

Women
Entrepreneurship
Knowledge Hub

Grow Global

Women Entrepreneurs
& Export



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About WEKH

The Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (WEKH) is a national network and accessible digital platform for sharing research, resources, and leading strategies. With ten regional hubs and a network of more than 250 organizations, WEKH is designed to address the needs of diverse women entrepreneurs across regions and across sectors. In response to COVID-19, WEKH adopted an agitator role connecting women entrepreneurs and support organizations across the country and led network calls and training sessions. WEKH's advanced technology platform, powered by Magnet, will enhance the capacity of women entrepreneurs and the organizations who serve them by linking them to resources and best practices from across the country.

With the support of the Government of Canada, WEKH will spread its expertise from coast to coast, enabling service providers, academics, government, and industry to enhance their support for women entrepreneurs. Ryerson University's Diversity Institute, in collaboration with Ryerson's Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship and the Ted Rogers School of Management, is leading a team of researchers, business support organizations, and key stakeholders to create a more inclusive and supportive environment to grow women's entrepreneurship in Canada.



EDC.CA

About EDC

Export Development Canada (EDC) is a financial Crown corporation dedicated to helping Canadian companies of all sizes succeed on the world stage. As international risk experts, we equip Canadian companies with the tools they need – the trade knowledge, financing solutions, equity, insurance, and connections – to grow their business with confidence. Underlying all our support is a commitment to sustainable and responsible business. To help Canadian businesses facing extreme financial challenges brought on by the global response to COVID-19, the Government of Canada has expanded EDC's domestic capabilities until December 31, 2021. This broader mandate will enable EDC to expand its support to companies focused domestically. For more information and to learn how we can help your company, call us at 1-800-229-0575 or visit edc.ca.



BDC.CA

About BDC

The Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) is the bank for Canadian entrepreneurs. It provides access to financing, as well as advisory services to help Canadian businesses grow and succeed. Its investment arm, BDC Capital, offers a wide range of risk capital solutions. For more than 75 years, BDC's only purpose has been to support entrepreneurs in all industries and at all stages of growth. For more information and to consult more than 1,000 free tools, articles and entrepreneurs' stories, visit bdc.ca.

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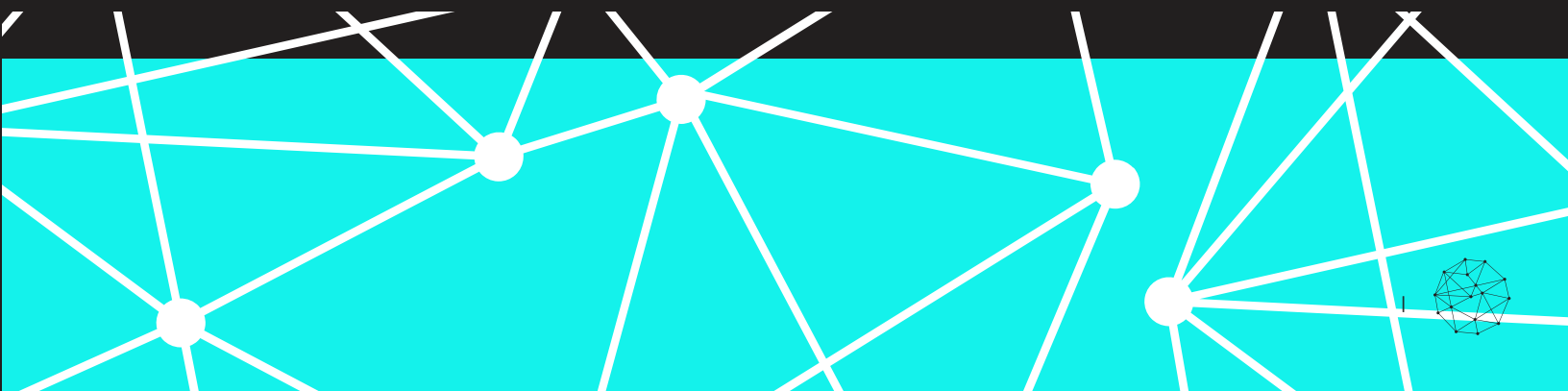
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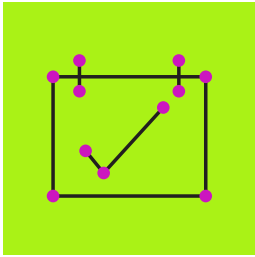
Canada

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Executive Summary

The Importance of Exporting

Exports are an important driver of economic growth and innovation, but Canadian companies have not fully exploited the potential of international markets. Access to international markets opens doors to: networks of peers and experts, allowing for knowledge gain and to make valuable contacts; new markets and diversified consumer bases; new product development and service ideas; and access to diversity and talent on a global scale.

This report reviews the pre-COVID-19 state of women entrepreneurs and their exporting behavior based on three sources: a review of the existing literature; 96 in-depth interviews with women entrepreneurs; and a survey of 815 entrepreneurs and some decision makers.¹

The Literature Review

The literature reinforces the importance of exports to overall economic growth and shows that companies that export tend to be larger, grow faster, and be more innovative than those that do not, although a causality is not established. Compared to other countries, Canadian entrepreneurs are less likely to export than others, which presents a significant loss of opportunity. While the gap between men and women entrepreneurs is narrowing, women are less likely to export than men. Women-owned

SMEs, export propensity is complex. As such, in order to adequately represent the multifaceted nature of this issue, we used multiple tools to ensure the best research results and to test for consistency. There are structural differences – for example in terms of size, age, sector of women-owned businesses – as well as individual preferences that explain some of the ongoing variation between men and women entrepreneurs and their exporting behavior. At the same time, the growing proportion of women-owned businesses that are exporting has significantly narrowed the gap between men and women.

Companies that export tend to be larger, grow faster, and be more innovative than those that do not.

Interviews: What the Entrepreneurs Said

Interviews with 96 women entrepreneurs shed light on their experiences and perspectives on exporting. The following themes emerged from the interviews about the importance of and challenges related to exporting:

¹ Breakdown of respondents: 463 Majority/sole women-owned business; 33 Minority women-owned business/Decision maker; 261 Majority/sole men-owned business; 51 Minority men-owned business/Decision maker; 7 Who chose not to answer the gender question



- > Canadian women entrepreneurs are interested in export and know that export increases their businesses opportunities for growth.
- > Many new markets are opening up through trade agreements and yet, many women entrepreneurs are not aware of how these trade agreements can aid their export efforts.
- > Women entrepreneurs report challenges to export goals, including access to timely and relevant information, as well as support and access to needed networks. Successful exporters have strong networks to turn to for advice, are aware of the resources that can assist them with export, and are strategic and deliberate regardless of how they began their export journey.
- > Women entrepreneurs not exporting are generally: not networked and so do not know where to turn to for advice despite the massive amount of information available; have limited time, ability, and finances to research export markets; and even when they were aware of them, find the current traditional networks and organizations in the ecosystem often do not serve their interests.

Survey: Similarities and Differences Between Men and Women Entrepreneurs

A survey of 815 entrepreneurs revealed important differences in their experiences and attitudes toward exporting. In general, the profile of the respondents, like the profile of Canadian entrepreneurs, showed significant differences between men and women. Similar to the findings in the [Literature Review](#), women were more likely to have smaller companies and were more likely to be self-employed. Their companies were also more likely to be in the service or retail sectors than in technology, manufacturing,

or construction for example. There were many similarities between men and women entrepreneurs in terms of the reasons for and barriers to engaging in export. Women were more likely to report that barriers to exporting were lack of information or understanding where to start. Both men and women reported taking advantage of the supports and services aimed at advancing exporting. While they were equally likely to access supports, men were more likely to report learning on their own.

Taken together, the research suggests that the gap between men and women entrepreneurs is narrowing. Canadian women

Canadian women entrepreneurs are resilient, ambitious, and well poised to take on global growth of their firms.

entrepreneurs are resilient, ambitious, and well poised to take on global growth of their firms. However, obstacles remain. For example, women entrepreneurs need access to timely and relevant information, more inclusive networks, and capital. Sufficient differences between attitudes and perceptions suggest that information needs to be tailored to women entrepreneurs' specific needs. Support in navigating programs is also key: as one entrepreneur noted, there are *"too many great programs we don't know about and the lack of information is a problem."*



Characteristics of Successful Exporting Women Entrepreneurs

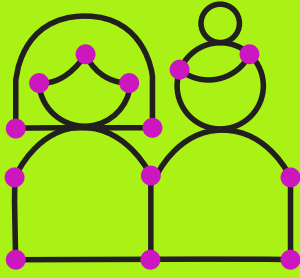
While each entrepreneur's journey is different, there are common factors that successful exporting women entrepreneurs share. These include:

1. **Structural characteristics:** their companies tend to be larger, incorporated, and in sectors which lend themselves to exporting, such as manufacturing, wholesale trade, and transportation and warehousing.
2. **Processes:** exporting women recognize the challenges of exporting but seek out the information, networks, mentors, and supports they need to develop an evidence-informed strategy.
3. **Individual characteristics:** exporting women tend to have more work experience, have been in business longer and share ambition, risk tolerance, clarity of vision, tenacity, and have strong networks who can help them. Immigrant women entrepreneurs are slightly more likely to see the opportunities for going global.
4. **Experiences:** exporting women with more experience appear to be more aware of and likely to use the resources available, such as programs, which increased the likelihood of translating their ambitions into concrete plans.

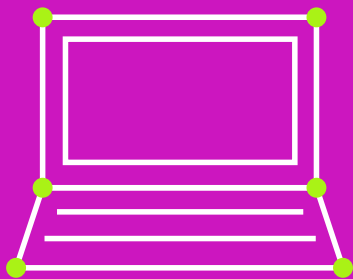
What Could Enhance the Ability of Women Entrepreneurs to Export?

1. All frontline interactions with women entrepreneurs including Export Development Canada (EDC), Trade Commissioner Service (TCS), and Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) need to train frontline workers to seek out local





96
women
entrepreneurs
interviewed



815
entrepreneurs
and decision
makers surveyed

entrepreneurs with the potential to export. This includes instilling a partnership mindset that looks to both support and build relationships with the entrepreneurs while remaining mindful of the needs of diverse women. It is important to focus not only on larger businesses but also smaller ones with potential. Some successful women exporters reported information from frontline BDC personnel that helped them find resources and access support from EDC and the TCS.

2. EDC and TCS provide relevant information and make training available to key organizations in the export ecosystem that are supporting women entrepreneurs.
3. Trade Commissioners ensure that women invited on trade missions are provided with specific connections in the destination country that can open the doors to business opportunities.
4. TCS and EDC provide a concierge service so women seeking information can speak to a knowledgeable individual who can also connect them to other needed resources.
5. Modify and offer a version of TAP specifically for women entrepreneurs. Make the information about the program available through networks of women, enterprise centres, and on social media. Offer a follow-up program that supports the implementation of the export plan developed in the initial program.
6. EDC and TCS offer training on exporting aimed at smaller women-owned businesses in multiple formats such as online and in-person sessions to encourage even micro and small businesses to go global with their businesses – including service-based businesses.
7. Existing networks – such as Boards of Trade – make a concerted effort to include diverse women entrepreneurs and support export knowledge.

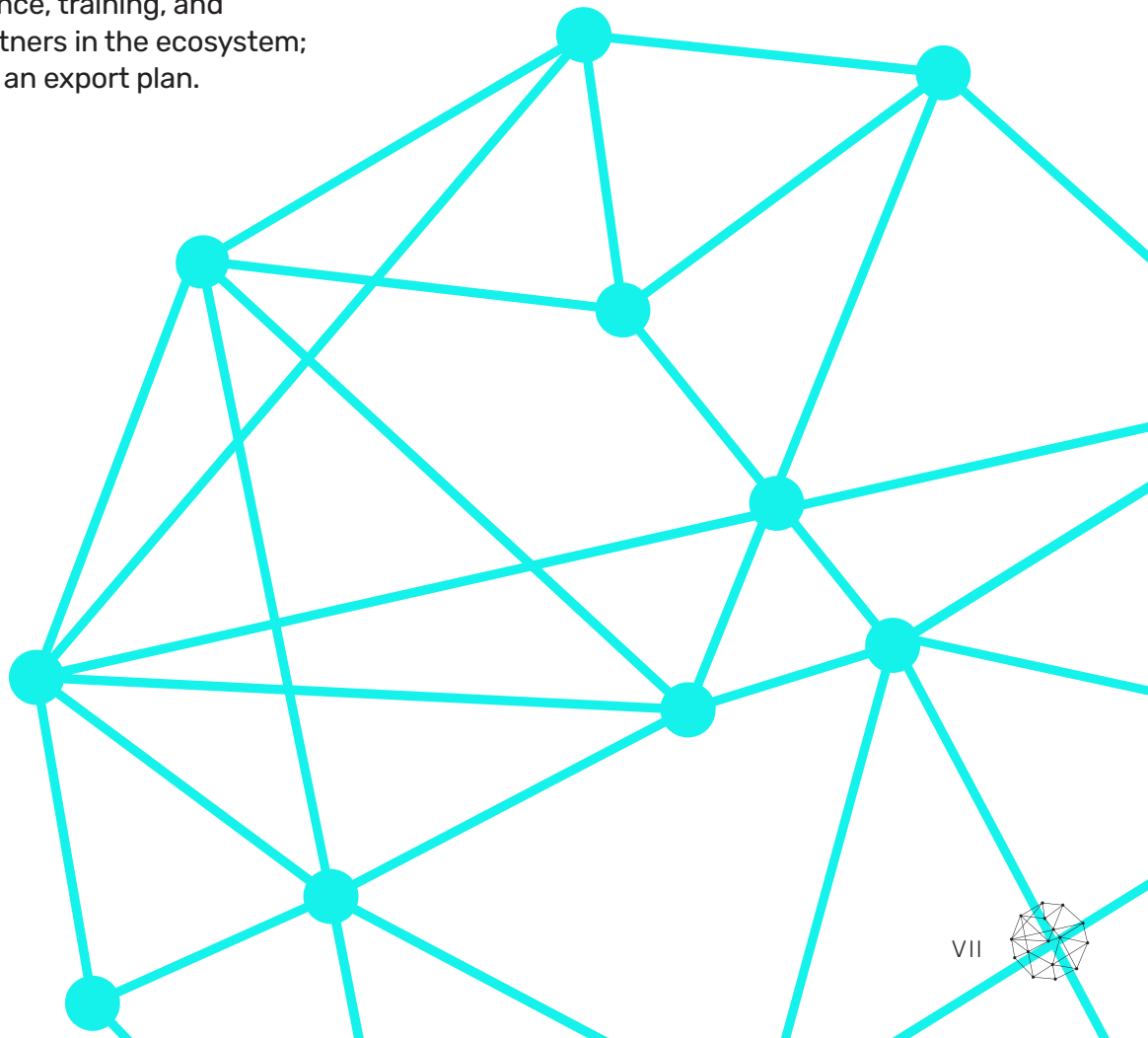


8. Complete the implementation of Canada's supplier diversity programs and create awareness around the benefits of these programs with other large corporations.

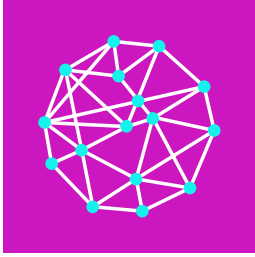
Promote Benefits of Exporting to Women Entrepreneurs

The research showed that while some women saw the upside of pursuing exporting, many were less aware of the opportunities around and support for such goals. Growing exports among women entrepreneurs requires leveling the playing field regarding access to financing, support, incubation, child care, etc., but it also includes investing in the following:

1. Women's business centres and organizations supporting women entrepreneurs can support women entrepreneurs to consider growth through export; seek assistance, training, and knowledge from partners in the ecosystem; and then to develop an export plan.
2. Women entrepreneurs need to grow their networks and join relevant associated organizations such as the Organization of Women in International Trade (OWIT), Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, and relevant industry associations to obtain support, advice, and information.
3. Women entrepreneurs need to seek out mentors to help them with their business growth either through their own networks (from partners) or others in the ecosystem. In addition, they should reach out to the TCS and EDC for information and assistance to develop an export strategy
4. Women entrepreneurs should consider participating in supplier diversity programs to increase export possibilities and take the steps needed to be certified for these programs through WEConnect or the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC).







Introduction

Background: Exporting, Economic Growth, and Business Success

Exporting is critical to Canada's economic growth, and while some companies have achieved significant success, Canadian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have the potential to export more. Although Canadian women entrepreneurs are narrowing the gap with men in terms of exporting, more can be done.

SMEs are the foundation of Canada's economy as they employ the majority of the workforce. Small enterprises employ 8.29 million individuals (69.7% of the employed population) while medium-sized businesses employ 2.37 million individuals (19.9%).¹ Their success has significant effects on jobs for Canadians and, as a result, is a major focus of economic development policies.

In 2018, exports accounted for 30.2% of Canada's gross domestic product (GDP)

(\$672 billion).² International trade has played a key role in Canada's economy. Studies by Statistics Canada³, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED)⁴, the Conference Board of Canada,⁵ and Export Development Canada (EDC)⁶ all emphasized the importance of exports and their contribution to economic growth in the country. The intense competition of the global marketplace enables exporters to build an understanding of different customer needs, improve efficiency, and create innovation. As of 2017, SMEs were responsible for \$48 billion worth of Canadian services exports.⁷

Canada's relatively small domestic market makes it necessary for many firms to

SMEs are the foundation of Canada's economy as they employ the majority of the workforce.

¹ Government of Canada. (2019). *Key Small Business Statistics—January 2019*. https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03090.html

² Allen, S. (2018, March 31). *The Canadian Economy at a Glance. InvestorsFriend*. <https://www.investorsfriend.com/canadian-gdp-canadian-imports-and-exports/>

Statistics Canada. (2017). *Measuring Canadian Export Diversification*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/13-605-x/2017001/article/54890-eng.htm>

³ Statistics Canada. (2017). *Measuring Canadian Export Diversification. Statistics Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/13-605-x/2017001/article/54890-eng.htm>

⁴ Innovation Science and Economic Development Canada (2018). *Summary of the Survey on Financing and Growth of Small and Medium Enterprises, 2017*.

⁵ The Conference Board of Canada (2018). *Who Has Been Left Out of Trade's Benefits?* https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/39237eef-c560-4498-895c-eb5bde54e0f3/9619_Who%20Has%20Been%20Left%20Out%20of%20Trades%20Benefits_BR.pdf

⁶ EDC (2019). *2019-2023 Corporate Plan Summary*. <https://www.edc.ca/content/dam/edc/en/corporate/corporate-plan-summaries/corporate-plan-summary-2019-2023-edc-tabled-version.pdf>

⁷ Global Affairs Canada. (2019). *Canada's State of Trade 2019*. https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/economist-economiste/state_of_trade-commerce_international-2019.aspx?lang=eng



tap into global markets to grow.⁸ ISED (2019)⁹ indicated that, as of 2017, of 48,454 establishments in Canada that exported goods, Ontario had the highest number of exporters at 42.8 exporters per 1,000 establishments. The lowest number of exporters were found in Newfoundland and Labrador with 14.8 and 17.2 exporters per 1,000 establishments, respectively. Export helps SMEs seek out new growth opportunities and increase sales and revenues. Exporting companies are more likely to be high growth than non-exporting companies: 10% of exporters achieved 20% growth or higher in sales annually compared to 8% for non-exporters between 2009 and 2011.¹⁰ They also tend to be larger than equivalent domestic-oriented companies.¹¹

Exporting is crucial to the economic growth of entrepreneurs and the development of their adaptive skills to foreign markets. It not only generates financial benefits but also value as a learning process. It also provides a vehicle to accumulate knowledge and technological expertise.¹²

Studies reported that SME exporters are more innovative and invest more in research and design (R&D) than non-exporters.¹³ SME exporters were able to introduce at least one type of innovation in their firm (60%), reduce costs (43%), and increase sales (75%). As exporting companies have more communications in global markets, they are exposed to new technologies and

Exporting is crucial to the economic growth of entrepreneurs and the development of their adaptive skills to foreign markets.

processes. This helps them generate new ideas, improve productivity, and lower costs.¹⁴ Overall, compared to non-exporters, SME exporters reaped the best return on investment through a combination of export and innovation.

There are many examples of SMEs that have driven growth by accessing international markets. Below are several stories from interviews of women succeeding in building export into their businesses. These stories are explored further in the section of the report, [*Interviews: What the Entrepreneurs Said*](#).

1. The first woman entrepreneur bought an existing business in the services sector with her husband as a minority share holder after looking for several years. They are experiencing export success. The woman entrepreneur has a strong network and is well connected. After learning about several opportunities, she was able to access grants and training. She and her partner developed a successful export strategy. As a way to mitigate their

8 Manseau, Amélie. (2017). *Why more Canadian Business should be exporting*. Retrieved from Export Development Canada. <https://www.edc.ca/en/blog/reasons-to-export.html>

9 Innovation Science and Economic Development Canada (2019). *Key Small Business Statistics-January 2019*. http://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03090.html#point4-2

10 Seens, D. (2015). *SME Profile: Canadian Exporters*. Industry Canada. [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/vwapj/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf/\\$file/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/vwapj/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf/$file/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf)

11 World Trade Organization (2017). *Gender Aware Trade Policy*. https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news17_e/dgra_21jun17_e.pdf

12 Hessels, J., & van Stel, A. (2011). *Entrepreneurship, export orientation, and economic growth*. *Small Business Economics*, 37(2), 255-268.

13 Seens, D. (2015). *SME Profile: Canadian Exporters*. Industry Canada. https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_02925.html

14 Brown, B. (2017, August 10). *7 Reasons Why Exporters Do Better*. Export Development Canada. <https://www.edc.ca/en/blog/why-exporters-are-more-successful.html#1>



export risks, they used partnerships and collaboration to expand their reach into other countries by working with other businesses. The biggest opportunity they see for growth and expansion is to sell to governments: These are their largest customers and there is potential to expand that base. When they initially bought the company, they were already on the government procurement list so they were able to get a standing offer for their provincial region. This has been invaluable.

2. The second woman entrepreneur, who has an MBA, has global clients for her technology. To grow her tech company, she accessed grants which she became aware of through her strong and connected network. She also used her network to acquire clients in other countries through referrals. These contacts also enabled her to find the right consultant to assist her with a strategic focus on her business' finances so she would be well positioned for growth. She connected with TCS in Europe to help her hire programmers in a specific country and she received funding to participate on a trade mission. BDC support has been important to her business growth although she has not connected with EDC yet.
3. The third woman entrepreneur and her partner have been having export success with their beauty products. They wholesale their products in the USA as well as selling through other channels like e-commerce, in spas, and in national brand name stores. They are looking to expand to Europe. They took the trade accelerator program and found it helpful. They have worked with EDC and TCS as well and connected with BDC at a networking event. They have interest from other countries (e.g., Mexico and Brazil) – these opportunities were uncovered at a trade show they attended.

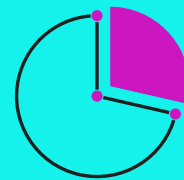


Small
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In 2018, exports
accounted for

30.2%

of Canada's GDP product



SMEs were
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billion worth of Canadian
services exports





While it is undeniable that women entrepreneurs are making great strides, it is also undeniable that women entrepreneurs have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic because their businesses tend to be smaller and operating in the most affected sectors. Women entrepreneurs' progress is being set back by the pandemic. Many solopreneurs could not take advantage of the aid programs made available by various levels of government. The supports outlined in the report will be needed more than ever to deal with capital requirements, broken supply chains, border restrictions, and political disruptions that affect markets. Digital transformation supports will be necessary to help women entrepreneurs pivot their business and expand their business opportunities.¹⁵

Research Questions

This report focuses on exploring the following questions:

1. What are the patterns of exporting by Canadian women entrepreneurs?
2. What are the drivers to exporting for women entrepreneurs?
3. What are the barriers to exporting for women entrepreneurs?
4. What are the strategies that could advance exporting by women entrepreneurs?

Methods

This report explores the patterns of exporting, as well as the drivers and impediments to increasing export behavior using three principal sources: 1) published research; 2) in-depth interviews with 96 women entrepreneurs; and 3) a survey of 815 entrepreneurs.

¹⁵ Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub. (2020). *The Impact of COVID-19 on Women Entrepreneurs*. https://wekh.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/WEKH_The_Impact_of_COVID-19_on_Women_Entrepreneurs-1.pdf

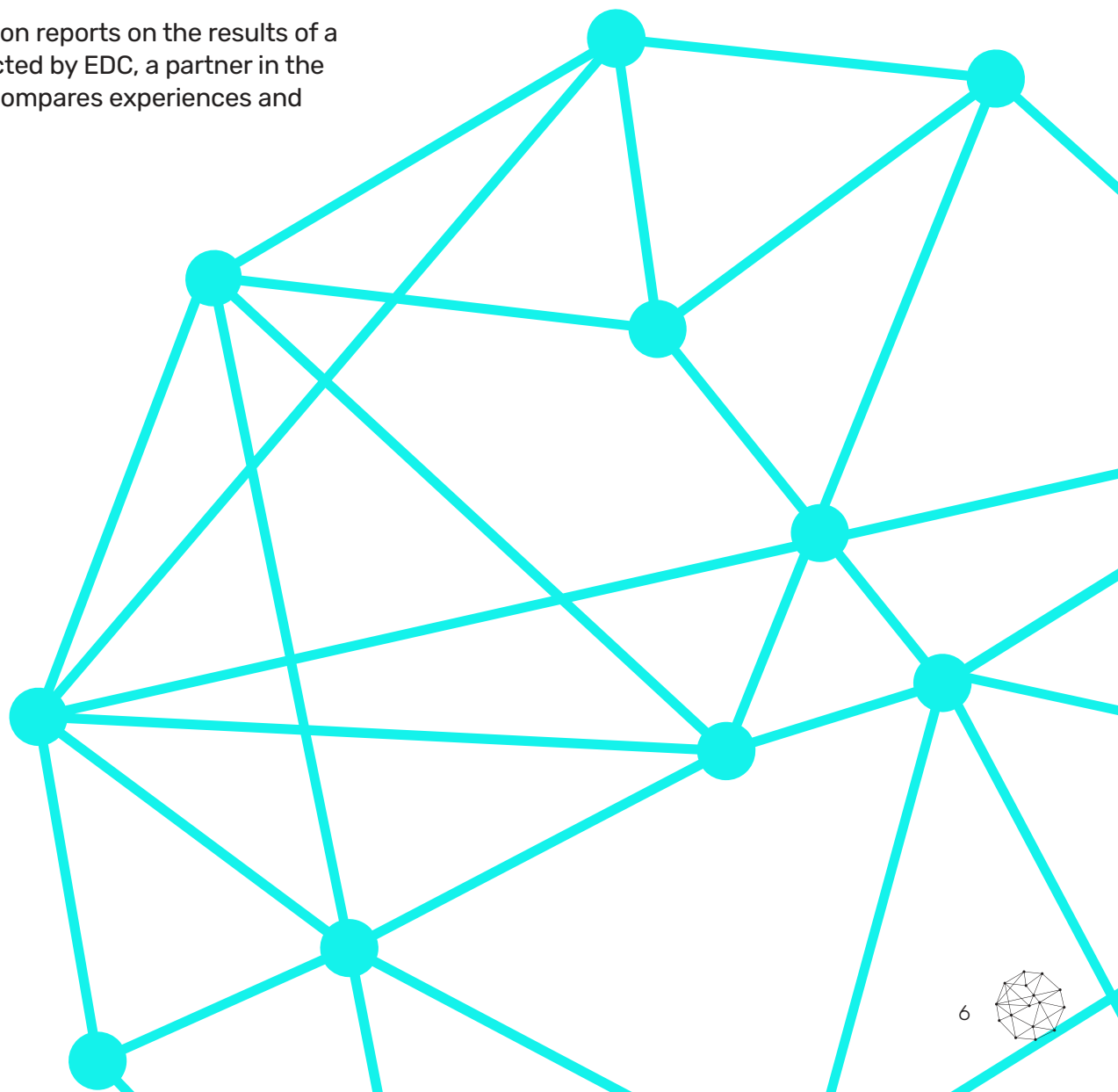


The first section of this report reviews published research, including academic studies as well as reports from a range of government and industry organizations.

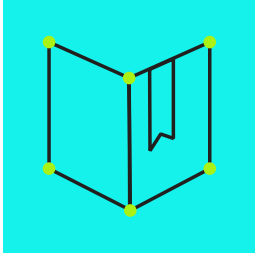
The second section of the report analyses the results of in-depth interviews with 96 women entrepreneurs. The respondents were identified through multiple selection methods including self-selection, award winners, fellow entrepreneurs' recommendations, as well as recommendations from organizations in the ecosystem such as the women's business centres and immigrant women's organizations so as to ensure representation across Canada, a diversity of sectors, and different sizes of enterprises. (A table summarizing the profile of the respondents is included in [Appendix C](#).)

The third section reports on the results of a survey conducted by EDC, a partner in the study, which compares experiences and

perspectives of 815 entrepreneurs, including 463 women and 261 men. These surveys with entrepreneurs were conducted with a business panel through Maru/Blue, and have similar characteristics to the overall profile of Canadian Businesses in terms of region, size, and high-level sector. The respondents were business owners or executive leaders within the company. The entrepreneurs surveyed were diverse in terms of the sectors, size, and age of the enterprises, as well as the background of the entrepreneurs themselves. Of the respondents, 23% of women and 19% of men were racialized, 9% of women and 10% of men had a disability, and 4% of men and women were Indigenous. This indicates a good cross section of experiences.







Literature Review

Exporting Behaviour of Canadian SMEs

How Much Do Canadian Companies Export?

According to a 2018 report from the Conference Board of Canada, there has been an increase of \$483.6 billion in exports of Canadian goods in 2017, 41.9% of which came from SMEs. While more than 48,000 Canadian companies exported goods, of which 97.4% were SMEs, it remains that these SMEs represented only 11.7% of all SMEs in Canada.¹ Unlike their international counterparts, most SMEs seem to be focused on providing local services: 93% of all SMEs report their sale destination to be within their local municipality or region. There are opportunities to expand to global markets and help Canadian SMEs adopt a more international mindset.²

Where Do Canadian Companies Export?

A majority of the exporters focused mostly on the United States.³ With the explosion of technology and increasing trade openness,

many smaller markets, such as Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Central and Eastern Europe are open for exporters to explore.⁴ Emerging markets offer a key source of growth, diversification, and economic prominence, but only 10 to 12% of Canadian SME exporters currently sell to Latin America, China, or other Asian markets.⁵ Although Canada exports to 240 different countries, it has a highly concentrated destination market.⁶ Hall indicates that Canadians are somewhat reluctant to enter less traditional markets because emerging markets can be challenging.⁷ For example, the growing population in India promises opportunities for Canada, but removing business and infrastructure bottlenecks can be difficult.

There are opportunities to expand to global markets and help Canadian SMEs adopt a more international mindset.

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- 1 Government of Canada (2019). *Trade and small and medium-sized enterprises*. <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/sme-pme/sme-roles-pme.aspx?lang=eng>
 - 2 Government of Canada (2019). *Trade and small and medium-sized enterprises*. <https://www.international.gc.ca/trade-commerce/sme-pme/sme-roles-pme.aspx?lang=eng>
 - 3 Seens, D. (2015). *SME Profile: Canadian Exporters*. Industry Canada. [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/vwapj/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf/\\$file/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/vwapj/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf/$file/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf)
 - 4 Hall, P.G. (2019). *As the World diversifies, will we?* EDC. <https://www.edc.ca/en/weekly-commentary/as-the-world-diversifies.html>
 - 5 Seens, D. (2015). *SME Profile: Canadian Exporters*. Industry Canada. [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/vwapj/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf/\\$file/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/vwapj/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf/$file/SMEPCE-PPMEEC_2015_eng.pdf)
 - 6 Statistics Canada. (2017). *Measuring Canadian Export Diversification*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/13-605-x/2017001/article/54890-eng.htm>
 - 7 Hall, P.G. (2019). *As the World diversifies, will we?* EDC. <https://www.edc.ca/en/weekly-commentary/as-the-world-diversifies.html>





Mineral fuels
(crude oil)
accounted for

>33%

of total Canadian
exports to the USA



Canada
exports to

240
countries

Which Sectors Export?

SME exports as a share of total sales by industry was not the same in different industries in 2017. Top exporting sectors included: manufacturing (14.2%); wholesale trade (9.0%); transportation and warehousing (8.8%); professional, scientific, and technical services (7.8%); agriculture and resources (3.6%, down from 4.0% in 2011); retail trade (3.5%), information, cultural, and public services (2.5%); accommodation and food services (0.8%); and construction (0.4%). During the period between 2011 and 2014, mineral fuels (namely crude oil) accounted for over 33% of total Canadian exports to the United States (on higher crude oil prices). All Canadian provinces and territories have been involved in trade activities with the rest of the world. For long periods, Canadian exports were highly concentrated in Ontario and Alberta. In terms of product diversification, the export products were mainly in vehicles, parts, and mineral fuels.

Why Do Companies Export?

A number of push and pull factors motivate business owners to export. They may be seeking to expand their markets, or they may already be familiar with the target market. Some firms are pushed to export because of a surge in foreign demands. Many become accidental exporters when a firm receives unsolicited orders from abroad.⁸ Some see exporting as a way to offset risks in the domestic market by channeling products into new markets. Competing globally makes exporters more resilient; they are better able to absorb shocks in the domestic market and cope with fluctuations in the business cycle.⁹ Even in a volatile foreign market,

8 Liargovas, P. G., & Skandalis, K. S. (2008). Motivations and barriers of export performance: Greek exports to the Balkans. *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 10(3), 377-392.

9 Deloitte (2014). *The Future of Productivity: Smart Exporting for Canadian Companies*. Deloitte Canada
<https://www2.deloitte.com/ca/en/pages/deloitte-private/articles/the-future-of-productivity.html>



business owners can spread risk and reduce business volatility by 20% through exports.¹⁰ Exporting can also revitalize growth and extend product lifespan in businesses whose markets have matured or whose growth has declined. Studies from different countries have indicated that exporting firms have higher survival rates and longevity compared to those of non-exporters.¹¹

In the face of domestic and global competition, exporting is a strategy for many organizations to drive down processing costs.

Entry into new markets accelerates the productivity and growth of companies as they learn about new processes. Companies that can no longer compete in the international market can reduce the negative impact of exit and remain viable by entering a new domestic market.¹² Ultimately, exporting and expansion have compelling benefits for Canadian firms.

In the face of domestic and global competition, exporting is a strategy for many organizations to drive down processing costs through enhanced cost reduction initiatives that allow them to reduce prices while maintaining margins.

A relaxation in trade restrictions is also a critical determinant in the decision to enter markets that were once difficult for exporters to access. Additionally, federal, provincial, and some municipal governments in Canada have prioritized support for export-related programs and organizations that support and mentor business owners to stimulate exports.

What Factors Affect Propensity to Export?

For many organizations, the decision to export varies greatly by sector. It might include access to skilled labour, availability of raw materials, investment attraction initiatives, knowledge of the local market, and the agility to respond to changes in customer demand.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

It is cost efficient and profitable to export when the firm is located close to the exporting country. Usually, large cities with information centers, transportation, and support mechanisms are favorable for export development.¹³ The industry of operation also dictates the choice of location.

ATTRIBUTES OF EXPORTING FIRMS AND THEIR OWNERS

Export propensity can be attributed to owner and firm attributes.¹⁴ Competency is also important; owners that export often have higher levels of education than those who do not. Knowledge of international markets is key, which is likely why newcomers are slightly more inclined to export than Canadian-born entrepreneurs, as well as those with personal experience living

¹⁰ Garcia-Vega, M., Guariglia, A., & Spaliara, M. E. (2012). Volatility, financial constraints, and trade. *International Review of Economics & Finance*, 21(1), 57-76

¹¹ Dzhumashev, R., Mishra, V., & Smyth, R. (2016). Exporting, R&D investment and firm survival in the Indian IT sector. *Journal of Asian Economics*, 42, 1-19

¹² Baldwin, J.R., and Yan, B. (2012). *Market Expansion and Productivity Growth: Do New Domestic Markets Matter as Much as New International Markets?*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0027m/11f0027m2012078-eng.htm>

¹³ Wiedersheim-Paul, F., Olson, H. C., & Welch, L. S. (1978). Pre-export activity: The first step in internationalization. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 9(1), 47-58.

¹⁴ Liao, X. (2015). *Export Propensity of Canadian SMEs: A Gender Based Study*. Master's Thesis, University of Ottawa.



abroad. Exporting companies need access to information to help navigate complex international contexts and often need to rely on technology.¹⁵ SME owners with 10 or more years of managing experience are more likely to export.¹⁶ Most young entrepreneurs are keen to establish their businesses in the domestic market first rather than in the international market.

Exporting Behavior of Women Entrepreneurs

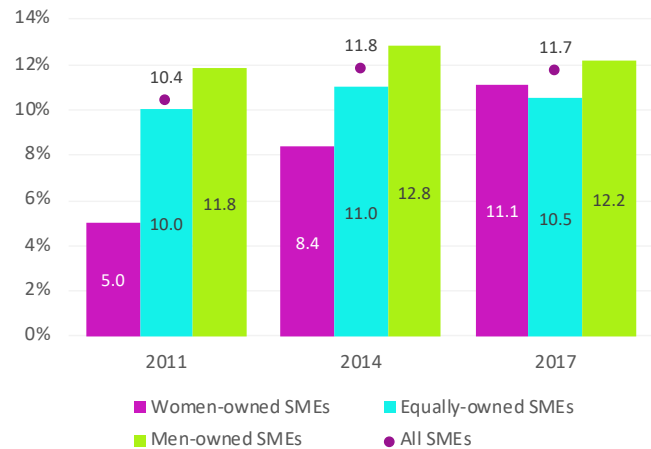
How Much Do Canadian Women Export?

Earlier studies indicated that women entrepreneurs have less propensity to export than men entrepreneurs.¹⁷ But many of the factors affecting women entrepreneurs' propensity to export are structural – tied to the sector, the size and age of their businesses, as well as the aspirations of their owners.¹⁸ However, the 2017 Survey on Financing and Growth of SMEs (SFGSME) from Global Affairs Canada (GAC 2019) reported that the likelihood of women-owned SMEs to export among all SMEs increased from 5.0% in 2011 to 11.1% in 2017, narrowing the gap compared to men-owned SMEs (11.8% in 2011 and 12.2% in 2017) (Figure 1).

The likelihood of women-owned SMEs to export among all SMEs increased from 5.0% in 2011 to 11.1% in 2017.

FIGURE 1

Export Propensity of SMEs by Majority Gender of Ownership, 2011, 2014, 2017



Source: Obtained from Office of the Chief Economist, Global Affairs Canada based on SFGSME 2011, 2014, 2017

What Factors Affect Women Entrepreneurs' Propensity to Export?

SIZE

The women-owned SMEs that export are smaller than their men-owned counterparts. As seen in Figure 2 below, in small to medium enterprises, firm size for men-led exporting SMEs was nearly double than that for women-owned SME exporters in 2014. In micro and small enterprises, exporting SMEs led by men and women accounted for 84.2% and 75.9% respectively. Questions remain about causality – does a smaller size result in a business being less likely to export or vice versa? The directionality of the factors associated with exporting warrants further exploration.

¹⁵ Serra, F., Pointon, J., & Abdou, H. (2012). Factors influencing the propensity to export: A study of UK and Portuguese textile firms. *International Business Review*, 21(2), 210-224.

¹⁶ The Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (2018). *Majority-Female Owned Exporting SMEs in Canada*. TCS. https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/businesswomen-femmesdaffaires/2016-MFO_SMES-PME_EDMF.aspx?lang=eng#Footnote-1

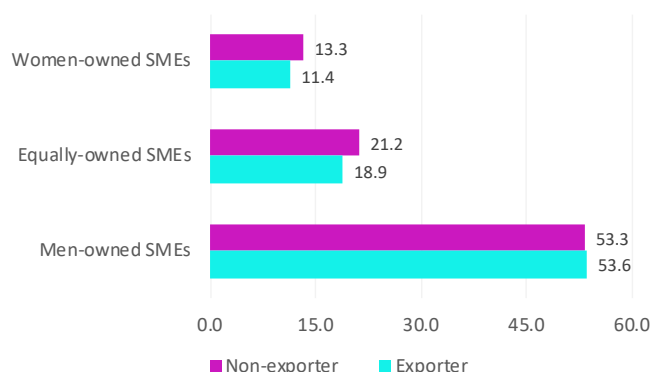
¹⁷ Orser, B., Spence, M., Riding, A., & Carrington, C. A. (2010). Gender and export propensity. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 34(5), 933-958. Statistics Canada. (2017). *Measuring Canadian Export Diversification*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/13-605-x/2017001/article/54890-eng.htm>

¹⁸ Government of Canada (2020). *Business Women in International Trade*. <https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/businesswomen-femmesdaffaires/index.aspx?lang=eng&>



FIGURE 2

Exporter and Non-exporter SMEs by Gender based on 2017 SFGSME



The recent 2017 SFGSME reported that majority women-owned businesses constituted 14.9% of high-growth firms (defined as those with 20% or more growth per year) while majority men-owned businesses accounted for 68% of high-growth firms. If women SMEs are slower growing on average, they might be less likely to become large enough for exporting.¹⁹

SECTORS

The 2017 SFGSME reported that women-owned businesses are more dominant in service industries such as retail trade, accommodation, food services, and tourism – and less so in agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, construction, manufacturing, mining, and oil and gas extraction industries. The health care and social assistance industry experienced the largest increase for both women-owned enterprises and equally-owned enterprises.

FIRM AGE AND EXPERIENCE

Women-owned SMEs are likely to be newer than those owned by men, and those that export are more likely to be more experienced

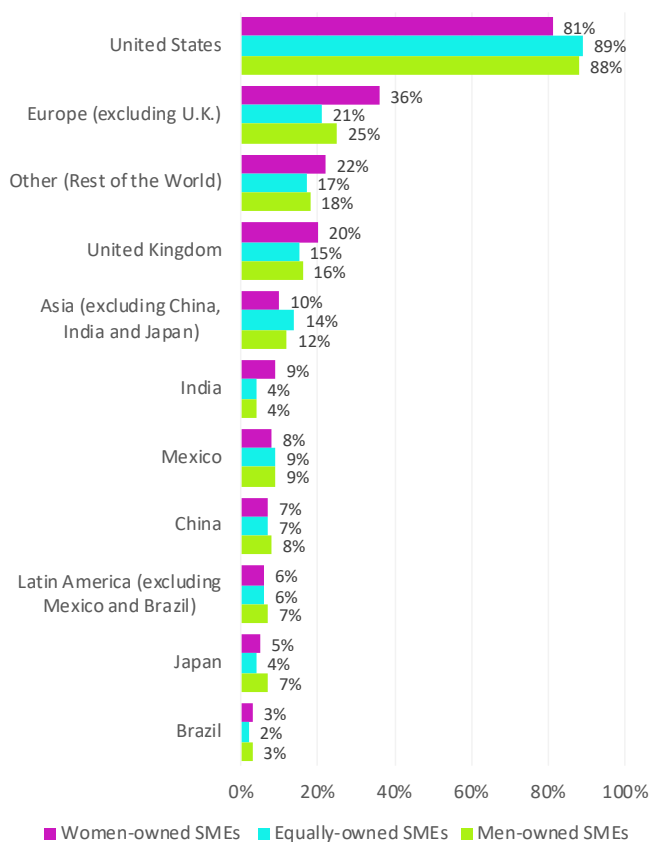
than those that do not. For example, in 2014, 80.7% of women-owned SME exporters had 10 or more years of managing experience, while only 66.5% of women non-exporters had the same level of experience.

DESTINATIONS

Like men, women-owned SME exporters are more likely to be located in Ontario than non-exporters.²⁰ Surveys reported that women-owned SMEs are more likely to export to Europe than men-owned SMEs, as well as to India (Figure 3).²¹

FIGURE 3

Export Destination of Women-owned SMEs



Source: Obtained from BDC 2019 based on 2017 SFGSME

¹⁹ The Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (2018). *Majority-Female Owned Exporting SMEs in Canada*. TCS. https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/businesswomen-femmesdaffaires/2016-MFO_SMES-PME_EDMF.aspx?lang=eng#Footnote-1

²⁰ The Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (2018). *Majority-Female Owned Exporting SMEs in Canada*. TCS. https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/businesswomen-femmesdaffaires/2016-MFO_SMES-PME_EDMF.aspx?lang=eng#Footnote-1

²¹ Business Development Canada (2019). *Majority women-owned SME profile: Based on the 2017 Survey on Financing and Growth of SMEs*. Research and Market Intelligence at BDC





TYPES OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ACTIVITIES

Canadian SMEs are more likely to import than they are to export. Women majority-owned SMEs are not significantly different than those owned by mostly men in the nature of their import/export activities, although they are marginally more likely to import goods to be resold as they are and less likely to import goods to be used in production in Canada. This is likely a function of sector (e.g., retail versus manufacturing).

E-COMMERCE

A growing number of Canadian women business owners have launched e-commerce businesses to stay competitive, increase business growth, and expand to new markets. Online businesses provide a degree of anonymity to women business owners, thereby reducing potential gender discrimination.²² Such initiatives have narrowed the earnings gap between women

and men entrepreneurs and there has been a significant gain in e-commerce growth.²³ Briggs reported that by the year 2023, Canadian e-commerce will approach an estimated CA \$108 billion.²⁴

IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS

SME owners who were born outside of Canada are slightly more likely to export than SMEs owners born in Canada, given their knowledge of a foreign market. The number of businesses owned by immigrant women that export has increased over the years,

Online businesses provide a degree of anonymity to women business owners, thereby reducing potential gender discrimination.

²² Suominen, K. (2018). *Women-Led Firms on the Web: Challenges and Solutions*. International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development. Retrieved from https://www.ictsd.org/sites/default/files/research/women-led_firms_on_the_web_-_suominen.pdf

²³ Paypal Canada and Barazza & Associates. (2018). *Women's Entrepreneurship Study*. Retrieved from <https://www.paypalobjects.com/digitalassets/c/website/marketing/na/ca/consumer/sell-online/paypal-canada-women-entrepreneurship-study-2018.pdf>

²⁴ Briggs, P. (2019). *Canada Ecommerce 2019*. eMarketer. <https://www.emarketer.com/content/canada-ecommerce-2019>



with BDC reporting rates of 29% of SMEs led by immigrant women engaging in export – compared to 27% equal ownership and 23% men-owned businesses.

Challenges to Exporting

Once the decision has been made to export, the preparation phase can be an uphill task. Business owners seeking to expand globally must often investigate access to suppliers, the quality of logistics networks, political stability, currencies, labour flexibility, and whether organizational cultures are compatible with those in target markets. Exporting businesses need to forge connections with distributors, partners, suppliers, customers, service providers, industry associations, and government contacts to build global networks.²⁵

DIFFERENCES IN PERCEIVED OBSTACLES AND RISKS

While men and women ranked obstacles in much the same way, women saw more obstacles to exporting. For example, 24% of women identified logistical obstacles as a challenge compared to 19% of men. Border obstacles were a challenge to 22% of women compared to 17% of men. Financial risk was cited by 21% of women compared to 16% of men. On virtually every dimension, women saw more obstacles – although they

were less likely to see obstacles with market knowledge (11% vs. 14%), lack of financing or cash flow (10% vs. 13%) or intellectual property issues (4% vs. 6%) in part perhaps reflecting structural differences.²⁶

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

According to studies, women SME owners in Canada face barriers such as lack of investors, mentors, and fewer chances to participate in networks with high net worth individuals.²⁷ While the results of the BDC study above suggest that, at least in the sample surveyed, cash flow was not raised as a barrier, we know from other work that women often use personal assets when they are starting new businesses and this slows their opportunity to grow.²⁸ Studies also indicate that, for a majority of the women-owned SMEs, debt financing is less likely to be approved compared to men-owned SMEs, and the interest rate for debt financing was higher as well.²⁹ However, these differences are diminishing.³⁰

BIAS TOWARDS TECHNOLOGY SECTORS

Research also suggests that systemic barriers exist. For example, most policies and financial assistance programs currently associate innovation with technological advances and miss identifying that women are extensively innovating.³¹ As a result, women entrepreneurs miss the opportunity to receive adequate financial assistance.

25 Brown, B. (2017). *7 Reasons Why Exporters Do Better*. Export Development Canada. <https://www.edc.ca/en/blog/why-exporters-are-more-successful.html#1>

26 Obtained from BDC (2019) based on (SFGSME, 2017).

27 Rosa, J.M. and Sylla, D. (2016). *A Comparison of the Performance of Majority Female-owned and Majority Male-owned Small and Medium-sized Enterprises*. Government of Canada https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03034.html

28 Beckton, C., McDonald, J., & Marquis-Bissonnette, M. (2018). *Everywhere, Everyday, Innovating: Women Entrepreneurs and Innovation*. <https://carleton.ca/creww/wp-content/uploads/here.pdf>

29 Jung, O. (2010). *Women Entrepreneurs*. Small Business and Tourism Branch, Industry Canada [https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/vwapj/Profile-Profil_Oct2010_eng.pdf/\\$file/Profile-Profil_Oct2010_eng.pdf](https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/vwapj/Profile-Profil_Oct2010_eng.pdf/$file/Profile-Profil_Oct2010_eng.pdf)

Rosa, J.M. and Sylla, D. (2016). *A Comparison of the Performance of Majority Female-owned and Majority Male-owned Small and Medium-sized Enterprises*. Government of Canada. https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03034.html

30 Rosa, J.M. and Sylla, D. (2016). *A Comparison of the Performance of Majority Female-owned and Majority Male-owned Small and Medium-sized Enterprises*. Government of Canada. https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03034.html

31 Beckton, C., McDonald, J., & Marquis-Bissonnette, M. (2018). *Everywhere, Everyday, Innovating: Women Entrepreneurs and Innovation*. <https://carleton.ca/creww/wp-content/uploads/here.pdf>



TECHNOLOGY SKILLS

Generally, SME owners tend to have insufficient knowledge regarding adopting e-commerce technology.³² Lack of resources and technical skills deter new adopters from experimenting with e-commerce.³³ Security concerns regarding e-payments, applications regarding taxation rules, regulatory issues and compliance costs, as well as cultural barriers, can dissuade SME owners from pursuing e-commerce initiatives.³⁴ However, as noted above, there is also research to suggest that the shift to e-commerce is helping to level the playing field.³⁵

BURDEN OF UNPAID WORK FOR WOMEN

Women have historically invested more time and energy than their life partners in family roles such as parenting and homemaking. The United Nations estimated that, women spend at least twice as much time as men on domestic work globally. Such family embeddedness may result in time constraints and hinder their aspirations to export. Women who wait while they raise children or gather more experiences can miss out on learning opportunities such as Futurpreneur.³⁶ Culture-based gender roles are dominant in developing countries and can act as an impediment to women's opportunities for export. Even in developed countries such as Canada, gender can affect the operation of a business, access to professional networks, and other resources.³⁷ The moral

and psychological support of a spouse or a partner can often encourage women SMEs owners to commit to export.³⁸

Success Factors

Canada has many success stories of companies, led by both men and women, that

Culture-based gender roles are dominant in developing countries and can act as an impediment to women's opportunities for export.

have grown their businesses through export across sectors.

However, research is still limited on the specific factors and processes that enable companies to successfully export. Firms with a unique set of resources are more likely to be international and export but the factors that enable them to do so are complex.³⁹ The characteristics of the sector and macro level factors are important (e.g., it is harder for a corner store or restaurant to go global than a tech firm or retailer). Characteristics of the particular firm – its assets and

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- 32 Arendt, L. (2008). Barriers to ICT adoption in SMEs: how to bridge the digital divide? *Journal of Systems and Information Technology*, 10(2), 93-108.
- Kalinic, Z. (2014). Barriers to higher and faster adoption of e-commerce. In *Proceedings of 3rd International Scientific Conference Contemporary Issues in Economics, Business and Management—EBM* (pp. 697-716).
- 33 MacGregor, R. Vrazalic, L. (2005). A basic model of electronic commerce adoption barriers: A study of regional small businesses in Sweden and Australia. *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 12(4), 510-527
- 34 Chitura, T., Mupemhi, S., Dube, T., Bolongikit, J. (2008). Barriers to Electronic Commerce Adoption in Small and Medium Enterprises: A Critical Literature Review. *Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce*, 13(2), 1-13
- 35 Mazzarol, T. (2015). SMEs engagement with e-commerce, e-business and e-marketing. *Small enterprise research*, 22(1), 79-90.
- 36 Beckton, C., McDonald, J., Saifuddin, S.M., Ozkan, U.R. (2016). *A Force to Reckon With: Women Entrepreneurship and Risk*. <https://carleton.ca/creww/wp-content/uploads/here-1.pdf>
- 37 Tapp, S. (2016). *Increasing women's participation in international trade is a worthwhile objective: It's also smart Economics*. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/november-2016/removing-the-barriers-to-women-traders/>
- 38 Cesaroni, F. M., & Paoloni, P. (2016). Are family ties an opportunity or an obstacle for women entrepreneurs? Empirical evidence from Italy. *Palgrave Communications*, 2(1), 1-7.
- 39 Bloodgood, J.M.; Sapienza, H.J.; Almeida, J.G. (1996). The internationalisation of new high potential U.S. ventures: Antecedents and outcomes. *Entrepreneurship, Theory and Practice*, 20, 61-76



capacity – also come into play, as do the availability and size of local markets as well as capacity to grow. Other factors have to do with human capital – leadership and talent. Ultimately a manager’s decision process for export, networking in global context, and born-global firms are among the important behavioral aspects of internationalization and are shaped by their perceptions of opportunity and risks.⁴⁰ Knowledge about foreign markets, product nature, product life cycle stage, products’ superior and heritage value, and identifying new business opportunities in foreign markets are also key. Previous international experience may also be a factor through being directly involved in business with foreign markets or expanding networks with foreign partners. Although women entrepreneurs are keen to network, studies have suggested that they may lack knowledge about networking possibilities and feel many existing networks are not relevant to their needs.⁴¹ Many women entrepreneurs even reported that they were not included or comfortable in mainstream networks, incubators, and accelerators. The duration of many incubators is short, and women do not feel welcome in the tech sector ones. Additionally, women bear disproportionate responsibilities for family obligations which limit time and flexibility.⁴² In spite of gender differences, however, it is clear that encouraging a diverse set of businesses to export is in everyone’s interest and exploring how to most effectively do this is an important area for research.



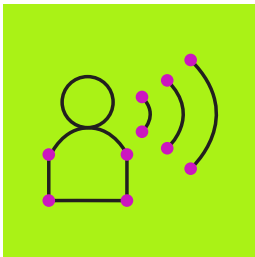
⁴⁰ Akter, M., Rahman, M., & Radicic, D. (2019). Women Entrepreneurship in International Trade: Bridging the Gap by Bringing Feminist Theories into Entrepreneurship and Internationalization Theories. *Sustainability*, 11(22), 6230.

⁴¹ Beckton, C., McDonald, J., & Marquis-Bissonnette, M. (2018). Everywhere, *Everyday, Innovating: Women Entrepreneurs and Innovation*. <https://carleton.ca/creww/wp-content/uploads/here.pdf>

⁴² Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Secretariat (2017). Women’s SMEs: Conquering International Markets. SOM Steering Committee on Economic and Technical Cooperation (SCE). Policy Partnership on Women and the Economy (PPWE). <https://www.apec.org/Publications/2017/05/Womens-SMEs-Conquering-International-Market>







Interviews: What the Entrepreneurs Said

This section of the report reflects on the results of interviews with 96 women entrepreneurs aimed at helping us understand the factors affecting decisions to export. Through these interviews, a number of themes emerged which help us better understand both challenges and potential solutions.

Profile of Respondents

In total, we spoke to 96 entrepreneurs with companies of various sizes across sectors (see [Appendix C](#) for profile of respondents). Approximately 53 of them currently exported, 29 were considering exporting, and 15 were neither exporting nor had plans to export. Women-owned SMEs in Canada are a mix of those actively engaged in export activities, those preparing to export, and those who are not. Many are committed to a community business, such as a retail space or a local service. Some of the women entrepreneurs we spoke to were unincorporated businesses with no employees.

Importance of Exporting

Export opportunities are on the minds of many Canadian women entrepreneurs as they consider ways to grow and expand their businesses. Many felt the opportunity to grow through export overshadowed any concerns or challenges, and they pursued export with vigour. An entrepreneur from Ontario said, she was keen *“to grow outside of Canada.”* Another said *“I thought about my business as global from the start.”* Another said, *“In five years, I can transform this business into a big global business, if I can position*

the business properly [...] I need to navigate the system.” Another said, *“I do sell outside of Canada from website sales but I want to grow it significantly.”*

Others found export to be an exciting and obvious growth strategy and were well versed in the intricacies of taking their products and services to the global market and, as such, were seeing great success. And there were those who had never really considered export before but were interested in the opportunity. For example, one woman in Toronto said that when she attended the BDC bootcamp, she realized there are more opportunities to grow her business: *“I’ve been in a bubble with my business and now I’m going to think about what else and how else I can grow my business but thinking globally to do so.”*

There is an awareness by women exporters that we *“live in a global world.”* As one woman entrepreneur said, *“we need to have women think about global opportunities. We can eliminate the fear in doing so and demystify export.”* She went on to say:

“The weak dollar is a huge opportunity for export and this needs to be shared and communicated to women entrepreneurs. We need to hold up examples of people who have done it really well and show the way. Highlighting the success stories [...] from where you are to where you can get to.”



Another entrepreneur described needing to be prepared for increased demand by having her own warehouse and assembly plant, IP protection, and teams in place before moving to export. Another described preparing her training system as a way to enhance her export in services. One entrepreneur said she had *“no prescription for success but learning to say yes opens up opportunities.”*

At the same time, some women indicated that focusing on local and national markets was sufficiently challenging and they had no intention of growing further. For example, one woman said, *“I haven’t thought of looking outside of Canada. I have no plans to expand. I have a regional business and plan to make it regional.”* And yet, another woman said, *“We have gone national with the business,”* which was a big accomplishment because of challenges they experienced.

Often women entrepreneurs experiencing export success built on previous work or other business experience which gave them more confidence in reaching out to new markets and to deal with risk.

The women entrepreneurs who export have two traits in common: all are persistent and highly resilient. Some spoke of the setbacks they experienced before achieving success. One described *“spending considerable time trying to get into one Asian market and then finding out a neighbouring country was a much friendlier market for her products.”* Others described having possible connections in a market that did not come to fruition through contracts, having to regroup and rebuild before moving forward again. Many prepared carefully for export making sure they had all of their *“ducks lined up.”* For example, one woman said she has slim margins so tariff changes have a huge implication on her business and she considered tariff implications carefully as she continued to export.

While some of the exporters were entering new markets slowly because of financial restraints, others had obtained financing or were preparing to seek financing for export. Financial institutions, partners, resources from the existing business in Canada, and (in a few instances) investors were the source of funding. One entrepreneur who had a major setback with a man investor, later found a woman investor and mentor who is helping her rebuild her export capability. She is an amazing example of resilience and the desire to grow to help others through using her product. Some were simply bootstrapping from the proceeds of their initial exports to expand. Those with export success were resilient and undeterred by challenges, including financing, and pressed on regardless.

Enablers of Exporting

Goals and Plans

Those that were exporting did so for a variety of reasons. Some started their business as a global company with a solid plan to export right from the outset, some were pulled in by opportunities presented to them, and others were pushed by the need to grow their business given the size of the market in Canada.

For many women entrepreneurs, the issue was clearly not intent. One entrepreneur said, *“I’m making inroads into the USA but it has not converted into sales.”* Having a clear strategy for export is a factor in export success. Some women had attended trade shows and trade missions as part of their strategy to gather information and make connections. One woman described how having a booth near the Trade Commissioner Service booth at a trade show led to connections.



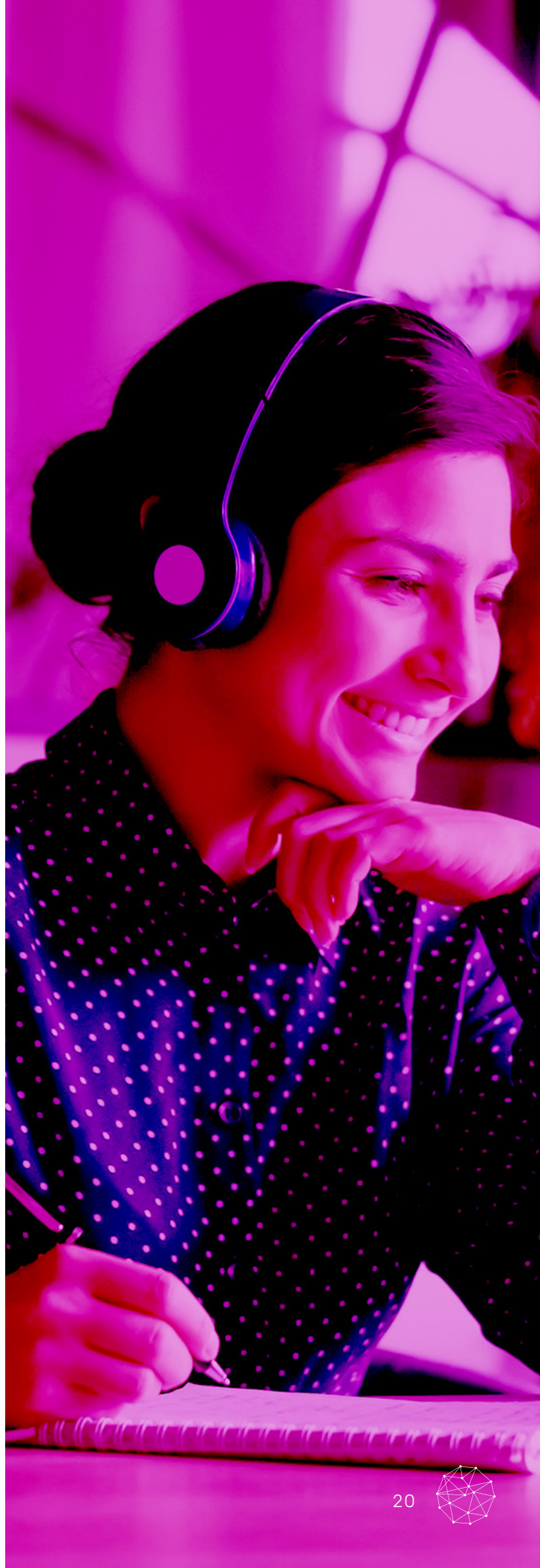
Technology

E-commerce added opportunities for some, while for others it was another level of challenges. In many ways, e-commerce challenges were similar to those experienced by business owners exporting products through more traditional methods. The advantage of e-commerce was perceived as the ease of operating an online business, especially when services like Shopify were used and the relative low cost to set up and begin selling online became widespread. E-commerce enabled many women entrepreneurs to find global customers.

Importance of Networks

Women entrepreneurs who were experiencing export success tended to have strong networks and solid connections to many different parts of the market or system. One woman said, *"I have a global network that I ask advice of. It keeps me up to date for trends and where the industry is going."* Because of their broad networks, they were able to find the information they needed in a timely manner and navigate the system to achieve the outcomes they needed. They were aware of the resources available in the ecosystem and were often successful in accessing the funding opportunities as well. These same exporters were quite sophisticated in their level of engagement with different networks and organizations in business and export because they found value in not only having the broad network, but using it to help grow their businesses.

Women's business networks and centres have been helpful for some women in finding support, accessing information, and locating resources. One woman said, *"I have contacts with NLOWE [Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs] who can be helpful with my expansion plans. I am aware of the Organization of Women in International Trade [OWIT] but I haven't been involved with them."* Sometimes their





financial institution's account managers provide them with information about other available resources. In some regions in the country, women have formed informal networks to help and support each other, and to share information. Those with previous experience and networks found them incredibly helpful in finding their way to export. One woman had a large network of fellow business people who would always

"agree to meet and share their knowledge" with her.

Women entrepreneurs with champions found it easier to find information about grants and other funding opportunities. One entrepreneur said, *"I learned about a grant opportunity through BDC. My contact was instrumental in me getting BDC financing and in getting the CanExport grant [...] Having a BDC champion has been instrumental in the success of my business."* Those who were aware of the TCS found many interactions helpful in understanding possible markets and in obtaining connections within it, as well as powerful introductions. One woman said of her export experience with TCS and the business she was able to secure overseas, *"TCS - had an amazing experience!"*

Well-networked women entrepreneurs often participated in trade missions, connected with TCS before landing in a new potential market, and deemed the service important to their export plan.

Importance of Support Programs

Many, but not all, of those exporting were aware of or had used the services of their provincial or regional development agencies or that of the TCS or EDC. One entrepreneur attributed her business growth decisions to the training she received at the BDC Bootcamp for women entrepreneurs and the information that she obtained about all the services available to help her export. Many entrepreneurs interviewed who had attended this or another boot camp agreed. In several instances, the entrepreneur had been approached by the BDC or the TCS with an opportunity for their product or service. Approaches by BDC, EDC, and TCS were welcomed and considered a highly desirable connection whether actioned immediately or later as the business developed. Where the provincial and regional agencies are linked to the TCS and EDC, information is



more readily accessible, and links can be provided which have assisted a number of entrepreneurs in preparing for export. For example, one entrepreneur shared how she received very strategic and valuable advice from EDC: *"My EDC rep shared that I should build a relationship with the Royal Bank of Canada [RBC] because they underwrite EDC insurance."* She went on to share how important that information was to her and her export success. Some had taken the *Trade Accelerator Program* (TAP) and others, such as the *Forum for International Trade Training* (FITT) to try to better understand how to navigate the complexities of export. Those who took advantage of TAP found it helpful. However, one entrepreneur echoed the sentiment of others who participated in the program, stating that while it was very helpful, they *"needed help converting TAP content into execution."* Some took the FITT skills program and found it to be very useful.

Generally, women who had participated in export training programs felt better equipped to take their business global. Others spoke of the benefit of participating in an accelerator which gave them access to advice, an expanded network, and funding which facilitated their ability to consider export. One in particular described how her mentors in the program supported her to export at an early stage of her business development. Similarly, knowing other women entrepreneurs who were exporting was both inspiring and helpful because it aided in demystifying the process. This was true even when women did not personally know the women exporters. Another spoke of the benefit of participating in a structured shared space such as *One Eleven* in Toronto where information was regularly shared about what worked and what might be a pitfall. The sharing of information and insights from other women entrepreneurs who export was seen as valuable by many. For example, when participants heard women exporters speak or read their stories, they felt better informed

and more confident in going global. It seemed to make the perceived complexities less onerous because as one woman said, *"if she can do it, so can I."*

Globally, when women entrepreneurs were aware of programs and services, they generally took advantage of the them. However, in some instances, the services were not needed because the entrepreneur already had an extensive network and was not exporting products that would require EDC export insurance, nor access to trade missions or shows.

Challenges to Exporting

Even those who saw exporting as a viable option saw challenges. In talking about her export plan, one woman said, *"I found there is a good market there [in Mexico] but I need the money to fund the expansion. I know that there is global business potential."* Many, however, expressed frustration and concern about how to craft the right strategy to achieve export success. For example, one woman said:

"I'm interested in export. Think it might be ideal. I'm well networked in the USA and think it would be great. There is nothing stopping me from doing it but I am worried if you asked for references, etc., my credibility - as a start-up - I don't have a proven track record."

Access to Information and Pathways

There is a wealth of information available for entrepreneurs on how to grow and expand their businesses yet the interviews revealed that many women entrepreneurs are not sure where to go for information regarding



export – this includes many who are already exporting.

One woman indicated that there is a “*need [for] a better continuum of information [...] that relates where you are as an entrepreneur.*” Because they did not have the knowledge, network or roadmap to guide their initial and ongoing steps toward export success, they were concerned about moving forward in the wrong direction and making costly mistakes. One woman said:

“Resources – need to have them laid out and available. Right now, it is hard to navigate what’s available to women entrepreneurs. And it takes a ton of time to figure out what’s available, and since we have so much on the go as women entrepreneurs, need to have the info more easily reachable.”

One entrepreneur in the food industry said, “*I want to be able to access more knowledge and help to grow the business. For a smaller business, this is a challenge.*” She went on to say:

“Guidance is important. I have had problems understanding food labeling, as an example. It feels like I am always reacting to things I’m learning rather than knowing the next steps needed. If knew the steps [for export] I could plan better.”

Many are not aware of services that can assist them (including TCS and EDC), what each does, and how each can help them. One entrepreneur from Ontario said,

“I know the government is interested in supporting export initiatives. But I wonder if there is a disconnect. I would like to have a case worker approach to export. Someone who could help direct me to the right resources that are currently time consuming to locate.”

Without ready access to important information relating to export, a choice is often made to hold back on seeking new markets or stay with familiar markets such as the USA. Many indicated that a lack of information about the challenges in different sectors or type of export business was common. There were different concerns expressed depending on the industry. For example, finding information on product labelling and packaging for food products was quite different than looking for information for e-commerce, services, or non-perishable products. Some answers were easier to find while other information was harder to track down. Most of the women interviewed were not aware of existing trade agreements beyond NAFTA that could open new markets for them, and could mean tariff reductions or opportunities without tariffs. Or, if they were aware of the agreements, they did not necessarily connect it to their own business opportunities. The tariff agreements may be complex, holding detailed chapters too time consuming to navigate – this means many are unfamiliar with their contents. Those who had strong networks that included BDC, TCS, and/or EDC (and others) had more understanding of the potential of new markets for their



products or services because of the new tariff agreements. They had a clearer understanding of the link between the two. One woman said, *"I have gone on trade missions to the USA with the Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs [NLOWE], two or three trade missions—I made contacts but didn't get any contracts/ sales. I still see the trade missions as worthwhile."*

Immigrant Women – Balancing Local and Global Opportunities

Some immigrant women entrepreneurs were struggling to adapt to their new country, access resources, and learn how to start a business in a new environment. Others had created networks both in Canada and their former country and, as such, were exporting from the start of launching their business in Canada and saw their opportunities as significant because of their knowledge and understanding of another trading country. One successful immigrant entrepreneur said, *"I want to get connected into the Canadian ecosystem."* Even though she was having significant export success to her former country, as an immigrant to Canada, she felt outside of the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Costs of Exporting

Some women entrepreneurs expressed concern about the expected associated costs and their perceived view of export as an overwhelming challenge; these concerns motivate them to stay in the Canadian market for the foreseeable future. One woman said, *"the initial capital for business is from savings and my personal investment—no loans were received for it."* Another entrepreneur said, *"raising funds is the biggest issue and I'm the one who raises the funds. I currently don't have the money to do so in the USA [...] and don't have the team to*

do so right now. And until I see more success in Canada, I can't take on the USA." Another said, *"I need a lot of capital for promotion and marketing in order to expand to export. I have some fear around debt and it is stopping me from expanding my business."* Research shows that women are often more cautious of debt.¹

Perceptions of Risk and Uncertainty

Many said they had to overcome fears regarding export as a business approach to growth. One said that, *"export adds a layer of complexity that scares you."* Another said, *"on the other side of fear is greatness"* which made her move forward with her export plan. A third woman said *"women are selective about growth—need to take away the fear from exportation."* Part of the fear relates to taking on possible debt to finance their export goals. Also associated with the general perceptions of risk was the uncertainty and instability of the global context. One woman said, *"I have to keep apprised of what's happening because political landscapes that change have a direct possible impact on my business."*

Network Challenges

While successful exporters discussed the support they had received from agencies and coaches, some felt that there were gaps. Failure on the part of the TCS to follow up was a complaint by some women entrepreneurs. Others were frustrated by a slow response time, which meant they had to make export decisions without the benefit of TCS input and expertise. Those happy with TCS found champions who made important introductions and were trusted allies in their export plan. They raved about the service and attributed their comfort in their markets in part due to their relationship with TCS. Another shared the importance of

¹ Freel, M., Carter, S., Tagg, S., & Mason, C. (2012). The latent demand for bank debt: characterizing "discouraged borrowers". *Small business economics*, 38(4), 399–418





trade missions led by the Prime Minister or by Ministers for establishing the immediate credibility of their businesses in that market. Some felt that without such high-level leadership, it was more difficult to prove their credibility as a business.

Unfortunately, for a significant number of women entrepreneurs, information about these services had not filtered down to their networks or social media sites and, as a result, they were unaware of the programs and opportunities available to them, despite their interest in and willingness to participate in these programs. This highlights the need for additional efforts to strengthen the ties in the export ecosystem to ensure a wider number of women entrepreneurs are aware of the abundance of offerings.

A number of respondents echoed this entrepreneur's sentiments: *"to be able to export my business, I need to feel supported and get balance because I am already working so hard."*

In contrast to those with strong and connected networks, those women entrepreneurs with more limited networks face a major impediment to export and obtaining knowledge about export. Many women entrepreneurs felt that existing networks (such as the *Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade*) were not always helpful, inclusive, or relevant to them as women in business. One woman said of her community:

"There are some very successful women in business here but government and big business is driven by older men. It is an old boys' club. Very traditional. And they don't welcome women to the business community."



One woman said many of the existing networks are *“not a good investment of her time.”* A challenge for some women is finding the time to network. Others expressed a feeling that the network needs to have considerable value such as providing information and support to warrant their expenditure of limited time and energy. If they felt it was not going to directly benefit their business, some were less interested in engaging in the events.

For example, one woman said that she was aware of many global funding opportunities because her BDC connection brought them to her. However, when that person moved on, she felt she did not have the same champion and so became more disconnected. The power and importance of champions who bring information and opportunities to women entrepreneurs for export was clear. These could be among any of the partners in the ecosystem including financial institutions, accelerators, incubators, and other ecosystem members such as women’s business centres.

Many of the entrepreneurs were not aware of the existence of networks such as OWIT, a member-based organization, or Business Women in International Trade (BWIT), a program of the Trade Commissioner’s service which offer programs and services to assist with export.

Lack of information and networks are major impediments to export for women-owned businesses because networks are a source of information, resources, and support. Some social media networks have proven helpful. Many women-owned businesses rely on professionals such as lawyers and accountants for advice about their business or mentors. Mentors and champions are important and can play a pivotal role in helping a woman entrepreneur to prepare for export and to navigate the challenges. For instance, one entrepreneur described how

her mentor was instrumental in helping her to export.

The survey breaks down the percentage who have knowledge of the services of each organization in more detail. For example, the entrepreneurs surveyed had more knowledge of TCS as opposed to EDC. While entrepreneurs may use the services of TCS, for many reasons they may not use the products and services offered by EDC at their early stage of export. This is in contrast to well-connected and networked women exporters. Those who were exporting and connected to TCS, BDC, EDC and other export-related organizations were often well-versed in the available resources in the ecosystem and were applying to and receiving different funding opportunities to assist with their go-to-market strategies or expansion plans.

The small SME’s expressed concern because, without extensive resources, they felt constrained in their ability to search for information that could assist them with export. One said, *“I am potentially interested in export. If it made sense, I would. But I want more information before I am willing to export.”* One described the challenge as *“a big black hole.”* Another articulated the *“need to know who can help—often you do not know the right questions to ask and there seems to be a stigma around size and export.”* While information is out there, it is difficult to access for a busy entrepreneur. Another said, *“I don’t know how much money I need to begin to export. I need help answering my questions about money for insurance and capital up front needed to export.”*

Those with limited resources found it hard to sift through and find the needed relevant and timely information for whatever stage they are at on the export journey. They often had no or few employees, as well as very little time or resources to search for export assistance. With no single portal or access point for the



most critical and necessary information for export, many women entrepreneurs struggled with next steps for export. One entrepreneur summed up: *"if it takes more than 15 minutes to find information, I do not have the time."*

While some were aware of the relevant and helpful services offered by BDC, TCS, and EDC, and were making use of the information and services, many lacked this important knowledge and understanding of how they could be assisted by these organizations. While all three organizations have strong communication strategies to reach women entrepreneurs, some women entrepreneurs are not connected to the networks where this information is available. Others found the information was not in an easily digestible format and so, even if they received the email, they often didn't read the information because they felt it would not be specifically relevant to them. Even when information was available, there was a desire for a contact person to be available to answer their questions. With so much general information available, they felt it could be hard to attain answers to the specific export questions that they had. One said:

"I know that the federal government is interested in supporting export initiatives but I wonder if there is a disconnect. I would like to have a caseworker approach – someone who can help direct me to the right resources because finding them now is so time consuming and I need to be able to trust the source [...] someone who will give helpful advice and not self-serving advice."



Market Intelligence – Legislation, Norms, and Protections


Intelligent market information is important for entrepreneurs trying to decide which markets are best for their business expansion goals. One successful entrepreneur shared that:

"I would need to spend a lot of time to understand the export opportunity. Currently, we don't have an export strategy. [...] I have been on one trade mission in 2018 and I went to get exposure. And to be educated. And, if we consider it down the road, we have an early taste of what it would be like to consider export. Also, we went to get ideas and trends in other markets."

Another said, *"I need market intelligence and more information on how to do it best and right."*

Some entrepreneurs spoke of making the wrong assumptions about specific markets which led to, as one entrepreneur described, *"spending a great deal of time trying to access one market only to learn their requirements were very onerous and an adjacent market was friendlier for her products."* This example was not unique. A number of other entrepreneurs described making costly mistakes of this kind because





they did not have appropriate market information. One entrepreneur said:

"In doing business in other countries, I think about business ethics and the cost of doing business elsewhere, and are you getting the right info? And I'm not sure who to trust. Are the terms and conditions fair? Or are you getting ripped off?"

These were the immediate concerns she had as she considered exporting. She also said:

"Protecting IP is another one of my concerns. And, not getting paid right away and, as well, am wondering if the contract deals are good and fair. I'm wondering about the contract details. I see lots of risks. And I'm learning as I go. When I started, I didn't even know the right questions to ask because it was so new!"

Market intelligence can include cultural differences that can affect success relating to the products or services, the political climate of a country, understanding of the special regulations, or labeling requirements in a given market, among other insights. For example, some entrepreneurs spoke of creating special clean beauty products for markets in Africa or Asia, and how the need to confirm the best market was critical for their export success because of the difference in regulations. One said, *"as females we tend to do a lot of research before we jump into a market."* Another said:

"As women, we are more risk rational. We budget things differently. Think about possibilities differently. And, as women, we tend to market differently. Feels like it is important to connect with our consumers. to talk directly to them [...] what they like and don't. Hear all of their stories [...] I love this part of business [...] how my product affects people's lives and developing relationship with consumers."

We heard from immigrant women entrepreneurs who were exporting to their former country or region because of their understanding of the culture and markets. While some women entrepreneurs were able to commission market studies, or access them through provincial organizations, or the TCS, others were unaware of the services or perceived *"a bias against small SMEs"* by these services. One woman said, *"people want my products but they don't know where to find them."* Another said:

"I am trying to figure out how to make the contacts with the right people to help drive the business forward for export [...] how to reach the right decision makers who will want to buy my products. Currently, I'm using LinkedIn to tap into the right people."



Service Providers

EDC, TCS, and BDC were perceived by some as focusing their attention on larger businesses and, as a result, some women entrepreneurs did not reach out to these organizations (see [Appendix B](#) for a list of export-oriented organizations). Survey results confirmed a lack of market intelligence was one of the barriers to export. Those who were successful at export seemed to have strong networks, solid market intelligence, and a connected ecosystem that enabled them to tap into experts, opportunities, and support when needed. Good market intelligence enabled them to connect with potential customers, which was identified as a challenge in both the survey and the interviews.

The complexities included the need to become knowledgeable about customs, tariffs, legal requirements, and the most effective and least expensive shipping options, including using freight forwarders. While many recognized that they needed additional information and wanted access to export expertise, they were concerned about the costs of doing so. One woman said, *“smaller companies don’t know how to leverage the trade agreements.”* However, another said, *“My husband and I speak Spanish so we decided with NAFTA—we decided to do our expansion in Mexico. We had to source our own raw materials from Asia because they are not manufactured in Mexico,”* but this did not deter them.

Others expressed a desire for relevant and current expertise, meaning they wanted to connect with experts who had recent experience in export, rather than those that did it many years before. Many wanted to get advice from experts who might be able to assist them, but they believed accessing experts might be expensive and even unaffordable without some kind of grant or other funding. Some were working with Shopify to reduce their shipping costs, and due to the ease of setting up a platform to

launch an e-commerce business that would open their business to a global market.

Many women entrepreneurs expressed a desire for more training tailored to their specific needs. In the survey, a significant number of women entrepreneurs expressed an interest in more training as well. The opportunity to network with other women entrepreneurs and take time to step out of the business to work on growth plans was seen as highly desirable by many. Women entrepreneurs want to consider export but realize that they need more information and a plan to be able to move forward.

Access to Funding

Another information gap is knowledge about funding opportunities, including grants available to help with export. One successful woman entrepreneur said, *“I’m not really aware of what’s available for export and I haven’t been approached by the different groups like EDC and BDC.”* Some entrepreneurs expressed frustration at the difficulty of first finding an applicable grant, then facing a difficult application process. For example, one woman entrepreneur said, *“I have a bit of an aversion to government. It is difficult to navigate for information.”* In addition, *“it is hard to figure out what’s worth the time and effort to apply for a grant. Also, I feel intimidated by the grant application process because I’m not an expert.”* For many, the application process is complex and the language of the bureaucracy is difficult to understand. One said, *“it took a lot of work to land a grant.”* Some sought grant writers to help them but this is an expense that is seen as risky by some because there is no guarantee of a successful application. Others were aware of *CanExport* grants and took advantage of them to attend trade shows and conferences. This enabled them to explore new markets and to connect them to potential distributors or partners. One woman said, *“I received a CanExport grant for a Berlin show and got a distributor in Germany and the Czech Republic as a result.”*



Financing

A number of studies of women-owned SMEs revealed that financing for start-up or growth was a constant challenge for them. One woman said, *"I used my own money to start the company. All of my life savings went into the company to start it."* Another said, *"I self-funded with personal loans through the years."* Another outlined that:

"For funding, I have been self-funded. My growth has been calculated. I haven't had to take a lot of loans out. The business is six years old and the business is going well. I've had steady growth – 50% on an annual basis."

It is no surprise that access to resources is a similar impediment for many who wish to export. For example, one business with two co-founders said:

"We tried to get more money from banks [...] and tried to get the amount increased but the bank wasn't helpful. To get more money, we had to put money in [...] as a result, we can't find a way to work inside traditional banking [...] so usually go outside for money."

One business had an amazing and very promising product with a great deal of interest from a number of potential buyers. Yet she was experiencing obstacles finding the resources to manufacture in Canada to prepare for sales and export. She had sought a loan and was considered high risk

despite the indications of great interest from potential buyers. This entrepreneur was knowledgeable and was constantly seeking the necessary information to move her business forward. She was not alone in this regard. Another women entrepreneur had contracts already in place and indications of interest from more markets and yet struggled to obtain the necessary loans. A number, as reflected in the survey, had not asked for financing for growth.

For many, bootstrapping their resources, or asking for support from friends and family seemed the only realistic options – but these could result in slower growth. Some who were exporting successfully had implemented an export plan which included the need for additional capital and they solved it in advance of their export ambitions. Others wanted more information and support. *"It's not a capital issue—it's a knowledge issue,"* one woman said. *"We already have the inventory, but we don't know how to market it for export."*

Export is an avenue for growth and export readiness often requires more capital. One woman said, *"I have a plan to grow the business. My BDC loan has come with great terms. Better than I expected. I was scared all the way through that I was going to be turned down but the good news is they made it easy and decent for me."* Previous studies found that many women entrepreneurs viewed debt in a negative light and often asked for smaller loans than necessary to grow their business. One entrepreneur had a growing tech business with a number of existing and upcoming contracts in external markets. She needed a larger line of credit. She was considering asking for an increase that was relatively small compared to her business opportunities. After discussion and encouragement from some in her network she asked for almost 10 times as much and received almost eight times as much as her original contemplated ask.



Some women expressed difficulty securing loans and grants for manufacturing. Some were able to get support from the TCS, provincial or municipal economic development agencies, or through the *CanExport* program to enable them to travel to trade shows or explore new markets. As noted in previous studies, some women entrepreneurs are reluctant to seek funding from man investors. Experience and studies have shown that man investors do not necessarily understand the potential for women-owned businesses in beauty, women's health, and fashion industries. Women entrepreneurs are also aware that the majority of venture capital funds have gone to men-owned SMEs which, along with the concerns about giving up equity, makes them more reluctant to seek venture capital. Some entrepreneurs sought a partner both to help with financing, and to add a skillset or knowledge base needed to advance the business. Financial institutions have increased loans available to women entrepreneurs – a positive step forward but women-owned businesses continue to struggle to obtain the capital necessary for growth and export. Also, from the survey and interviews, women-owned businesses are more likely to be sole proprietors which makes it more difficult for them to qualify for some financial products they may need. When resources are strained, some women entrepreneurs chose not to export because, although they see the opportunity, they may not have the resources to pursue it.

Preferential Procurement

Customers are very important for business growth. Access to corporate and government supplier diversity programs was seen as very valuable to global growth. As one woman said, *"I am currently exporting. I have been strategic. I used the approach for women-owned business set asides as part of WEBENC for supplier diversity. This opened up procurement opportunities."* "If

you are a [...] women-owned business, you go into a different department for procurement. Through supplier diversity, it opens up the whole market." As a knowledgeable and networked entrepreneur, she was able to take advantage of all of the possible opportunities to grow her business. Opportunities exist to increase availability of supplier diversity programs.

Talent

The competition for talent and expertise is often fierce in the marketplace – and for SMEs it can be even harder. One woman said, *"I'm in a competitive industry and it is hard to find talent in the community. I have to be strategic in keeping people happy and interested in their wellbeing."* The skills needed to both grow a business and to export are specific and can be difficult to attract and retain. One woman said, when thinking about skill development and retention, *"I think about each employee and look at what might be the right training for each employee."*

Those located in smaller centres found it particularly hard to find and keep the right skilled talent. One woman with future export goals said:

"I live in a small town. Accessing talent has been a challenge. I've had to recruit people from outside of the community. I know it will continue to be a challenge on the horizon, especially to find more experienced and knowledgeable staff."

Finding the right talent can be time consuming and making a mistake can be very costly for a small business. One woman said, *"We currently have a skilled labour shortage in the city."* Some choose to hire



new graduates and train them, while others seek those with more *“experience and expertise”* to enable the business to operate with fewer staff because the experienced members can take on more challenges and roles. One woman from the east coast said, *“I am very strategic with my team and who I hire—80% of my team is women. My second in command is a woman who I depend on.”*

Many simply worked longer hours, engaged talent on contract, or formed collaborations with other businesses to enable them to be more productive and grow. The additional knowledge and skills needed to export successfully was at times hard to find for some businesses and impacted their decisions around growth.

Supply Chain

For those who manufacture a product, finding reliable manufacturers or suppliers in other countries is often a major hurdle. One entrepreneur described how a poor quality product from an overseas manufacturer set back her business for several years and forced her to seek more reliable, but higher cost facilities in the countries with the most demand for her product. Without connections, it is difficult to connect with manufacturers, or know if they are reliable and produce high quality products. One woman said, *“China—things didn’t go well in China. The sourcing agent was a disappointment.”*

Many were not aware that the TCS could help them with support in finding reliable manufacturers. Some were fortunate to find them through referrals from other business owners, suppliers, or connections in the country. Another had her prototype stolen when her business decided to change the manufacturer because of quality concerns. She had not obtained IP for the product both because of cost and time to obtain it. Any entrepreneur who manufactures outside of their direct control would encounter this risk.

Some of those who wished to manufacture in Canada faced obstacles in obtaining funding for a facility, and obtaining components and supplies if they need to be imported because of tariff and shipping costs. Many found it difficult to obtain grants for manufacturing, depending on the industry. For example, women-owned businesses that are in traditional *“women spaces”* such as clothing and beauty found this particularly difficult and had to bootstrap, take loans if possible, or seek funding from family and friends. Obstacles of this nature contribute to slower growth even where the desire to move forward faster exists.

Finding reliable distributors in new markets is a challenge that some expressed. In some cases, referrals from other business owners in their network enabled a connection; attending trade shows and using TCS resources assisted in finding reliable distributors as well. Not all TCS interventions were successful in making these connections. In some instances, suppliers or clients were the ones who helped with distribution, introducing the entrepreneur to distributors or potential new markets.

Intellectual property is important for product- and service-based businesses that have created something new and wish to protect it. Many choose to delay seeking IP protection both because of cost and time consumption to move through the process. Several commented that, *“it was faster and easier to get IP protection in the US than in Canada.”* As a consequence, those without protection were more vulnerable to theft of their IP. One woman said, *“I have trademarks in China. I have some IP in the USA also. But I’m not sure if they are actually protected.”*

The paperwork necessary to export was seen as a challenge due to the high load of knowledge of procedures needed – and one of the more significant ones as reported by the survey respondents. This is consistent



with the overall theme of access to timely and relevant information as necessary to being able to demystify the system and to export.

Another challenge cited is that exporting *“is slow as turtles walking across the floor,”* with long sales cycles which can be affected by political changes. Some entrepreneurs had their export negatively impacted when tariffs or sanctions were imposed on their export market. These conditions were outside of their control and, in those instances, impact their ability to obtain both contracts and funding. In addition, the long sales cycles has meant it can often be months between initial contact and flow of goods and payments. Without access to bridge financing, business continuity can be threatened.

Logistics

Shipping costs were often cited as an impediment to product export both in the interviews and in the survey. One woman said, *“I’m selling online but not exporting yet. I need to consider the expensive shipping costs [...] they’re very significant. And I’m focused on the major cities for growth.”* Service businesses did not share this challenge for obvious reasons. Many complained that shipping costs were prohibitive when the products had smaller margins. Some who lived close to the US border had their products shipped to a US destination and then picked them up to reduce costs. Several mentioned the benefits of Shopify’s platform which enabled them to get a 40% reduction in their shipping costs. In the countries where they had a significant number of orders, some looked for warehouses to reduce these costs. This entailed finding partners to reduce warehousing costs in some cases. Sometimes products were assembled or produced in the countries where the product was being sold.

Several mentioned challenges associated with shipping by container on ships. If they do not have sufficient product to fill a container, goods can be damaged when the ship

stops anywhere other than the destination ports (and unloading and reloading occurs). In addition, shipping products that are sensitive to heat and cold can be risky. One entrepreneur told about her product being *“left on the tarmac in the heat”* for some hours because the airline decided not to put it on that particular flight. Several said the timing of shipping is important because delays and risk of damage occur during peak traffic periods on airlines. Some simply found the costs prohibitive so chose to stay only in the Canadian or local market, which limits their growth possibilities.

Navigating customs, tariffs, taxes, and other legalities was difficult for many. Often the entrepreneurs felt they were in a *“black hole”* in having to find information with all of these issues. For food-related products, obtaining certification from food inspection agencies can be an onerous and time-consuming process. Food labelling is *“challenging.”* No checklists exist to make it easier. Certification is necessary for export of food products and for new exporters, it can be onerous.

Customs was a major hurdle for some. One entrepreneur explained how her product arrived in her destination country and she faced great difficulty in trying to get it through customs. Another recounted the story about how customs examined her products, did not repack them, and they were damaged by being left in the rain. No redress was possible because of a fear of retribution: if customs were challenged with respect to how they handled the goods, there may be detrimental consequences. Many use customs brokers to help them navigate the process and communicate with distributors more familiar with systems in other countries.

Gender and Age

Many younger women reported facing challenges with regards to being taken seriously by financial institutions, investors, and clients. Older women also had challenges. One woman said, *“being an older*



entrepreneur, I might be more cautious than a younger woman and less aggressive than a man.” Another older woman entrepreneur said, “I have built something that is very different from everyone—and is thriving as a result.”

As well, women found they faced challenges in some markets where they are not culturally or legally viewed as equal. One exporter said, *“I simply focus on the value proposition for the customer and they soon forget about my gender.”* While older women had experience and confidence, they also faced challenges related to ageism for loans and grants designed for younger entrepreneurs.

Systemic Barriers – Unpaid Work

Women entrepreneurs often have families and family obligations that need to be integrated with their business goals. These obligations limit time available for networking and, in turn, can limit the size of their network. This has implications for building the awareness and information needed to assist with the growth of their businesses.

Needed Supports

A question was posed to each entrepreneur interviewed about what would help them engage in export, facilitate that process, and increase the likelihood of success. Some issues were consistently flagged by women entrepreneurs in regards to export considerations. These were: uncertainty around how to access helpful and timely information about export, as well as availability thereof; financing and the need for additional capital to grow through export; as well as human resource challenges to match export growth needs.

Access to Information, Advice, and Knowledge

Number one on the list was access to clear, readily accessible information about the export process in an easily digestible format.

Included should be links to services, grants, and other resources that could provide further knowledge. Market information was key. Entrepreneurs want to understand the pros and cons of different markets for their product or service, as well as the legal, tax, and tariff information needed for each possible market. This would include regions where trade agreements have made the markets more accessible.

Success Stories

There is an important role for partners in the export ecosystem to work together to demystify export, with a goal of reducing women entrepreneurs’ concerns and fears about taking their businesses global. One way to do this is to continue to profile those who are experiencing export success.

When considering export, some women entrepreneurs are concerned with the added perceived complexity of completing sales in another country. If, however, they were exposed to other women entrepreneurs successfully exporting, this has a positive impact on their perception of the difficulties related to export. Their perception often shifts because of the real and current examples of other women taking their products and services global. One woman said:

“We don’t have anyone to look up to and learn from. We want a small business example to learn from. We think there is a lack of expertise available to grow for us. We already have a sense of how to grow in Canada but the USA is so big.”

Support, Blueprint, and Pathways

Proactivity by export support agencies could help women entrepreneurs. Reaching out



to export-ready businesses and supporting them to enter the best markets for their products and making their services offered widely known through many different networks would be helpful. Proactive approaches by EDC, BDC, and TCS are welcomed. One entrepreneur talked about receiving a call from EDC about a buyer in another country who was very interested in her product. While she was not quite positioned to export at that moment, it inspired her to see the path to that eventuality. Another woman found buyers on her own, and the process of engaging with them would have been much easier with knowledge and support from EDC and TCS. Reaching out to businesses ready for export can accelerate the process by offering connections, resources, and encouragement. Currently, many entrepreneurs are not aware of the services available or the differentiation between TCS, EDC, and BDC. Part of a blueprint could also provide this information.

Most entrepreneurs do not have the time to read complex trade agreements nor work through their chapters to determine applicability to their own product or service. A number asked for workshops with live experts to answer questions, as well as short e-learning modules with, again, the ability to ask specific questions applicable to their business sector. Although in many cases this information is currently available from a variety of partners in the export ecosystem, the women entrepreneurs were unaware of these offerings. Many described the need for a “blueprint” that provided clear steps to export, and the grants and resources necessary to navigate the process.

Information

Information needs to be channeled through many different networks and social media platforms as women-owned businesses are often not part of traditional networks. One exporter said:

“I like articles and information for resource information and I want more learning events. For example, Shopify online learning events are helpful. I want to be able to tackle specific issues and use webinars as well. And I would love to be able to access industry experts. Finally, I would love to be spoon-fed research but recognize that time is an issue and while I want the information, I want it synthesized.”

In addition, showcasing women entrepreneurs in other markets and telling the world how great Canada is for business is important. Profiling women entrepreneurs’ success is a catalyst for other women entrepreneurs to see themselves as achieving similar success. Government purchases of products from women-owned businesses is a positive selling point for these businesses in export.

Networks

Networks that are relevant to women-owned businesses could be a valuable source of information and can be a channel for accessing resources necessary for business and export success. In provinces such as Nova Scotia, where the provincial agencies and federal agencies work together, more women-owned businesses find it easier to access the relevant information. In a number of instances, entrepreneurs mentioned provincial agencies that had offered assistance or offered information about other resources such as TCS. Supporting the integration of women-owned businesses into key networks is important, as is support to new and growing networks. Coordination





between provincial, federal, and municipal agencies that support export provides an easier path for women-owned businesses to gather funding and knowledge for export.

IP Issues

Making IP protection less time consuming and onerous is important to protect products and services from theft. This has been recounted by entrepreneurs from experience. The current process is simply one more hurdle to clear in preparing for export.

Financing

Finance for export is important since it is currently prohibiting many from export or slowing down their progress. Ready access to grants and financing would increase the likelihood of export and export success. Currently, applicable grants are not easy to access and application processes can be overwhelming for a small business owner with limited time and financial constraints.

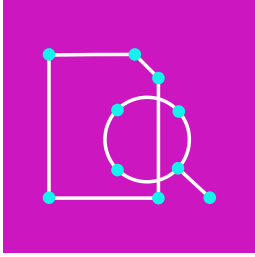
Domestic policies that support women entrepreneurs' access to capital for growth are also important in increasing the likelihood of export because it can increase growth and lessen reliance on single markets. This increases the likelihood of success and sustainability.

Human Resource

Access to talent is a challenge for most entrepreneurs. Government support programs for hiring and training new graduates, re-training staff, or providing a portion of the salary to engage older adults are all very beneficial. In addition, supporting programs to help employ new immigrants and refugees, as well as underrepresented populations are beneficial for entrepreneurs.







Survey: Similarities and Differences Between Men and Women Entrepreneurs

Survey Results

The survey results are important as they support the information documented from the lived experiences of those interviewed. The interviews provide more in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in considering export. The survey also adds valuable information and nuance.

Size and Sector

The characteristics of the companies surveyed are similar to the characteristics of Canada's entrepreneurial ventures. The women-owned businesses tend to be smaller. For instance, 52% have sales of less than \$250,000, compared to 31% for men-owned businesses. They are more likely to be micro firms (87% compared to 71% of men-owned businesses). Women-owned businesses are also more likely to be sole proprietor (53% compared to 42% for men-owned businesses) and less likely to be a corporation (26% compared to 41% for men-owned businesses). This affects the types of resources they have available to them. For instance, TCS only deals with corporations and banks have different asset requirements for incorporated versus sole proprietors. Additionally, women-owned businesses tend to operate in different sectors. They are nearly twice as present in the consumer merchandise sector (25% compared to 14% for men-owned businesses), and are less present in other sectors such as advanced manufacturing and technology (which are more dominated by men). For example,

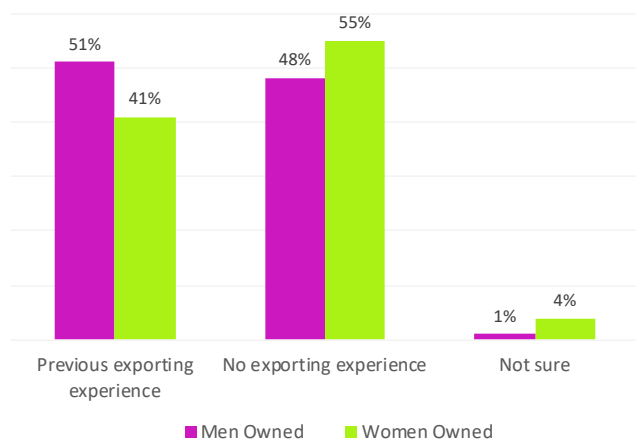
men-owned SMEs are twice as likely to be in ICT sectors than women-owned businesses (11% versus 5%) but a third as likely to be in retail (3% versus 9%). These structural differences have significant implications for the propensity to export. These sectoral differences are even more observable when looking at specific products. On the one hand, women-owned businesses are five times more present in the cosmetic and beauty products; three times more present in fashion, clothing, and retailing products; and twice as present in arts and entertainment products. On the other hand, men-owned businesses are twice as present in technology, IT, and software products; twice as present in manufacturing products; and twice as present in accounting, finance, and insurance products. It is important to mention that they are quite on par for some product categories, such as consulting and training, as well as professional and administrative services.

Previous Experience

Perhaps as a result of the sample source, the numbers indicate that SMEs owned by men and women are almost equally as likely to be exporters (50% to 49%). However, women-owned businesses are significantly less likely to have previous export experience. Indeed, while 51% of men-owned companies have previous export experience, only 41% of women-owned companies can boast the same. 55% of women-owned businesses have no previous export experience (see Figure 4).



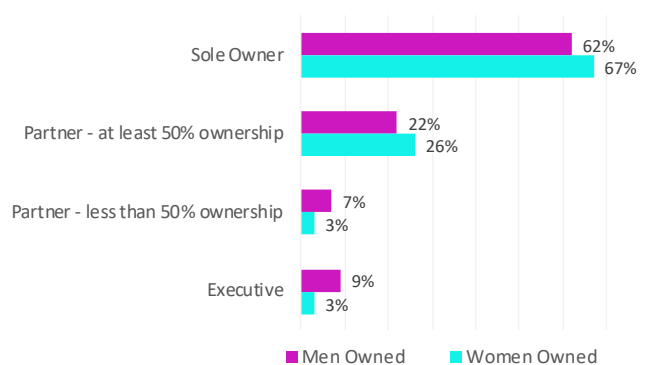
FIGURE 4
Past Exporting Status



Structure of Companies

The structure of the companies surveyed were also different – women-owned SMEs slightly more likely to be sole owner (67% compared to 62%). While being slightly more often sole owner, women-owned businesses are much less likely to be corporations (26% compared to 41%) (see Figure 5).

FIGURE 5
Role

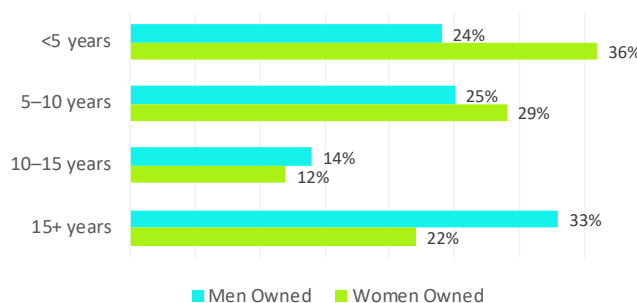


Age of Firm

Women-owned businesses are also younger – respondents reported fewer years leading their company as shown in Figure 6 below. For instance, 36% indicated fewer than five years' experience (compared to 24% for

men-owned businesses), while only 22% indicated more than 15 years (compared to 33% for men-owned businesses). This could tie into what we see later with women experiencing more barriers related to information, procedures, knowledge, support, etc.; fewer years of experience can play a role here.

FIGURE 6
Years Leading Company



Target Markets

Unsurprisingly, for both men-owned and women-owned businesses, the main target markets were the United States (68% and 73%) and North America (excluding the USA; 34% and 36%). However, men-owned businesses were more likely to target South America (20% compared to 12%), as well as the Middle East and Africa (16% compared to 11%). Women-owned businesses were more likely to target Western Europe (28% compared to 23%) and Eastern Europe (24% compared to 20%).

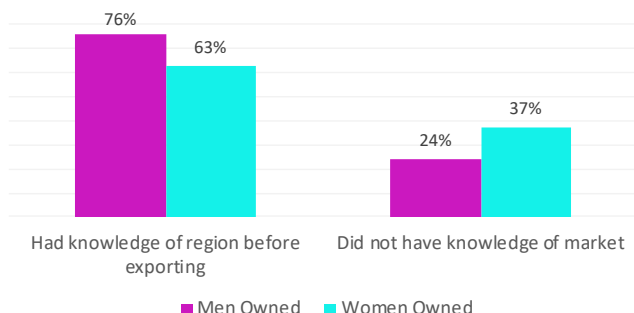
Knowledge of International Markets

Of those export markets targeted, men-owned businesses were more likely to have knowledge about the regions before exporting as shown in Figure 7 below. Indeed, 76% of men-owned businesses had knowledge of the region before exporting, while only 63% of the women-owned businesses indicated having knowledge of the regions.



FIGURE 7

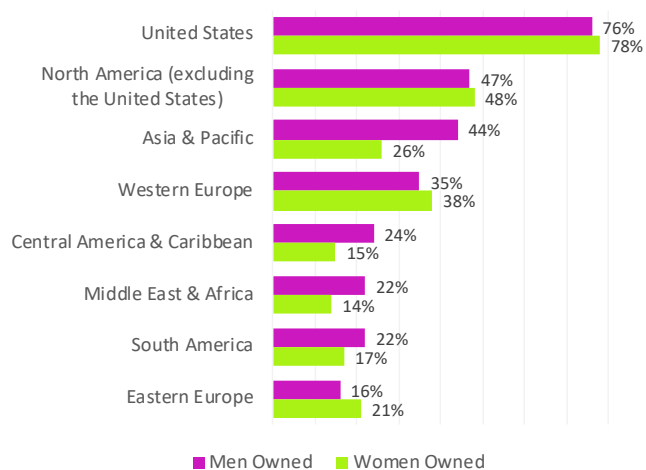
Knowledge of Target Export Markets



It is also worth mentioning that the markets of interest for both men-owned and women-owned businesses are well aligned with current export markets, as shown in Figure 8.

FIGURE 8

Current Export Markets



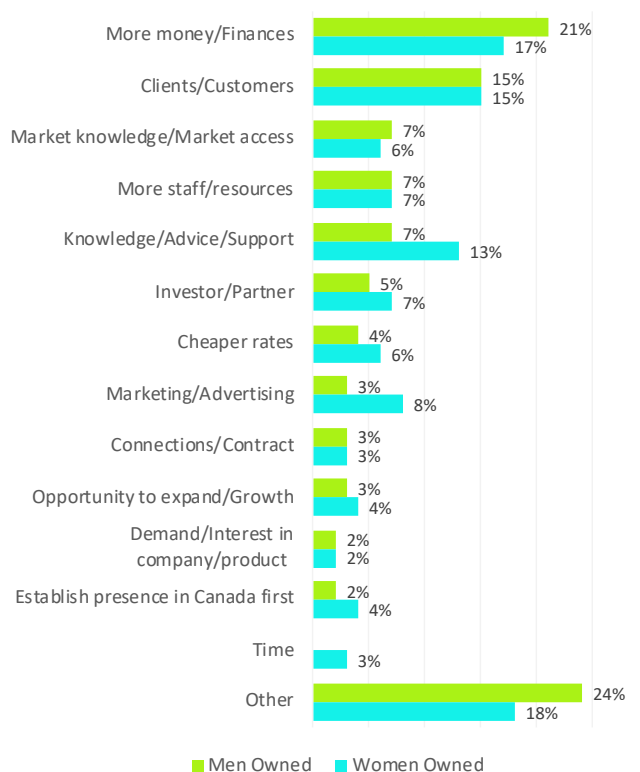
Reasons for Exporting

It is crucial to understand the differences between the barriers perceived and lived by men-owned and women-owned businesses when they are making the decision to export or not. It is also interesting to analyze why they desire and/or decide to export in the first place. Again, there are differences here as well. Indeed, as shown in Figure 9 below, the most cited reason for starting exporting among men-owned businesses

was financial incentive and the opportunity for more money, at 21% (compared to 17% for women-owned businesses – also the most cited reason). However, 13% of women-owned businesses mentioned wanting to start exporting to seek knowledge, advice, and support, while only 7% of men-owned businesses mentioned this factor. There are also reasons to start exporting that are fairly even on both sides, including the opportunity for new clients (15% for both), more staff and resources (7%), and making connections (3%).

FIGURE 9

Reasons to Start Exporting

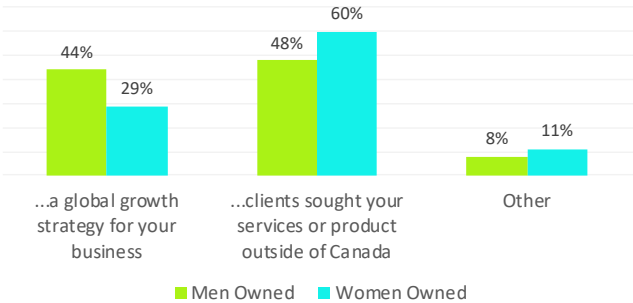


One of the most glaring differences observed in the data is related to the main reason to export. As shown in Figure 10 below, 44% of men-owned businesses export as a global growth strategy for their businesses (compared to 29% for women-owned businesses). Meanwhile, 60% of women-owned businesses export because clients outside of Canada sought



out their services or products (compared to 48% for men-owned businesses). This would indicate that men-owned businesses have a more proactive stance to create offers in new markets to grow their businesses, while women-owned businesses have a more reactive stance by focusing on exporting to new markets where they know there is already a demand. This was also reflected in the interviews.

FIGURE 10
Reasons for Exporting



Financing for company growth is an area where there are more commonalities than differences, as shown in Figure 11 below. Indeed, both men- and women- owned businesses are mainly using their companies' cash flow (44% and 40%) and lines of credit (10% for both) in order to finance their growth. Overall, products used to fund growth were similar, with women slightly less likely to self-finance or use buyer financing. Indeed, 21% of women-owned businesses also indicated using no product at all, compared to only 8% for men-owned businesses.

FIGURE 11
Financing Growth of Company

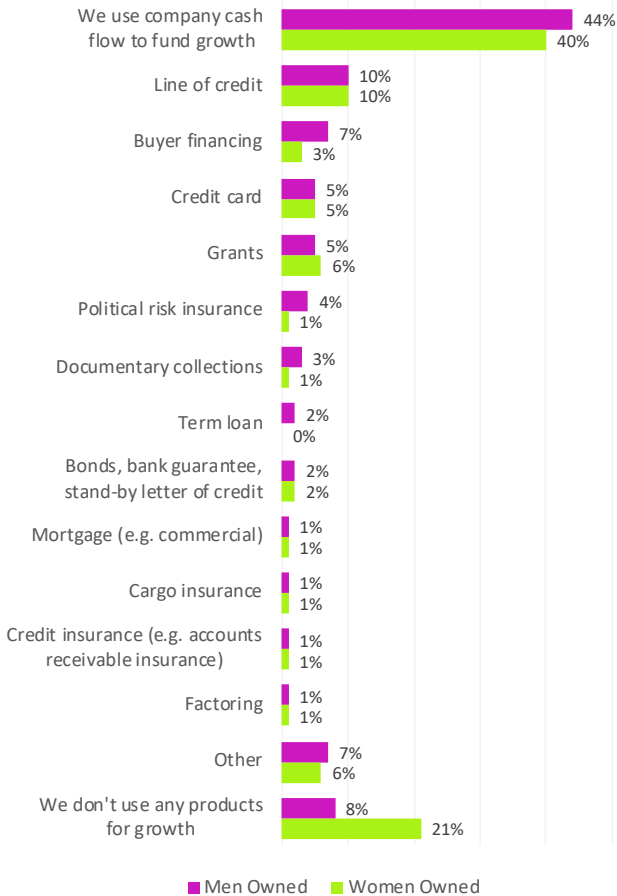
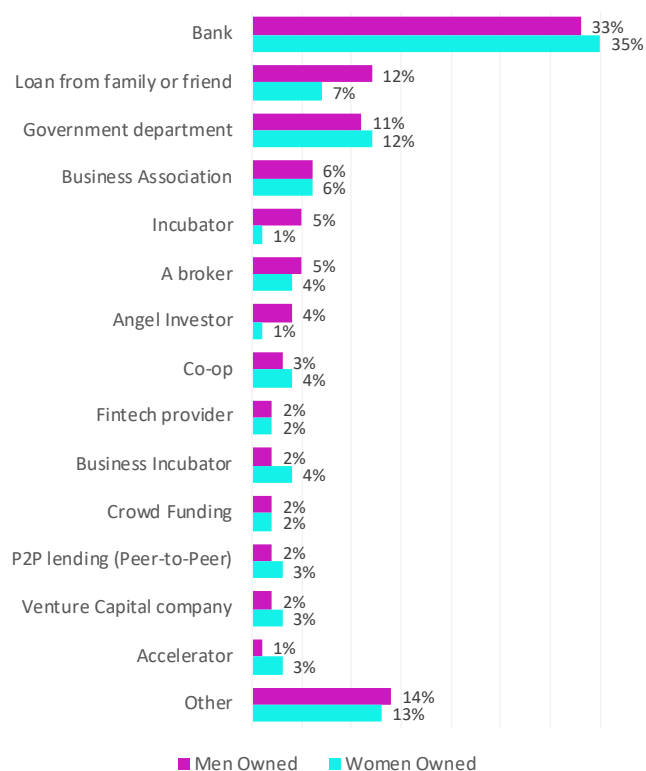


FIGURE 12

Sources of Finance for Growth of Company



Barriers to Exporting

Obstacles to Exporting

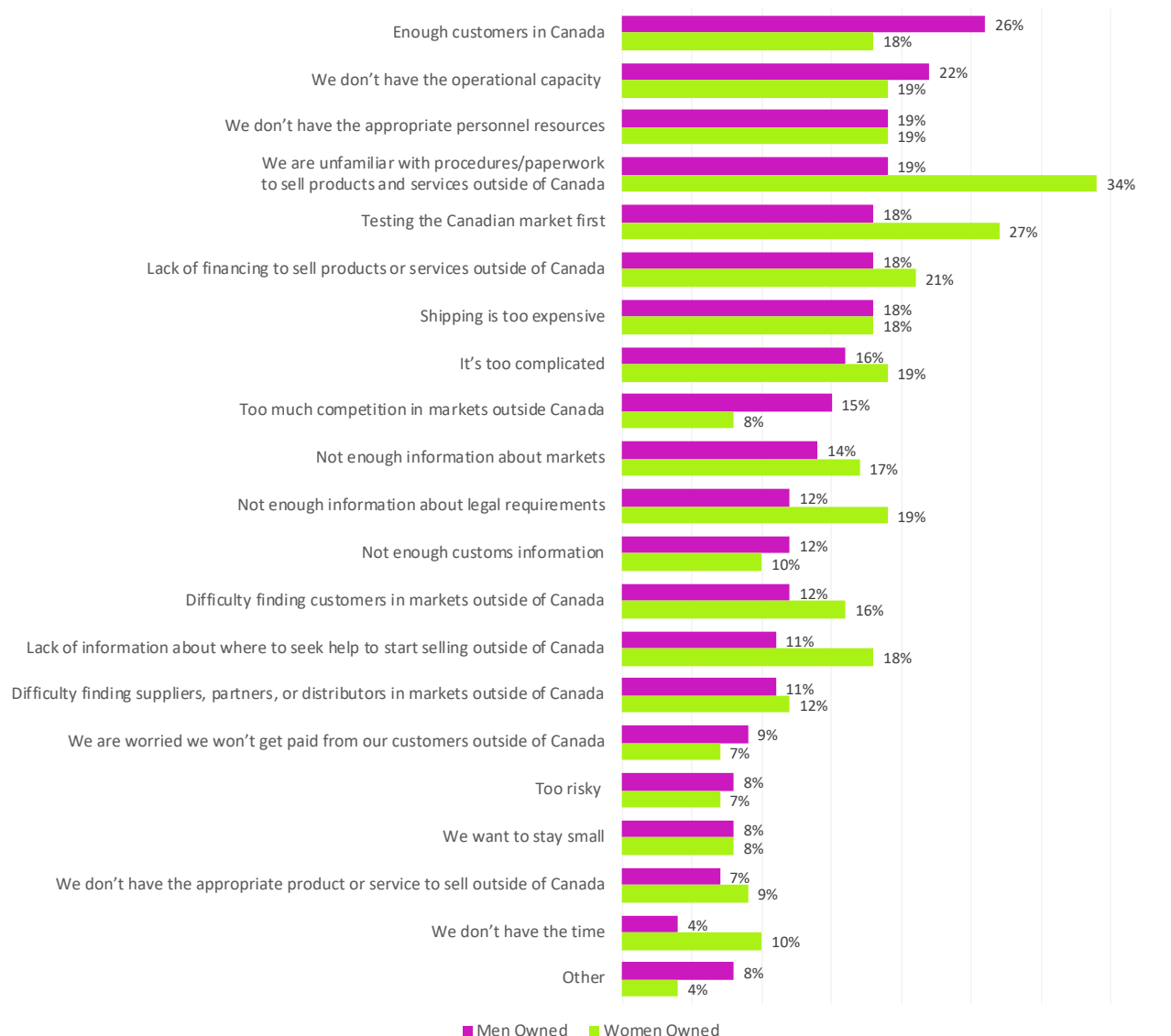
An area of concern is the difference in reasons cited between men-owned and women-owned businesses to explain what obstacles were preventing them from exporting. As shown in Figure 13, women-owned companies were significantly more likely to cite information reasons to explain why they were not exporting. For instance, 34% mentioned being unfamiliar with the procedures, (the most cited reason by women-owned companies; compared to 19% for their men-owned counterparts), 19% mentioned not having enough information about the legal aspects of exporting (compared to 12% for men-owned), and 18% mentioned the lack of information about where to seek help (compared to 11% for men-owned companies).

Conversely, the most cited reasons by men-owned businesses was that they have enough consumers in Canada, at 26% (compared to 18% for women-owned), and that they do not have the operational capacity (22% compared to 19% for women-owned). Those results bring to light a potential concern about a lack of equality around access to information, resources, and processes to engage with them or, at least, that women perceive the challenge to access those resources as more problematic than men respondents.



FIGURE 13

Obstacles Preventing Export



Challenges Among Exporters

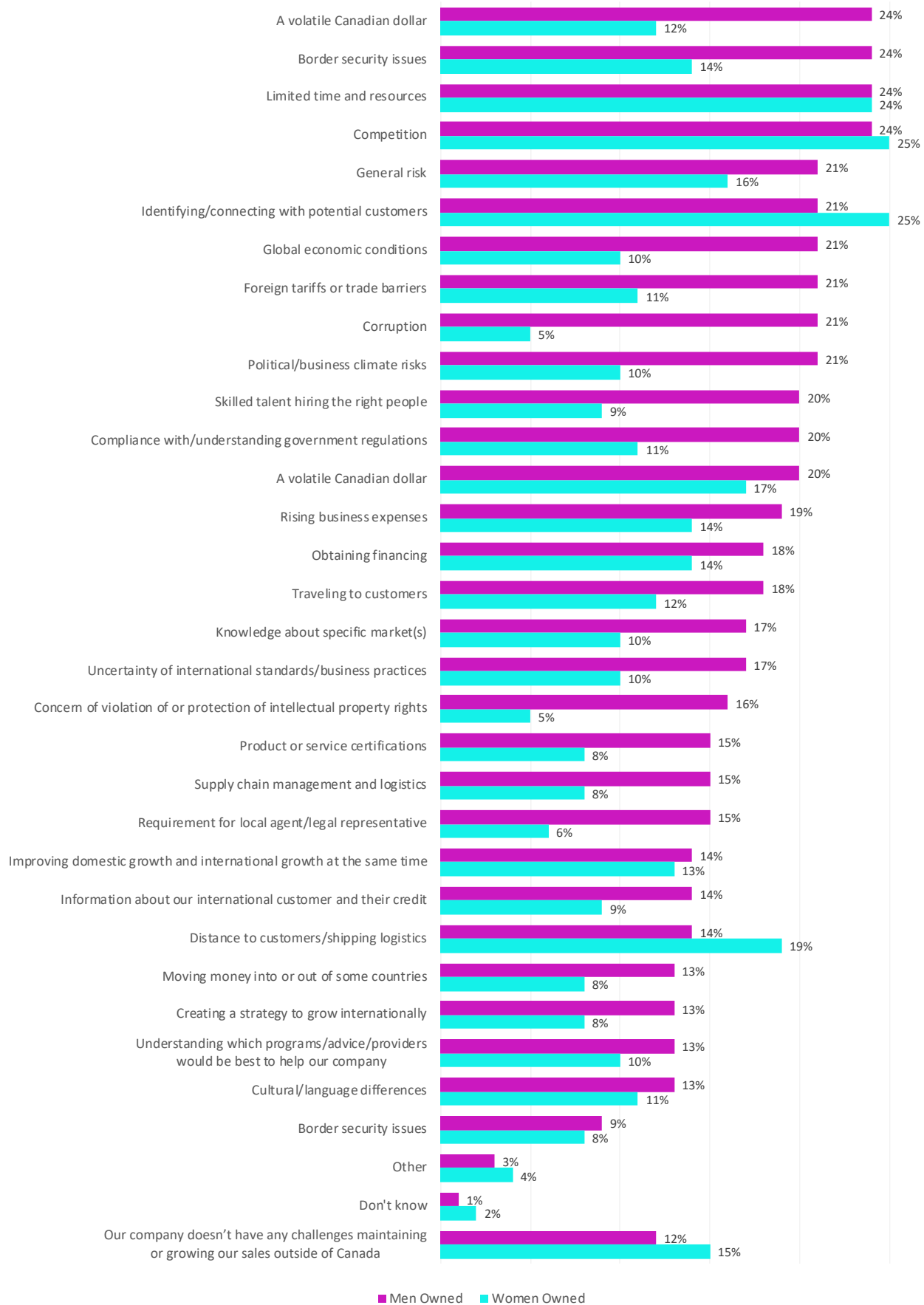
Regarding challenges for growth and/or maintaining export business, as shown in Figure 14, 24% of men-owned businesses indicated getting paid as a challenge (compared to 12% for women-owned businesses) and 24% indicated identifying/connecting with potential suppliers/partners/distributors (compared to 14% for women-owned businesses). Globally, men-owned businesses report higher levels of experience with all challenges identified

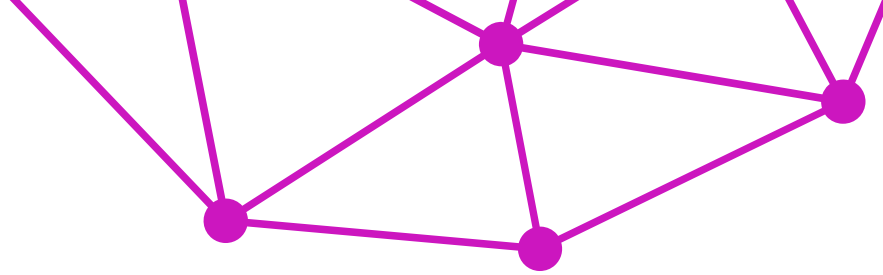
except competition (nearly equal), limited time and resources (equal), identifying/connecting with potential customers (21% compared to 25% for women-owned businesses), and distance to customers/shipping logistics (14% compared to 19% for women-owned businesses). Lastly, women-owned businesses were more likely to indicate that their company does not have any challenges maintaining or growing our sales outside of Canada (15% compared to 12% for men-owned businesses).



FIGURE 14

Challenges Growing/Maintaining Export Business



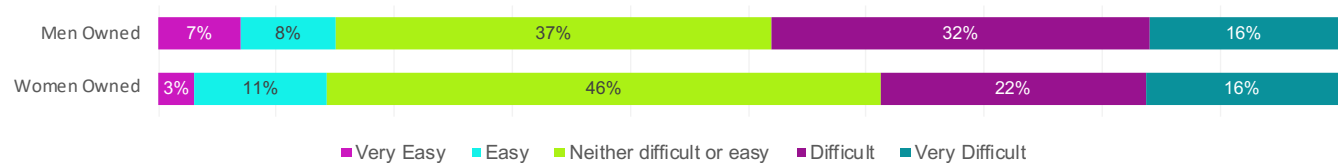


Financing

While there is evidence that women face barriers to financing, they are less likely to see it as a barrier: 48% of men-owned businesses considered ease of access to financial products to grow their business as difficult or very difficult, compared to only 38% of women-owned businesses. This may

be a result of not having enough experience: almost half (46%) of women-owned businesses considered ease of access to financing as neither difficult nor easy compared to 37% of men (see Figure 15). This is a point where the data yields different results between the survey and the interviews.

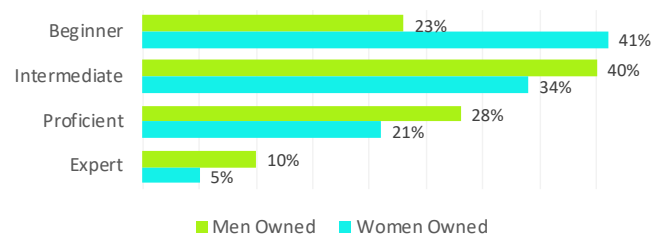
FIGURE 15
Ease of Access to Financial Products for Growing Business



Knowledge

Women-owned businesses were more likely to identify their level of literacy regarding their understanding of what their company needs to enter new markets and expand their consumer base outside of Canada as beginner (41% compared to 23% for men-owned businesses). Conversely, as shown in Figure 16 below, they are less likely to identify as intermediate (34% compared to 40%), proficient (21% compared to 28%), or expert (5% compared to 10%). Clearly and problematically, the level of self-efficacy seems to be lower.

FIGURE 16
Literacy



Supports for Exporting

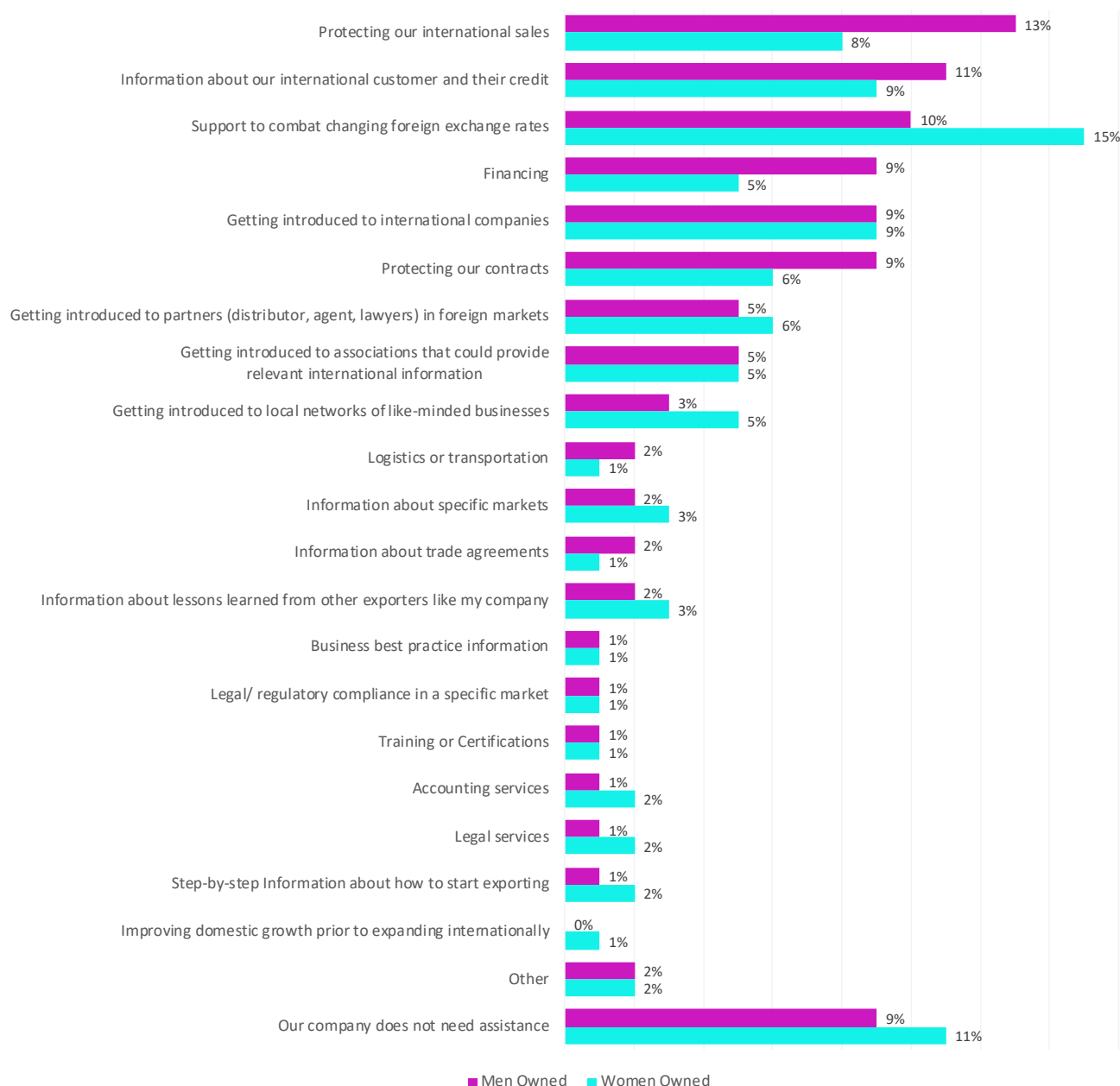
Assistance with Exporting

While financing was high on the list, respondents identified a number of forms of assistance that they needed (Figure 17) with some differences between men-owned and women-owned businesses. For instance, women-owned businesses were more likely to want support to combat changing foreign exchange rates (15% compared to 10% for men-owned businesses), while men-owned businesses were more likely to want support to protect their international sales (13% compared to 8% for women-owned businesses) and financing (9% compared to 5% for women-owned businesses). They had relatively equal desire for support to gain information about their international consumers and their credit (around 10%), getting introduced to international companies (9%), and getting introduced to partners and associations (both around 5%).



FIGURE 17

Assistance of Value to Grow Outside of Canada



Training

Men- and women- owned businesses are equally likely to have received training to start exporting (82% and 84% and to continue exporting, 86% for both). However, men-owned businesses were much more likely to be self-taught (16% compared to 6%), while women-owned businesses were more likely to have received training from friends,

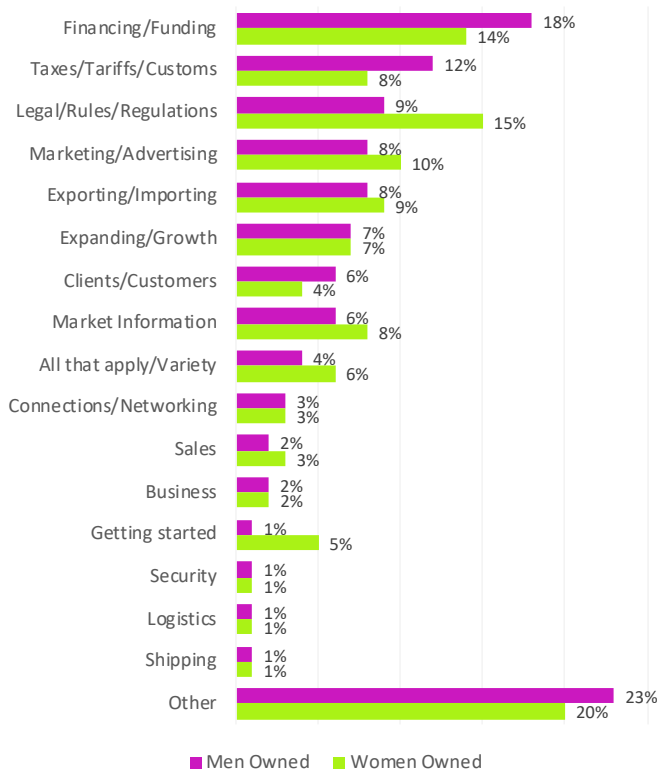
colleagues, and business partners (21% compared to 11%). For both men and women, EDC and BDC were the most likely sources of training (21% for both). Men-owned businesses were twice as likely to indicate that they would continue their training via formal education (14% versus 7% for women-owned businesses). Women-owned businesses cited their work and employer, as well as their friends, colleagues, and



businesses partners as sources of continuing training (11% for each) while men did not.

Areas for more training are outlined in Figure 18 below and differ slightly – men wanted more training in financing and funding (18% vs 14%), while women-owned companies were more concerned about the legal and regulatory aspects of exporting (15% vs. 9%).

FIGURE 18
Interest in Additional Export Training Topics



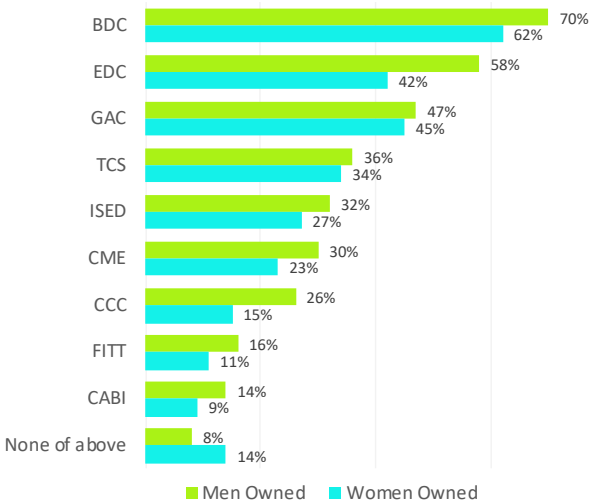
Familiarity and Use of Service Providers

Overall Awareness

An important difference that we see in the data is the level of familiarity with export-oriented organizations, as shown in Figure 19. Indeed, men-owned businesses are more likely to be familiar with almost all of them: 70% versus 62% with BDC; 58% versus 42% with the EDC; 30% versus

26% with the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters (CME); 26% versus 15% with Canadian Commercial Corporation (CCC), etc. Descriptions of these organizations are available in [Appendix B](#).

FIGURE 19
Familiarity with Export-Oriented Organizations



Use of Services

Women-owned businesses were also less likely to access exporting assistance, not mainly because they were declined access but because they did not try to access assistance. Indeed, as shown in Figure 20 below, 61% of women-owned businesses did not try to access assistance for market surveys (compared to 43% for men-owned businesses), 56% did not try to access assistance for tax information (compared to 42%), 59% did not try to access assistance for tariffs (compared to 47%), and 64% did not try to access assistance regarding regulatory fees (compared to 48%).

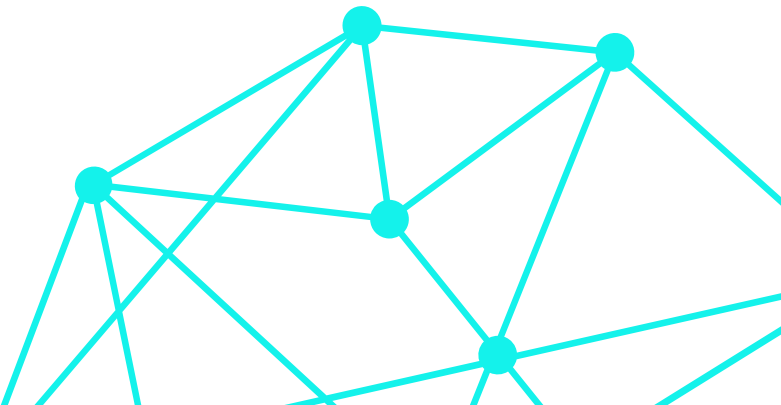
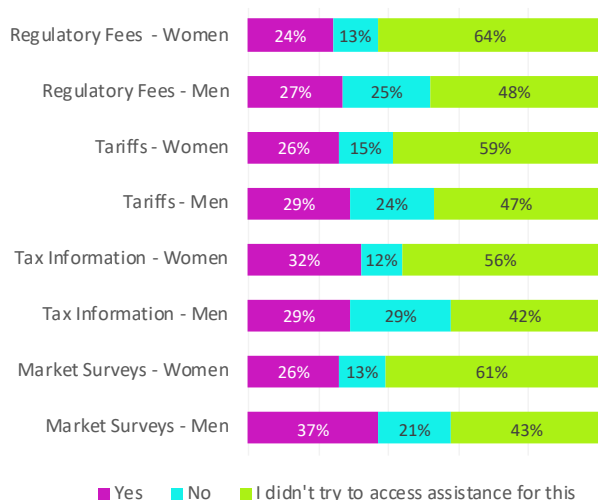


FIGURE 20

Access to Exporting Assistance



This is concerning because the data shows that a similar percentage of men-owned businesses and women-owned businesses were able to access assistance across all four components (market surveys, tariffs, tax information, and regulatory fees). Consequently, there are most likely some lost opportunities amongst the large percentage of women-owned businesses that did not seek assistance.

The four main sources for this information (market surveys, tax information, tariffs, and regulatory fees) were the ECD, BDC, TCS, and provincial agencies as shown in Figures 21, 22, 23, and 24 below. Clearly there are some differences in gender reflected in the ways in which men and women access these services. There are also results that would need further exploration, such as the fact the survey indicates that men-owned business access tax information through Business Women in International Trade more than women-owned businesses. Is it because they use publicly available documentation? It would be interesting to investigate such avenues.



FIGURE 21

Sources Used to Access Market Surveys

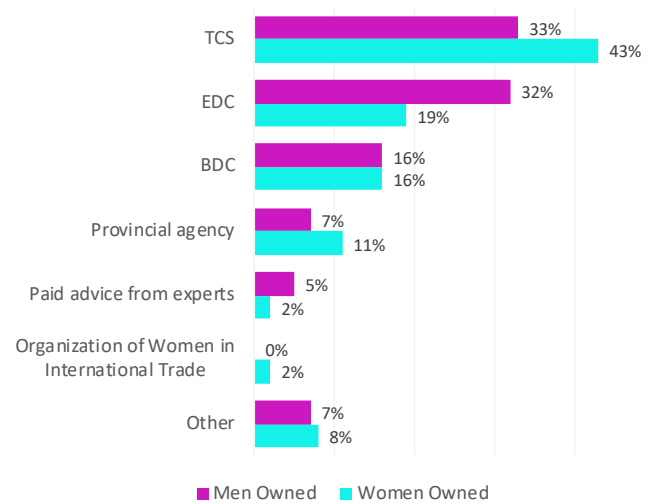


FIGURE 22

Sources Used to Access Tax Information

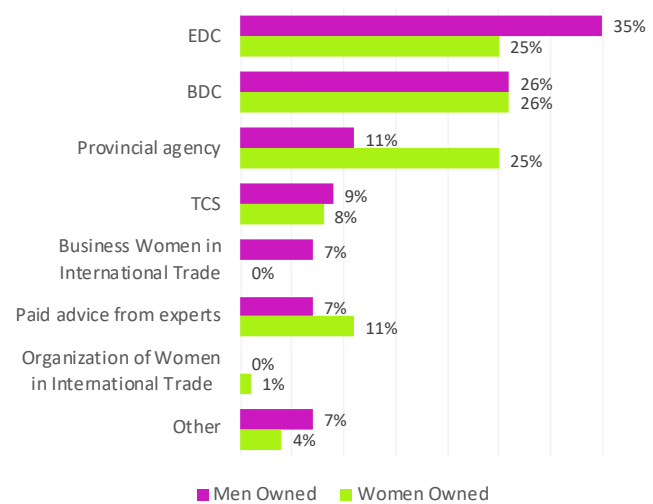


FIGURE 23

Sources Used to Access Assistance with Tariffs

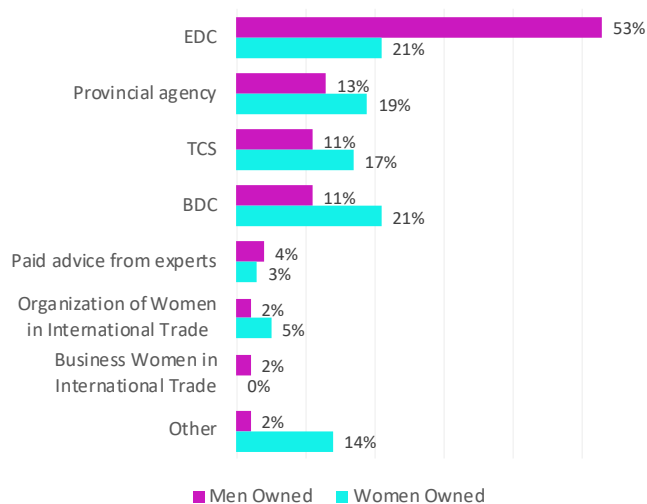
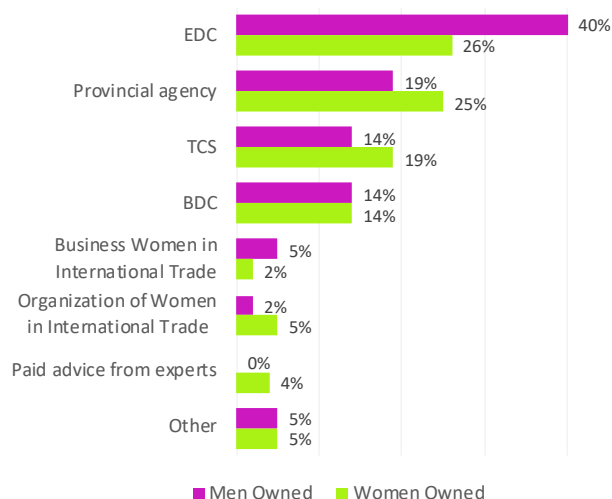


FIGURE 24

Sources Used to Access Assistance with Regulatory Fees

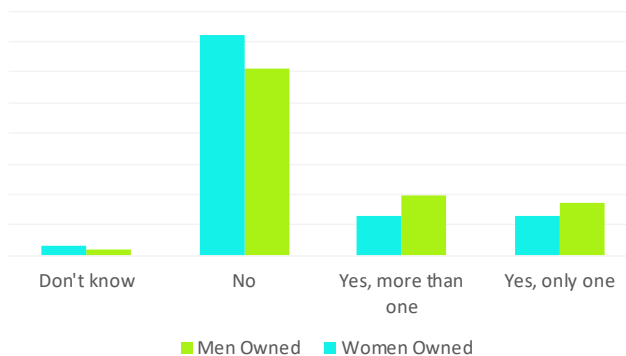


Participation in Trade Missions

Women-owned businesses were also less likely to have participated in trade missions as 72% of them indicated they had not, compared to 61% for men-owned businesses, as shown in Figure 25 below.

FIGURE 25

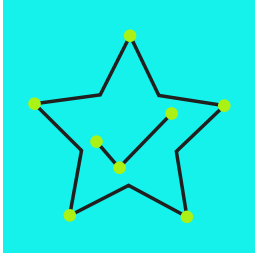
Participation in Trade Missions



There is no doubt that exporting is a great enabler for growth, but from the data we see in this section, there is fear about the complexity of the process and a need for more support. Numerous respondents underlined that they find accessing resources challenging (e.g. information, support, training, financing, etc.), and that more guidance and clarity would be beneficial in helping them navigate the process to realize their aspirations.







Conclusions and Implications

This report draws on three important data sources, academic and government research, in-depth interviews with 96 women, and a survey with 815 men and women entrepreneurs and decision makers. Many women entrepreneurs are engaged in trade activities or are contemplating trade as an opportunity for the growth of their business.

Characteristics of Successful Exporting Women Entrepreneurs

While each entrepreneur's journey is different, there are common factors that successful exporting women entrepreneurs share. These include:

1. **Structural characteristics:** their companies tend to be larger, incorporated, and in sectors which lend themselves to exporting.
2. **Processes:** exporting women recognize the challenges of exporting but seek out the information, networks, mentors, and supports they need to develop an evidence-informed strategy.
3. **Individual characteristics:** exporting women tend to have been in business longer and share ambition, risk tolerance, clarity of vision, tenacity, and have strong networks who can help them. Immigrant women entrepreneurs are slightly more likely to see the opportunities for going global.
4. **Experiences:** exporting women appear to be more aware of, and likely, to use the resources available. Many indicated that they became aware of the opportunities

or translated their ambitions into plans because of the programs they found.

What Could Enhance the Ability of Women Entrepreneurs to Export?

1. All organizations with frontline interactions with women entrepreneurs including Export Development Canada (EDC), Trade Commissioner Service (TCS), and Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC) need to train frontline workers to seek out local entrepreneurs with the potential to export. This includes instilling a partnership mindset that looks to both support and build relationships with the entrepreneurs while remaining mindful of the needs of diverse women. It is important to focus not only on larger businesses but also smaller ones with potential. Some successful women exporters reported information from frontline BDC personnel that helped them find resources and access support from EDC and the TCS.
2. EDC and TCS provide relevant information and make training available to key organizations in the export ecosystem that are supporting women entrepreneurs.
3. TCS ensures that women invited on trade missions are provided with specific connections in the destination country that can open the doors to business opportunities.
4. TCS and EDC provide a concierge service so women seeking information can speak to a knowledgeable individual who can also connect them to other needed resources.





5. Modify and offer a version of TAP specifically for women entrepreneurs. Make the information about the program available through networks of women, enterprise centres, and on social media. Offer a follow-up program that supports the implementation of the export plan developed in the initial program.
6. EDC and TCS offer training on exporting aimed to smaller women-owned businesses in multiple formats such as online and in-person sessions to encourage even micro and small businesses to go global with their businesses – including service-based businesses.
7. Existing networks – such as Boards of Trade – make a concerted effort to include diverse women entrepreneurs and support export knowledge
8. Complete the implementation of Canada's supplier diversity programs and create awareness around the benefits of these programs with other large corporations.

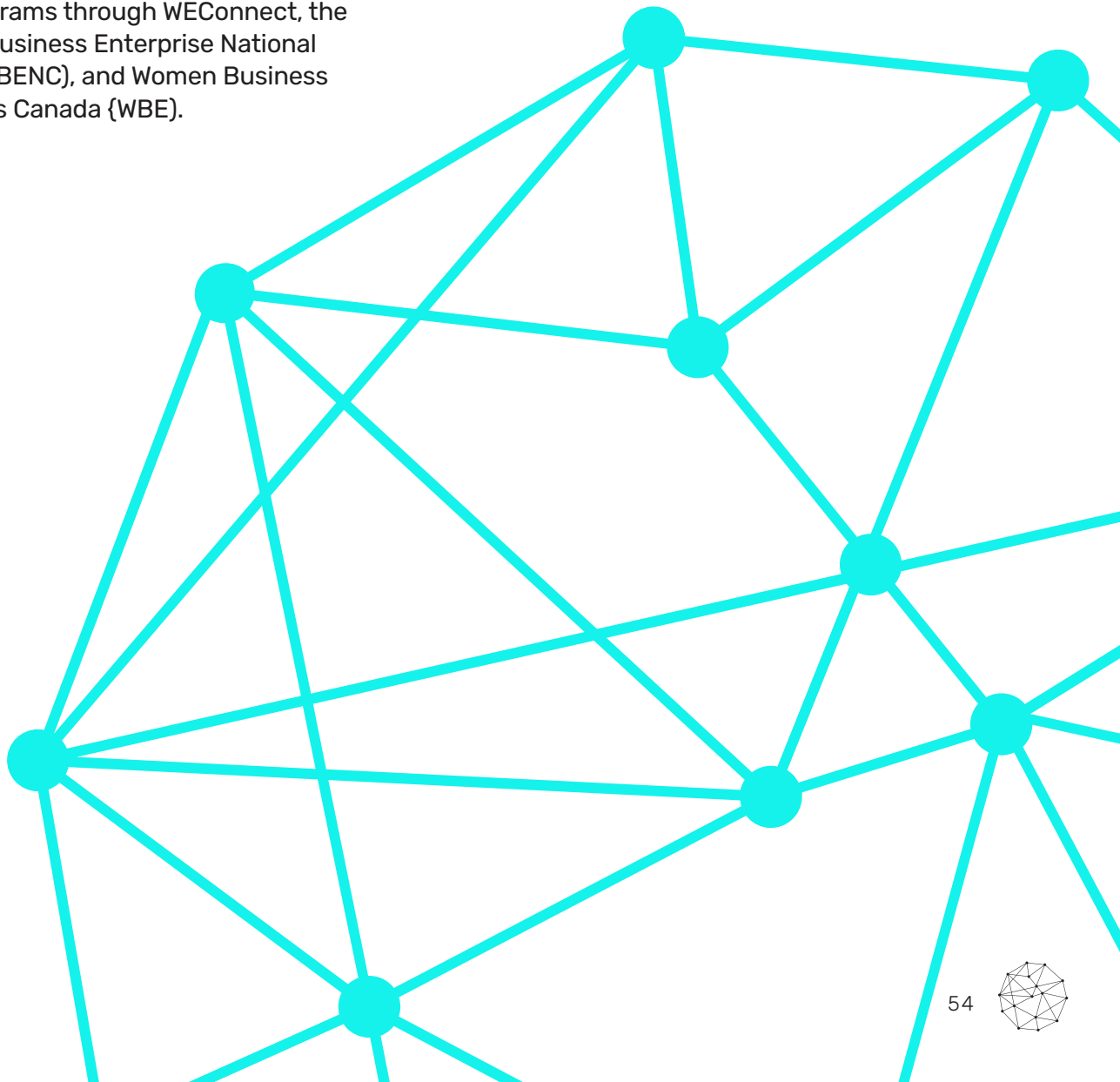
Promote Benefits of Exporting to Women Entrepreneurs

The research showed that while some women saw the upside of pursuing exporting, many were less aware of the opportunities around and support for such goals. Growing exports among women entrepreneurs requires leveling the playing field regarding access to financing, support, incubation, child care, etc., but it also includes the following:

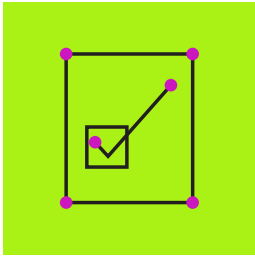
1. Investments should be made in women's business centres and organizations that support women entrepreneurs and encourage them to consider growth through export; seek assistance, training, and knowledge from partners in the ecosystem; and then to develop an export plan.



2. Women entrepreneurs need to grow their networks and join relevant associated organizations such as the Organization of Women in International Trade (OWIT), Chambers of Commerce, Boards of Trade, and relevant industry associations to obtain support, advice, and information.
3. Women entrepreneurs need to seek out mentors to help them with their business growth either through their own networks (from partners) or others in the ecosystem. In addition, they should reach out to the TCS and EDC for information and assistance to develop an export strategy
4. Women entrepreneurs should consider participating in supplier diversity programs to increase export possibilities and take the steps needed to be certified for these programs through WEConnect, the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC), and Women Business Enterprises Canada (WBE).







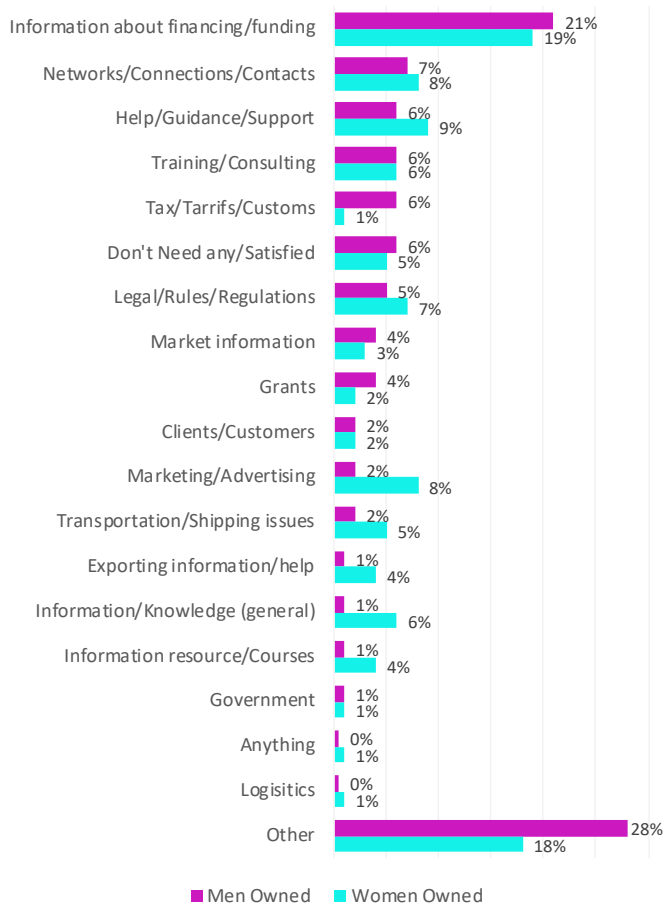
Appendix A

Additional Survey Figures

FIGURE 26

Desired Services

Q42. What service do you wish were available to help you grow your business outside of Canada?



Base: n=556; all respondents (DK/NR removed n=247) (multiple response accepted)

FIGURE 27

Reason for not Exporting

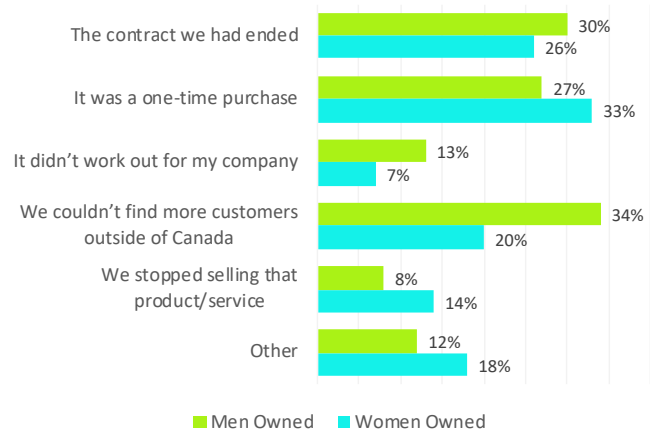
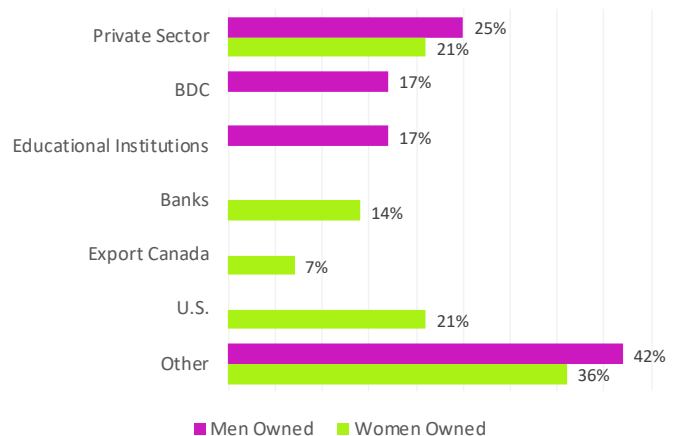


FIGURE 28

Sources for Receiving Training for Exporting (RTE and NEXTporters)

Q21. Are you taking any training to start selling outside of Canada?



Base: n=26*; those who are RTE or NEXTporters and taking training (DK/NR removed n=9)

*Exercise caution due to small base



FIGURE 29

Receiving Training to Continue Exporting

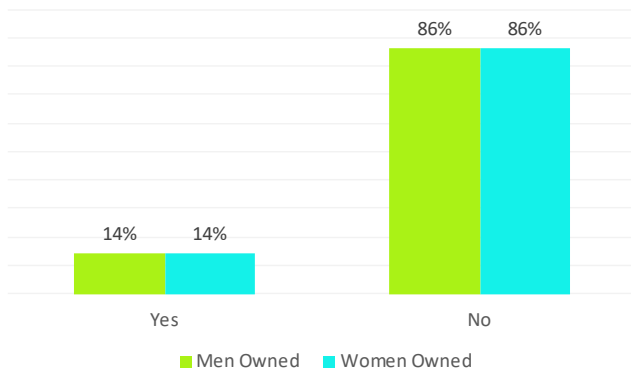


FIGURE 30

Reasons for Using Loans, Mortgages, Credit or Grants

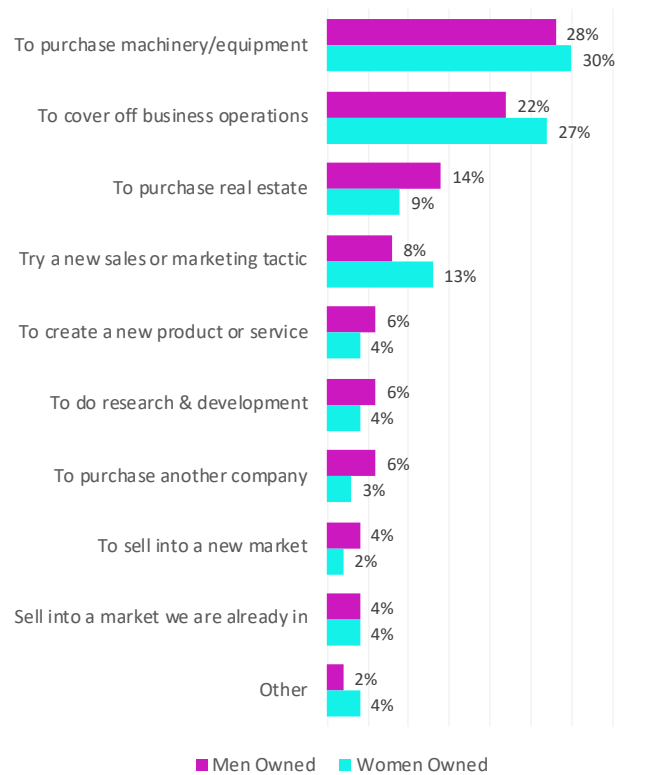


FIGURE 31

Denied Financing in Last 5 Years

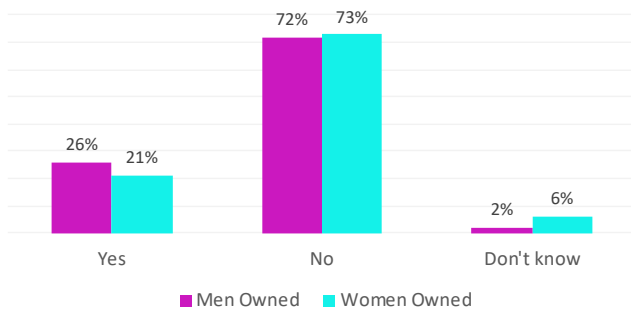


FIGURE 32

How Did You Acquire Knowledge of Target Export Markets

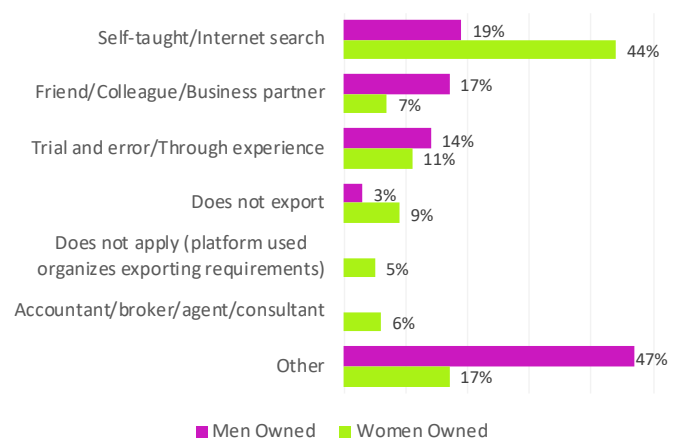


FIGURE 33

Trade Mission Funding

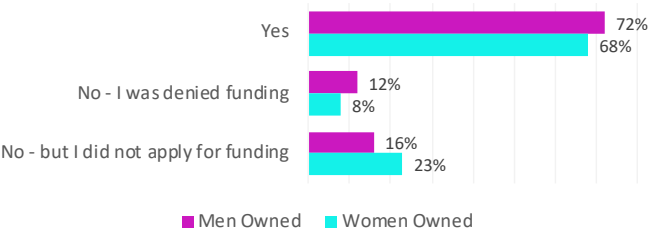


FIGURE 34

Visible Minority, Person with a Disability, or Indigenous

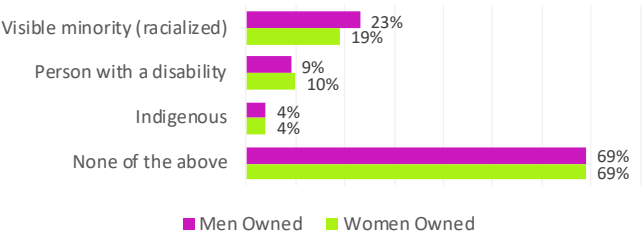


FIGURE 35

Born in Canada

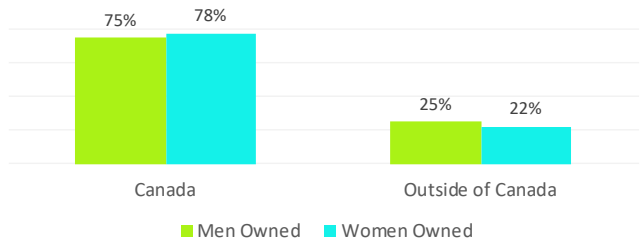
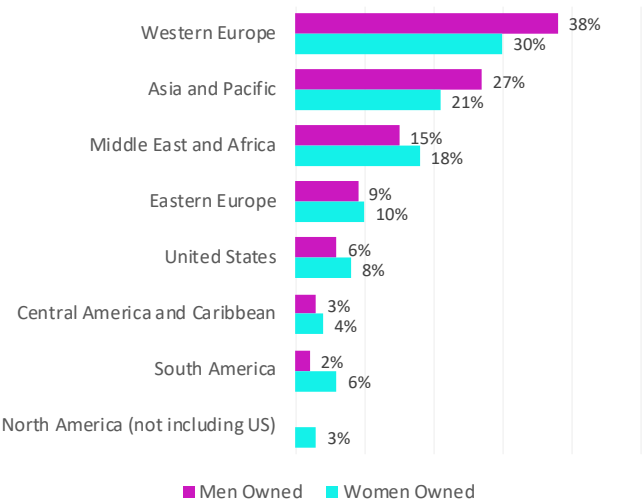
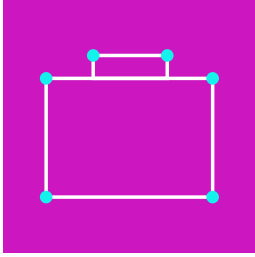


FIGURE 36

Country of Birth





Appendix B

Export-Oriented Organizations

> ***The Business Development Bank of Canada (BDC)***

BDC is the only financial institution devoted exclusively to entrepreneurs. They help create and develop strong Canadian businesses through financing, advisory services and capital, with a focus on small- and medium- sized enterprises.

<https://www.bdc.ca>

> ***Export Development Canada (EDC)***

EDC has been Canada's export credit agency since 1944. They support and develop Canada's export trade by helping Canadian companies respond to international business opportunities. They provide insurance and financial services, bonding products, and small business solutions to Canadian exporters and investors, and their international buyers.

<https://www.edc.ca>

> ***Global Affairs Canada (GAC)***

GAC shape and advance Canada's interests and values in a complex global environment. They promote international trade and provide consular support. GAC leads international development, humanitarian, and peace and security assistance efforts.

<https://www.international.gc.ca>

> ***Trade Commissioner Service (TCS)***

For 125 years, TCS has been helping companies navigate international markets. Trade commissioners in more than 160 cities worldwide can provide business owners with key business insights and access to a network of international contacts.

<https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca>

> ***Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED)***

ISED works with Canadians in all areas of the economy and in all parts of the country to: improve conditions for investment; enhance Canada's innovation performance; increase Canada's share of global trade; and build a fair, efficient, and competitive marketplace.

<https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/icgc.nsf/eng/home>



> **Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters (CME)**

CME is Canada's largest trade and industry association, and the voice of manufacturing and global business in Canada. CME directly represents more than 10,000 leading companies nationwide. More than 85% of CME's members are SMEs.

<https://cme-mec.ca>

> **Canadian Commercial Corporation (CCC)**

CCC offers commercial advocacy, collaborative project development, and foreign contracting expertise to help Canadian exporters secure international contracts with government buyers around the world.

<https://www.ccc.ca>

> **Forum for International Trade Training (FITT)**

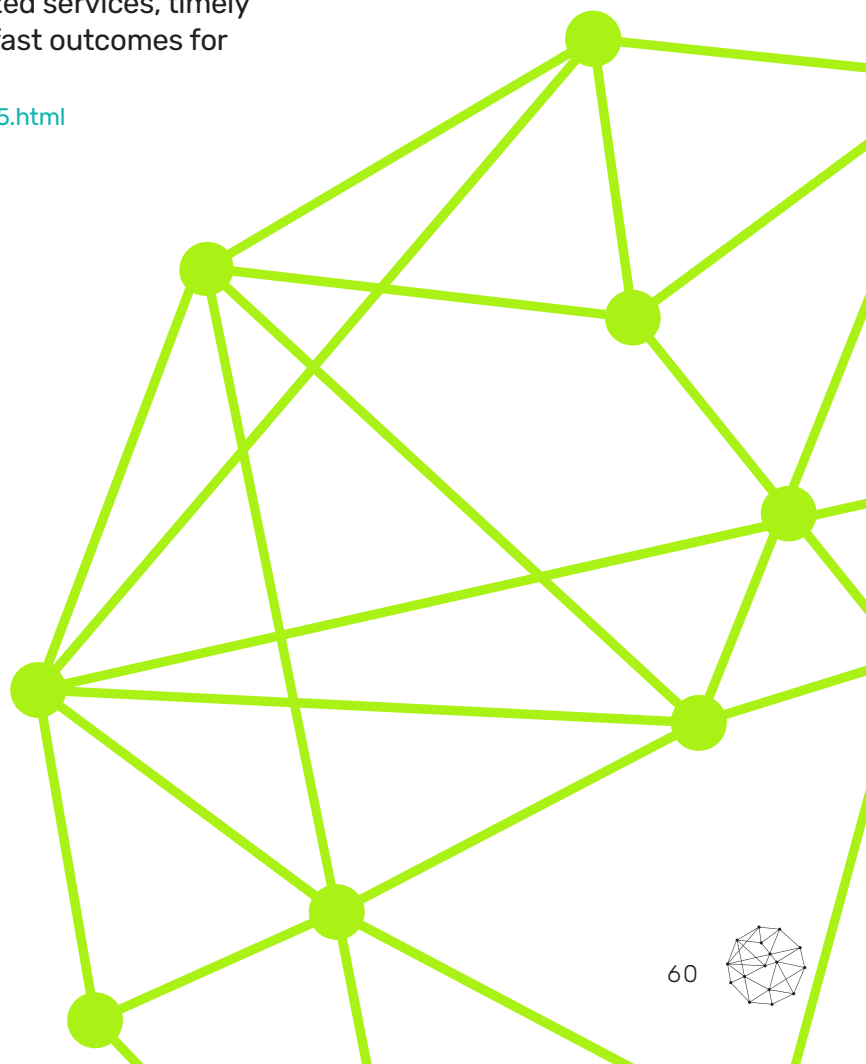
FITT is dedicated to providing international business training, resources, and professional certification to individuals and businesses. FITT is the world's leading export-import training and certification expert.

<https://fittfortrade.com>

> **Canadian Acceleration and Business Incubation (CABI)**

CABI is focused on raising the quality of incubators and accelerators across the nation, which provides specialized services, timely funding, and global connectivity to foster fast outcomes for start-ups.

https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/061.nsf/eng/h_03045.html





Appendix C

Table of Interviewees

ID	Sector	Size/Number of Employees	Export Status	Incorporated	Location
1	Retail	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	East
2	Training Services	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
3	Financial Service	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	East
4	Retail	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
5	Retail/E-Commerce	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	Central
6	Food Industry	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	Central
7	Manufacturing	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
8	Hospitality	26 – 50	No	Yes	East
9	Service	11 – 25	Considering	No	Central
10	Health	26 – 50	Considering	Yes	East
11	Service	0 – 10	Yes	No	East
12	Pet Industry	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
13	Food Industry	0 – 10	No	Yes	East
14	Food Industry	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	East
15	Entertainment	100 +	Yes	Yes	East
16	Home Goods	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
17	Health	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	East
18	Retail	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	Central
19	Retail	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central
20	Consulting	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central
21	Tech	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	Central



ID	Sector	Size/Number of Employees	Export Status	Incorporated	Location
22	Consulting	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	Central
23	Home Goods	0 – 10	Yes	No	Central
24	Service	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central
25	Food Industry	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	Central
26	Communication/ Service	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	Central
27	Beauty	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	Central
28	Service	0 – 10	No	No	Central
29	Health/Tech	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	Central
30	Tradeshow Industry	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	West
31	Tech/Marketing	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	West
32	Publishing	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	West
33	Food Industry	26 – 50	Considering	Yes	Central
34	Childcare	0 – 10	No	Yes	West
35	Beauty	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	West
36	Agriculture	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	Central
37	Service	100 +	Considering	Yes	West
38	Food Industry	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	West
39	Fitness	26 – 50	No	Yes	Central
40	Service	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	West
41	Service	0 – 10	No	No	West
42	Fitness	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	West
43	Food Industry	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	West
44	Food Industry	26 – 50	Yes	Yes	West
45	Food Industry	51 – 100	Considering	Yes	West
46	Consulting	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central



ID	Sector	Size/Number of Employees	Export Status	Incorporated	Location
47	Clothing/E-Commerce	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	West
48	Service	11 – 25	No	Yes	Central
49	Hospitality	11 – 25	No	Yes	East
50	Clothing	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	West
51	Marketing	0 – 10	Yes	No	East
52	Service	0 – 10	No	Yes	East
53	Food Industry	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
54	Social Enterprise	26 – 50	No	Yes	East
55	Service	0 – 10	Considering	No	East
56	Service	0 – 10	Yes	No	Central
57	Tech	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	Central
58	Tech	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	West
59	Service	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	West
60	Service/Tech	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	East
61	Retail/Service	100 +	No	Yes	West
62	Service	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	East
63	Tourism	11 – 25	No	Yes	East
64	E-Commerce	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
65	E-Commerce	0 – 10	Yes	No	East
66	Merchandising	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
67	Tourism	0 – 10	Yes	No	East
68	Service	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
69	Food Industry	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
70	Food Industry	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	East
71	Manufacturing	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	West
72	Tech	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	West



ID	Sector	Size/Number of Employees	Export Status	Incorporated	Location
73	Service	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	West
74	Service	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central
75	Service	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central
76	Service	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	Central
77	Real Estate	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	Central
78	Toys	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central
79	Alcohol	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	West
80	Gift Industry	0 – 10	No	Yes	West
81	Service	0 – 10	Considering	No	West
82	Manufacturing	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	West
83	Consulting	11 – 25	Yes	No	East
84	Alcohol	11 – 25	Considering	Yes	East
85	Service	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central
86	Manufacturing/ Distribution	0 – 10	Considering	Yes	Central
87	Service	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	Central
88	Beauty	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	West
89	Service	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	West
90	Tech	0 – 10	No	No	West
91	Service	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central
92	Tech	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	West
93	Service	0 – 10	Yes	Yes	Central
94	Tech	100 +	Yes	Yes	Central
95	Tech	11 – 25	Yes	Yes	Central
96	Beauty	26 – 50	Yes	Yes	East

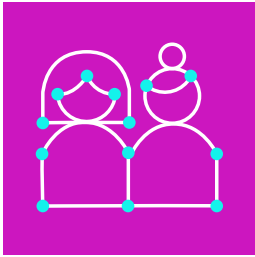




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About the Authors

Clare Beckton

BA • LLB (Sask) • MPA (Harvard)

Clare Beckton is an award-winning advocate for the advancement of women, speaker, coach, consultant, and the author of *Own-it Your Success, Your Future, Your Life* and a number of other publications. She is a recipient of a Fulbright scholarship and a Littauer fellowship by Harvard (for leadership and contribution to Public Service). Clare is founder of *Own Your Own Success* and an executive in residence of the Carleton University Centre for Research on Inclusion at Work, former founding Executive Director of the Centre for Women in Politics and Public Leadership at Carleton University, as well as a founding member of the women and philanthropy program at the Queensway Carleton Hospital in Ottawa. She founded and co-developed the acclaimed *Advancing Women in Leadership* program.

Clare was recognized three times by Women's Executive Network (WXN) as one of Canada's 100 Most Powerful Women along with other recognitions for her leadership, including a Canada 125 medal for Public Service.

In addition to being a lawyer and a recognized former professor of law at Dalhousie University, she was a senior executive in the Government of Canada, where she held prominent positions such as head of the agency for Status of Women Canada and assistant deputy Attorney General Aboriginal Affairs.



She serves or served on a number of boards in leadership roles including the Harvard Women's Leadership Board, the Beechwood National Cemetery, and the International Women's Forum Canada board and the Queensway Carleton Hospital Board as chair. Clare is also a member of UNICEF's 25th team supporting maternal and newborn health and served as a member of the Task Force on the Growth of Women Owned Businesses and as a member of the advisory boards of the Canadian Board Diversity Council and the Algonquin College Law and Security program.

Clare is a dedicated mentor in the International Women's Forum (IWF) fellows program and has been a mentor for IWF international's elite athlete program, WXN and CWCT along with many informal mentoring roles. She has written numerous articles on human and Charter rights and was a blogger for the Huffington Post, where she focused her writing on gender issues.



Janice McDonald

B.A. • M.A. • ICD.D • M.F.A.
Founder of The Beacon Agency



Janice McDonald knows that small hinges swing big doors. As a global champion for women, she's been pushing for equity since 1992, when she completed her first graduate degree and wrote her thesis on women on boards in Canada.

She has Leadership training from Harvard and INSEAD and she was appointed to Women's Leadership Board at Harvard Kennedy School. She was chosen as a Mentor in 2020 with the prestigious Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation. McDonald has a BA in communications, MA in Canadian Studies, certification in conflict resolution from CICR, her ICD.D designation, and an MFA. She is currently in the first global cohort of The Power MBA.

She is an award-winning entrepreneur, a four-time WXN Top 100 winner and 2016 WXN Hall of Fame inductee, a sought-after speaker, and the co-author of three groundbreaking studies on women entrepreneurs in Canada, released in 2016, 2018, and in 2020.

Women in Trade – Los Angeles awarded her Global Trade Ambassador for Canada in 2017, and in 2018 she received an Inspiring Fifty Women in Tech award. She was Chair of International Women's Forum Canada Ottawa Chapter and on the global IWF Leadership Foundation Board, was a Board director with Futurpreneur, Ashbury College and Ottawa Senators Foundation to name a few and is an independent director with Vista Radio.

Her 2020 book, *Fearless. Girls with Dreams, Women with Vision* is a Canadian national bestseller. Her popular and influential Fearless Women Podcast is currently in its second season.





Tasnuva Chaudhury

Research Associate

Tasnuva Chaudhury, is a Ph.D. candidate and a Research associate in Management at the Sprott School of Business, Carleton University. She completed her MBA from Texas Tech University and her bachelor's degree from North South University. Prior to joining the Ph.D. program, Tasnuva had several years of academic and practitioner experience. She taught in Bangladesh for several years and gained valuable research

experience in a non-profit organization that provided support to female victims of human trafficking.

She is currently teaching an undergraduate course at Carleton University and actively involved in research projects on women's representation in entrepreneurial curriculum and professionalism in police forces. She has published a study in a scholarly journal and presented her findings at academic conferences. Tasnuva was also involved in community-building and networking activity to disseminate research on women and work with the Centre for Research on Inclusion at Work at Carleton University.

