DANUBE • 16(4) • pp. 367–383
DOI: 10.2478/danb-2025-0019

sciendo Danube

Gender, Self-Employment and Motivational Factors in a Slovak Context

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to examine and analyze the relationship between gender motivation for self-employment in the Slovak Republic. The article examines potential differences in motivational factors for entering self-employment between men and women based on 13 motivational factors, which were divided into two categories: "pull" and "push". For the evaluation of the data from the primary questionnaire survey in which more than 300 respondents were involved, we used the Jamovi statistical software, while for statistical testing we used the Mann-Whitney U test. Our results showed that statistically significant differences exist in the two evaluated factors (I wanted better working conditions, I had the opportunity to get the resources to start a business). We did not demonstrate statistical significance between men and women in the other evaluated motivational factors for self-employment. In the aggregate statistical testing of the influence of pull and push factors by taking gender into account, we also did not demonstrate statistical significance. However, our results indicate that the respondents were motivated to start a business more by pull factors.

Keywords

Self-Employment, Gender, Motivation, Push Factors, Pull Factors

I. Introduction

The dynamic development of small and medium-sized enterprises is one of the basic prerequisites for the healthy economic development of the country. Small and medium-sized enterprises in Slovakia account for 99.9% of the total number of business entities,

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provide employment opportunities for almost three quarters of the active workforce and contribute more than half of the added value in the corporate economy. Almost 97% of SMEs and up to 97.4% of all active businesses were micro-enterprises in 2023. In absolute terms, this amounts to 650 533 entities. The structure of business entities was further complemented by small enterprises with a share of 2.0% (13 674 in absolute terms) and medium-sized enterprises with the smallest share of 0.4% or 2 731 entities. The share of large enterprises in the total number of active business entities remained unchanged from previous years at 0.1%, i.e. 668 entities in absolute terms. Micro-enterprises (including the self-employed) account for the largest share of employment in the long term. In 2023, their share was 47.7%. Interestingly, the share of small enterprises (13.0%) and medium-sized enterprises (14.1%) was considerably lower. Large enterprises accounted for more than a quarter of employment in the business economy (25.2%) (Slovak Business Agency, 2024).

Within this structure, self-employment plays an important role, often perceived as a path to economic independence and flexibility (Taylor and Walley, 2004; Zapkau et al., 2017). Although self-employment is a widespread form of entrepreneurship, the motivations for engaging in it vary according to gender, as confirmed by several international studies (Šahin, 2018; Dawson and Henley, 2012).

The term "self-employed" is used to characterize any individual who establishes, runs, and possibly enhances a new business venture (Taylor and Walley, 2004). Some authors extend this concept to those who have bought out or inherited a business (Johnson et al., 2003). According to Zapkau et al. (2017), self-employment involves three distinct stages: (1) the development of self-employment intention (Krueger, 1993), (2) investment during the gestation period (Carter et al., 1996), and (3) self-employment behavior and outcome success (Kessler and Frank, 2009).

Self-employment is a prevalent means of earning income in Slovakia and across the European Union. While it is often seen as an economically independent activity related to entrepreneurship, not all self-employment qualifies as entrepreneurship. Blackburn and Smallbone (2008) suggest that research on self-employment should begin with an investigation into self-employment motivation, which is influenced by social, economic, psychological, cultural, and societal norms (Duchéneaut and Orhan, 2000).

Social feminist theory posits that males and females approach business problems differently, with women often facing greater challenges in raising capital (Black, 1989; Eisenstein, 1981). Additionally, while females may display lower performance compared to males in some contexts, this does not imply inherent lower capabilities but highlights gender-based issues in resource acquisition and financial management (Black, 1989). Liberal feminist theory advocates for gender equality, arguing that inequality arises from unequal opportunities (Ahl, 2006; Greer and Greene, 2003).

Research indicates significant differences in self-employment motivation between genders. For instance, Šahin (2018) found that men are often more motivated by financial goals, while women prioritize personal growth and family. Coleman (2019) states that women often face greater difficulties accessing finance, although they may exhibit higher self-

employment self-efficacy (Wilson, 2007). Furthermore, gender diversity within firms can influence self-employment motivation, as suggested by Smith (2014).

The topic of the study is the subject of growing interest among both experts and policy-makers, as it relates to the promotion of entrepreneurship and gender equality (Ahl, 2006; Marlow and McAdam, 2013). However, in the Slovak context, there is a lack of empirical analyses that systematically examine whether men and women differ in their reasons for entering self-employment. This gap is critical because without knowledge of specific motivations, it is not possible to effectively set up measures to support women's entrepreneurship. Existing studies focus mainly on foreign environments (Humbert and Drew, 2010; Lingappa and Rodrigues, 2023), while Slovak conditions have been little researched. Furthermore, the literature points to inconsistent conclusions about the prevailing "push" (necessity) and "pull" (opportunity) factors among women (Hughes, 2003; Orhan and Scott, 2001). Our study therefore responds to this gap and presents the first empirical findings from Slovakia.

The aim of this study is to analyse gender differences in motivations for entering self-employment in the Slovak Republic, with a particular emphasis on pull and push factors. The following research questions arise from this aim:

* Are there differences between men and women in the individual motivational factors for entering self-employment?
* Do women and men differ in the overall level of push and pull motivations?
* Which factors show the greatest gender differences and what are their possible explanations based on the literature?

In order to achieve the set aim, we conducted a questionnaire survey in 2022. We obtained data from 306 respondents – self-employed (210 men, 96 women). Motivations for entrepreneurship were rated on a Likert scale (1–5) and analysed using the Mann-Whitney U test in Jamovi software. The factors were divided into "push" and "pull" according to the GEM model (Lingappa and Rodrigues, 2023).

The study is based on the concept of push/pull motivation (Moore and Buttner, 1997; Duchéneaut and Orhan, 2000), which distinguishes between negative external pressures (push) and positive opportunities (pull). This framework is key to understanding gender differences in entrepreneurial decisions.

II. Literature Review

Theoretical Background: Motivation and Self-Employment. Entrepreneurial motivation is widely recognised as a central driver of business creation, performance, and growth (Shane et al., 2003; Laguir and Den Besten, 2016). Motivational theories, including McClelland's concept of the need for achievement, argue that individuals (particularly women) may be driven to self-employment by aspirations for accomplishment and personal efficacy (Panday and Sharma, 2022). Differences in entrepreneurial outcomes between men and women have been linked to variations in motivational patterns, perceived constraints in resource acquisition, and divergent thresholds for business expansion (Maehr, 1974; Humbert and Drew, 2010; Lee and Marvel, 2014). These findings support the need for a deeper understanding of how gender shapes motivations toward self-employment.

Push and Pull Motivations in the Self-Employment Context. The distinction between push and pull factors has become a dominant framework for understanding why individuals enter self-employment (Humbert and Drew, 2010; Dawson and Henley, 2012). Pull factors relate to positive attractions such as autonomy, self-realisation, financial expectations, or the identification of a market gap (Verheul et al., 2002; Marlow and McAdam, 2013). Push factors refer to adverse conditions, including unemployment, job dissatisfaction, redundancies, or lack of alternative employment opportunities (Aldrich and Cliff, 2003; Carter et al., 2003; Laspita et al., 2012).

Although the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) distinguishes between opportunity (pull) and necessity (push) entrepreneurship, numerous studies argue that motivations are often mixed and multidimensional (Alexandre et al., 2019; Giacomin et al., 2011; Mehtap et al., 2019; Pascher et al., 2015). Research further demonstrates that the economic implications of necessity- and opportunity-driven entrepreneurship differ, though the relationship is highly context-dependent (Acs et al., 2005; Cervelló-Royo et al., 2020; Calderon et al., 2017). This variability reinforces the importance of examining motivational factors within specific national and socio-economic environments.

The table 1 highlights the relative importance of these factors in influencing women's decisions to become self-employed, providing a comprehensive overview of the motivations behind their entrepreneurial endeavours.

Table 1: Key motivational factors for women

Pull factors	**Push factors**
autonomy and independence	dissatisfaction in the labour market
personal satisfaction and success	the need for a higher income
the dream of entrepreneurship	redundancies
a gap in the market	unemployment
seeking a challenge	last chance
rejection of stereotypical female identities	

Source: Own elaboration according to Humbert and Drew (2010)

Gender-Specific Motivational Patterns. A substantial stream of research highlights the unique motivational drivers of women in self-employment. Women are frequently motivated by autonomy, independence, personal fulfilment, and work-life balance (Goffee and Scase, 1985; Marlow, 1997; Moore and Buttner, 1997; Duchéneaut and Orhan, 2000; Tlaiss, 2015; Agarwal et al., 2018; Cho et al., 2019; Shastri et al., 2019).

However, push factors also play a prominent role in women's decisions. Structural labour-market barriers, such as the "glass ceiling", exclusion from informal business networks, and limited access to flexible work arrangements, can push women toward self-employment as an alternative career path (Moore and Buttner, 1997; Mattis, 2004; Orhan and Scott, 2001; Belle and La Valle, 2003). Furthermore, women often seek self-employment due to challenges in returning to the labour market after maternity or caregiving (Sarri and

Trihopoulou, 2004), or due to sudden changes in household economic circumstances (Campbell, 1994).
Family business tradition is also identified as an important pull factor, sometimes more pronounced among women (Chell, 2007). These findings suggest that gendered pathways into self-employment are shaped both by personal motivations and by structural conditions.

Mixed Evidence on Gender Differences in Push/Pull Dynamics. Despite claims that women are more frequently driven by push factors due to their weaker position in the labour market (Hughes, 2003), existing evidence remains inconclusive. Some studies report a higher prevalence of necessity-driven motivations among women (Kjeldsen and Nielsen, 2000), while others find no meaningful differences in the dominance of push or pull factors between genders (Orhan and Scott, 2001; Sarri and Trihopoulou, 2004).
Similarly, gender differences in business scale and growth have been attributed to underlying differences in motivation, access to resources, and entrepreneurial constraints (Cooper et al., 1989; Cliff, 1998; Carter et al., 2003). These inconsistencies underscore the importance of more context-specific analyses that can capture national labour-market conditions, institutional settings, and socio-cultural norms.

Identified Research Gap and Relevance for the Slovak Context. Although the international literature provides extensive insights into gendered motivations and push/pull dynamics, there is a clear lack of empirical research examining these patterns in the Slovak Republic. Existing studies seldom compare men and women systematically, and most do not analyse motivational factors through the established push/pull framework.
Moreover, as Lingappa and Rodrigues (2023) reveal, more than half of studies on women's entrepreneurial motivation do not apply an explicit theoretical model, illustrating the need for further conceptual clarity. This gap is particularly relevant in Slovakia, where gender inequalities in the labour market, caregiving norms, and differences in employment flexibility may substantially shape entrepreneurial motivations – yet remain understudied.

Implications for the Present Study. Building on the theoretical foundations and empirical findings summarised above, the present study addresses this research gap by examining gender differences in self-employment motivation in Slovakia using a structured push/pull framework. By analysing 13 motivational factors and comparing men and women directly, the study offers evidence on whether gendered patterns identified internationally also manifest in the Slovak context.

III. Data and Methodology

We conducted a primary quantitative study using a structured questionnaire administered in November and December 2022. To ensure that the target population was correctly captured, the questionnaire was distributed by trained student interviewers who were instructed to approach only individuals engaged in self-employment on the basis of a trade authorization (hereafter referred to as sole traders).

A total of 306 valid responses were collected (210 men and 96 women). As the sampling procedure followed a convenience approach, the sample is not statistically representative of the population of Slovak sole traders. Consequently, our findings should be interpreted as exploratory and indicative rather than generalizable to the entire self-employed population. The dataset includes information on respondents' demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, education, family status, and region of residence. The largest age group was 41–50 years (33.01%), and the most common education level was secondary education with a school-leaving certificate (53.11%). Married and single individuals dominated among men, while women were more frequently single or divorced. Most respondents operated in the Banská Bystrica and Žilina regions.

Table 2: Structure of respondents

		Males		Females		Total	
		N	%	N	%	N	%
Age	Less than 20 years	5	2.38	0	0	5	1.63
	20–25 years	51	24.29	17	17.71	68	22.22
	26–30 years	29	13.81	9	9.38	38	12.42
	31–40 years	34	16.19	21	21.87	55	17.97
	41–50 years	64	30.48	37	38.54	101	33.01
	51–60 years	19	9.05	8	8.33	27	8.82
	More than 60 years	8	3.9	4	4.17	12	3.93
	Total	210	100	96	100	306	100
Highest completed education	basic (completed primary school)	1	0.48	0	0	1	0.33
	secondary education without school leaving certificate	35	16.75	3	3.13	38	12.46
	secondary education with school leaving certificate	115	55.02	47	48.96	162	53.11
	university education	58	27.75	46	47.91	104	34.1
	Total	209	100	96	100	305	100
Family status	married	96	45.93	36	37.5	132	43.28
	single	96	45.93	42	43.75	138	45.25
	divorced	16	7.66	17	17.71	33	10.82
	widowed	1	0.48	1	1.04	2	0.66
	Total	209	100	96	100	305	100.01

Source: Own elaboration

These descriptive characteristics help contextualize the sample but are not used as control variables in the statistical analysis, as the study focuses specifically on gender differences in motivational factors. The more detailed structure of respondents by gender, education, and marital status is shown in Table 2.

The core part of the questionnaire assessed 13 motivational factors for entering self-employment (M1–M13). Respondents rated their agreement with each motivation on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). Based on established literature (Humbert and Drew, 2010; Dawson and Henley, 2012), these motivations were grouped into two composite categories:

* Pull factors (9 items): positive incentives such as autonomy, higher earnings, perceived opportunities, or improved working conditions.
* Push factors (4 items): negative circumstances such as unemployment, redundancies, or inability to find regular employment.

The main independent variable is gender (male/female).

Our study aims to examine whether men and women differ in the motivations that led them to enter self-employment in Slovakia. Based on the literature review and identified research gap, we formulated the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: There are statistically significant differences in specific motivational factors for entering self-employment between men and women, particularly in terms of push and pull factors.

To test this hypothesis, we compare the distributions of motivational ratings between men and women using the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U test. This method is appropriate because:

1. the motivational variables are ordinal (Likert-scale responses),
2. the distributions deviate from normality and
3. the two groups (men and women) are independent.

The test is applied both to individual motivations (M1–M13) and to the aggregated pull and push factor scores. This analytical strategy directly operationalizes the research hypothesis by evaluating whether gender significantly affects the intensity of self-reported motivations.

Although the data provide valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged:

* Non-representative sample: The convenience sampling approach limits generalizability. Results should therefore be interpreted as exploratory evidence of possible gender patterns rather than as population-wide conclusions.
* Self-reported data: Motivational factors reflect personal perceptions and may be influenced by recall bias or social desirability.
* Absence of additional covariates: Because demographic and contextual variables (e.g., age, household situation) were not incorporated into the analysis, observed gender differences cannot be adjusted for potential confounders.

These limitations do not undermine the descriptive value of the findings but highlight the need for further representative and multivariate research.

IV. Results and Discussion

To test the hypothesis, we analysed respondents' answers to 13 motivational factors (M1 to M13) capturing reasons for entering self-employment. Nine of these factors represent pull motivations and four represent push motivations, and respondents indicated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale. List of motives divided into push and pull factors is provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Push and pull factors to start self-employment

Factors	Code	Reasons to start self-employment
Pull Factors	M1	family reasons – I wanted to work from home
	M2	I wanted to be independent "my own boss"
	M3	I wanted better working conditions
	M4	I wanted to earn more money
	M5	I had the opportunity to get the resources to start a business
	M6	I identified an opportunity to sell my products/services
	M7	I have joined the family business
	M8	I have seen opportunities to get financial support from the state and have taken advantage of them
	M9	I saw entrepreneurship as an opportunity to make myself better
Push Factors	M10	I had problems finding a regular employment
	M11	I became redundant in the company where I worked (lost my job)
	M12	my employer wanted me to have a trade authorisation
	M13	I wanted to be employed but the only option was to have a trade authorisation

Source: Own elaboration

Respondents in questionnaire were asked to rate their agreement with various reasons for starting a sole trader business on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 represents "strongly disagree" and 5 represents "strongly agree"). As respondents were not required to answer all items, the number of responses varies for each motive. Table 4 presents the number of respondents, divided by gender, who indicated specific motivations (M1 to M13) for starting self-employment. The data includes the count of male and female respondents, missing responses, mean, median, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for each motivation factor.

Table 4: Number of Respondents by Gender Who Indicated Various Motivations for Starting self-employment

	Gender	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8	M9	M10	M11	M12	M13
N	M	203	196	189	191	189	190	185	186	194	186	188	188	190
	F	92	92	89	92	90	90	89	87	94	88	91	88	92
Missing	M	7	14	21	19	21	20	25	24	16	24	22	22	20
	F	4	4	7	4	6	6	7	9	2	8	5	8	4
Mean	M	3.87	4.19	4.1	4.52	3.08	4.23	2.98	3.06	4.44	2.65	3.27	3.16	3.05
	F	4.2	4.47	4.57	4.51	3.86	4.27	3.56	3.21	4.61	2.73	3.46	3.41	2.72
Median	M	3	5	4	5	3	4	1	1	5	1	1	1.5	2
	F	4	5	5	5	4	4	1	2	5	1	1	1	1
St. dev.	M	2.9	1.67	1.46	1.26	2.32	2.31	3.07	2.97	1.49	2.55	3.11	2.6	2.6
	F	2.68	1.73	1.61	1.18	2.42	2.07	3.48	3.01	1.5	2.63	3.34	3.23	2.55
Min.	M	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	F	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Max.	M	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
	F	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9	9

Source: Own elaboration

Descriptive statistics show substantial variation across items and between genders, with women generally reporting slightly higher levels of agreement for several motivations. While these descriptive tendencies provide an initial insight into gendered motivational patterns, the central focus of the analysis lies in the comparative evaluation of motivational differences between men and women. These findings provide a basis for testing Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 1: There are statistically significant differences in specific motivational factors for entering self-employment between men and women, particularly in terms of push and pull factors.

To examine these differences, we applied the non-parametric Mann-Whitney U test, which is suitable for comparing the distributions of ordinal scores between two independent groups. We tested each motivational factor individually and subsequently compared the aggregated push and pull scores. Results of Mann-Whitney U test are displayed in Table 5.

The analysis revealed statistically significant gender differences for two motivations: M3 ("I wanted better working conditions") and M5 ("I had the opportunity to get the resources to start a business"). All remaining motivations, as well as the aggregated push and pull scores, showed no statistically significant differences.

Beyond identifying these differences, it is essential to interpret their meaning within the broader theoretical and empirical context. The significantly higher female agreement with "better working conditions" (M3) aligns with extensive literature documenting gendered disparities in paid employment. Numerous studies have shown that women are more likely

to encounter inflexible working hours, limited opportunities for advancement, workplace discrimination, and a greater conflict between paid work and family responsibilities (Moore and Buttner, 1997; Mattis, 2004; Belle and La Valle, 2003; McGowan et al., 2012). In this context, self-employment can represent a strategic avenue for women to secure more autonomy, flexibility, and control over work-life balance. Therefore, the stronger emphasis on better working conditions among women in our sample is theoretically consistent with existing evidence and likely reflects persistent structural inequalities in the Slovak labour market.

Table 5: Testing hypothesis H1 – Independent Samples T-Test

		Statistic	df	p
M1	Student's t	−0.9238	293	0.356
M2	Student's t	−1.2801	286	0.202
M3	Student's t	−2.4638	276	0.014
M4	Student's t	0.0475	281	0.962
M5	Student's t	−2.5631	277	0.011
M6	Student's t	−0.1227	278	0.902
M7	Student's t	−1.3963	272	0.164
M8	Student's t	−0.3673	271	0.714
M9	Student's t	−0.8962	286	0.371
M10	Student's t	−0.2302	272	0.818
M11	Student's t	−0.4804	277	0.631
M12	Student's t	−0.6867	274	0.493
M13	Student's t	1.005	280	0.316
Pull_Score	Student's t	−1.66	258	0.098
Push_Score	Student's t	−0.2706	267	0.783

Source: Own elaboration

Note: $H_a\ \mu_1 \neq \mu_2$

[a] *Levene's test is significant* ($p < .05$)*, suggesting a violation of the assumption of equal variances*

The second significant difference – women's higher agreement with the motivation "I had the opportunity to get the resources to start a business" (M5) – can likewise be interpreted in light of established empirical findings. Prior research indicates that women often face greater obstacles in accessing formal financing, information networks, and entrepreneurial support systems (Duchéneaut and Orhan, 2000; Carter et al., 2003). As a result, women may be more dependent on situational opportunities, such as family support, favourable external conditions, or temporary resource availability. When such opportunities arise, they may play a disproportionately important role in catalysing women's transition into self-employment. This interpretation is consistent with behavioural economic perspectives emphasising the

importance of context and opportunity structures in shaping entrepreneurial decisions among women (Sarri and Trihopoulou, 2004).

Although these two significant findings reinforce the theoretical expectations regarding gendered barriers and opportunities, the absence of gender differences in the remaining motivations requires equal attention. Several explanations are plausible. First, the similarity of men's and women's responses may reflect a genuine convergence of motivations. Recent research suggests that as entrepreneurship becomes more socially accepted and widely accessible, men and women increasingly share similar reasons for entering self-employment, such as autonomy, income motives, or the identification of market opportunities (Dawson and Henley, 2012; Franck, 2012). Second, the Slovak socio-economic context may contribute to this convergence: regional labour-market constraints, job instability, and limited employment alternatives affect both genders, potentially reducing gender-specific motivational divergences. Third, methodological considerations must be acknowledged. The sample is non-representative, self-reported measures may introduce noise, and the variability of responses (particularly high standard deviations in some items) may limit the ability to detect subtle gender differences. Thus, the absence of statistical differences should not be interpreted as definitive evidence of gender homogeneity but rather as a result shaped by both contextual and methodological factors.

The aggregated push and pull scores provide additional insight. Although respondents appear generally more motivated by pull than by push factors, the lack of statistically significant gender differences suggests that broad categorical distinctions may obscure important nuances. This finding corresponds with critiques in the literature arguing that push/pull dichotomies oversimplify entrepreneurial behaviour and fail to capture domain-specific or context-dependent differences (Lingappa and Rodrigues, 2023). At the same time, the predominance of pull motivations aligns with international research showing that self-employment in developed countries is increasingly opportunity-driven, though the specific form of these opportunities may vary between genders (Cervelló-Royo et al., 2020).

Overall, the results partially support the hypothesis: gender significantly affects certain specific motivations but does not appear to shape broader categories of push or pull factors. These findings underscore the need for more nuanced analyses of entrepreneurial motivation that consider structural gender inequalities, context-specific opportunity structures, and the limitations of aggregated motivational models. From a theoretical perspective, the results contribute to the growing evidence that gendered differences in entrepreneurship are not uniform but concentrated in areas linked to labour-market inequality and resource accessibility. From a policy standpoint, the findings suggest that interventions seeking to promote women's entrepreneurship in Slovakia should focus particularly on improving working conditions in paid employment, enhancing access to resources and support mechanisms for business creation, and strengthening institutional frameworks that enable women to overcome structural barriers.

V. Conclusion

Entrepreneurial activity represents an important form of labour-market participation in Slovakia and across Europe, and understanding the motivations behind the decision to become self-employed is crucial for designing effective policy measures that support sustainable entrepreneurship. The findings of our study show that, despite wide-ranging theoretical expectations regarding gender-based differences in entrepreneurial motivation, men and women in our sample share largely similar reasons for entering self-employment. Statistically significant gender differences emerged only for two specific motivational factors (better working conditions and access to resources) while most of the pull and push factors did not exhibit meaningful variation between genders.

These results must be interpreted within the broader socio-economic context of Slovakia, where structural labour-market constraints, limited job mobility, and persistent inequalities in work-life balance shape entrepreneurial pathways for both genders. The stronger emphasis of women on the desire for better working conditions reflects well-documented challenges faced by women in salaried employment, including lower flexibility, slower career progression, and the disproportionate burden of caregiving responsibilities. The greater sensitivity of women to opportunities for obtaining start-up resources aligns with international evidence that women often face more barriers to accessing finance, networks, and institutional support. These gender-specific insights highlight that, while overall motivational patterns may converge, certain structural factors continue to influence women's decisions to pursue self-employment in distinct ways.

In a broader European context, our findings resonate with policy priorities articulated in strategic documents such as the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 and the European Pillar of Social Rights, which emphasise the need to reduce gender gaps in labour-market participation and support women's access to entrepreneurship. The predominance of pull motivations observed among both genders suggests that self-employment in Slovakia is predominantly opportunity-driven rather than a last-resort option, which is consistent with trends in many EU countries. At the same time, the gender-specific findings recorded in our study point to areas where targeted support instruments (such as improved access to microfinancing, mentoring, work-life balance policies, and flexible forms of support for early-stage entrepreneurs) could help reduce persistent structural barriers faced particularly by women.

From a theoretical perspective, our study contributes to the international literature by providing evidence from a country that is underrepresented in empirical research on gendered entrepreneurial motivation. The results suggest that motivational differences between men and women are not universal but context-dependent, reinforcing arguments for more nuanced and country-specific analyses rather than broad generalisations. This contribution is particularly relevant for comparative studies aiming to examine how institutional settings, labour-market structures, and cultural norms shape entrepreneurial behaviour.

However, several limitations of the study must be acknowledged. The sample is non-representative and relies on self-reported retrospective data, which may be influenced by selective recall. The absence of additional socio-demographic variables prevents us from conducting deeper multivariate analyses that could reveal the role of age, family composition,

education, or life stage in shaping entrepreneurial motivations. These limitations restrict the generalisability of our findings, yet they also provide valuable guidance for future research. Future studies should therefore adopt more robust sampling strategies, incorporate longitudinal data, and include a wider set of explanatory variables to capture the complexity of entrepreneurial decision-making. Comparative research across different EU countries could further illuminate how national policies, labour-market conditions, and welfare systems influence gendered motivations for self-employment. Such research would offer deeper insight not only into individual motivations but also into the structural conditions that facilitate or constrain entrepreneurial activity.

In conclusion, while our results show that men and women in Slovakia share many similar motivations for entering self-employment, the identified gender-specific differences underscore the need for targeted support measures and for a more nuanced understanding of how socio-economic and institutional contexts shape entrepreneurial decisions. By situating our findings within both the Slovak and broader European framework, the study contributes to ongoing debates on gender equality, entrepreneurship, and labour-market policy, and it highlights the importance of further research capable of capturing the diverse and evolving nature of self-employment motivations.

Acknowledgements

This article was supported by the National Research Agency of Slovakia, project VEGA No. 1/0536/24 "Slovak Household Management and Decision-Making about Unpaid Work in the Post-Covid Economy" and project VEGA No. 1/0415/25 "Commuting in Slovakia and its impact on the well-being of commuters" at the Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia.

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