

# THE MIDLIFE MOUNTAIN

## WHY WOMEN STRUGGLE TO START SOCIAL BUSINESSES



"Women want to create positive social change but are held back by systemic constraints."

Professor Ute Stephan

### WOMEN WANT TO START SOCIAL BUSINESSES

Globally, women lead **half** of all social enterprises.



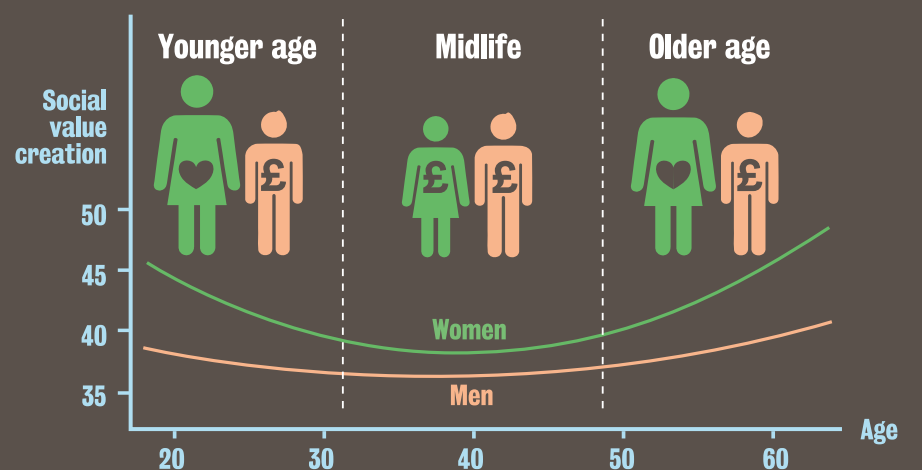
FOR-PROFIT SOCIALLY-DRIVEN



And they are **three times** more likely to start socially-driven businesses than for-profit ones.

So what's stopping them?

### MIDLIFE WOMEN ARE HELD BACK



A global study\* of over 5,000 entrepreneurs reveals **women in their peak entrepreneurial age (late 30s)** are least likely to create socially responsible businesses.

### WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?



**Household and caregiving duties** disproportionately hinder women's ability to focus on social impact. **These demands peak during midlife**, forcing many to prioritise profit over purpose.

### THE POWER OF SOCIAL ENTERPRISES



Compared to profit-focused firms, social enterprises play a critical role in the competitiveness of economies, through:

**1 in 3**

**UK businesses** are social enterprises. Supporting **4.8 million** jobs.

- **Economic output**
- **Job creation**
- **Greater innovation**

### HOW TO OVERCOME BARRIERS FOR WOMEN

To unlock women's potential in social entrepreneurship, **systemic changes** are needed.

Key solutions include:



Affordable childcare



Eldercare support



Rebalancing household responsibilities

### A CALL TO ACTION FOR POLICYMAKERS

By removing these barriers, governments can grow more inclusive economies, nurture innovation, and boost social impact. It's a win-win!



INCLUSIVE  
SUSTAINABILITY

\*This **Bitesize Research** has been drawn from the publication 'Entrepreneurship, age, and social value creation: A constraint-based individual perspective' by Professor Ute Stephan and co-authors Brigitte Hoogendoorn, Lorraine Uhlener and Peter van der Zwan, and is part of the Centre for Sustainable Business's **Inclusive Sustainability 2025** campaign. Data on social enterprises globally from [initiatives.weforum.org/global-alliance-for-social-entrepreneurship/state-of-the-sector](https://initiatives.weforum.org/global-alliance-for-social-entrepreneurship/state-of-the-sector)

Find out more on our webpage: [kcl.ac.uk/inclusive-sustainability](https://kcl.ac.uk/inclusive-sustainability)