



SUMMARY REPORT OF STARTUP CANADA WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURS PROGRAM IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE EMBASSY OF ISRAEL



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Executive Summary

In 2020, Startup Canada partnered with the Embassy of Israel to implement the first phase of a pilot project aimed to further promote, celebrate, and educate the startup community on the importance of women entrepreneurship globally. This was executed through the **Startup Canada Women Entrepreneurs Program** which supports women entrepreneurs, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, to start and scale thriving businesses.

The impetus behind this bilateral partnership was informed by provisions in the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA)¹ as well as findings from the 2020 Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE)², which ranked Israel as the best place in the world to be a woman entrepreneur and with Canada in 7th place.

Spanning over six months, Startup Canada and the Embassy of Israel engaged **five high profile women entrepreneurs** from both Canada and Israel to discuss their experiences as women entrepreneurs, and how both countries can work together to better support women.

Through four robust roundtable working sessions, surveys and peer-to-peer sessions, four main topics were identified as requiring additional support and exploration:

- 1) Access to funding and capital
- 2) Overcome societal barriers, expectations, and influence
- 3) Foster women's representation and inclusion in decision-making processes and positions of authority in the public and private sector
- 4) Increase mentorship opportunities

Project stakeholders worked together to solidify quick, actionable recommendations for both the private and the public sector. Highlights of these recommendations include two practical solutions that addresses high priority concerns:

- **Solution 1: Canada-Israel Women's Empowerment Competition**
A joint-pitch competition for women entrepreneurs to showcase what and how Canada and Israel are supporting the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Prizes include flexible funding offerings to winners.
- **Solution 2: Communications Advocacy Campaign**
A "day in the life" communications and PR campaign that builds upon the success of the first phase of this Canada-Israel women-led project. This campaign will spotlight and feature up to six women who participated in the first phase of the project.

¹ See chapter 13 on trade and gender in the CIFTA at <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/trade-agreements-accords-commerciaux/agr-acc/israel/fta-ale/t-ext-texte/13.aspx?lang=eng>

² See page 11 for the full index in the 2020 MIWE at https://www.mastercard.com/news/media/1ulpy5at/ma_miwe-report-2020.pdf

It is important to note that the proposed solutions serve as pilot projects to test the impact of the proposed solutions, and draw attention to the impact of women-led initiatives such as this. In addition to the aforementioned solutions, which will be implemented in the spring of 2021, there will also be a strong focus on encouraging mentorship amongst women entrepreneurs in the international arena.

Introduction

In 2020, Startup Canada partnered with the Embassy of Israel to implement the first phase of a pilot project aimed to further promote, celebrate, and educate the startup community on the importance of women entrepreneurship globally. This was executed through the **Startup Canada Women Entrepreneurs Program** which supports women entrepreneurs, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, to start and scale thriving businesses.

Background

The strong bilateral relationship between Canada and Israel is exemplified through the Canada-Israel Free Trade Agreement (CIFTA), particularly in chapters that highlight the relationship between trade and gender which acknowledges the significance of viewing economic and trade issues with gendered lens. This is of utmost importance in order to cultivate an environment for the inclusion of women in decision-making processes and representation for positions of authority in the public and private sector. The CIFTA provided an ideal baseline for this project to unfold, especially as this line of work greatly aligns with Startup Canada's current efforts in supporting women entrepreneurs to go global.³ We strived to enhance the ability of women in both Canada and Israel to not only benefit from the agreement, but to also gather recommendations on how and what can be done to better support each other in the immediate future and in the years ahead.

The most recent 2020 Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE) ranked Israel as the best place in the world to be a woman entrepreneur, jumping up three places from the previous year. Canada, however, has dropped to 7th place (from 3rd in 2019). It is important to note that a majority of the top 20 are high-income economies which are fueled by highly supportive entrepreneurial conditions. The MIWE highlights the strides that women entrepreneurs are making in overcoming gender-related biases and advancing their business. Research from the MIWE consolidates that the growing female entrepreneurial environment has a positive and significant impact on the labour force, economic growth, and trade and innovation. Startup Canada and the Embassy of Israel partnered to better understand these statistics and determine

³ Startup Global (formerly the Canadian Export Challenge) is one of Startup Canada's flagship programs. It connects a pan-Canadian cohort of entrepreneurs committed to growing global businesses with a network of partners committed to their success. In 2021, Startup Global will support entrepreneurs to become export-ready, connect them with the trade and global growth ecosystem, and provide global exposure through workshops, pitch building bootcamps, 1-on-1 meetings, digital resources and more. All packaged on an accessible and easy to use Startup Global portal. This year's vision of Startup Global is clear: provide the resources and knowledge on exporting that Canadian entrepreneurs need in the way that they want to consume it. The digital event landscape has changed drastically over the past year due to limitations of in-person events. This has brought new tools and innovations which allow people to engage with content in different digital ways. Startup Canada will leverage these new technologies and approaches in order to connect with our audience.

how both countries can work together to continue building a robust ecosystem for women entrepreneurs.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted women entrepreneurs, and in order to co-create solutions and implement recommendations from those experiencing the turbulences, it is imperative that thought leaders, influencers, and decision-makers listen, reflect, and act in partnership with entrepreneurs in the grassroots community.

About Startup Canada

Startup Canada is Canada's leading entrepreneurship organization that aims to make Canada the best place to start a business. Startup Canada promotes and supports the success and growth of Canada's 3.5 million entrepreneurs, with a mandate to foster economic growth, competitiveness, and prosperity through entrepreneurship. Since launching, Startup Canada's programming has directly supported more than 200,000 entrepreneurs and 50 grassroots Startup Community organizations. Working with over 750 ecosystem partners, including accelerators, incubators, research parks, educational institutions, economic development agencies, associations, and government programs, Startup Canada serves entrepreneurs from all backgrounds, industries, and stages of development, with a network reflective of Canada's diverse population.

Startup Women

Since launching in 2012, Startup Canada has been among the most influential and active voices for women entrepreneurs—advocating to government leaders and working alongside government and industry to optimize conditions for women-led businesses across the country. Startup Women is one of Startup Canada's flagship programs that formally launched in 2020 with a specific intention to build programming for women entrepreneurs and employ a gendered lens through which to examine the startup ecosystem. Since launching, we have engaged more than 12,000 women from coast to coast to coast. Programming activities consisted of a series of free mentorship, networking, and education initiatives running throughout the month of March in celebration of International Women's Day. The program brought together Startup Communities, leading women entrepreneurs, government, and industry partners together to celebrate the contributions and achievements of women entrepreneurs to the Canadian economy and startup ecosystem. Covering a wide range of topics and issues, Startup Women encourages all of Canada's 3.5 million entrepreneurs to choose to challenge the status quo in order to build a more gender-balanced world.

About the Startup Canada Women Entrepreneurs Program

In partnership with the Embassy of Israel, Startup Canada engaged five high profile women entrepreneurs from Canada and Israel over the course of six months in activities that helped highlight their experience and story. Activities include a series of working roundtable sessions, surveys, and peer-to-peer sessions which allowed the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Timeline

The following activities took place from October 2020 to April 2021.

Project Component	Date
1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES IDENTIFIED Startup Canada and the Embassy of Israel met to discuss the project's scope and objectives.	October, 2020
2. PARTICIPANTS SELECTED Startup Canada and the Embassy of Israel identified and screened program participants.	October, 2020
3. FIRST VIRTUAL MEETING: Kick off roundtable Main topic focused on identifying the barriers to supporting women entrepreneurs in both Canada and Israel, which included special guests: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MP Rachel Bendayan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade. • MK Michal Cotler-Wunsh, Member of the Knesset. 	November 10, 2020
4. PROJECT PROMOTION A press release was published to announce the launch of the Startup Canada Women Entrepreneurs Program with accompanying social media promotion.	November 12, 2020
5. SECOND VIRTUAL MEETING: Roundtable discussion The project stakeholders and participants further discussed the barriers that women entrepreneurs face in Canada and Israel, and build out actionable recommendations.	December 2, 2020
6. THRIVE WOMEN PODCAST INTEGRATION Further promotion of the program was supported through starring program participants as guests on Startup Canada's Startup Women Podcast. This podcast episode discussed the inception of the project and featured: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MP Rachel Bendayan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade. 	Shared in tandem with International Women's Month (IWM) -March 31, 2021

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MK Michal Cotler-Wunsh, Member of the Knesset. 	
<p>7. THIRD VIRTUAL MEETING: Roundtable discussion</p> <p>As the penultimate meeting between project stakeholders, this roundtable focused on project development and next steps moving forward.</p>	January 21, 2021
<p>8. FOURTH VIRTUAL MEETING: Roundtable discussion</p> <p>The final meeting honed in on wrapping up any remaining project activities as well as outlining key recommendations.</p>	February 23, 2021
<p>9. PROGRAM INTEGRATION</p> <p>Further implementation and promotion of the program was conducted through integrating project elements with Startup Canada's month-long Startup Women initiative. Activities included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each entrepreneur in the project offered the opportunity to become a mentor for IWM. • Through a randomized selection process, one Canadian and one Israeli entrepreneur invited to participate in one GR Roundtable • All project participants were given free and open access to all IWM webinars. 	March, 2021
<p>10. PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION</p> <p>Through a randomized selection process, one Canadian and one Israeli entrepreneur will participate in an Instagram Live takeover in the month of April.</p>	April, 2021
<p>11. THRIVE WOMEN PODCAST INTEGRATION</p> <p>Another featured episode on the Startup Women Podcast which will feature two participants from the project (one Canadian and one Israeli entrepreneur), highlighting the importance of storytelling, mentorship, and empowerment.</p>	Will be shared in June 2021

Objectives

The central premise for this project and partnership with the Embassy of Israel was to further promote, celebrate, and educate the startup community on the importance of women entrepreneurship globally. It has been clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted women entrepreneurs. Creating spaces where women can gather to discuss their views

and experiences is crucial in developing solutions co-created by women to support in COVID-19 recovery measures.

This project aimed to create a space where women from both Canada and Israel could gather to share insights, offer recommendations, and co-create solutions to better support women. There were four key objectives embedded in this project.

Objective 1: To identify barriers to supporting women entrepreneurs in Canada and Israel

The first session provided an opportunity for five high profile women entrepreneurs from both Canada and Israel to gather and discuss their experiences as women entrepreneurs, as well as how both countries can work together to better support women. Project participants were joined by two special guests, MP Rachel Bendayan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade, and MK Michal Cotler-Wunsh, Member of the Knesset.

Outcome: Outlined barriers to supporting women entrepreneurs in both countries.

Objective 2: To identify a joint initiative between Canada and Israel that helps to reduce barriers for women

The first session featured five female entrepreneurs from both Canada and Israel who gathered for a virtual roundtable discussion. The initial consultation enabled entrepreneurs to discuss on-going barriers to success and the impact of the pandemic. The second session further discussed these barriers by breaking down key themes outlined in the first session which included fostering women representation and inclusion, societal expectations and influence, access to funding and capital, and the need for mentorship. These recommendations provided the platform for the Startup Canada Women Entrepreneurs Program to take shape.

Outcome: Analyzed barriers to supporting women entrepreneurs in Canada and Israel, and discussed strategies that can be taken in both countries to collectively reduce these barriers.

Objective 3: To identify key recommendations on how to implement a joint initiative

The initial consultations (roundtable 1 and 2) enabled project participants to discuss barriers they face and the impact of COVID-19. Our second session further discussed these barriers by breaking down the key themes discussed in session one, including 1) fostering women representation and inclusion, 2) societal expectations and 3) access to funding. The third session focused on discussing these themes with the aim to create key recommendations for both the private and public sector to better support women.

Outcome: Discussed barriers for women entrepreneurs in both countries and concrete strategies that can be taken in both countries to collectively to reduce these barriers.

Objective 4: To implement key recommendations

Previous sessions included the discussion of key themes including 1) fostering women representation and inclusion, 2) societal expectations and influence 3) access to funding and 4) the need for mentorship. Our final session solidified recommendations for both the private and public sector to better support women, as well as the important role of mentorship for both new and budding entrepreneurs and for the entire international ecosystem. In collaboration with the women entrepreneurs in the project, two key activities were outlined that could be implemented by Startup Canada and the Embassy of Israel to ensure continuity of support for women entrepreneurs.

Outcome: Identified recommendations and discussed two key strategies that both Canada and Israel can implement collectively to reduce these barriers and test the impact of the solutions.

Participants

Canadian Entrepreneurs

Nancy Wilson: Nancy Wilson is the founder and CEO of the Canadian Women's Chamber of Commerce (CanWCC), a national, not-for-profit organization that advocates for women-identified business owners in Canada. Nancy is a Chartered Professional Accountant, with over a decade of accounting and finance experience in the private sector. Prior to CanWCC, she ran an accounting and advisory firm specializing in women business owners and entrepreneurs. After experiencing a lack of resources, difficulty finding connections, and numerous barriers both as a business owner and indirectly through her clients, Nancy launched the Canadian Women's Chamber of Commerce in January 2018.

Melloney Campbell: Melloney Campbell is the Startup Community Leader for Startup Peel in Ontario. Melloney is both an entrepreneur and an entrepreneur support catalyst. Alongside her community, she encourages, connects, and supports those looking to start and scale their businesses. Melloney is a certified Project Management Professional whose background in digital media, broadcast and interactive media platforms span more than 16 years. Melloney is currently working alongside various industry professionals to bring an incubator/accelerator to the region of Peel. In addition to running her own business, Clicktagmedia Inc. which specializes in data hygiene, postage optimization and AI integrated marketing; Melloney is a respected mentor, moderator, speaker, and active Startup Canada policy lobbyist for change to support and to bring greater funding for women-led businesses. Melloney has represented Canada at various entrepreneurship events in the Pacific Alliance promoting Canada's entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Brenda Halloran: Brenda Halloran is a global leader with a local conscience. Often referred to as the people's mayor, Halloran successfully held the top job as the Mayor of the City of Waterloo, Canada from 2006-2014. Responsible for leading the city through one of the most dynamic and innovative periods in its history, Halloran's global profile took root when Waterloo won the most "Intelligent Community Award" in 2007 and IBM's Smarter City Challenge in 2012. Halloran is an authority in urban centers and advancing technology. In 2012 she led a Mayor's International Business mission to ten cities in China. She signed friendship agreements with cities in China, Taiwan, and Europe, establishing business relationships and opening doors of economic opportunities for Waterloo. She has spoken on the international stage on innovation, technology, intelligent communities, and the importance of startups and creating an

intelligent nation. Today, Halloran is the CEO of WEK Effect Inc., and the President of the Trillium Innovation Venture Group.

Mary Doyle: Mary describes herself as a crystal ball engineer—equal parts futurist and problem solver. She is a writer, speaker, program developer, and consultant with over 28 years of experience working in all three sectors. She has been recognized in all areas of her professional development, being named Business Person of the Year, a Canadian Woman Entrepreneur Icon and receiving a top teaching award for the most outstanding qualities of scholarship, teaching ability and character. While entrepreneurship is at the heart of all of her work, she sees it as a way of “thinking and acting” to bring about change in any area. She is fearlessly optimistic and challenges people to have faith in the future as they work to make a difference. Today she is the founder of Rural on Purpose, a social purpose business with a global mission to change the course of rural communities and introduce a new era of rural leadership, confidence, and prosperity.

Yamila Franco: Yamila was born and raised in the Dominican Republic and was awarded a full scholarship to study at the University of Victoria in Victoria, British Columbia. As a proud Afro-Indigenous Womxn, Yamila is a passionate teacher and natural community leader. Her journey first started by leading programs for underrepresented groups in STEM and evolved to work as a financial educator and advisor upon realizing the huge lack of financial literacy in her communities. Earlier this year Yamila was awarded the REP Youth Award by Here Magazine due to her leadership in the community, presented at the national Global Student Entrepreneurship Awards, facilitated a #BlackLivesMatter virtual community townhall with the Support Network for Indigenous Women and Women of Color (SNIWWOC), and hosted a financial literacy clinic with Mujerón Movement. You will find Yamila advocating and creating more spaces for the BIPOC community to join the entrepreneur ecosystem and bring positive change in her communities. She is also the 2020 Canadian Export Challenge Startup winner.

Sowmya Rajasekaran: After being laid off during the pandemic, Sowmya launched Buildupwomen Series. Buildupwomen Series is an online community created to inspire, learn, share, support, engage, and build up women during and post-pandemic. The first season launched ten live series discussions on key subject matters including women leadership, economic abuse, unemployment, job market navigation, accessibility and education during COVID-19, motherhood, mental health, and self-care. The series now includes 30+ inspiring female disruptors, change-makers, influencers, advocates and community leaders across Canada with a core focus on diversity and inclusion. Sowmya is a champion and an outspoken advocate for inclusion and women's empowerment with a key focus in social impact. She currently works with the Ontario Disability Employment Network to focus on innovation and best practices in diversity and inclusion. Sowmya comes with 10+ years' experience working in community development, education, skills development, partnership development, and social impact. In every organization she has been involved with or programs she has led, it has always been her first nature to look through the diversity and inclusion lens.

Israeli Entrepreneurs

Anat Natan: Anat is the CEO and Co-founder of ANINA Culinary Art Ltd. She's also part of the “The Kitchen FoodTech Hub” by Strauss-Group, which aims to tackle food waste generated by

superficial judgements on the appearance of a dish. The group does this by revealing the exciting eating experiences nature can offer.

Claudia Ben-Yaakov: Claudia Ben-Yaakov serves as the Innovation and Entrepreneurial Center Manager at the Zefat Academic College since March 2020, and serves as the professional manager of two Maof-Tech acceleration programs in the Galilee area since December 2019. She is a business development specialist focused on innovation and technology-driven startups, a tech entrepreneur, and an electrical engineer.

Tamar Shapira: Tamar is the Founder and CEO of SenseIT. SenseIT is developing a new standard for web accessibility testing like no other automatic tool on the market. Their new web testing tool allows users to test for web accessibility compliance, useability, and functionality which are executed by their unique algorithms that incorporate user experience and global compliance standards.

Adi Paz: Adi's background is a unique combination of high curiosity for disruptive technologies and strong international business background in the hi-tech sector, as well as incubating and investing in disruptive technologies. She is currently the Co-founder and CEO of OnTime, an early-stage startup looking to tackle challenges around the "passenger economy" in the future mobility world.

Tali Scheffer: Tali is the Co-founder and Lead of the Division of Oncology at Advanced Development Innovation & Investigator Initiated Research in Oncology (ADIR-O). She provides the strategic direction to the Oncology division which aims to facilitate POC, MOK and ClinOps real world evidence phases within different landscapes, global clinical registration strategy of the new entities, combine technology per need, clinical marketing strategy, patient access programs, R&D development, regulation understating, market needs and implementation bringing from idea to execution in stretched timelines.

Startup Canada Hosts

Kayla Isabelle: Kayla is the CEO of Startup Canada, the national rallying community supporting and giving a voice to Canada's 3.5 million entrepreneurs. Kayla has dedicated her career to supporting entrepreneurs, both in Canada and internationally. Kayla is an award-winning strategic communications consultant and change management facilitator, and is passionate about leveraging the power of storytelling in the entrepreneurial community. An advocate for women in leadership, Kayla is also the host of the Startup Women Podcast focused on providing resources to women entrepreneurs across Canada. Kayla is the Board Chair of the Innovators and Entrepreneurs Foundation, President of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Ottawa Chapter, and a former Board Member of the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS). With a passion for mentorship, Kayla runs the IABC Members Connect Mentorship program, is a Carleton University Network Mentor, and Ottawa Community Immigrant Services Organization (OCISO) Career Mentor. Kayla has also worked as a coach at the World Skills Employment Centre for newcomers to Canada, and as a volunteer with the Darkness into Light Suicide Prevention initiative.

Natasha Hope Morano: Natasha is the President of NHM Connect, an Ottawa based consultancy company specializing in strategic partnerships, fundraising, event management and corporate and government relations. A demonstrated history of working in the non-profit sector has equipped Natasha with providing high level strategic advice to her client base. Natasha has grown her reputation by building authentic and respected relationships and connections with a diverse ecosystem of partners. Stewarding and cultivating relationships is a central pillar of her everyday operation and how she assists her clients in achieving their mandates. She proudly serves as Startup Canada's Director of Corporate and Government Affairs and strives to create meaningful engagement between both the private and public sector.

Discussion

Over the span of six months, ten women entrepreneurs were able to gather and discuss the hurdles and barriers each have had to overcome, despite their geographical locations and cultural upbringings. Collectively, they were able to create the momentum required to test new approaches in reducing the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on women, especially those from marginalized communities. This pilot project has revealed the need for entrepreneurial support organizations to create opportunities for like-minded women to gather and co-create solutions that can better support women entrepreneurs and provide the needed infrastructure to flourish. The long-awaited call for the gender gap to be closed has never been more important and it is critical that the decision makers both within the private and public sector provide women entrepreneurs the opportunity to thrive. Society must champion gender initiatives as it is critical to releasing women's potential nationally and internationally.

Pairing both Canadian and Israeli women together for this project provided an opportunity to strengthen both countries' bilateral relationship and celebrate the accomplishments of women entrepreneurship internationally. Both countries recognize the important role of women in stimulating the economy, especially now given the impact of COVID-19, and have set out goals to support women entrepreneurs. The Government of Canada is advancing women's economic empowerment through the Women Entrepreneurship Strategy (WES)⁴, an investment that aims to increase women-owned businesses (i.e. double the number of women-owned businesses by 2025), as well as to increase access to the financing, talent, networks and expertise they need to start up, scale up and enter new markets. Similarly, in 2019 the Israel Innovation Authority⁵ launched an incentive program for women-led startups aiming to double the number of women entrepreneurs. It is evident both countries realize the important role women play in the national and international landscape. More can and must be done.

The Embassy of Israel deeply aligns with supporting women entrepreneurs locally and internationally and were instrumental in ensuring this project was able to launch. Both Canada and Israel have made strong commitments around gender equality and the empowerment of

⁴ Visit the WES website at <https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/107.nsf/eng/home>

⁵ Visit the Israel Innovation Authority website at <https://innovationisrael.org.il/en/news/israel-innovation-authority-launches-incentive-program-female-led-startup>

women and girls through the CIFTA. Furthermore, the new trade and gender chapter in the CIFTA provides a framework for Canada and Israel to work together in enhancing the ability of women to benefit from the opportunities created by CIFTA and remove barriers to participation.

Through active discussions, suggestions for support included the development of new tools, additional resources and training or educational seminars, mentorship opportunities, flexible funding, better childcare solutions, campaigns to amplify women's voices both at the local and international level, and the need to foster women's representation and inclusion in decision making processes and positions of authority.

The group also discussed the barriers women face both presently and pre-pandemic, as well as examined the policies that are working in each country and where there is room for improvement. The group identified four major areas of concern, including:

1. Access to funding and capital
2. Societal barriers and expectations and influence
3. The need to fostering women's representation and inclusion in decision making processes and positions of authority in the public and private sector
4. The need for mentorship

Access to funding and capital

Women entrepreneurs are less likely to seek growth financing. Women have barriers to finding investors, mentors, networks, and often use personal assets and capital for financing, which can slow growth (Beckton, McDonald & Marquis-Bissonnette, 2018). Additionally, a majority of women-owned SMEs are also far less likely to seek credit from financial institutions or seek financing from family and friends (Rosa & Sylla, 2016). The barriers in place that prevent women from accessing these funding opportunities include a lack of awareness and understanding of the available funding, and systemic barriers. Women entrepreneurs also disproportionately take on emotional labour at home, and this can lead to women entrepreneurs having to balance or sacrifice professional opportunities to develop their career.

It is important to build resources and educational tools illustrating funding opportunities for women entrepreneurs, provide support to help develop applications and financial plans, connect women entrepreneurs with networks, and collaborate with funders from institutions, government, and investors to co-create funding solutions and test their effectiveness. Flexible funding models are essential if we wish to better support women with their business and with the responsibility of having children. Untethered grants and innovative funding opportunities are important especially in the context of COVID-19 and the increased burden on women.

Societal barriers, expectations and influence

It is vital that women have equal opportunities to act on their ideas regardless of their geographical location and cultural upbringing. However, it is important to note that life experiences shape and influence the entrepreneurship journey. Societal barriers, expectations,

and influence impacts the ability to lead not only in the workplace but also domestically. It is no surprise that women are more vulnerable to COVID-19–related economic effects because of existing gender inequalities⁶, and there is no simple one-size-fits-all approach to identifying solutions to remedy this. However, women do require equal resources and support for childcare domestically and support for their businesses. It is also important to examine the impact of specific educational upbringing programs, such as that of the army or boarding school and women in male-dominated industries. The group discussed the need for sports and cultural events to emphasize the role of women, the important role of mentorship, and the need to encourage women to participate in educational activities promoting women’s empowerment.

There was a consensus that there needs to be more conversations surrounding the struggle women face with balancing family life and that of their careers. Additionally, it was agreed upon that there is a need for more promotion of equality and empowerment through storytelling. It is important to share women’s successes in the entrepreneurial and startup domain so men, women, and children of all ages can be inspired and realize that women are an equal part of this ecosystem and domain.

Women’s representation and inclusion in decision making

Inclusion and promotion need to be incorporated into educational curriculum and be upheld both in the private and public sector. Examples need to be set both in the boardroom and within all levels of government regarding balanced representation and pay equity.

Women’s voices must be amplified in order to raise awareness regarding the importance of inclusion and equity. Women should celebrate others in their network and celebrate comradery.

It is also important to take into consideration women from marginalized communities and ensure steps are taken to create equal opportunities for all women.

Mentorship

Mentorship and advisory support are an essential success factor for women entrepreneurs. Having access to free, flexible, and varied mentorship through an accessible platform allows women entrepreneurs to connect with subject matter experts, industry advisors, and peer-to-peer support from like-minded women entrepreneurs internationally. Mentorship increases the confidence levels of women entrepreneurs, point them in the right direction to resources, and create a network of engaged women entrepreneurs.

By building the networks of women entrepreneurs (with subject matter experts, private sector partners, public sector partners, and peer-to-peer support locally,

⁶ Read more about the disproportionate effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on women at <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects>

nationally and internationally), we can increase collaboration to accelerate systemic change, and work across sectors to break down silos.

It is also important to create an ecosystem that welcomes women to test their innovative ideas free of judgement or criticism. Women empowerment needs to be supported and incorporated at every level of education. There is a need to change the educational landscape in order to ensure new generations of entrepreneurs are set up for success. It is vital that new aspiring entrepreneurs have tools, resources, and guidance throughout their entrepreneurship journey. Gender equality cannot be accomplished without empowering all women and girls. The role of mentorship plays a significant role in achieving this outcome.

Based on the above four key areas of concern, two women-led activities were proposed that include a blended selection of recommendations, ranging from mentorship, flexible funding, and educational awareness campaigns. The two solutions and actions proposed include a **Joint-Pitch Competition** with flexible funding prizes to winners, as well as a **Communications Advocacy Awareness Campaign** highlighting and amplifying women entrepreneurs in both Canada and Israel. **The proposed activities will serve as pilot projects to test the impact of the proposed solutions and draw attention to the impact of women-led initiatives such as this.**

Recommendations

The findings of this report indicate the need to implement women-led solutions and consider innovative approaches to meet the needs for every woman entrepreneur. Based on the key findings and previous discussions surrounding access to funding, societal barriers, fostering women representation and inclusion in decision making processes and positions of authority in the private and public sectors, and the importance of mentorship, two women-led practical solutions were recommended.

Solution 1: Canada-Israel Women Empowerment Competition

A joint-pitch competition to showcase what Canada and Israel are doing to support the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) with flexible funding prizes to winners. Implementation of this competition will be executed through Startup Global, one of Startup Canada's flagships programs. It connects a cohort of entrepreneurs committed to growing global businesses with a network of partners committed to their success.

This customized women empowerment joint-pitch competition will have a specific focus on highlighting women entrepreneurs in both Canada and Israel who align or support the UN's SDG. The competition will be available to organizations that have a mandate to promote gender equality. Participants from phase one of this project will have an opportunity to participate as a judge, mentor, and/or advisor. Additionally, cash prizes will be given to the top 4 participants who can use this prize money for any support they require. In doing so, this will support the implementation of a new flexible funding model where women can spend the prize money on

anything they require. Startup Canada will track how the money is spent to illustrate the requirement for innovative funding models such as this. The desire for flexible funding opportunities has been widely advocated for. This program will provide a platform and practical support for women entrepreneurs.

Solution 2: Communications Advocacy Campaign

This awareness campaign will showcase and highlight Canadian and Israeli women entrepreneurs through a “day in the life” PR initiative.

Six women from both Canada and Israel who previously participated in the project will have the opportunity to showcase their lives and everyday activities to the international landscape, in an effort to reveal the realities of what it is like to be a woman entrepreneur in both countries. It is important to share women’s stories in the entrepreneurial and startup domain so men, women, and children all ages can be inspired and realize that women are an equal part of this ecosystem and domain. Their stories will be used as case studies to illustrate to private and public sector leaders and decision makers what the realities are like for women entrepreneurs. This activity will also be used to amplify their voices, challenge stereotypes, and cut through the noise to show what barriers they encounter and how societal expectations impact their everyday routine. The stories will be captured over the course of six months and will be a part of an international advocacy campaign. These stories will be used in further advocacy efforts, with the aim of communicating recommendations and key takeaways directly from women entrepreneurs to key decision makers over the span of one calendar year.

In addition to the above-mentioned solutions which have plans to be implemented in the spring of 2021, there will also be a strong focus on encouraging mentorship amongst women entrepreneurs in the international playground in the year ahead. This will be measured by the number of mentors and mentees that are able to connect over the course of the year, and quantitative and qualitative feedback on the experience.

Conclusion

We are hopeful those reading this report will be inspired, and use this project as the impetus to collaborate with a like-minded partner to support women entrepreneurs through innovative women-led approaches. The power of partnerships such as the one between the Embassy of Israel and Startup Canada can be transformative and bring words into action. This program is proudly able to bring the conversations amongst ten women entrepreneurs to life through existing programming, such as Startup Women in the month of March and beyond. By showcasing leading women through communication campaigns, interviews, and presentations, we can give them a podium to share their lived experiences as part of the dialogue and solution.

**In the spirit of the official theme for International Women’s Day
#ChooseToChallenge, we challenge anyone reading this report to not only call out gender bias and inequality but to be part of the change. Collectively, we can foster an inclusive world and entrepreneurial landscape, but it begins with taking the time to listen, reflect and implement change.**

Beginning in April 2021, Startup Canada and the Embassy of Israel will pilot phase two of this project by implementing the two women-led solutions outlined in this report. Together we aim to deepen the impact in the ecosystem by encouraging women-led recommendations and solutions. If we can encourage innovative approaches to support women, we will be one step closer to reaching gender parity and empowering all women and girls.

Appendix

Launch of project press release

Ottawa, ON – November 12, 2020 | Startup Canada is delighted to partner with the Embassy of Israel to further promote, celebrate and educate the startup community on the importance of women entrepreneurship globally. This partnership will be delivered through the **Startup Canada Women Entrepreneurs Program** which supports women entrepreneurs, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds, to start and scale thriving businesses.

The program, running from November to March, launched with a digital round table featuring high profile entrepreneurs from Canada and Israel. The round table discussion focused on identifying key barriers to supporting women entrepreneurs in both countries and establishing strategies to reduce these barriers. Each month, 10 high profile women entrepreneurs from Canada and Israel will discuss and workshop the main take-aways from the initial round table. Their final findings and project outcomes will be shared during Startup Canada's International Women's Day program.

Quotes from Roundtable Panelists and Guests:

"Every barrier for women that is attached to a statistic is amplified in rural communities. Whether it is income, health care, internet access, whatever the statistic is, I can tell you it is going to be worse in a rural community for women. Being a part of this project is really important for me for this reason. Entrepreneurship itself is a vehicle for change and a mindset of growth. If we approach this discussion understanding that frustration is just raw material for entrepreneurs, we will be able to solve some of the problems we are talking about." – **Mary Doyle, Founder of Rural On Purpose.**

"There are a lot of barriers in my community. I think there is an overused narrative of activism and anti-racism surrounding black women and Indigenous women. When you are so focused on that side of things, there isn't a lot of room to focus on entrepreneurship. As a result of these systemic barriers, a lot of black or Indigenous entrepreneurs have not been able to expand their teams or their businesses." – **Yamila Franco, Co-Founder of Nyoka Design Labs.**

"Being a women entrepreneur isn't easy, but it is possible. Speak to other women, break down that fear of being a mom and a business owner, and just do it! Women speaking to women is wonderful but including men in the conversation is also important. The more we can bring the entirety of society into these discussions and advocate for our *whole* community, the better off we will be." – **Tamar Schapira, Founder and CEO of SenseIT.**

"One of the most interesting data points I've seen is that both Canada and Israel are amongst the top 5 markets for women entrepreneurs. That ranking is based on the available support that our governments have put together to ensure women entrepreneurs have access to the capital and mentorship they need to start up a new business, or to see existing businesses thrive." – **MP Rachel**

Bendayan, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade.

“Recognition is extremely important – the recognition of barriers, the recognition of hurdles, the recognition of challenges. Recognizing the barriers in front of you is a precondition to the ability to lean in and create change. The importance of sounding our voices as women and the imperative for viewpoint diversity will be what pave the way for reconciliatory processes that enable prosperity for women entrepreneurs.” – **MK Michal Cotler-Wunsh, Chair of the Special Committee on Drug and Alcohol Use, Chair of the Subcommittee on Israel-Diaspora Relations.**

According to the third edition of the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (November 2019) female entrepreneurs around the world are making strides to overcome gender-related biases and advance their businesses. This has a meaningful impact on the labor force, economic growth, and the well-being of their societies. Both Canada and Israel are included in the [top 5 markets for women](#) entrepreneurs, based on supporting conditions and opportunities to thrive. This is something that must be celebrated and is the impetus behind this partnership.

“Despite systemic barriers, women entrepreneurs around the world continue to challenge the status quo and provide thoughtful, innovative solutions that help to empower their communities,” said Kayla Isabelle, CEO of Startup Canada. “We are thrilled to partner with the Embassy of Israel to advocate for the national and international benefits of healthy and diverse small business ecosystems, help in developing actionable strategies to reduce barriers for women entrepreneurs, and amplify the voices of women entrepreneurs across the globe.”

“The trade and gender chapter in the CIFTA agreement provides a beautiful platform for this project to unfold, and I am delighted that we have the opportunity to work with such incredible entrepreneurs from both Canada and Israel,” said Natasha Morano, Corporate & Government Affairs Director at Startup Canada.

Over the next few months, a number of the roundtable participants will be featured on Startup Canada’s THRIVE Podcast for Women Entrepreneurs. Join along with the conversation [here](#).

Summary of findings

Below you will find a summary of the main findings from the roundtable participants with reference to key recommendations for both the private and public sector to better support women entrepreneurs, as well as personal reflections. These findings in conjunction with the roundtable discussions and peer-to-peer sessions, shaped the suggested solutions to be implemented in spring 2021 in partnership with the Embassy of Israel.

Private Sector Recommendations		
Access to Funding	Societal Barriers	Representation and Inclusion
The creation of a women entrepreneurial community and social platform where women can communicate and get to know each other, have meetups, pitching meetups and get to know other women in the sector and build strong personal business connections and collaborate, encourage women partners in traditional VC firms.	Regulation – Supporting financially by law CEO and C-level women with kids under the age of 12 years old, for a period of the first 5 years of Start-up.	Regulatory – Minimum percentage of women in boards – creating company criteria – no. of board seats, revenue etc. Encourage Board of Directors to have a balanced representation of men and women.
Mixed gender events focusing on how funding can be allocated to women-led ventures.	Army - Continue supporting women taking leading roles (historically led by men) in the army – relevant for Israel.	Attendance – All formal events will need to have participation of both genders. Emphasize the need for a mixed panel of executives in public and leading private companies and ensure this need is met.
Educating women about Money- raising capital, managing budgets, creating business plans, negotiation skills and other business savvy skills.	Education (from youngest age possible) – Including classes/lectures of women empowerment as part of the academic education through sessions and lectures / mentoring of leading successful businesswomen.	Educate and raise awareness regarding the importance of inclusion through projects such as this.
Regulatory - Supporting financially or regulatory VC that invest in women entrepreneurs as a goal.	Sports & Cultural events to emphasize the role of women and encourage young women to attend/participate, women clubs and communities specialized in different aspects and ecosystems.	Govt incentives for companies that adhere to ensuring there is representation and inclusion within their firms.

Worldwide collaboration - World tours women only teams of CEO and C-level, Special stage for women only - Special global pitching days for women CEO only.	Integrate family life and career for women of childbearing age thus reducing the fear factor women face in 'choosing' between family life and building a career.	
	The gap in salaries between men and women impact the # of women who get to powerful positions with money funding access more money = higher influence	

Public Sector Recommendations		
Access to Funding	Societal Barriers	Representation and Inclusion
Encourage building women entrepreneurial communities by funding the process of building these communities.	Setup conventions /startup competitions that are equally represented by 50% women and 50% men.	Set an example via representation and inclusion through all levels of government.
Better access to educational resources and tools.	Role Models/Mentorship and community engagement - Encourage women to share their success stories, women clubs and communities specialized in different aspects and ecosystems.	Educate and raise awareness regarding the importance of inclusion through projects such as this.
More opportunities to engage with government officials to inform them of struggles.	Inequality in salaries (the gap in salaries between men and women impact the # of women who get to powerful positions with money	

	funding access more money = higher influence.	
	Education and exposure from youth.	

Personal Reflections pertaining to 3 main themes		
Access to Funding	Societal Barriers	Representation and Inclusion
Create women activities and promote entrepreneurial communities, networking and learning from others – always as questions and never stop learning.	<p>Promotion of equality, mentorship and empowerment - it is important to share women success in the entrepreneurial and startup domain so men, women, children all ages can be inspired and realize that women are an equal part of this ecosystem and domain, and lead by example.</p> <p>Other topics include: Confronting inequalities in salaries in the workplace, at each research and trial adding the genderism difference and learning.</p>	Inclusion and promotion of feminine culture needs to begin from a young age and upheld. More representation in high impact roles and recognizing young women in the communities who are making an impact.
Education- (how to speak about money with confidence), barriers to knowledge of funding-process of applying, assistance with applications.	Awareness- Women have been impacted the most during the pandemic. Mothers, parents, unemployment, balancing motherhood, school and work-the societal impacts on women during pandemic is stressful and more support is needed.	Recognizing and being cognizant of who (age, BIPOC, Persons with disabilities, Newcomers; woman) is NOT at forefront of conversations that involve them. And putting steps in place to ensure these conversations.

Lack of awareness of access to funding for women of color, BIPOC, newcomers/immigrant entrepreneurs, persons with disability/ties.	We need to educate the youngest members of society, so they grow up in a world where women are not looked down upon and need “special” attention.	Access- With the pandemic, several services have shifted online, however online does not mean accessible.
Leadership styles and Roles- there needs to be more talk about how women lead differently, (just as worthy of funding as men). Women VC's should be mainstream and not the exception. Learning how to leverage the advantages and overcome the barriers as a woman CEO in a world led by men.	Roles and responsibilities- balancing motherhood / personal relationships and the demand of being a CEO needs to be better understood. (The sense of ambivalence on the part of the environment towards careerist women - pride and criticism at the same time).	Mentorship and comradery- Pushing and supporting other women to take leading positions in startup.

Resources

- [Canadian Women's Chamber of Commerce: Falling Through the Cracks Report](#)
- [CIFTA: Backgrounder](#)
- [Mastercard Index](#)
- [Women Entrepreneurship Strategy](#)
- [Breaking down the barriers for women entrepreneurs](#)
- [Women in Trade](#)
- [Israel and the U.S. among the best places to be a woman entrepreneur](#)
- [Israel launches incentive program for female-led startups](#)
- [Embassy of Israel in Canada](#)
- [Israel Innovation Authority](#)
- [Israel Innovation Authority Launches Incentive Program for Female-Led Startups](#)
- [Canadian Diversity](#)
- [COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects](#)