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SELF-EMPLOYED WOMEN FACING CRISIS

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Adva Center
Information on Equality and Social Justice in Israel

“Self-Employed Women Facing Crisis”: Independent Women Business Owners in Israel During Periods of Economic Crisis

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Abstract

This study examines how women-owned small businesses in Israel have coped with economic crises, focusing on three major crisis periods in recent years: the COVID-19 crisis, the October 7th war, and the fighting between Israel and the Iran war of June 2025. The study is based on a survey conducted in 2025 among women who established or continued to operate small businesses after participating in business entrepreneurship training programs run by the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women (EEW).

The businesses owned by the survey participants are mostly very small businesses, and most do not employ additional workers. These businesses tend to operate in fields such as grooming and cosmetics, food and cooking, personal coaching and training, design and art, and education and teaching. These fields rely heavily on direct contact with customers and in-person activity, making them especially vulnerable during periods of crisis and activity restrictions.

The study's findings indicate that during crisis periods, most business owners experienced significant damage to their business activity and income. Between 60% and 70% of respondents reported a decline in business income during the crisis periods examined, and in many cases business activity was also temporarily halted. Alongside the economic damage, many of the women described feelings of ongoing uncertainty, difficulty planning ahead, and psychological burnout stemming from the need to combine business management with family responsibilities during emergencies.

The study also indicates that some business owners managed to develop various adaptation strategies to cope with the damage to business activity. Among other things, it emerged that some women moved to online activity, adapted their products or services to new needs, or reached out to additional target audiences. However, only about half of business owners managed to make adaptations of this kind, partly due to a shortage of financial resources, professional knowledge, or appropriate business support.

[1] We thank Dr. Alina Rosenfeld for her assistance in preparing the data file and for reading and commenting on an earlier version of the report.

A further finding of the study is that access to government assistance during crisis periods was limited for a significant portion of business owners. About 42%–43% of women whose businesses were harmed during the COVID-19 crisis or during the October 7th war did not apply for a government grant, or wanted to apply but did not know how. In addition, some women who did apply for a grant did not actually receive assistance. These figures point to a gap between government assistance tools and the ability of very small business owners to make use of them.

The study indicates that small businesses owned by women operate within a particularly vulnerable economic framework in times of crisis. A combination of the characteristics of micro-businesses, structural gender gaps, and assistance policy that is not fully suited to very small businesses increases the vulnerability of women business owners during emergencies.

Given the contribution of these businesses to household livelihoods and to the economic resilience of communities, it is important to develop public policy that recognizes their unique characteristics and provides tailored responses. Strengthening assistance mechanisms, improving access to information, and better adapting support tools to very small businesses may contribute to business owners' ability to cope with future crises and to strengthening Israel's economic and social resilience.

Based on the study's findings, several key recommendations for public policy are proposed:

- Systematic collection and publication of data on small businesses in Israel, broken down by gender;
- Establishment of a fast and simple-to-operate compensation mechanism for small business owners in times of crisis;
- Adapting eligibility conditions for government grants to businesses with low turnover that do not employ workers;
- Expanding assistance mechanisms for training and support in online commerce and digital marketing;
- Developing frameworks for business networking and strengthening cooperation among small business owners.

"Endless Struggle": Independent Women Business Owners in Israel During Periods of Economic Crisis

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to examine the challenges faced by women small-business owners and the ways they cope during periods of economic crisis. The study focuses on two major crises that have struck the Israeli economy in recent years: the economic crisis created in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the crisis created by the events of October 7 2023 and the war that broke out in their wake.

The study was conducted by the Adva Center in partnership with the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, and is based on a survey of self-employed women operating small businesses, most of them micro-businesses,[2] who participated in the Association's economic empowerment training programs.

The Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women has operated since 2000 to promote the economic and social independence of women facing economic hardship and employment barriers. The Association's activity focuses on developing business entrepreneurship as a means of strengthening economic independence and expanding employment opportunities for women from diverse population groups in Israeli society.

The Association's flagship program, "A Business of Your Own," is intended for women who wish to establish an independent business as a source of livelihood, or for women at the start of their journey as self-employed workers, and is aimed mainly at women from the social and geographic periphery. It is intended for women facing employment and capital barriers, and helps them establish a stable source of income to improve their economic situation and their families' resilience. Some of the courses are run in formats adapted to the culture of specific population groups, such as Arab women, Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) women, Ethiopian women, and immigrants from the former USSR and Ukraine. The programs are run in cooperation with the local authority where the training takes place.

"A Business of Your Own" combines practical business training with a process of personal empowerment and strengthened economic capability. Participants receive comprehensive training that includes building a business plan, financial management and marketing, alongside ongoing individual and group mentoring. After completing the basic training, graduates have access to professional enrichment courses (financial and cash-flow management, running a business in the digital world, building a business plan, familiarity with digital marketing tools and innovative AI tools, etc.), personal mentoring, lectures, participation in forums run by the Association, and a support network of business owners who are Association graduates. The Association's regional forums are organized on a geographic basis and bring together women from all population groups.

[2] A large proportion of the businesses run by these women are micro-businesses (*asakim ze'irim*), a term defined in the Income Tax Ordinance as a business whose annual transaction turnover reaches up to NIS 120,000 per year.

Since its founding, more than 6,000 women in dozens of localities across the country have participated in the Association's programs, and with its assistance about 1,700 businesses have been established and developed. Data provided by the Association's staff show that the vast majority of women trained through the programs run small businesses and mostly do not employ additional workers.[3] In 2020 the Association conducted an evaluation study of graduates of the "A Business of Your Own" program, which included women who participated in the program between 2013 and 2020.[4] The study's findings showed that the main source of funding for opening the graduates' businesses is self-financing. It was also found that the common fields of activity among business owners include art and design; personal coaching and training; education and teaching; food and cooking; cosmetics and grooming; administration; and fields related to welfare, sports, health, and alternative medicine. Some of these fields characterize women's employment both as salaried employees and as self-employed workers.

According to the Association's staff, whereas in the past the women who came to the Association's programs did so mainly through welfare frameworks, in recent years the Association has also been approached by women with academic degrees who wish to establish an independent business, as well as women who already run a business and wish to develop and expand their activity. Nevertheless, most participants arrive at the training courses without prior knowledge of establishing and managing a business.

The Association also operates in partnership with the "Ma'of" centers of the Small and Medium Business Agency at the Ministry of Economy and Industry, which offer a basic course for opening and managing a business — "Starting a Business" — comprising 14 sessions and run with partial subsidy from the Agency. As part of this partnership, the Association adds eight further sessions focusing on aspects of personal empowerment and capability development.[5]

During the lockdowns and restrictions imposed following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Association began developing digital activity, through which courses, forums, lectures and personal business consulting were delivered via online means such as the Zoom platform and social networks. In addition, a package of free personal consulting was developed, which was in high demand among self-employed women.

In the period following the COVID-19 crisis there was a rise in demand for participation in the Association's courses. Alongside content dealing with running a business during periods of crisis and uncertainty, the Association also provided information and guidance regarding government assistance and obtaining grants.

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[3] Interview with staff of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 6, 2025.

[4] "A Business of Your Own," 2020. Evaluation research report of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women on graduates of the "A Business of Your Own" program, 2013–2020.

[5] Interview with staff of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 6, 2025.

This practice was also employed during part of the months of the war. During the war, the Association opened dedicated courses both for women who had been evacuated from their homes and for women who had returned to localities that had been evacuated during the war.

The purpose of this study is to examine what responses are needed for women small-business owners during periods of crisis and during routine periods, thereby contributing to the formulation of public policy that provides suitable and effective assistance to small-business owners. The study seeks to expand the limited existing knowledge base in Israel regarding small businesses owned by women, and to examine the patterns of harm and coping among this group.

1. Small Independent Businesses Owned by Women in Israel

According to data from the Small and Medium Business Agency at the Ministry of Economy and Industry, in 2022 about 660,000 businesses operated in Israel, of which about 99.5% (about 657,000) were small and medium businesses employing up to 100 workers. Of all small and medium businesses, about 56% (about 370,000) were businesses that do not employ workers — about 324,000 individuals working as self-employed. However, the Small and Medium Business Agency's data does not include a breakdown by gender.[6]

Some small businesses in Israel are classified by the Tax Authority as a "micro-business" (*esek za'ir*). This is a classification for income-tax purposes that applies to self-employed individuals who do not employ workers and whose revenue turnover is relatively low. According to the current definition (as of 2025), a "micro-business" is a business whose annual transaction turnover does not exceed NIS 120,000. This classification grants significant relief in dealings with the Tax Authority, including an automatic deduction of 30% of income as a recognized expense, without the need to present actual receipts or invoices. In addition, owners of such businesses are usually not required to submit a full annual report to the income-tax authorities and can use a simplified online reporting system. However, the Tax Authority does not publish data on the number of active businesses defined as "micro-businesses," nor does it publish gender-based data on this population.

Information about the population of self-employed women can be learned from the gender-breakdown data on self-employed individuals published by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), although this data does not include a breakdown by business size. According to CBS data, in 2024 the rate of self-employment stood at 15.7% among all employed men, while the rate among employed women stood at 9.6%. Women made up 37% of all self-employed people in Israel that year. Most self-employed people in Israel do not employ workers, but this phenomenon is more common among women: the rate of self-employed women who do not employ workers stood at 86%, compared with 65% among self-employed men.[7]

Gender differences are also reflected in the distribution of occupations among self-employed men and women who do not employ workers. While most self-employed women who do not employ workers are concentrated in academic occupations (43.7%) and in sales and services fields (30.1%), their share in skilled occupations in industry and construction is very low (see Table 1).[8] In addition, there are also significant differences in education levels: the education level of self-employed women who do not employ workers is considerably higher than that of men in this group (see Figure 1).

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[6] Ministry of Economy and Industry, Small and Medium Business Agency. December 2023. Periodic report: The state of small and medium businesses in Israel 2023.

[7] Adva Center analysis of the CBS Labor Force Survey for 2024.

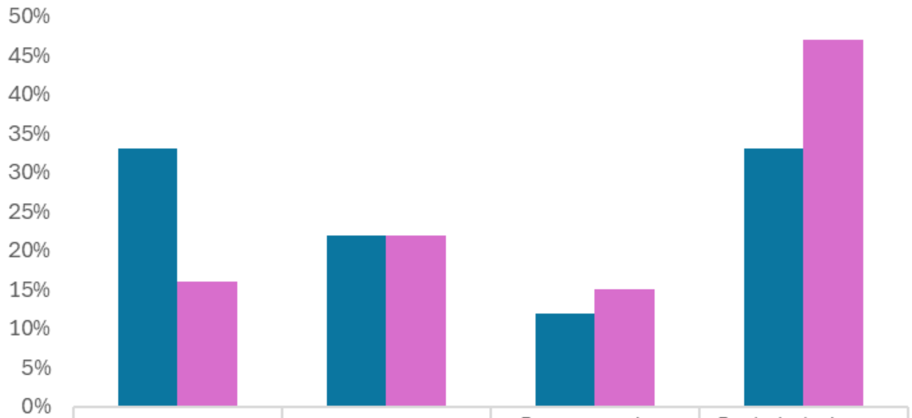
[8] It should be noted that a similar gender distribution exists among salaried employees.

Table 1: Occupations of self-employed people who do not employ workers, by gender, 2024

	Men	Women
Managers	1.8	0.3
Academic professionals	31.3	43.1
Engineers, technicians, agents, and associate professionals	17.5	18.5
General clerks and office workers	0.9	1.5
Sales and service workers	12.3	31.4
Skilled agriculture, forestry, and fishery workers	1.9	0.1
Skilled industry and construction workers and other skilled workers	32.9	3.3
Unskilled workers	1.4	1.8
Total	100	100

Source: Adva Center analysis of the CBS Labor Force Survey for 2024.

Figure 1: Distribution of education level among self-employed men and women who do not employ workers, 2023



	No matriculation	Matriculation	Post-secondary (non-academic)	Bachelor's degree or higher
Men	33%	22%	12%	33%
Women	16%	22%	15%	47%

Source: Adva Center analysis of the CBS Labor Force Survey for 2024.

Despite women's relative advantage in education level, the income level of self-employed women is significantly lower than that of self-employed men. The CBS Labor Force Surveys do not include wage data, but the 2023 Household Expenditure and Income Survey shows that the average monthly wage of self-employed men that year stood at NIS 14,153, compared with NIS 7,474 among self-employed women — a gap of 47%. The gap in median income was also significant, standing at 43%, with men's median wage at NIS 9,292 compared with only NIS 5,251 among self-employed women (see Table 2). It should be noted that this survey does not distinguish between self-employed people who employ workers and those who do not.

Table 2: Median and average wage of self-employed men and women, 2023

	Median wage	Average wage
Men	9,292	14,153
Women	5,251	7,474
Gender wage gap	43%	47%

Source: Adva Center analysis of the CBS Household Expenditure and Income Survey for 2023.

Gender wage gaps among the self-employed are larger than the gaps between salaried male and female employees. CBS Household Expenditure Survey data show that in 2023 the gap between the average monthly (gross) income of self-employed women and that of self-employed men stood at 47%, while the gender gap in income among salaried employees stood at 36%. Moreover, gender income gaps among the self-employed grew considerably in recent years: according to a CBS analysis, between 2015 and 2021 the wage gap between male and female salaried employees grew by 2.2 percentage points, while the gap between self-employed men and women grew by 4.5 percentage points.[9]

Beyond differences in occupation, the lower income of self-employed women is also linked to differences in the number of paid working hours. According to CBS Labor Force Survey data for 2024, self-employed women work on average fewer weekly hours than self-employed men, a pattern similar to that found among salaried employees. This gap may be related to the gendered division of household chores and the care of children and family members, which is still borne to a much greater extent by women.[10] Thus, according to this data, self-employed women who do not employ workers worked on average 31 hours per week, compared with 40 hours per week among men in the same category. Among self-employed people who do employ workers, the gender gap is smaller, but the volume of work is higher: men work an average of 48 hours per week and women 42 hours per week.

[9] CBS, March 2024. Data compilation for International Women's Day 2024.

[10] Noga Dagan-Buzaglo, Miri Endeweld-Sabag, Tehila Sharabi, December 2025. Poverty and economic inequality from a gender perspective. Adva Center.

2. An International Perspective on the Self-Employed in Ordinary Times and in Times of Crisis

According to OECD data for 2024, the rate of self-employment in Israel out of total employment is low compared with the average among OECD member states: 12.9% versus 16.6%, respectively. A comparison among OECD countries in terms of the self-employment rate in 2024 shows that Israel ranks 22nd out of 33 OECD countries, and in a similar position in a comparison of the rates of self-employed women.[11]

Studies conducted in Europe on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the labor market indicate that the self-employed were harmed economically to a much greater extent than salaried employees. This gap is linked, among other things, to a relatively high concentration of self-employed people in sectors that were particularly hard-hit during the lockdown periods, as well as to a lower level of social protection compared with salaried employees. While most European countries introduced social-support mechanisms for the self-employed during the crisis, this support was usually more limited than the support system available to salaried employees. In many countries, self-employed people were not entitled to unemployment benefits or sick pay, two central social-security components available to salaried employees during that period.[12]

Although the COVID-19 crisis harmed the self-employed as a whole, studies indicate that the damage to women-owned businesses was deeper and more prolonged. International studies by the OECD and the World Bank point to a recurring pattern of greater vulnerability among self-employed women in times of crisis, both during the COVID-19 pandemic and during the 2008 global financial crisis.[13] The research literature offers several key factors that explain this phenomenon: first, small businesses owned by women are concentrated in sectors that are especially vulnerable during periods of economic crisis, mainly personal services, retail trade, tourism and hospitality; as a result, they tend to be hit more significantly when economic activity declines. The hospitality and food-service sector, in which many women operate, was also especially hard-hit during the COVID-19 crisis. Second, most micro-businesses owned by women are based on self-financing, with limited savings and limited access to bank credit. Because of this, in times of crisis they face more significant liquidity difficulties. Third, during the COVID-19 crisis there was an increase in the burden of household and childcare responsibilities, a burden that falls to a much greater extent on women.

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[11] OECD Data, Self-employment rate.

[12] Eurofund. (2024), Self-employment in the EU: Job quality and developments in social protection, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

[13] OECD. 2021. Entrepreneurship Policy Through a Gender Lens; OECD. May 2021. An in-depth analysis of one year of SME and entrepreneurship policy responses to COVID-19. Lessons learned for the path to recovery; World Bank Group. 2021. The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Women-Led Businesses. Policy Research Working Paper 9817; World Bank Group. July 2021. Female-owned Firms during the COVID-19 Crisis. Global Indicators Briefs No. 2.

As a result, many women were forced to reduce their working hours in their businesses more than men did.

Reports by the OECD and other international bodies indicate that the public assistance programs implemented during the COVID-19 period often operated in a way that mainly benefited larger and more established businesses, and that women business owners reported greater difficulty in receiving compensation, grants, or loans. For example, conditions such as a minimum revenue turnover for receiving assistance worked against small businesses, whose turnover is on average lower. In addition, assistance mechanisms based mainly on loans were less relevant for women, who even in ordinary times tend to rely less on external financing. Studies found that women-owned businesses closed for longer periods during the crisis, experienced a sharper decline in demand and income, and required longer recovery periods even after the crisis ended. The OECD notes that in the years following the COVID-19 pandemic, the trend of expanding women's entrepreneurship observed in the years preceding the pandemic was halted.[14]

The international literature also points to gender gaps in the structure of business networks. Women's business networks are described as smaller and less diverse than men's. In addition, women tend more to include family members and friends in their networks, whereas men's networks tend more to include business service providers and other entrepreneurs, with greater economic and social influence. These differences may affect cooperation, business relationships, access to business information, and access to economic resources — factors that may be especially critical during periods of crisis. The literature also shows that digitalization — that is, the shift to online business activity and the use of digital tools — was a central survival and adaptation strategy for small businesses during the COVID-19 period. However, many women encountered greater difficulties than men in implementing these processes, partly due to gaps in access to resources, technological knowledge, or free time.[15]

In light of these findings, the research literature emphasizes the importance of entrepreneurship training and business-skill development for women. Alongside this, the importance of supportive infrastructure — such as available childcare services and maternity and parental leave arrangements — is also emphasized, as these play a significant role in promoting gender equality among the self-employed and business owners, both in routine times and in times of crisis. Furthermore, on the basis of lessons learned from COVID-19, the research literature points to the need to develop gender-sensitive assistance mechanisms, and to the importance of ensuring accessibility of public support to businesses from vulnerable groups, among them women-owned businesses, new businesses, and minority-owned businesses.

Based on the findings described above, the OECD recommended incorporating a gender lens into government programs supporting entrepreneurship, and

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Gergeli O., Oborni K. and Popovic Pantic S. 2024. "Digitalization as a resilience strategy for women owned SMEs during crises". *Society and Economy* 46 (2024) 4, 386–403.

adapting support mechanisms — both in routine times and in emergencies — to the characteristics and unique needs of women-owned businesses. However, only a small number of countries have actually implemented these recommendations. Among the more notable are Canada, which developed dedicated programs for recovery from the COVID-19 crisis for women and minorities, and Ireland, which worked to collect gender-disaggregated data in order to ensure that women-owned businesses receive sufficient benefit from government support.

Against the backdrop of findings from the international literature, the next chapter examines the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and the October 7th war on small businesses in Israel.

3. The Impact of the COVID-19 Crisis and the October 7th War on Small Businesses in Israel

Unlike international studies that provide gender-disaggregated data on businesses, in Israel no systematic data has been collected on small businesses owned by women. The absence of this data makes it difficult to examine the scope of harm to women-owned businesses during crisis periods. Nevertheless, the scope of harm can be assessed indirectly by examining the economic sectors that were especially hard-hit, as well as by examining the size characteristics of businesses.

A survey conducted for the Ministry of Justice in April 2020, which examined the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on businesses in Israel, did not include a gender breakdown, but pointed to the sectors in which the most significant harm was recorded. These sectors included teaching and instruction, arts and entertainment, hospitality and food, and trade — fields characterized by a high proportion of small businesses owned by women.[16]

As noted, the surveys conducted by the Small and Medium Business Agency also generally do not include a gender breakdown. A report published by the Agency regarding the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on businesses in Israel indicated that the crisis created particularly significant difficulty for small and micro businesses.[17] Surveys conducted by the Agency during the war period indicate that women business owners expressed higher levels of concern regarding the future of their businesses compared with male business owners. For example, 74% of women business owners expected difficulties in their business as a result of the war, compared with 65% of male business owners. Across all business components in which special difficulties arising during the war period were reported, the proportion of women business owners who expressed concerns was higher than the proportion of male business owners. Thus, it was found that 46%

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[16] Ministry of Justice et al., 2020. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on small businesses — summary of survey findings, April 2020.

[17] For a periodic survey for the period 2019–2024 that also addresses the impact of COVID-19 and the war, see the Small and Medium Business Agency, January 2025. Barriers facing small and medium businesses, 2019–2024.

of women feared difficulties with business cash flow, compared with 40% of men. Likewise, 27% of women business owners reported fear of difficulty in returning the business to full activity, compared with 23% of men. Regarding fear of difficulty in loan repayment, no significant gender gap was found.

The report also addresses the Agency's activity from a gender perspective, and shows that the proportion of women participating in the activity of the "Ma'of" centers, through which the Agency operates business services and training, is higher than the proportion of men. For example, 63% of all participants in training within the centers' activity were women. In the Haredi sector an even larger gap was found, with 70% of training participants being women. Among the Arab population the picture is more balanced, but there too the proportion of women participating in training is slightly higher than that of men, at 52%.[18]

The official data regarding the impact of the October 7th war on businesses in general, and on small businesses in particular, is relatively limited, and even the data that has been published does not allow for a systematic examination of the war's unique impact on small businesses owned by women.

A State Comptroller's report published in June 2025, which dealt with the implementation of economic assistance to small businesses in the first months of the war, pointed to a central institutional failure: the absence of a uniform definition of "micro-business" and "small business" among the various state authorities. This gap makes it difficult to create a comprehensive, up-to-date, and relevant database of small businesses, to identify their needs, and to formulate tailored assistance programs. The report also noted that the Tax Authority does not transfer to the Small and Medium Business Agency ongoing information regarding the turnover of small businesses, which limits the Agency's ability to design assistance policy based on up-to-date and reliable data.[19]

Additional information on the war's effects on businesses can be found in a CBS survey published in December 2023. However, the survey relates only to the first two months of the war — October and November 2023 — and does not focus on small businesses and does not include a gender breakdown.[20] Apart from this unique report, the CBS periodically publishes surveys on the demographics of businesses, dealing among other things with business openings, closures, and survival rates. The most recent survey published relates to the years 2021–2023 and therefore does not provide a complete picture of the war's impact on the stock of businesses in Israel.

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[18] The Small and Medium Business Agency, March 2024. Periodic report: Promoting business knowledge as a way to integrate women into establishing and managing a business.

[19] State Comptroller, June 2025. Implementation of economic assistance to small businesses in the first months of the "Swords of Iron" war.

[20] Central Bureau of Statistics, December 2023. Survey of the state of businesses during the "Swords of Iron" war: data from a rapid survey for December 2023.

These information gaps highlight that even after the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis, state institutions still lack a complete, gender-disaggregated picture required for formulating data-based public policy.[21]

A study by the Knesset Research and Information Center published in March 2025 examined the harm to businesses in the northern region as a result of the war. The study's findings showed that the closer businesses were located to the border, the greater the extent of harm. It was also found that small businesses were the sector most significantly affected. In terms of economic sectors, it was found that the sector most harmed was the hospitality and food sector, a field in which many women small-business owners operate — alongside the arts and entertainment sectors.[22] Similar findings also emerged from a report by the "Yozmot Atid" (Future Initiatives) association, published in February 2024, which examined the war's impact on the association's graduates who run small businesses. The report presents the findings of two survey rounds conducted approximately two months and approximately four months after the outbreak of the war (494 respondents in the first round and 565 in the second), from which it emerges that more than half of the respondents in the first round and about 40% in the second round reported a decline of more than 50% in income. The report shows that beyond the damage to income, women small-business owners reported emotional strain and professional uncertainty, and emphasized a need for targeted assistance in business development — mainly in marketing, expanding the customer base, and professional mentoring.[23]

4. Women Small-Business Owners in Crisis Periods: A Survey Among Graduates of the Programs of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's

This section presents the findings of the current study, conducted during 2025 among graduates of the programs of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women.

The study began with a preliminary qualitative stage, which included in-depth interviews with members of the Association's management team as well as with facilitators working within the Association's programs among various population groups and in diverse geographic regions across the country. The purpose of the interviews was to map the central difficulties faced by small-business owners during the COVID-19 crisis and during the October 7th war. From the interviews,

[21] CBS, August 2024. Demography of businesses — survival and movement of businesses 2021–2023.

[22] Knesset Research and Information Center, February 2025. The impact of the "Swords of Iron" war on the state of businesses in the North.

[23] Amit, Ronit. February 2024. The impact of the "Swords of Iron" war on the association's graduates — summary report. Yozmot Atid (Future Initiatives).

conducted during March 2025, the central patterns of harm to businesses and the needs of women during the two crisis periods emerged.[24]

Among the central patterns that emerged from the interviews were periods in which it was not possible to operate the business at all, periods of significant decline in income, the need to make adjustments to the business-activity model — including a shift to digital activity — and difficulties in accessing government assistance. These difficulties stemmed, among other things, from bureaucratic complexity and from a lack of fit between some government assistance tools and the characteristics of micro-businesses. The findings of the qualitative stage were used as the basis for developing a research questionnaire distributed among women graduates of the Association's business-entrepreneurship training programs. The study population includes women aged 20 and above, owning an active business or a business that operated in the past, who experienced the impact of the COVID-19 crisis and/or the impact of the October 7th war on the business's activity.

The questionnaire was distributed during the months of October–December 2025. In addition, the questionnaire also included questions regarding the implications of the days of fighting between Israel and Iran in June 2025 ("Operation Rising Lion") for women small-business owners.

D.1. Research Questionnaire

Based on the preliminary qualitative research described above, an online survey questionnaire was formulated to examine the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, the October 7th war, and the Israel–Iran war in June 2025 on the activity of small businesses owned by women. In addition, questions were included examining the ways in which business owners coped with harm to their activity and income.[25]

The questionnaire included 30 questions and was divided into three main parts: the first part dealt with business characteristics, including the year the business opened, its field and nature of activity, its mode of operation (from home, outside the home, or hybrid), income level, and use of digital platforms. The second part focused on the impact of the crises and coping strategies, and included separate questions for each of the crisis periods.

For each period, the scope of business activity, changes made to business activity, income changes, applications for public assistance, and functional and personal difficulties associated with the crisis period were examined. The third part included questions on personal characteristics of the respondents, including age, education, family status, nationality/ethnicity, religiosity level, and place of residence.

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[24] Interview with the management team of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 6, 2025; interview with the team of facilitators of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 23, 2025.

[25] The data does not include the effects of later security developments in the region, including the war between Israel and Iran that broke out in February 2026.

As described above, the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women operates among various population groups in Israel, including Jewish, Arab, and Haredi women, and the questionnaire was distributed among graduates of the programs from all these groups. Before distributing the questionnaire, a pilot was conducted, administered during July–August 2025, with the participation of about 30 women. Based on the pilot's findings, some of the questions were reformulated and the response options refined.[26]

Following the pilot, an anonymous online questionnaire was distributed during October–December 2025. In total, 267 women participated in the study, and participation was voluntary.[27] The response rate varied among questions, and therefore the number of observations varies between variables and analyses. The analyses are based on the data available for each question, and each finding is presented on the basis of the relevant number of respondents for it.

The quantitative analysis presented below is based on descriptive statistics and is intended to describe central patterns of harm to business activity and coping strategies during the crisis periods.

D.2. Demographic Characteristics and Business-Activity Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

Most respondents are Jewish women, making up 88% of the sample, alongside Arab women at a rate of 12%. Regarding type of locality — 73% of respondents live in Jewish localities, 12.4% in Arab localities, and 14.6% in mixed localities (Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Jerusalem, Haifa, and Akko). This distribution reflects the participation of women from various types of localities, as well as the Association's activity among diverse population groups.

Regarding the October 7th war, most respondents reported that they were not required to leave their homes (67.5%). Among the respondents who did experience a change in residence during the war period, the most common pattern was leaving following evacuation by the state or the local authority (13.4%). This was followed by leaving for short periods (13%) and leaving for personal initiative for an extended period (6.1%).

Regarding religiosity level, most respondents defined themselves as secular (55.8%) or traditional (27.7%), together making up 83.5% of the sample. Alongside them, a smaller proportion defined themselves as religious or Haredi (a definition relating only to the Jewish population).

[26] The pilot data was not included in the final survey.

[27] It is important to note that the study population does not represent all self-employed women in Israel, but rather focuses on women owning micro-businesses who underwent training within the Association, and therefore the findings reflect the experiences and coping patterns of this specific group.

The respondents' ages ranged widely, between 25 and 65. The average age was 43, and the most common age was 39. Regarding family status, most respondents — 61.5% — are married, but a notable proportion — about 20% — are divorced or separated.

In terms of education, the sample is characterized by a high rate of higher education and professional training. 43% of respondents hold academic degrees and 44% hold non-academic professional training. A small proportion of respondents reported only a high-school education or no certification. This educational composition is consistent with statements from the Association's staff, according to which in recent years demand for the training programs has also grown among women with higher education who wish to open a business.[28]

Characteristics of the Businesses Owned by Survey Respondents

Year the Business Was Opened

The founding dates of businesses in the sample span nearly four decades, from 1988 to 2025. Business opening dates were divided into groups in order to distinguish between established businesses opened before the COVID-19 crisis (up to 2017), businesses opened close to the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis (2018–2019), businesses opened during the COVID-19 years (2020–2022), and businesses opened in the last two years (2023–2025), some of them after the outbreak of the October 7th war.

46% of businesses are relatively established, having been founded by 2017. Alongside them, 16% of businesses were founded in 2018–2019, 19% in 2020–2022, and a further 19% in 2023–2025.

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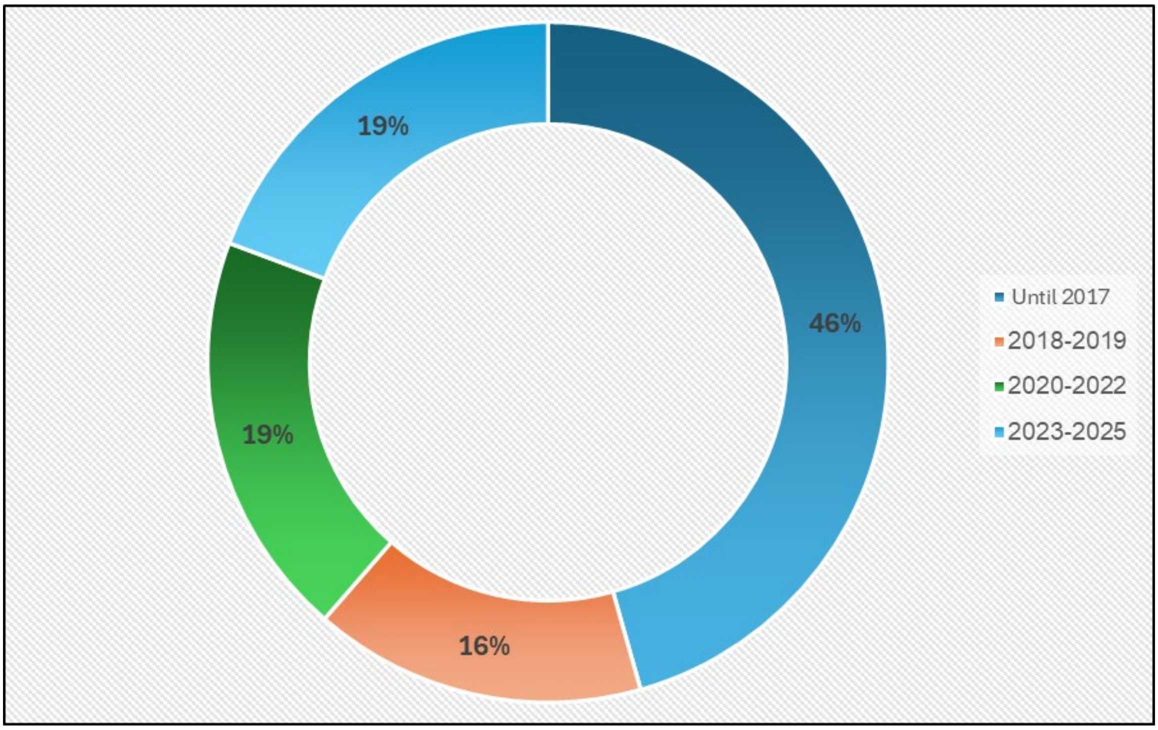
[28] Interview with staff of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 6, 2025.

Figure 2: Year of establishment of the businesses owned by survey respondents



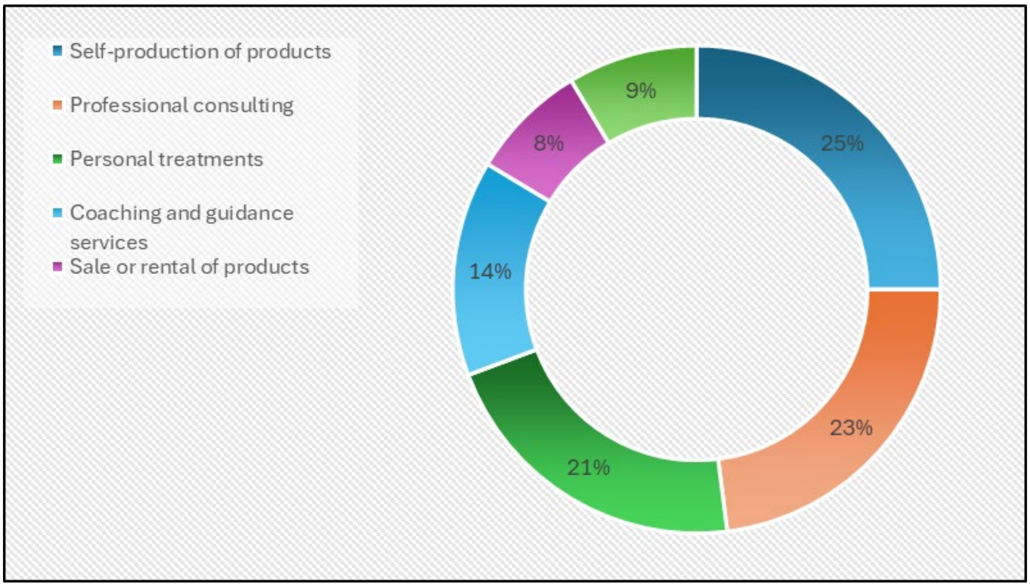
Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

Nature of Business Activity

The nature of business activity in the sample is diverse, distinguishing between the production and sale of products and the provision of various types of services. The highest rate — 25% — was recorded among businesses based on the self-production and sale of products, including handicrafts, food products, cosmetics, clothing, and jewelry. A similar rate — 23% — was recorded among businesses providing professional services, such as design, business consulting, bookkeeping, and social-media management. Alongside these, 21% of businesses provide personal services, including beauty treatments, emotional therapy, and body-mind treatments; and a further 14% engage in coaching, mentoring, tourism, and leisure. The remaining businesses operate in fields such as the sale or rental of products not manufactured by the business owner (8%), or other fields not detailed in the survey (9%).

This distribution of the nature of activity is similar to the findings that emerged in the Association's internal evaluation study from 2020, and indicates consistency between the current survey's findings and the characteristics of the target population as described in the Association's past studies.

Figure 3: Distribution of the small businesses owned by survey respondents, by nature of activity



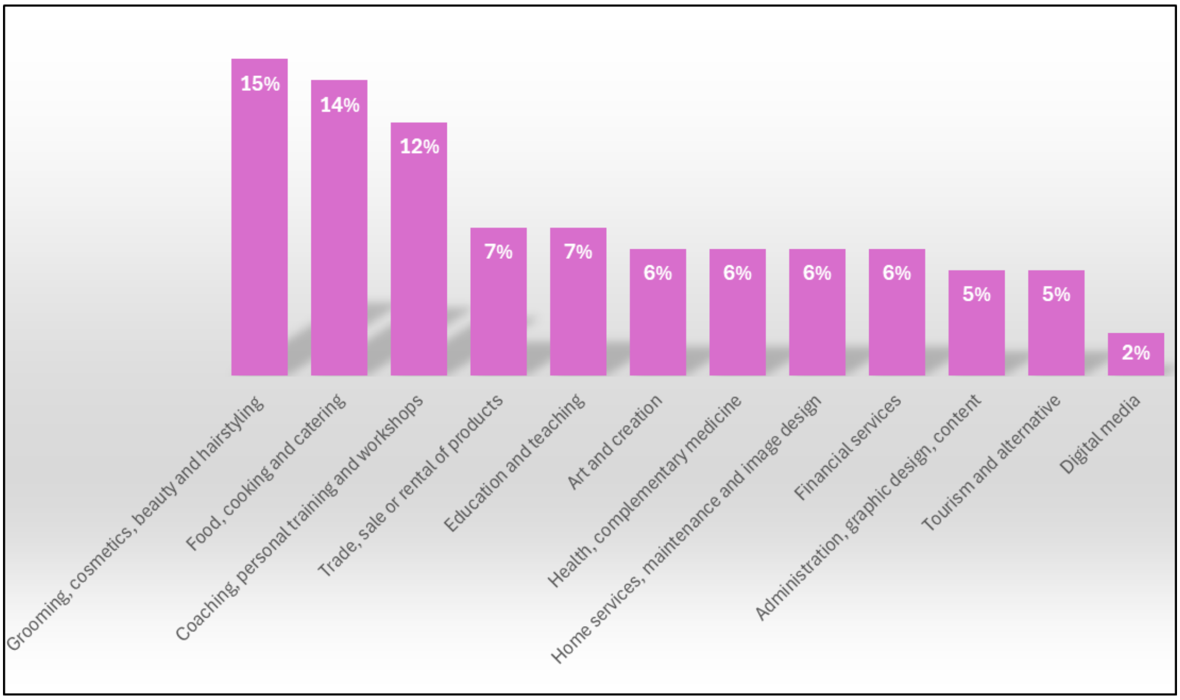
Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

Examining the nature of activity by the year the business opened shows different patterns between periods of establishment. While among businesses opened by 2017 a relatively widespread was recorded among types of activity, with no single dominant field, among businesses opened during the COVID-19 pandemic years (2020–2022) a relatively high proportion of businesses providing professional services was recorded (29.5%). Among businesses opened during the war (2023–2025), a high proportion of businesses engaged in coaching and facilitation stood out (25%), alongside a particularly low proportion of product sales (2.3%).

After presenting the nature of business activity, the distribution of businesses by economic field of activity, as classified in the questionnaire, was also examined.[29] The prominent fields are grooming, cosmetics and beauty (15%); food, cooking and catering (14%); and coaching, personal training and workshops (12%). Alongside these fields, survey respondents also reported businesses in the fields of education and teaching; health and complementary medicine; art and creation; tourism and leisure; and financial, administrative, and digital services. This distribution reflects a concentration of businesses in fields based on the provision of personal services and production, alongside a relatively low proportion of businesses in trade.

[29] The division into fields is based on the definition of the business's central field, as reported by the respondents. In cases of overlap between fields of activity, respondents were asked to choose the field that best represents the main activity of the business.

Figure 4: Economic fields of activity of the businesses owned by survey respondents



Note: The "other" category (9%) is not shown in the figure.

Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

Nature of Activity and Workspace

The nature of activity and workspace of the businesses in the sample is divided between working from home, working from a fixed location outside the home, and combined activity. 44% of businesses operate from home only, 29% operate from a fixed location outside the home, and 27% combine working from home with activity outside the home.

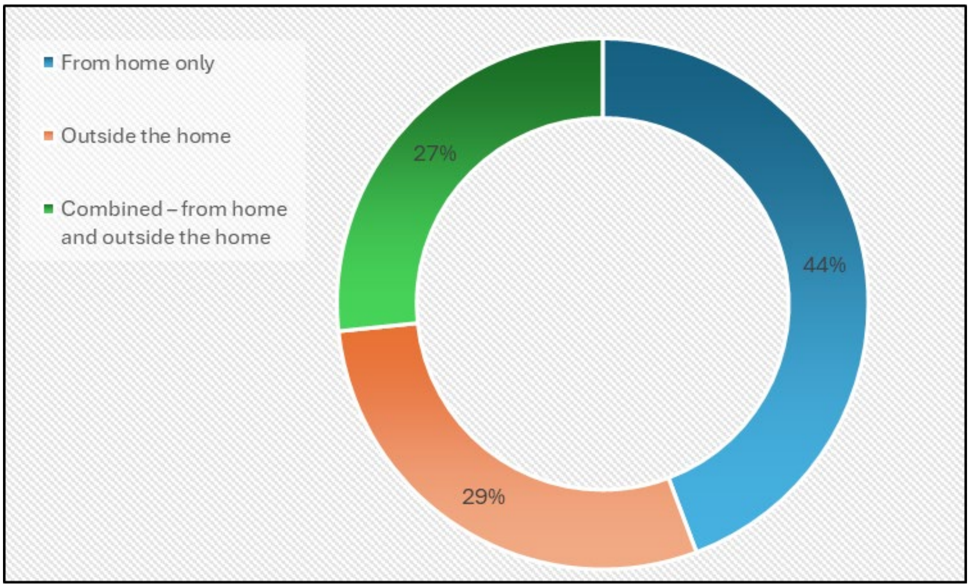
The distribution of workspace by year the business opened shows a clear trend of gradual increase in working from home among newer businesses.[30] While 40% of businesses opened by 2017 operate from home only, this rate rises to 43% among businesses opened during the COVID-19 period (2020–2022) and reaches 57% among businesses opened in 2023–2025.

An examination by nature of activity reveals differences in work-space patterns. Among businesses based on the production and sale of products manufactured by the business owner, most businesses operate from home only (73.8%), while a relatively small proportion operate outside the home or in a combined format. In contrast, businesses providing professional services are characterized by a

[30] The response options for the question on workspace were: working from home, working outside the home, and hybrid work (from home and outside the home). The data presented in this paragraph relates to the proportion of respondents who reported working from home only.

different distribution: more than half operate in a combined format, from home and outside the home (53.6%), and 27% operate from home only.

Figure 5: Workspace of the businesses owned by survey respondents



Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

Use of Digital Media

Among the businesses in the sample, a relatively high proportion of business owners (43%) do not use social media as part of the business's activity, while 57% reported that they operate a business page on digital media. This finding stands out in the current period, in which the use of digital tools in business activity is already well established. Among those who do use digital media, most respondents (73%) reported that using social media contributed to business activity to a great or very great extent.

Income Levels

The distribution of monthly business income in the sample is divided into three main groups, with no dominant concentration in a single group. 32.6% of respondents reported monthly income of up to NIS 5,000. 33.5% reported income in the range of NIS 5,000–8,000, and 33.9% reported monthly income of more than NIS 8,000.

D.3. Damage to Business Activity During Crisis Periods

This chapter presents key characteristics of the harm to the activity of the small businesses owned by survey respondents during three crisis periods: the COVID-19 crisis, the October 7th war, and the war with Iran in June 2025. The findings are presented in aggregate, in order to point to recurring patterns, rather than as a systematic comparison between the periods.

The three crisis periods differ in the characteristics of public regulation: the COVID-19 crisis was accompanied by general lockdowns and extensive restrictions on economic activity. During the war periods, no general lockdowns were imposed, and restrictions on business activity were more limited and targeted.

For the sake of a concise and clear presentation, activity levels were classified into three broad categories: full or nearly full activity, partial activity, and nearly full or full cessation of business activity.

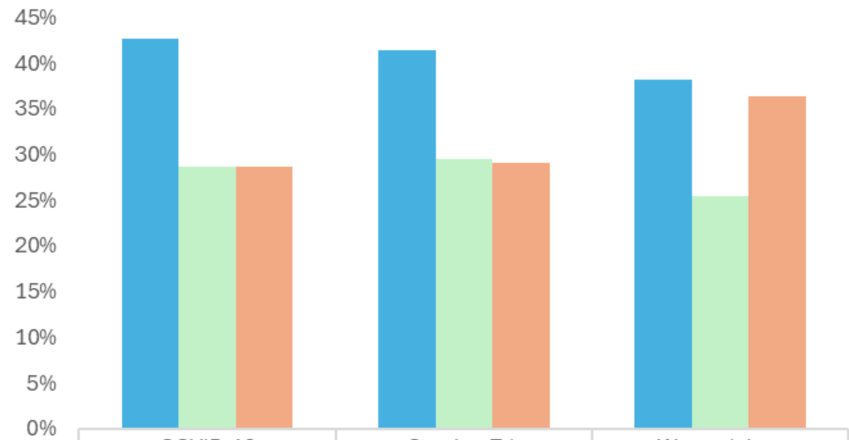
Level of Business Activity During the Crisis

Examining the level of activity of businesses during the three crisis periods shows a similar pattern, despite differences in the nature of the crises and the conditions of public activity in which they occurred. In each of the periods, the proportion of businesses operating at full or nearly full capacity was similar, ranging between 38%–43%. Partial activity was recorded among 25%–30% of businesses, and the proportion of businesses reporting a nearly full or full cessation of business activity stood at 29%–36%. In other words, the activity of about 60% of businesses was adversely affected to some degree during each of the crises.

It should be noted that similar rates of activity cessation do not reflect the duration of the cessation or its geographic spread. The fighting with Iran lasted only about two weeks, while the COVID-19 crisis was characterized by prolonged periods of repeated lockdowns across the entire country. The harm to business activity during the October 7th war was, to a large extent, spatial and differential, but the current sample does not include dedicated representation of businesses from direct combat zones, such as localities in the Gaza envelope and the northern border area.

Figure 6: Business activity during crisis periods: the COVID-19 crisis, the October 7th war, and the war with Iran

As a percentage within each period



	COVID-19	October 7th	War with Iran
Full or nearly full activity	43%	41%	38%
Partial activity	29%	30%	25%
Full or nearly full cessation	29%	29%	36%

Note: The data is based on respondents who reported that the business was operating during the crisis period: N=171 for COVID-19, N=210 for the October 7th war, and N=220 for the war with Iran. Respondents who indicated that they did not have a business during the relevant period are not included in the calculation.

Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

Changes in Business Operation

Examining the changes made by business owners during the crisis periods shows that in about half of cases there was no change in the mode of business activity. The proportion of respondents who reported that they did not change their mode of activity stood at 51% during the COVID-19 crisis; 52% during the October 7th war; and 59% during the fighting with Iran.

Among respondents who did make a change, the changes made were similar across periods and focused mainly on targeted adjustments. Among the changes made, a change in products or services was the most common — at a rate of 17%–20%; followed by a shift to digital activity at a rate of 12%–17%; and a change in customer base, recorded at a rate of 11%–13% of all respondents. During the fighting with Iran as well, a shift to digital activity was reported among some business owners, at a rate similar to that found in previous crisis periods. As noted, this finding relates to the existence of a media page for the business and does not necessarily reflect a change in the digital mode of operation of business activity.

One of the Association's staff members addressed the changes made during the COVID-19 crisis period in an interview:

> "Most switched to deliveries, adapted the business to a new product that could be sold online or by courier — all this also to cover fixed expenses.

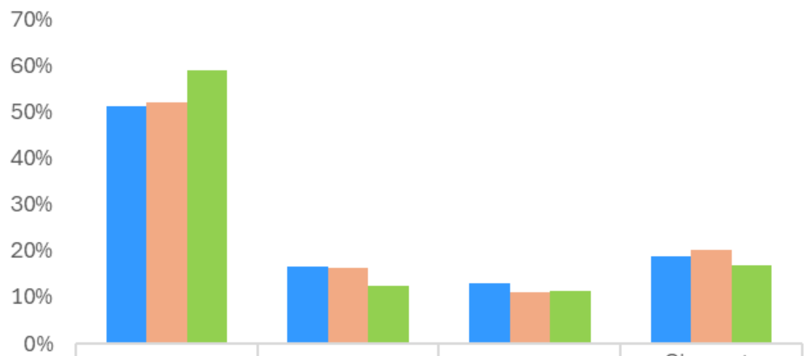
There were businesses that closed because they couldn't cover their expenses. In any case there was a decline in sales."[31]

Regarding the shift to digital business activity during the crisis period, one of the Association's program facilitators noted the difficulty of this transition, and addressed the strategies adopted by those who did not succeed in it:

"Those who had the human and financial resources, and the headspace and ability to cope — we helped them develop digital sales platforms. Those who didn't succeed, simply had no work. Unless, you know, we live in small localities, so within the locality they did their own marketing. The target audience changed, or expanded, or they tried to adapt it to what was available, to whomever they could reach."[32]

Figure 7: Changes in business operation during crisis periods: the COVID-19 crisis, the October 7th war, and the war with Iran

As a percentage within each period



	No change made	Shift to digital	Change in customer base	Change in products and/or services
COVID-19	51%	17%	13%	19%
October 7th	52%	16%	11%	20%
War with Iran	59%	12%	11%	17%

Note: The calculation is based on respondents who reported that they had a business operating during the crisis period. For COVID-19 the number of respondents stood at

Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

Changes in Business Income

Examining changes in income during the crisis periods indicates widespread harm to business income. In all three crisis periods, 64%–70% of business owners

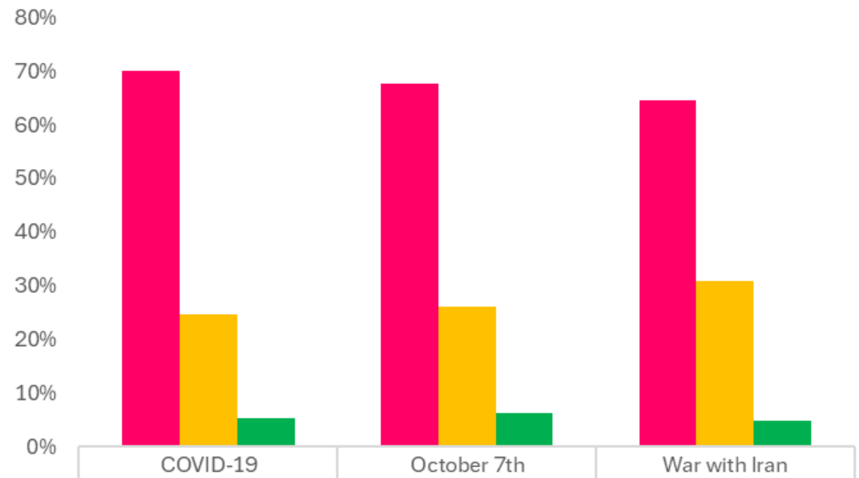
[31] Interview with staff of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 6, 2025.

[32] Interview with the team of facilitators of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 23, 2025.

reported a decline in income. A quarter to a third of respondents reported that income remained unchanged, while an increase in income was recorded at only low rates.

Figure 8: Changes in business income during crisis periods: the COVID-19 crisis, the October 7th war, and the war with Iran

As a percentage within each period



	COVID-19	October 7th	War with Iran
Income decreased	70%	68%	64%
No change	25%	26%	31%
Income increased	5%	6%	5%

Note: The calculation is based on respondents who reported that they had a business operating during the crisis period.

Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

Examining the proportion of businesses that reported a decline in income by nature of business activity shows that in all three crisis periods, harm to income was recorded across all fields of activity.

The highest rates of decline were recorded among businesses in the fields of coaching, mentoring, tourism and leisure, as well as among businesses providing personal treatments, with the proportion reporting a decline in income in these fields standing at 74%–81%. The lowest rates of decline were recorded among businesses providing professional services, in the range of 46%–60%. Rates of reporting a decline in income were similar, in each of the crisis periods, between those who operated a media page and those who did not.

Table 3: Proportion of businesses reporting a decline in income, by nature of business activity, in each of the crisis periods

	COVID-19	**October 7th War**	**War with Iran**
Self-production of products	69%	68%	62%
Sales or rental of products	56%	50%	47%
Personal treatments	80%	74%	75%

	COVID-19	October 7th War	War with Iran
Coaching and guidance services	81%	77%	78%
Professional consulting	54%	60%	46%

Notes:

1. The calculation is based on respondents who reported that they had business operation during the crisis period;

2. Does not include respondents who classified their business as "other";

3. The response options for the question on income change were: sharp decline, moderate decline, no change, moderate increase, and sharp increase. For the purposes of the analysis, the "sharp decline" and "moderate decline" responses were grouped into a single category of income decline.

4. The table shows the proportion of respondents reporting a decline in income out of all respondents who had a business operating in each crisis period;

Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

D.4. Assistance and Grants During Crisis Periods

Applying for a Government Grant

A comparison between the COVID-19 period and the October 7th war period shows a similarity in the scope of harm to business activity. In both periods, about two-thirds of businesses reported harm (68% during the COVID-19 crisis and 63% during the war). This similarity is notable given the differences between the nature of the crises, and especially the absence of a general lockdown during the war period. The similarity between the periods may suggest that coping with the COVID-19 crisis did not significantly reduce the scope of harm during the war period.

A similarity between the two periods is also evident in examining patterns of applying for assistance among businesses that were harmed. In both periods, about half of the businesses that were harmed applied for and received a grant (51% during the COVID-19 period and 50% during the war period), alongside 39%–42% who did not apply for assistance at all. The proportion of respondents who reported applying but not receiving a grant, as well as the proportion of respondents who indicated that they wanted to apply but did not know how, remained low and similar between the periods.

Table 4: Manner of applying for a grant during the COVID-19 crisis and the October 7th war

	COVID-19	October 7th War
Business was not harmed	32%	37%
Business was harmed	68%	63%
Total	100%	100%
Of businesses that were harmed:		

	COVID-19	October 7th War
Applied and received a grant	51%	50%
Did not apply	39%	42%
Applied but did not receive a grant	5%	6%
Wanted to apply but did not know how or whom to contact	4%	2%
Total	N=119, 100%	N=129, 100%

Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

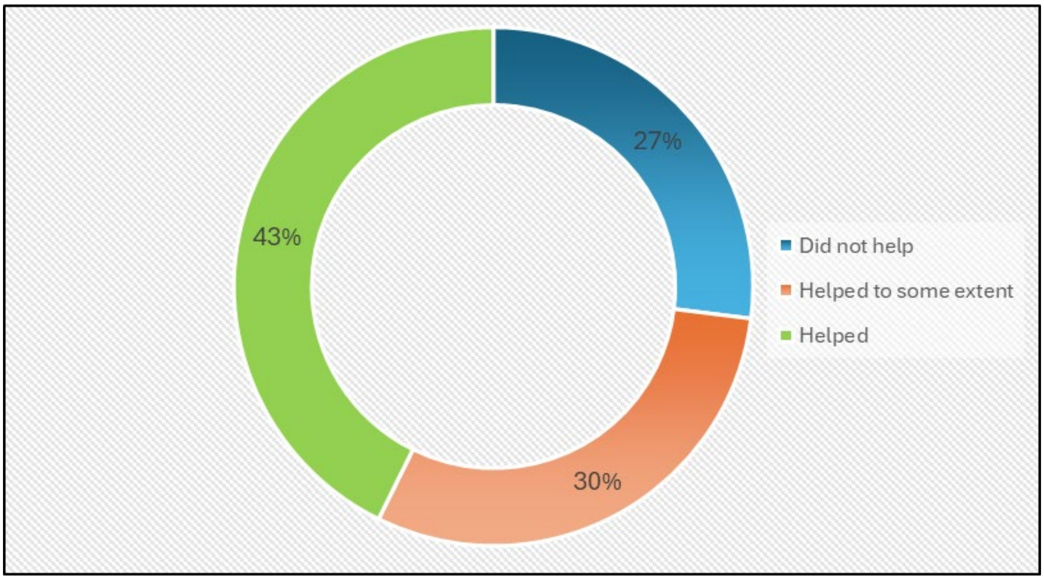
Regarding the contribution of the assistance grant, among respondents who received a grant, 43% reported that the assistance contributed to business activity to a great or very great extent; 30% reported that the assistance contributed to some extent; while 27% reported that the assistance contributed to a small extent or not at all.

Regarding the criteria for receiving a grant, one survey respondent addressed this in an open-ended question, noting the problem of calculating grant eligibility based on changes in the business's gross income during the crisis, as opposed to examining profitability levels, given the rise in business expenses during the crisis period:

> "If the authorities had considered the profitability factor and not only gross income, they would have understood that although the gross figure rose, profitability declined due to selling products online — meaning higher operating costs."[33]

[33] Response to an open-ended question in the Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

Figure 9: Contribution of the grant during the COVID-19 period and/or the October 7th war to business activity



Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

An examination of the period in which the business opened shows differences in access to grants between established and new businesses. Among businesses opened by 2017, about half (49%) of business owners received assistance, compared with only about a quarter among businesses opened during and after the COVID-19 period. However, when assistance was received, no difference was found in reports of its contribution between owners of established businesses and owners of newer businesses.

Assistance from the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women

The respondents in the study are graduates of courses run by the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, who have been exposed over time to its activity and services. Nevertheless, during the crisis period only some of the respondents actually made use of the Association (39% of all respondents). The largest group among them made use of lectures or written materials (54%) and group forums (33%), while requesting personal consulting was reported at a lower rate (13%).

Some of the business owners who participated in the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, or took part in consulting offered by the Association's facilitators, used the crisis periods to invest in business development and make lasting changes to their business. For example, one of the Association's program facilitators related in an interview:

> "There are some I saw who used this period [COVID-19] to improve their professionalism — they took more courses and certifications and explored more directions, and there are some who specifically looked at how to cut expenses. During the war period too, [the women] knew this was our new reality, and then they started reinventing the wheel and

> finding more directions… Some very good things came out of it — out of the crises, they actually grew."[34]

One of the Association's staff members specifically noted the assistance the Association gave women business owners in obtaining the grants due to them during the crisis periods:

> "Another challenge was how to receive grants from the state. We gave lectures about this on Zoom, and the facilitators gave private consulting sessions to help with the bureaucracy."[35]

D.5. Types of Difficulties Experienced by Business Owners

Respondents were asked to rate the level of difficulty they experienced in various areas of their lives during the crisis periods. The level of difficulty was measured on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates women who experienced no difficulty at all and 5 indicates a very high level of difficulty experienced. For the purpose of comparison between the periods, average ratings were calculated for each area. The data shows that in all the areas examined, there was an increase in the average level of difficulty during the war period compared with the COVID-19 period.

Among the areas examined, emotional difficulty was the highest in both periods. During the COVID-19 period, the average emotional difficulty stood at 2.38, and it rose to 2.84 during the war period. This finding aligns with the findings of the interviews, in which emotional difficulties and a need for psychological support emerged, in particular feelings of anxiety and uncertainty during the war period.

The interviews also revealed differences in coping patterns between the different periods and among women from different groups, alongside evidence that the Association's facilitators themselves also had to cope with emotional and operational burdens during this period. For example, one of the Association's staff members noted in an interview with the research team:

> "During COVID there was no choice — everyone knew the businesses were closed. During the war there was a sense that there was also a personal choice: am I personally able to continue, do I need to close in order to be with the children, or [because I've been] evacuated. During the war, the story was different for Jewish and Arab women. For Arab women it was harder to say they needed help. Among the Jewish women, every conversation began with a statement about the difficulty and the need for assistance."[36]

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[34] Interview with the team of facilitators of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 23, 2025.

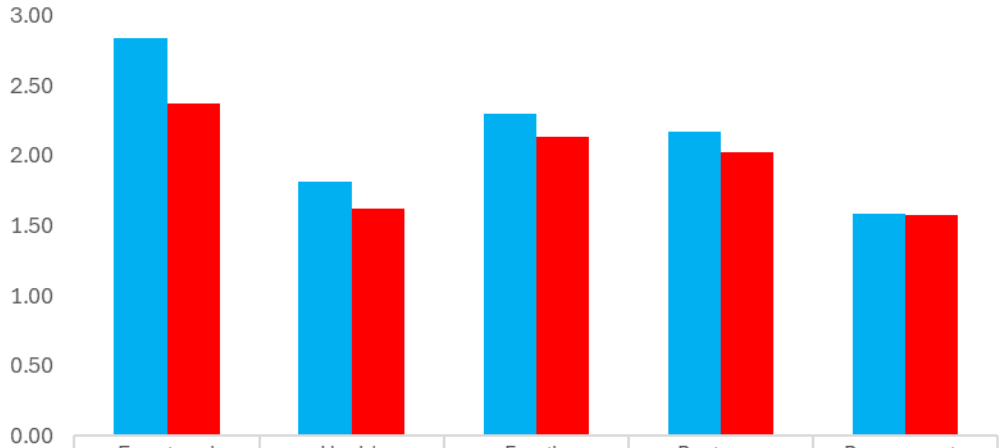
[35] Interview with staff of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 6, 2025.

[36] Interview with staff of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 6, 2025.

Regarding the differences between the conduct of Jewish and Arab women business owners during the war period, another staff member noted that:

> "Among the Arab women there was a kind of shame in projecting business-as-usual, when people are being killed and have no food. Many women didn't post content on Instagram at all, didn't market at all. They said: 'We won't market until there's a ceasefire.'"[37]

Figure 10: Average reported level of difficulty, by area and crisis period



	Emotional	Health	Family	Business	Bureaucratic
October 7th	2.84	1.81	2.30	2.17	1.58
COVID-19	2.38	1.62	2.14	2.02	1.57

Note: The calculation is based on respondents who reported having an active business during the crisis period.

Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

D.6. Needs That Emerged and Policy Implications

In examining the types of assistance that could have helped during the crisis period, more than a third of respondents indicated that they suffered no harm and had no need for assistance (37.3%). Among respondents who reported a need for assistance, the most common need cited, beyond financial assistance, was emotional and community support (22.4%). Additional needs cited at relatively similar rates included professional guidance in sales (13.2%), information about loans and grants (12.3%), and personal mentoring (10.1%). In contrast, assistance with financial management was cited at a relatively low rate (3.9%).

The need for emotional and community support stood out especially during the war period. In interviews with the Association's staff, the impact of the war on the emotional and personal capacity to run a business stood out, as did the contribution of emotional and community support to continued business activity:

[37] Interview with staff of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 6, 2025.

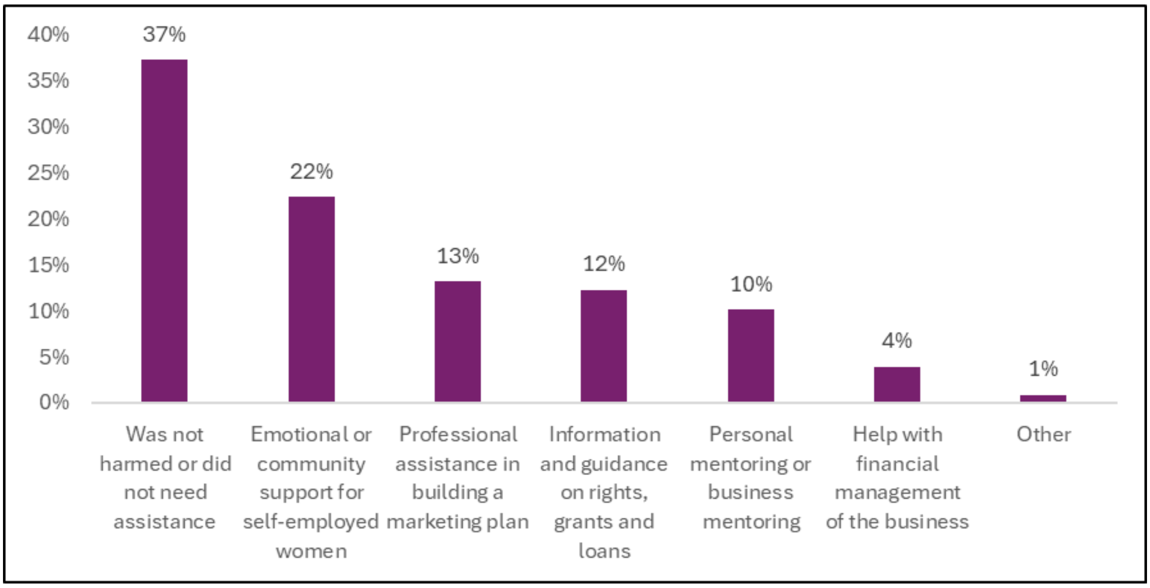
"Unlike COVID, [during the war period] many women sought empowerment because personal morale was low. 'The mental state was awful, politically and morale-wise.' They needed to hold onto something in order to help themselves. This is what brought them to the courses [of the Association], where the women sought help to get back on their feet and to run their business."[38]

Regarding the need for community support in creating business networks among business owners, as well as for business assistance in developing digital platforms, one survey respondent noted, in the open-ended question, that:

"I would have appreciated help setting up a website, and I also think that strengthening real, well-invested networking among business owners is good."[39]

Another respondent also noted the need to promote networking meetings, with an emphasis on creating meetings among women from within the same population group — in this case, among Haredi women.[40]

Figure 11: Desired types of assistance



Source: Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

[38] Interview with staff of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women, March 6, 2025.

[39] Response to an open-ended question in the Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

[40] Response to an open-ended question in the Adva Center survey among graduates of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's programs, 2025.

5. Summary and Recommendations

This study examined how women small-business owners in Israel coped with economic crises, focusing on the COVID-19 crisis and the October 7th war.

The study is based on a survey among women who established or operated small businesses and underwent training within the programs of the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women. Most of the businesses owned by survey participants are small independent businesses that do not employ workers, and rely mainly on self-financing. The prominent fields in which these businesses operate are grooming, cosmetics and beauty; food, cooking and catering; and coaching, personal training and workshops — fields that tend to be especially hard-hit during periods of crisis.

The international literature points to particularly high vulnerability of women-owned businesses in times of crisis. Among the central factors for this are concentration in vulnerable sectors, limited access to credit, heavy reliance on personal savings, an increased burden of family responsibility during emergencies, and relatively limited business networks. However, unlike international studies that provide gender-disaggregated data on businesses, in Israel systematic data on small businesses owned by women is not collected, which makes it difficult to examine the scope of harm to women-owned businesses and to design data-based assistance policy.

The findings of the survey conducted as part of this study show that during the economic crises that occurred in Israel following COVID-19 and the October 7th war, most business owners experienced considerable harm to their income, and in some cases even a complete halt of business activity. Many participants were forced to reduce their business activity, especially when the activity was based on direct contact with customers. Alongside the economic harm, the women also described a sense of ongoing uncertainty, difficulty in future planning, and psychological burnout stemming from the combination of business responsibility and family responsibility during emergencies.

The survey also examined adaptation strategies adopted by some business owners in order to maintain business activity. Among the prominent strategies that emerged: shifting to online activity, adapting products and services to new needs, and diversifying target audiences. However, the study shows that only about half of business owners managed to make adaptations of this kind, partly because these are steps that require financial resources as well as professional knowledge, consulting, and support — resources that were not always available to them.

The findings also indicate that access to government assistance was limited for a significant portion of participants, due among other things to complex bureaucracy, criteria not suited to micro-businesses, or lack of information. The survey conducted as part of this study shows that about 42%–43% of women whose businesses were harmed during the COVID-19 crisis or during the October 7th war did not apply for a grant, or wanted to apply but did not know how, and a further 5%–6% applied but did not receive the grant. According to the Association for the Economic Empowerment of Women's facilitators, there was high demand for the assistance the Association offered in the grant-application process, but the survey shows that many women were not aware of this option.

The central contribution of this study is in presenting the coping experience of women small-business owners during crisis periods. The findings indicate that these women's ability to cope with crisis periods depends not only on economic factors, but also on social resources and institutional support. In this way, the study expands the understanding of the unique vulnerability of small-business owners and highlights the importance of gender-tailored support mechanisms.

In sum, the study's findings indicate that women small-business owners in Israel operate within a business framework that is especially vulnerable in times of crisis. A combination of structural gender gaps, the characteristics of micro-businesses, and assistance policy that is not fully suited to their needs intensifies their vulnerability. As one survey respondent wrote in the concluding open-ended question dealing with the difficulties women face in managing a small business during periods of crisis: "Unfortunately, the struggles are endless."

In light of the study's findings, and in order to help women small-business owners cope with crisis periods, it is recommended to act in the following directions:

1. **Improve the small-business data system with a gender breakdown**

Systematic data on small businesses should be collected and published with a gender breakdown, including by business size, sector of activity, and income. As part of this, and in accordance with the recommendations included in the State Comptroller's report of June 2025, state authorities should improve the transfer of ongoing information on the status of small businesses from the Tax Authority to the Small and Medium Business Agency. In addition, a unified database should be created to enable the Agency to formulate data-based policy measures to assist small businesses, especially during crisis periods.

2. **Develop a rapid compensation mechanism for emergency situations**

A rapid compensation mechanism for emergency situations should be promoted, based on income and as well as profit data, in order to ensure the provision of sufficient and rapid assistance to small-business owners who have been harmed, and to reduce the considerable uncertainty that characterizes these periods.

3. **Adapt grant eligibility conditions for small businesses**

Eligibility conditions for government grants provided during crisis periods should be adapted to fit businesses with low turnover that do not employ workers. In particular, the possibility of providing compensation based also on profits, and not only on revenue turnover, should be examined, given the understanding that during crisis periods there is sometimes an increase in the expenses required to continue business activity, such as a shift to digital activity or delivery systems. In addition, assistance mechanisms should be examined from a gender perspective as well, with metrics established to examine the rate of utilization of assistance among women-owned businesses.

4. **Expand assistance for online commerce and digital marketing**

In order to encourage the business development of women small-business owners, especially during crisis periods, efforts should be made to expand assistance, subsidy, and training mechanisms in the fields of online commerce, digital marketing, and management of online sales platforms. This assistance should be provided broadly through a state body — such as the Small and Medium Business Agency. In addition, this assistance should be directed especially to women small-business owners who were economically harmed during crisis periods, through a public campaign and proactive outreach that ensures high utilization rates.

5. **Strengthening professional networks and business cooperation**

In order to strengthen the business capabilities of women small-business owners, efforts should be made to develop business networking frameworks among small-business owners operating in the same field of activity or the same geographic area. Such frameworks can contribute to expanding business opportunities, professional cooperation, and access to knowledge and resources.

The study's findings indicate that small businesses owned by women constitute a significant part of Israel's economic and social fabric, but are more vulnerable in times of crisis. Given the contribution of these businesses to employment, livelihoods, and strengthening the economic resilience of families and communities, it is important to develop public policy that recognizes their unique characteristics and provides them with tailored responses. Strengthening support mechanisms for small businesses owned by women — through improved access to information, adapted assistance tools, and expanded training and business-mentoring infrastructure — may not only help in coping with future crises, but also contribute to strengthening the local economy and promoting equal opportunity in the labor market.