in tourism** offers significant opportunities for innovation and empowerment for women, provided they have access to necessary technology and gender-sensitive training.
7. **Sex-disaggregated** data in tourism allows for more precise, targeted gender equality measures, leading to stronger empowerment outcomes for women.

These findings and recommendations offer a framework to support stakeholders in promoting women's empowerment in tourism, moving toward gender equality in the industry.

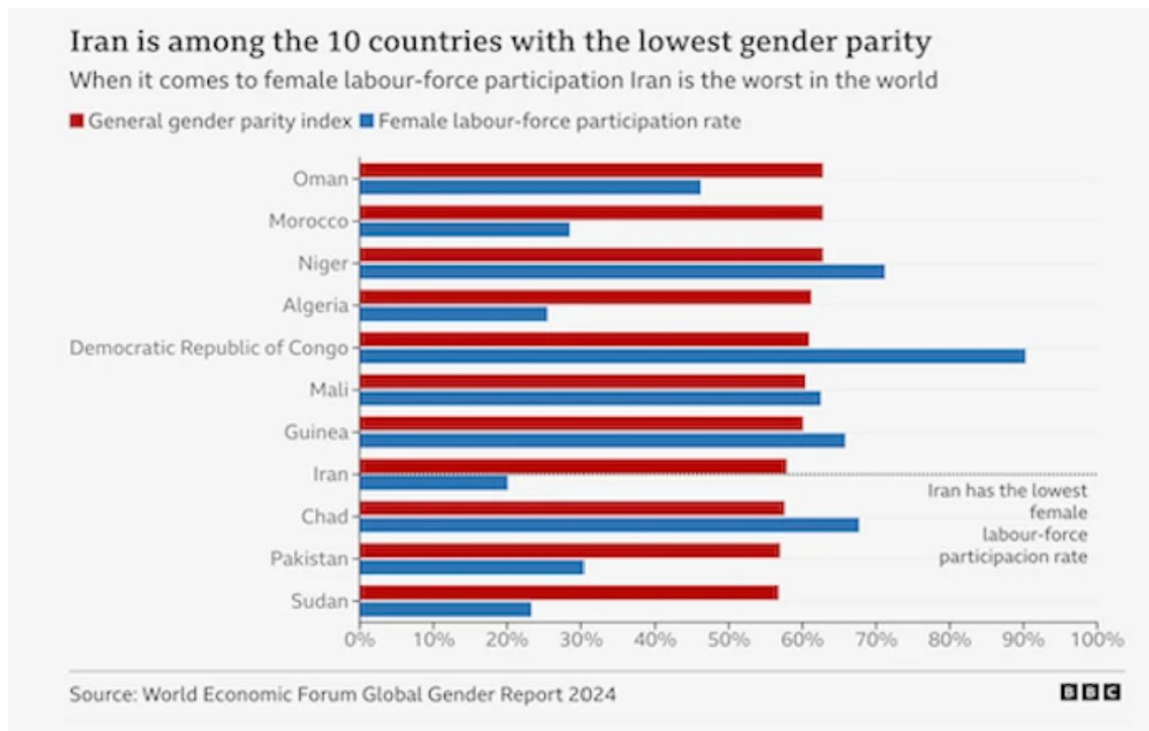


Figure 2.2. Iran’s rank in gender parity

The report also highlighted that tourism is a significant source of employment for women globally, with 54% of the workforce in the tourism sector made up of women, compared to 39% in the broader economy. However, despite higher employment rates, women in tourism earn 14.7% less than men, which is slightly lower than the 16.8% wage gap found in the broader economy. In terms of leadership, 23% of tourism ministers are women, compared to 20.7% of government ministers in general. These figures highlight both the opportunities and challenges women face in the tourism industry, especially in terms of pay equity and leadership representation.



a) World Bank (2019), World Bank Open Data, World Bank, Washington, D.C. (online), available at: [https:// data.worldbank.org](https://data.worldbank.org) (01-07-2019).

Figure 2.3 Women employment in tourism

2.4. Women in Iran

2.4.1. Woman’s participation in the labor market in Iran

A recent report from the Iran Statistics Center highlights that 71% of female graduates in Iran are unemployed, compared to a 27.1% unemployment rate for male graduates. The unemployment rate for women overall stands at 27.8%, nearly double that of men, which is 13.5%. While sectors such as finance, insurance, health, and education see higher employment for women, the overall disparity remains significant. The provinces with the highest unemployment rates include Sistan and Baluchestan, Hormozgan, Lorestan, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, and Kermanshah. These statistics reflect the ongoing gender inequality in the Iranian labor market.

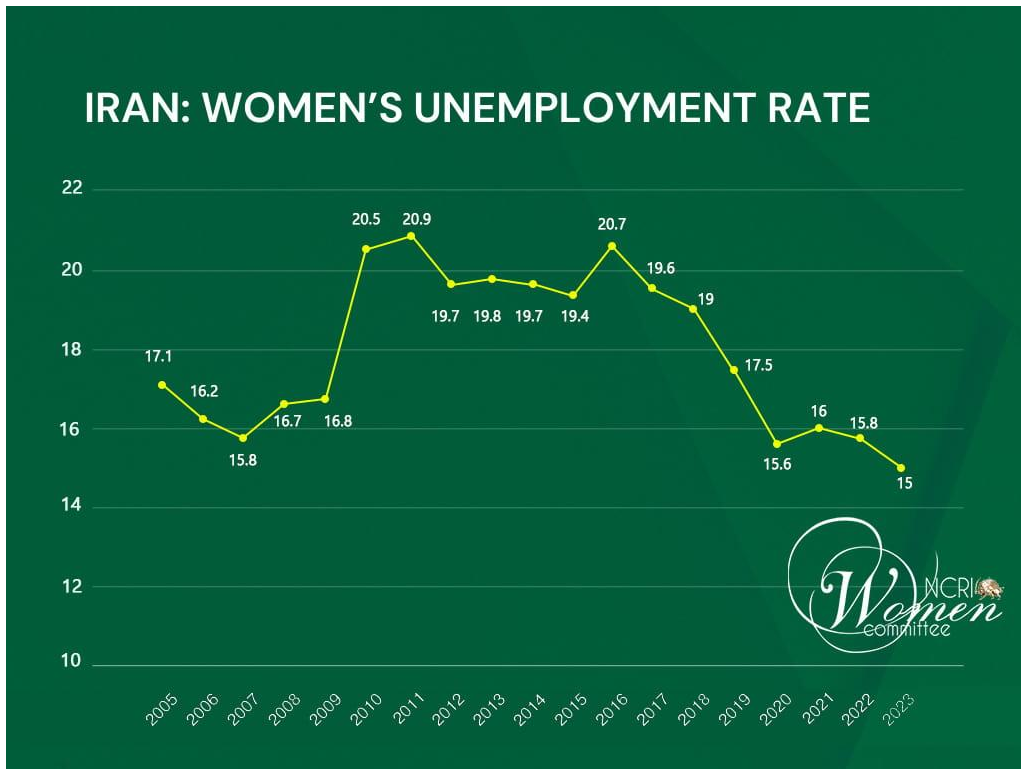


Figure 2.4. Women's participation in the labour market in Iran

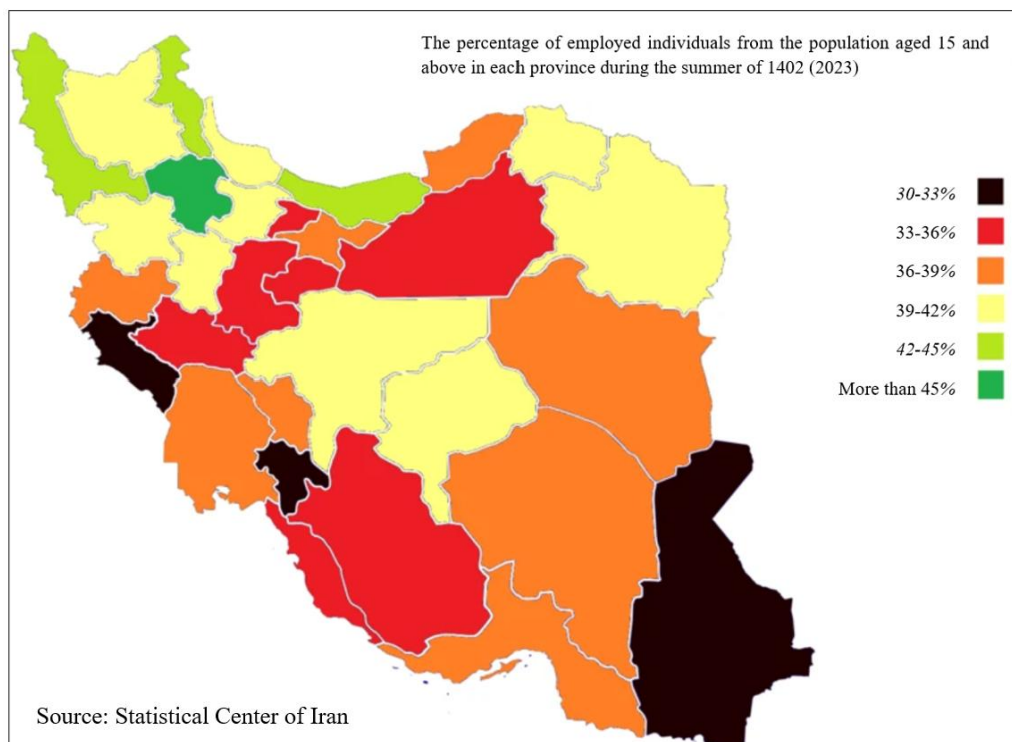


Figure 2.5. Employment rates in Iran

The labor market in Iran, as of 2023, reveals pronounced gender disparities. Of the 29.16 million people in the labor force, only a small fraction—16.80%—are women. This underrepresentation is further compounded by a female unemployment rate of 15.80%, which is significantly higher than the male rate of 7.75%. The overall labor force participation rate is 42.61%, yet only 14.38% of women are participating, compared to 70.58% of men. The majority of employed women work in the services sector, which accounts for 61.3% of female employment.

Such statistics indicate systemic barriers that hinder women's access to employment, potentially stemming from cultural norms, legal restrictions, or limited opportunities. These challenges highlight a critical need for policies that encourage female workforce participation and address gender inequality, which could lead to enhanced economic growth and social progress in Iran.

In addition, the 2024 Global Gender Gap Report by the World Economic Forum ranks Iran among the lowest in gender equality, placing it 143rd out of 145 countries. This reflects significant disparities across various dimensions, including economic participation, educational attainment, health, and political empowerment for women. Iran's ranking is a clear indication of the persistent challenges women face in areas like business and entrepreneurship, where access to finance, legal equality, and societal barriers continue to limit their opportunities.

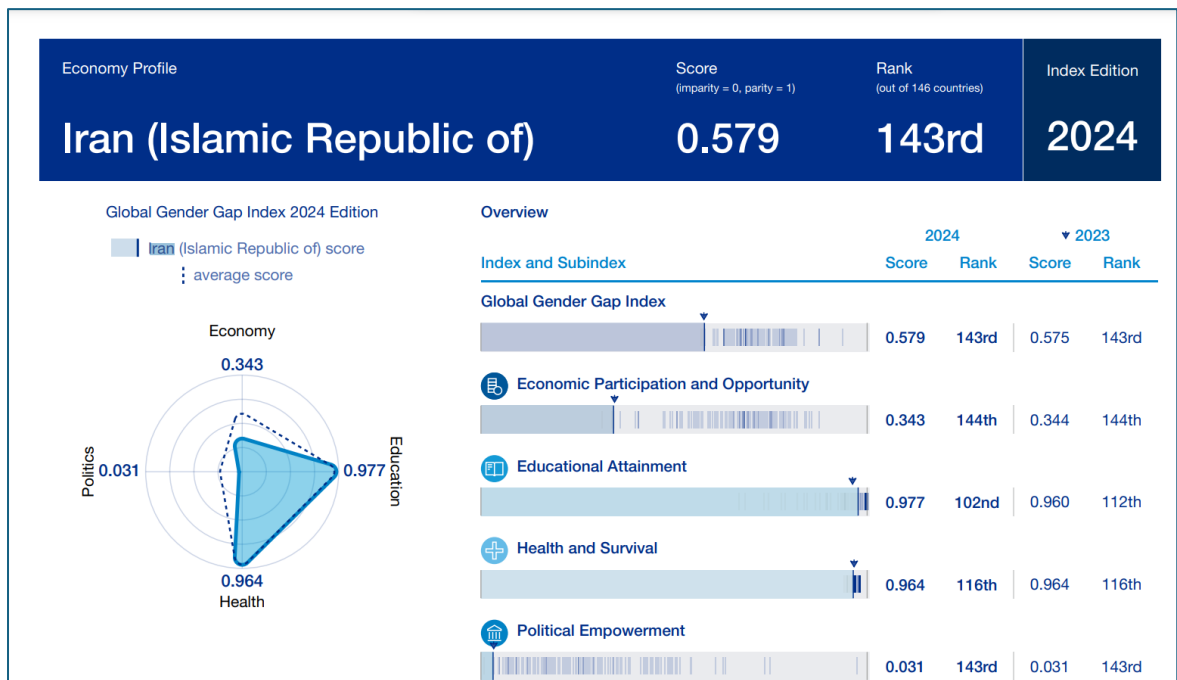


Figure 2.6. Iran and global gender gap index

To enhance women’s role in the national economy and address their unemployment crisis, fostering a supportive environment for women's entrepreneurship in Iran is crucial. This approach can create numerous opportunities for women and help alleviate unemployment.

2.4.2. Gender disparities in adult literacy in Iran

In Iran, adult literacy rates among women are lower than those of men (2022). However, the adult female literacy rate in Iran surpasses the average literacy rate for women in the Middle East and North Africa region. Adult literacy refers to the percentage of individuals aged 15 and above who possess the ability to read and write a simple statement related to their daily lives with comprehension.

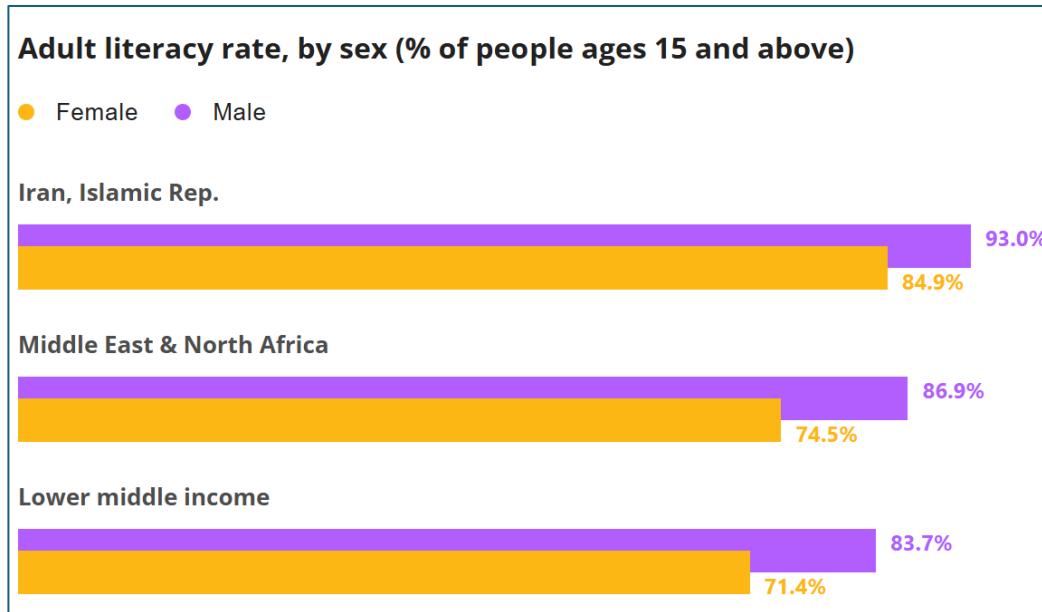


Figure 2.7. Adult literacy in Iran

2.4.3. Gender gap in labor force participation in Iran

In Iran, the labor force participation rate for females is 14.4%, compared to 70.6% for males in 2023. The labor force participation rate represents the proportion of the population aged 15 and older that is economically active. While the participation of women in the labor force has increased since 1990, the gender gap remains significant.

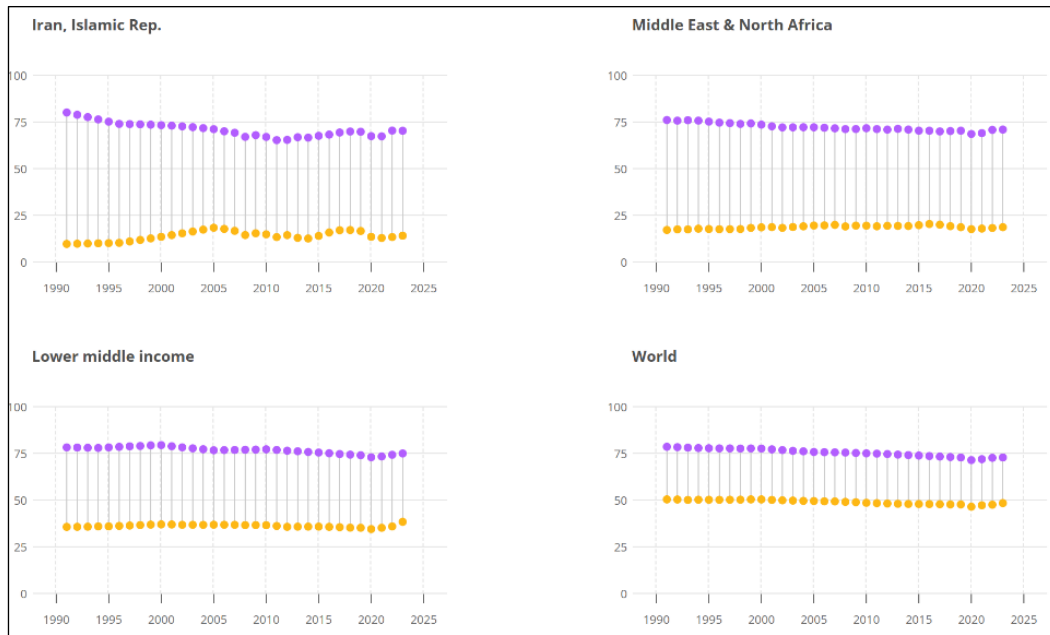


Figure 2.8. Labor force participation rate, by sex (% of population ages 15+)

2.4.4. Vulnerable employment trends in Iran

Vulnerable employment among females in Iran has improved since 1991. Workers in vulnerable employment are those least likely to have formal work arrangements, social protection, or safety nets, making them more susceptible to economic shocks and poverty. In 2022, vulnerable employment was 38.3% for women and 39.6% for men in Iran. Both rates are higher than the average vulnerable employment rates for men and women in the Middle East and North Africa region.

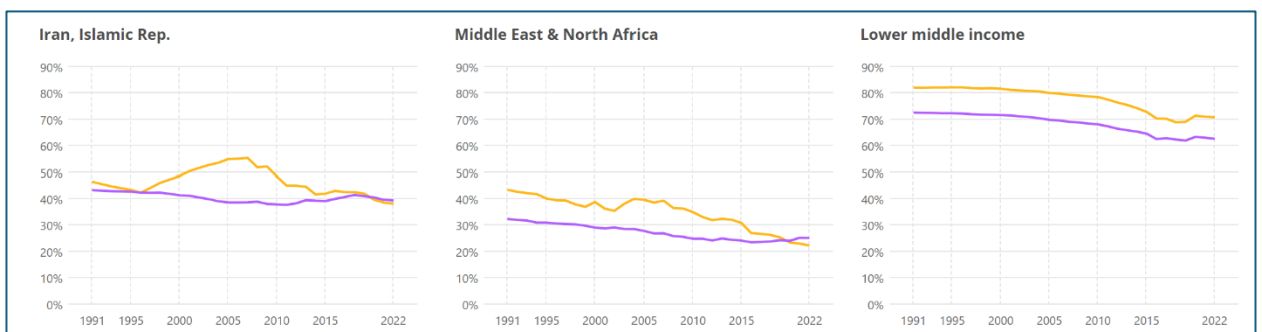


Figure 2.9. Vulnerable employment, by sex (% of total employment)

2.5. Iranian women and tourism entrepreneurs

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) 2023/24 Women's Entrepreneurship Report provides a comprehensive analysis of women's entrepreneurship globally, based on data collected over 25 years by the GEM consortium. The report examines various aspects of women's entrepreneurial activity, including startup intentions, business stages, industry sectors, motivations, perceptions, and demographic trends. It also explores emerging trends such as digitalization, sustainability, and access to finance. The report highlights several key findings about Iranian women entrepreneurs such as:

1. Startup Activity and Business Stages:

- **Startup Intentions:** Iran is mentioned in the context of startup intentions. The report notes that women in Iran have lower startup intentions compared to men, with a W/M (women-to-men) ratio of 0.49. This is one of the largest gender gaps in startup intentions among the countries surveyed.
- **Established Business Ownership:** Iran is also mentioned in the context of established business ownership. Women in Iran have lower rates of established business ownership compared to men, with a W/M ratio of 0.43.

2. High-Potential Entrepreneurship:

- **Innovation:** Iran is highlighted as one of the countries where women represent the majority of startups bringing new innovations to market. Specifically, women in Iran account for 53.5% of startups introducing new innovations.
- **Export Activity:** While not specifically highlighted for export activity, Iran is part of the broader analysis of women's participation in high-potential entrepreneurship.

3. Perceptions and Motivations:

- **Opportunity Recognition:** Women in Iran have relatively low rates of recognizing new business opportunities, with only 27.7% of women reporting seeing new opportunities, compared to higher rates in other countries.
- **Startup Skills:** Women in Iran report lower confidence in their startup skills compared to men, with a W/M ratio of 0.69.
- **Fear of Failure:** The report notes that fear of failure is a significant barrier for women in Iran, with women being less likely than men to report that fear of failure would prevent them from starting a business.

4. Demographic Indicators:

- **Age:** The report mentions that women entrepreneurs in Iran tend to be younger, with a significant proportion under the age of 35.
- **Education:** Women entrepreneurs in Iran are less likely to have graduate-level education compared to men, with a W/M ratio of 0.81.

5. Sustainability:

- **Sustainability Practices:** Iran is mentioned in the context of sustainability, where women are more likely than men to prioritize sustainability over economic goals. Specifically, women in Iran are 78% more likely than men to prioritize sustainability.

6. Informal Investment:

- **Investment Activity:** Iran is noted for having a relatively high average size of informal business investments by women, with women investing over \$10,000 on average.

Methodology

3.1. Research design

The study employs a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of women entrepreneurs. A comprehensive analysis of literature and prior studies (e.g., Seyfi et al., 2025; Demir & Tabrizy, 2022) informed the identification of key barriers, highlighting the need for deeper inquiry into gender-specific challenges. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were selected as the primary data collection method, enabling exploration of participants' perspectives while allowing flexibility to probe emergent themes (Hosseini et al., 2022). This approach aligns with the study's exploratory aims, prioritizing depth and contextual understanding over generalization.

3.2. Data collection

To collect data, a semi-structured in-depth interview approach was chosen as the most suitable method. This approach allows for accurate observation of participants' reactions and precise documentation of their responses (Hosseini et al., 2022). The interview questions were developed based on a review of the literature and previous studies (e.g., Seyfi et al., 2025; Demir & Tabrizy, 2022; Hosseini et al., 2022) and were tailored to fit the study's context. The lead author conducted all 20 interviews in Persian, each lasting between 30 and 50 minutes.

3.3. Sampling

Participants were selected via purposeful sampling, targeting women entrepreneurs actively engaged in Iran's tourism sector. The sample included entrepreneurs from diverse tourism-related industries, including hospitality, travel agencies, and handicrafts. Recruitment continued until "data saturation" was achieved, where no new insights emerged from subsequent interviews (Siyamiyan et al., 2022b). This criterion ensured a comprehensive exploration of themes while maintaining methodological rigor.

3.4. Data analysis

Thematic analysis, a systematic yet flexible method for qualitative inquiry, was employed to analyze the data (Hosseini et al., 2022). The process involved:

1. **Familiarization:** Repeated reading of transcripts to identify initial patterns.
2. **Coding:** Generating descriptive labels for key segments of data.
3. **Theme Development:** Grouping codes into broader themes reflecting socio-cultural, economic, and legal barriers.

4. **Review and Refinement:** Ensuring themes cohesively captured participants' narratives.

These steps align with established qualitative research practices, reinforcing the reliability of findings (Siyamiyan et al., 2023)

Findings and Results

4-1. Research findings

The findings show that women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry face a range of challenges, which can be categorized into three main areas: intrapersonal constraints, external barriers, and workplace constraints.

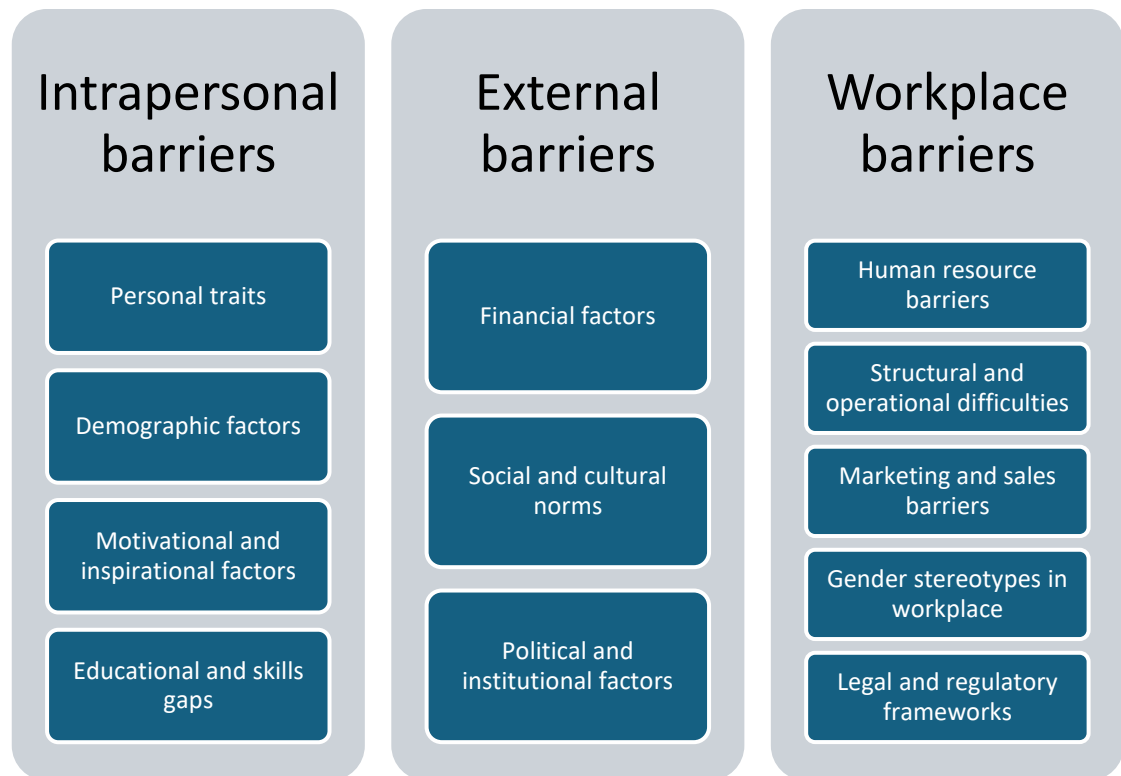


Figure 4.1. Challenges women entrepreneurs face in the tourism industry

4-2. Intrapersonal barriers

Intrapersonal barriers are internal psychological or emotional obstacles that can hinder women from pursuing or succeeding in entrepreneurship. In the context of Iran's tourism sector, intrapersonal barriers play a significant role in shaping women's entrepreneurial experiences. These barriers can be categorized into personal traits, demographic challenges, motivational factors, and educational or skills gaps.

- Personal traits

Several studies have emphasized the impact of personal traits on women's entrepreneurship (Seyfi et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2023). Characteristics such as shyness, fear of failure, and lack of self-confidence can deter women from actively engaging in entrepreneurial activities. Risk aversion and inflexibility further compound these challenges, as women may struggle to adapt to the volatile nature of the tourism industry. Additionally, low creativity, often rooted in limited exposure to innovative environments, can stifle entrepreneurial potential (Braun, 2022; Efthymiadou & Farmaki, 2023). This was echoed by participant 2:

“Sometimes, I hesitate to promote my business ideas because I feel like people won't take me seriously. The fear of failure is always in the back of my mind.”

- Demographic factors

Demographic factors play a crucial role in shaping women's participation in entrepreneurship (Seyfi et al., 2023; Demir & Tabrizy, 2022). Age affects experience and perception—young women may lack credibility, while older women might face digital barriers. Socioeconomic status impacts access to capital and resources; women from low-income backgrounds may be forced into necessity-driven entrepreneurship. Geographic location matters too—urban women usually have better access to markets and support, unlike those in rural areas. Family and marital status can limit time and flexibility due to caregiving roles. (Efthymiadou & Farmaki, 2023; Hosseini et al., 2023). This was mentioned by participant 6:

“In Iran, starting a business isn't just about having a good idea. It's about pushing past where I come from—the limits of my education, family expectations, and all the labels society puts on me before I even begin. Many women can't afford to dream like this, especially those growing up in rural areas where we're still struggling with basic needs.”

- Motivational and inspirational factors

Motivation and inspiration are crucial drivers of entrepreneurial success, yet women in Iran often face deficits in these areas. Personal growth and learning are also significant motivators, as building a business challenges women to develop new skills and evolve in

ways they may not have imagined. A lack of visible role models and limited achievement motivation are commonly cited challenges (Seyfi et al., 2023). The absence of strong female figures in entrepreneurship perpetuates a cycle of limited ambition and opportunities for women in the tourism sector. For many women, the desire for financial independence is a key motivator, providing the opportunity to support themselves and their families, and break free from dependency. Passion for a cause or idea often sparks entrepreneurial ambitions, as women seek to turn their passions into businesses that not only fulfill personal goals but also create a positive social impact (AlAmmary, 2022). The support of family and networks further fuels motivation, providing both emotional encouragement and practical resources. This was noted by participant 10:

“As a woman it’s hard to believe that success is possible. I’ve rarely seen women like me succeed in this industry.”

- Educational and skills gaps

Education level influences access to business knowledge, with less-educated women often struggling more. The tourism sector demands specific managerial and entrepreneurial skills, which many women lack due to educational gaps or limited prior business experience (Oghazi et al., 2024). Studies have highlighted the need for training programs focused on leadership, management, and innovation to empower women entrepreneurs (Czernek-Marszałek & McCabe, 2024). Without such interventions, women remain at a disadvantage, unable to compete effectively in the dynamic and competitive tourism industry. Women entrepreneurs in Iran also face barriers to training and skill development. There are few opportunities for professional growth, particularly in leadership and technical skills (Efthymiadou & Farmaki, 2023). Inadequate access to entrepreneurial training programs further limits women’s ability to acquire the skills needed for business success (Czernek-Marszałek & McCabe, 2024). This was highlighted by participants 1 and 8:

“It’s not that we lack the potential; it’s that we lack the access to programs that can help us unlock it.”

“I have great ideas, but I don’t know how to turn them into a business plan. I need training and mentorship to move forward.”

4-3. External barriers

The external barriers identified in the study refer to external, contextual factors that impede the development of women's entrepreneurship. These barriers often exist outside

of the individual's control and are shaped by broader societal norms, laws, and market conditions. Here's a breakdown of these barriers:

- Financial factors

Economic factors significantly influence women's ability to start and sustain businesses. These factors encompass the broader economic environment, access to financial resources, and market conditions that can either support or hinder women entrepreneurs. Gender wage gaps and income inequality impact women's ability to invest in their own businesses. Women generally earn less than men in many sectors, meaning they have fewer personal savings to reinvest in business ventures. This limits their ability to self-finance or reinvest profits back into their businesses. Women often face difficulty accessing funding or investment opportunities due to discriminatory lending practices and a lack of collateral (Seyfi et al., 2023). Pay inequality further exacerbates these challenges, as women have less disposable income to invest in entrepreneurial ventures (Hosseini et al., 2023). Financial dependence on male family members also restricts women's ability to make independent economic decisions, limiting their capacity to start or grow their businesses (Efthymiadou & Farmaki, 2023). One of the most significant economic barriers women face is limited access to capital. Women entrepreneurs often struggle to secure loans, venture capital, or investment funding compared to their male counterparts. Financial institutions and investors may have a gender bias, often viewing women as higher risks or less capable of managing businesses. This was commented by participant 18:

“Even if you have the skills and the passion, it doesn't matter without funding. Securing funding is one of the toughest parts of starting a business. It's not just about having a good idea—it's about having the resources to make it happen. Accessing financial support as a woman is like climbing a mountain. Every time I seek investment, I feel like I have to go the extra mile just to prove my worth.”

- Social and cultural norms

Social and cultural norms significantly shape the experiences of women entrepreneurs, influencing their ability to succeed or face barriers. These norms, deeply rooted in societal beliefs, traditions, and expectations about gender roles, family responsibilities, and women's place in the business world, can either facilitate or hinder entrepreneurial efforts (Czernek-Marszałek & McCabe, 2024).

In smaller or rural communities, traditional norms and resistance to change can make opposition to women's entrepreneurial activities particularly strong (Seyfi et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2022). This social isolation limits women's access to critical resources and networking opportunities, further hindering their entrepreneurial potential.

Cultural norms in Iran, especially patriarchal expectations, prioritize women's roles as caregivers, discouraging their participation in economic activities (Seyfi et al., 2023; Hosseini et al., 2023). Negative societal perceptions and stereotypes about women entrepreneurs often lead to a lack of support for their ventures, reinforcing the idea that women should prioritize family responsibilities over career aspirations (Demir & Tabrizy, 2022). These deeply ingrained beliefs create a challenging environment, where women must not only overcome market obstacles but also societal biases. As participant 5 shared:

"Cultural traditions often dictate that women should remain in the background, not lead. Starting my business meant confronting that deeply ingrained idea and showing that I could be both a business leader and a mother."

Women in the Iranian tourism sector are particularly affected by these traditional gender roles. In addition to societal pressures, women's mobility is restricted, which limits their access to networking opportunities and potential clients (Carrasco-Santos et al., 2024). The disproportionate responsibility for family care often leaves women with limited time and energy to dedicate to their businesses, especially in service-oriented sectors like tourism, where long hours and demanding schedules are common. Participant 1 explained:

"I had to fight against the belief that women should stay home and focus on the family. Breaking free from these traditional expectations was the first step to creating my own business."

The stigma surrounding women in the tourism industry is compounded by cultural attitudes toward women's mobility and independence. In many cases, women are required to seek permission from male family members to travel or engage in business activities, severely restricting their ability to operate effectively in the sector (Seyfi et al., 2023). This lack of autonomy not only limits entrepreneurial potential but also reinforces the gender disparities that exist within the industry.

Women who venture into the tourism sector also face resistance from their families and communities, who often view their entrepreneurial aspirations as incompatible with their roles as wives and mothers. As participant 9 noted:

"It's not just about starting a business; it's about convincing everyone around you that you're capable and deserving of the opportunity to succeed."

Religious restrictions and ethical concerns further complicate the situation for women entrepreneurs in Iran. Misinterpretations of religious teachings discourage women's independence and economic participation, reinforcing traditional roles and creating social pressure to conform (Seyfi et al., 2023). Ethical concerns about women engaging in business activities deemed inappropriate also limit their entrepreneurial opportunities. Addressing these barriers requires not only community-level education but also a reevaluation of cultural and religious narratives. As participant 12 explained:

"To succeed, we need to challenge the traditional views that hold us back, both within our communities and in our understanding of religion."

- Political and institutional factors

Political and institutional barriers are significant challenges that further complicate the entrepreneurial landscape for women in Iran. These barriers manifest through inconsistent policies, insufficient institutional support, and limited representation of women in decision-making roles. Although there are government programs that aim to support entrepreneurship, these initiatives are often poorly implemented and lack the necessary resources to make a meaningful impact (Braun, 2022). The inefficacy of these programs exacerbates existing challenges, making it difficult for women entrepreneurs to access the support they need to succeed. This was noted by participant 11:

"Even though there are government programs that are supposed to help women like me, the reality is that these programs rarely reach us or fail to address the real challenges we face in starting and growing a business."

4-4. Workplace barriers

Workplace barriers refer to challenges women face within businesses or institutions, including their own enterprises or external systems. These barriers impact women's ability to start, manage, or grow businesses and often arise from organizational structures, policies, and practices. Here's a breakdown of these barriers:

- Human resource barriers

Human resource barriers, including the lack of a skilled workforce, pose significant challenges for women entrepreneurs. Limited resources often make it difficult for women to attract and retain qualified employees (Seyfi et al., 2023). Additionally, distrust in women leaders and gender-based discrimination undermine their authority and

effectiveness in managerial roles (Bagheri et al., 2024; Demir & Tabrizy, 2022). Such biases not only hinder organizational success but also perpetuate systemic inequality within the workforce. This was echoed by participant 2:

“As a woman leader, earning trust within your team can feel like climbing a steep hill—it takes effort, patience, and persistence.”

- Structural and operational difficulties

Structural and operational barriers further constrain women’s entrepreneurial potential. Limited access to technology, tools, or office space hinders operational efficiency (Efthymiadou & Farmaki, 2023). Many women entrepreneurs also lack organizational support systems, such as mentorship, training, or access to professional networks (Czernek-Marszałek & McCabe, 2024). Traditional hierarchies and rigid organizational structures fail to accommodate inclusive practices, creating additional obstacles for women leaders (Hosseini et al., 2023). This was noted by participant 5:

“Without the right tools and infrastructure, running a business feels like being asked to build a house with no bricks.” – Female entrepreneur, Mashhad

- Marketing and sales barriers

Marketing and sales barriers also hinder women entrepreneurs, particularly in accessing competitive markets. Women often struggle to establish supply chain relationships due to exclusion from male-dominated networks (Seyfi et al., 2023). Limited sales opportunities and a dependence on exclusive clients make women-led businesses vulnerable to market fluctuations (Efthymiadou & Farmaki, 2023). These challenges highlight the need for greater inclusivity and support in market access. This was explained by participant 11:

“Breaking into established markets feels like knocking on a locked door that was never designed to open for women.”

- Gender stereotypes in workplace

Hostile work environments remain a significant barrier for women entrepreneurs. Women frequently encounter harassment, exclusion, or other forms of workplace

hostility (Demir & Tabrizy, 2022). Inflexible work policies further compound these challenges, as traditional arrangements often fail to accommodate women's dual roles in work and family life (Seyfi et al., 2023). Limited leadership opportunities for women in senior or decision-making roles perpetuate gender disparities within organizations (Hosseini et al., 2023). This was explained by participant 14:

“Balancing work and family are tough enough without facing hostility and exclusion in the workplace.”

Persistent gender stereotypes and cultural biases create additional challenges for women entrepreneurs within organizations. Women often face marginalization due to stereotyping and a preference for male leadership in critical roles (Seyfi et al., 2023). These biases perpetuate inequality, making it difficult for women to gain recognition or opportunities within their organizations (Demir & Tabrizy, 2022). This was stated by participant 12:

“People still assume that critical decisions require a man's touch. It's disheartening and frustrating.”

- Legal and regulatory frameworks

Regulatory barriers within organizations also hinder women's progress. Complex internal processes and bureaucratic hurdles often disproportionately disadvantage women entrepreneurs (Hosseini et al., 2023). Many organizations fail to implement or enforce gender equity policies effectively, further limiting opportunities for women. This was commented by participant 7:

“The rules are there, but they're more of a formality than a reality—nothing really changes.”

Legal and regulatory frameworks also disadvantage women entrepreneurs, either directly or indirectly. Restrictive laws and inadequate maternity leave policies discourage women from pursuing entrepreneurial activities (AlAmmary, 2022; Seyfi et al., 2023). Women in Iran frequently encounter bureaucratic hurdles, such as delays or challenges in obtaining business permits, which hinder their ability to operate legally and efficiently (Oghazi et al., 2024). These systemic barriers highlight the need for gender-sensitive reforms in business regulations and employment policies. This was stated by participant 10:

“Getting the necessary permits and licenses feels like navigating a maze designed to keep women out.”

5

Conclusions and Implications

5.1. Conclusions and implications

Women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry face a multitude of challenges that stem from intrapersonal, external, and workplace constraints. These barriers not only limit their ability to establish and sustain businesses but also reinforce broader gender disparities in the entrepreneurial landscape (Seyfi et al., 2023). Based on these considerations, this master's project aimed to achieve three key objectives: First, to identify the diverse barriers that restrict women's participation and success in Iran's tourism sector; second, to analyze the impact of gender-specific challenges on the entrepreneurial growth of women in the Iranian tourism industry; and third, to propose effective strategies to enhance the success and empowerment of women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector.

The findings reveal that women entrepreneurs in Iran's tourism industry face intrapersonal, external, and workplace constraints, which collectively hinder their ability to establish, sustain, and grow their businesses. These challenges are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional fabric of the country, creating a complex web of barriers that women must navigate to succeed in the entrepreneurial landscape.

At the intrapersonal level, women entrepreneurs in Iran often grapple with psychological and personal limitations that stem from deeply ingrained cultural norms and societal expectations. Many women report low self-confidence and a fear of failure, which are exacerbated by the patriarchal nature of Iranian society, where traditional gender roles often discourage women from taking risks or pursuing entrepreneurial ventures (Hosseini et al., 2023). Additionally, the lack of visible female role models in the tourism industry further diminishes women's motivation and self-belief, as they struggle to envision themselves as successful entrepreneurs (Panda, 2018). Balancing familial responsibilities with professional aspirations also poses a significant challenge, as women are often expected to prioritize domestic duties over their entrepreneurial ambitions (Al-Dajani & Marlow, 2015). These intrapersonal barriers highlight the need for initiatives that build self-efficacy, provide mentorship, and challenge traditional gender roles through education and awareness campaigns.

External barriers present structural and operational barriers that impede women's access to resources, leadership positions, and market opportunities. Women entrepreneurs often struggle with limited financial support, inadequate training opportunities, and gender-based biases in the workplace (Oghazi, Patel, & Hajighasemi, 2024). These biases manifest in various forms, including unequal access to networking opportunities, exclusion from decision-making processes, and a lack of representation in industry associations (Efthymiadou & Farmaki, 2023). Furthermore, rigid organizational hierarchies and restrictive policies create additional obstacles, making it difficult for women to scale their businesses or innovate within the tourism sector. To overcome these challenges, organizations must adopt gender-sensitive policies, promote diversity in leadership, and provide tailored training programs that address the specific needs of women entrepreneurs.

Workplace constraints encompass socio-economic, legal, and cultural barriers that shape the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem. Patriarchal norms, restrictive laws, and inadequate institutional support prevent women from fully engaging in the tourism sector (Seyfi, Hall, & Vo-Thanh, 2023). In many regions, cultural stigmas surrounding women's participation in business persist, limiting their mobility and access to public spaces where entrepreneurial activities thrive (AlAmmary, 2022). Financial barriers, including limited access to funding and unfavorable loan conditions, further restrict their ability to expand their businesses. Additionally, the lack of supportive infrastructure, such as childcare facilities and safe transportation, disproportionately affects women entrepreneurs, particularly in developing economies (Demir & Tabrizy, 2022). Addressing these environmental barriers requires systemic changes, including legal reforms, increased institutional support, and community-based initiatives that challenge traditional gender norms.

The results of this study can help understand the status of women in the Muslim world regarding entrepreneurship and the barriers they face in the tourism sector. The increasing educational level of women in Iran and many Muslim countries is helping to reduce some of the barriers to entry in the tourism sector.

5.2. Recommendations and practical implications

To foster a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial environment, it is essential to implement targeted policies that support women entrepreneurs. These include improved access to financial resources, mentorship programs, and legal reforms to promote gender equality in business (Czernek-Marszałek & McCabe, 2024). Governments and industry stakeholders must collaborate to create enabling environments that address the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs. For instance, establishing women-focused funding schemes, providing business development training, and creating platforms for networking and knowledge-sharing can significantly enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities. Additionally, promoting gender-sensitive tourism policies and encouraging the representation of women in decision-making roles can help dismantle systemic barriers and create a more inclusive industry. Furthermore, research should explore the effectiveness of legal mechanisms for addressing discrimination and protecting women's rights in business disputes. In addition, the below recommendations are suggested:

- **Addressing Socio-Cultural Barriers:** Promoting gender equality and challenging traditional gender roles through educational programs and awareness campaigns. This should involve community engagement to foster a more supportive environment for women entrepreneurs.
- **Improving Access to Finance:** Developing financial products and services tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs, including access to microfinance and loan programs with flexible eligibility criteria. This requires addressing biases in lending practices and providing training on financial management.
- **Strengthening Legal and Regulatory Frameworks:** Ensuring that laws and regulations protect women's rights in business and address gender discrimination.

This includes promoting legal literacy among women entrepreneurs and providing legal support for resolving business disputes.

- **Improving Infrastructure and Access to Resources:** Investing in infrastructure development, including reliable internet connectivity, transportation, and communication networks, to enhance the accessibility of resources for women entrepreneurs in all regions. This also involves providing access to essential business services, such as marketing and accounting support.
- **Developing Targeted Support Programs:** Creating government programs and initiatives specifically designed to support women entrepreneurs in the tourism sector, providing training, mentoring, and networking opportunities. These programs should be regionally tailored to address specific needs and challenges.

Addressing the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in the tourism industry is not only a matter of social justice but also a strategic imperative for economic growth and innovation. Women bring unique perspectives and innovative ideas that can drive the industry forward, particularly in areas such as sustainable tourism, community-based tourism, and cultural preservation (Seyfi et al., 2023). By empowering women entrepreneurs, the tourism sector can tap into a largely underutilized talent pool, fostering resilience and competitiveness in an increasingly dynamic global market. Moreover, the success of women entrepreneurs can have a ripple effect, inspiring future generations of women to pursue entrepreneurial ventures and contributing to the overall socio-economic development of their communities.

5.3. Limitation and future directions

This study, while providing valuable insights into the barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Iran's tourism sector, has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research focuses exclusively on Iran, and while it provides a detailed analysis of the socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers within this context, the findings might not be fully generalizable to other countries with different cultural, legal, and economic environments. Second, the study relies on a limited number of participants for qualitative analysis. Although purposeful sampling was used to ensure diversity among women entrepreneurs, the sample may not fully represent the wide range of experiences across Iran's various regions and industries. Third, while the study primarily explores barriers, it provides limited attention to the strategies or success stories of women entrepreneurs who have managed to overcome these obstacles. This may result in a somewhat unbalanced perspective on the entrepreneurial landscape. Fourth, the study is largely qualitative, relying on thematic analysis of interviews and literature. While this approach provides deep insights, the lack of substantial quantitative data limits the ability to statistically validate the findings or measure the broader impact of the identified barriers. Fifth, the research is confined to the tourism sector, which, while significant, may not provide a comprehensive view of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in other industries within Iran.

Future research could address these limitations by incorporating larger and more diverse samples, employing mixed-method approaches to combine qualitative and quantitative data, and expanding the scope to include comparative studies across regions or industries. Additionally, exploring the success strategies of women entrepreneurs could provide a more holistic view of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

5.4. Síntesis de las conclusiones

El presente estudio pone de manifiesto que las mujeres emprendedoras en el sector turístico de Irán enfrentan una serie de barreras complejas y multidimensionales que limitan su capacidad para alcanzar el éxito empresarial y contribuir plenamente al desarrollo económico del país. Estas barreras se agrupan en tres niveles principales: intrapersonales, externas y laborales, cada uno de los cuales presenta retos específicos que exigen soluciones integrales y personalizadas.

En cuanto a las barreras intrapersonales, se identificaron factores psicológicos, demográficos y educativos que afectan la confianza en sí mismas, la toma de decisiones y las habilidades emprendedoras de las mujeres. Muchas carecen de acceso a formación especializada y redes de mentoría, lo que dificulta el desarrollo de competencias clave para emprender en un sector tan dinámico como el turismo. Además, los factores culturales y sociales que influyen en las expectativas de género pueden generar dudas internas, falta de motivación y una menor propensión al riesgo, elementos esenciales para la innovación y el emprendimiento.

Por su parte, las barreras externas reflejan el impacto de las normas socioculturales restrictivas, las limitaciones económicas y los marcos legales desfavorables. Las mujeres emprendedoras enfrentan dificultades significativas para acceder al financiamiento, tanto por la falta de políticas inclusivas como por los prejuicios de las instituciones financieras. Asimismo, el entorno legal y regulatorio, en muchos casos, no está diseñado para apoyar de manera equitativa a las mujeres, lo que refuerza las desigualdades de género. Estas restricciones se ven agravadas por normas culturales que limitan la participación activa de las mujeres en roles de liderazgo o en sectores tradicionalmente dominados por hombres.

En el ámbito de las barreras laborales, los desafíos incluyen restricciones financieras, problemas en la gestión de recursos humanos, ineficiencias estructurales y operativas, así como obstáculos relacionados con el marketing y la promoción. Las mujeres enfrentan dificultades para acceder a mercados competitivos y carecen de apoyo organizacional que les permita sortear los retos inherentes al sector turístico.

Además, los estereotipos de género en el lugar de trabajo continúan siendo una barrera significativa, ya que limitan la percepción de las capacidades de las mujeres y su acceso a posiciones de liderazgo.

Para superar estos desafíos, el estudio enfatiza la necesidad de adoptar políticas públicas con enfoque de género que fomenten la igualdad de oportunidades en el emprendimiento. Es esencial fortalecer el acceso a recursos financieros mediante programas inclusivos que eliminen las barreras de género en el financiamiento y facilitar la formación técnica y profesional adaptada a las necesidades del sector turístico. Además, debe incentivarse la creación de redes de mentoría y de apoyo institucional que permitan a las mujeres acceder a experiencias, conocimientos y contactos que impulsen sus negocios.

A nivel cultural, es fundamental promover un cambio en las percepciones sociales sobre el papel de las mujeres en el ámbito empresarial. Esto incluye campañas de concienciación destinadas a desafiar los estereotipos de género, así como la implementación de iniciativas que resalten los logros de las mujeres emprendedoras como modelos a seguir.

En el ámbito laboral, se recomienda mejorar las estructuras organizacionales y operativas para garantizar que las mujeres emprendedoras puedan competir en igualdad de condiciones. Esto incluye la implementación de programas de apoyo específicos para superar desafíos relacionados con la promoción y el marketing, así como la creación de incentivos para que las empresas lideradas por mujeres puedan acceder a mercados globales.

En conclusión, abordar las barreras que enfrentan las mujeres emprendedoras en el sector turístico de Irán no solo es un imperativo de justicia social, sino también una estrategia clave para impulsar el crecimiento económico y la sostenibilidad. Las mujeres representan un recurso invaluable que, con el apoyo adecuado, puede transformar el sector turístico en un motor de desarrollo inclusivo e innovador.

5.5. Recomendaciones e implicaciones prácticas

Este estudio identifica las principales barreras que enfrentan las mujeres emprendedoras en el sector turístico de Irán y ofrece recomendaciones prácticas para superarlas. La implementación de estas medidas puede fomentar un ecosistema empresarial más inclusivo y liberar el potencial de las mujeres emprendedoras. Las recomendaciones e implicaciones prácticas se presentan a continuación:

1. Reformas políticas y legales

- Políticas con perspectiva de género: Los responsables políticos deben diseñar e implementar políticas inclusivas que respondan a las necesidades específicas de las mujeres emprendedoras, eliminando restricciones basadas en el género y promoviendo la igualdad de oportunidades.
- Simplificación de procedimientos regulatorios: Reducir los trámites burocráticos para la obtención de licencias y el registro de empresas disminuirá las barreras de entrada para las mujeres emprendedoras, especialmente en el sector turístico.
- Incentivos fiscales para mujeres emprendedoras: Ofrecer reducciones de impuestos y otros incentivos financieros a empresas lideradas por mujeres puede fomentar su crecimiento y competitividad en el mercado.

2. Apoyo financiero y accesibilidad

- Programas financieros inclusivos: Las instituciones financieras deben desarrollar productos adaptados a las necesidades de las mujeres emprendedoras, como microcréditos y préstamos con tasas de interés reducidas.
- Subvenciones y ayudas: Los gobiernos y las organizaciones internacionales deberían proporcionar subvenciones para apoyar a las mujeres en la creación y expansión de sus empresas turísticas.
- Capacitación en educación financiera: Formar a las emprendedoras en gestión financiera y estrategias de inversión puede mejorar su capacidad para administrar recursos de manera eficiente.

3. Educación y desarrollo de habilidades

- Programas de formación emprendedora: Implementar iniciativas de capacitación en áreas como desarrollo empresarial, marketing y gestión financiera permitirá a las mujeres adquirir habilidades clave para tener éxito en el sector turístico.
- Capacitación específica del sector: Ofrecer talleres y certificaciones en áreas como ecoturismo, turismo cultural y gestión hotelera puede ayudar a las mujeres a especializarse en nichos del mercado turístico.
- Programas de alfabetización digital: Dotar a las emprendedoras de competencias digitales, como marketing en línea, comercio electrónico y gestión de redes sociales, les permitirá aprovechar la tecnología para expandir sus negocios.

4. Apoyo institucional y redes de contacto

- Programas de mentoría: Establecer redes de mentoría que conecten a mujeres emprendedoras consolidadas con nuevas emprendedoras puede fomentar el intercambio de conocimientos y el desarrollo profesional.
- Redes empresariales de mujeres: Crear asociaciones y cooperativas centradas en mujeres emprendedoras puede proporcionarles acceso a recursos, apoyo entre pares y oportunidades de colaboración.
- Colaboraciones público-privadas: La cooperación entre gobiernos, empresas privadas y organizaciones no gubernamentales puede facilitar el acceso al financiamiento, la capacitación y las oportunidades de mercado.

5. Cambio de normas sociales

- Campañas de sensibilización: Las campañas a nivel nacional deben promover el valor del emprendimiento femenino en el desarrollo económico y desafiar los estereotipos de género perjudiciales.

- Modelos a seguir y casos de éxito: Visibilizar a mujeres emprendedoras exitosas en los medios de comunicación y foros públicos puede inspirar a otras mujeres y normalizar el liderazgo femenino en los negocios.
- Involucrar a los hombres como aliados: Programas que incluyan a los hombres como defensores de la igualdad de género pueden ayudar a desmantelar normas sociales que limitan la participación femenina en el emprendimiento.

6. Apoyo laboral y operative

- Políticas de trabajo flexible: Fomentar horarios de trabajo flexibles y opciones de trabajo remoto puede ayudar a las mujeres emprendedoras a equilibrar sus responsabilidades profesionales y personales.
- Servicios de apoyo operativo: La creación de servicios compartidos, como guarderías y espacios de coworking, puede reducir la carga operativa de las mujeres emprendedoras.
- Programas de acceso al mercado: Iniciativas que faciliten la participación de mujeres emprendedoras en mercados locales e internacionales, como ferias comerciales y plataformas digitales, pueden aumentar su visibilidad y competitividad.

5.6. Limitaciones y direcciones futuras

Este estudio, aunque ofrece valiosos conocimientos sobre las barreras que enfrentan las mujeres emprendedoras en el sector turístico de Irán, presenta varias limitaciones que deben ser reconocidas. En primer lugar, la investigación se centra exclusivamente en Irán y, aunque proporciona un análisis detallado de las barreras socioculturales, económicas e institucionales en este contexto, los hallazgos podrían no ser completamente generalizables a otros países con entornos culturales, legales y económicos distintos.

En segundo lugar, el estudio se basa en un número limitado de participantes para el análisis cualitativo. Aunque se utilizó un muestreo intencionado para garantizar la diversidad entre las mujeres emprendedoras, la muestra podría no representar plenamente la amplia gama de experiencias existentes en las distintas regiones e industrias del país.

En tercer lugar, aunque el estudio se enfoca principalmente en las barreras, presta poca atención a las estrategias o historias de éxito de mujeres emprendedoras que han logrado superar estos obstáculos, lo que podría ofrecer una visión algo desequilibrada del panorama emprendedor.

En cuarto lugar, se trata de una investigación predominantemente cualitativa, basada en el análisis temático de entrevistas y revisión de literatura. Si bien este enfoque brinda una comprensión profunda, la falta de datos cuantitativos sustanciales limita la posibilidad de validar estadísticamente los hallazgos o de medir el impacto global de las barreras identificadas.

Finalmente, el estudio se restringe al sector turístico que, aunque relevante, podría no reflejar completamente los desafíos que enfrentan las mujeres emprendedoras en otros sectores dentro de Irán.

Las investigaciones futuras podrían abordar estas limitaciones incorporando muestras más amplias y diversas, que garanticen la representación de distintas regiones, características demográficas y trayectorias empresariales. Además, el uso de metodologías mixtas que combinen enfoques cualitativos y cuantitativos permitiría realizar un análisis más integral y validar los hallazgos con mayor rigor estadístico.

Ampliar el alcance para incluir estudios comparativos entre regiones o industrias ofrecería una perspectiva más amplia sobre las barreras al emprendimiento femenino. Asimismo, explorar las estrategias de éxito utilizadas por mujeres emprendedoras que han superado estos desafíos proporcionaría aprendizajes prácticos y enriquecería la comprensión del ecosistema emprendedor. Estas líneas de investigación futura podrían aumentar la relevancia y aplicabilidad de los estudios, al tiempo que contribuirían al diseño de políticas e intervenciones más efectivas para el empoderamiento de las mujeres emprendedoras.

6

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