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A National Collaboration

This report reflects the collective expertise of organizations supporting women entrepreneurs across Canada. Their contributions helped identify the barriers, opportunities, and actions required to strengthen domestic trade, improve market access, and increase participation by women-owned businesses in Canada's economy.



The Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada (WEOC) is the national coordinating organization for Canada's women's enterprise and entrepreneurship ecosystem. WEOC works to strengthen women's participation in Canada's economy through ecosystem coordination, capital access, entrepreneurship pathways, strategic policy engagement, and national collaboration.

Through the WEOC Centre of Excellence, WEOC connects entrepreneurs, ecosystem organizations, investors, commercialization systems, and governments across the country to strengthen growth pathways, support ecosystem intelligence and coordination, and advance Canada's long-term economic competitiveness, productivity, and resilience.

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Executive Summary

As Canada works to strengthen economic resilience, improve productivity, diversify markets, and build a more integrated domestic economy, women entrepreneurs represent one of the country's most significant and underutilized sources of growth. To inform discussions with the Office of the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc on interprovincial trade, the Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada (WEOC) conducted a rapid national consultation between June 8 and 13, 2026, engaging organizations that support women entrepreneurs across Canada.

Consultation at a Glance

Indicator	Result
Organizations Consulted	11
Provinces/Territories Represented	8
Organizations Rating Barriers Significant (4–5/5)	60%
Regulatory Barriers	90%
Transportation & Logistics Barriers	80%
Product Standards & Certification Barriers	70%
Taxation & Compliance Barriers	70%
Market Access Barriers	60%
Organizations Providing Expansion Supports	60%
Organizations Conducting Formal Research	20%
WESK Respondents Targeting Canadian Markets	62%

What We Heard

The consultation found that women entrepreneurs are successfully launching businesses, generating customer demand, and identifying opportunities for growth. However, as businesses attempt to expand beyond their home province or territory, they encounter a combination of regulatory, transportation, certification, market access, procurement, and supply chain barriers that increase the cost and complexity of growth.

Organizations consistently emphasized that the challenge is not a lack of entrepreneurial ambition or market demand. The challenge is enabling businesses to scale.

Five Key Findings

1. Canada Functions as Multiple Markets for Women Entrepreneurs

Organizations consistently identified regulatory fragmentation, certification requirements, taxation differences, transportation costs, and market access barriers as challenges to growth across provincial and territorial boundaries. While Canada is a single national economy, many women entrepreneurs experience it as a collection of separate markets, requiring businesses to navigate multiple regulatory, administrative, and commercial systems in order to scale.

2. The Greatest Barriers Emerge at the Scale-Up Stage

While many women entrepreneurs are successfully launching businesses and generating customer demand, barriers become significantly more pronounced as firms seek to expand beyond their home province or territory. Organizations consistently reported that the challenge is not business creation, but business growth. As entrepreneurs pursue larger markets, procurement opportunities, supply chain relationships, and regional expansion, they encounter increasing costs, complexity, and administrative burden that can slow or limit growth.

3. Market Access Matters as Much as Regulatory Reform

Women entrepreneurs need customers, buyers, distributors, procurement opportunities, and supply chain connections in addition to regulatory reform. Organizations emphasized that practical market navigation supports—including training, advisory services, buyer introductions, market intelligence, and access to financing—are often as important as reducing regulatory barriers. The consultation suggests that business growth is constrained not only by rules and regulations, but also by limited access to commercial opportunities, business networks, and pathways to market.

4. Domestic Trade Is Both a Growth Strategy and a Resilience Strategy

Organizations identified growing interest in Canadian markets as businesses respond to tariffs, supply chain disruptions, and broader global economic uncertainty. Consultation participants consistently described domestic market expansion as an important opportunity to diversify revenue, strengthen business resilience, and reduce exposure to external market shocks. Supporting this trend, WESK data found that 62% of entrepreneurs currently exporting or planning to export identified Canada as a target market for future growth.

For many women entrepreneurs, expansion into another province or territory represents the first step toward becoming an exporter. RFAQ further emphasized the role of interprovincial trade as a pathway to export readiness, enabling businesses to build capacity, test new markets, and develop the experience necessary to compete internationally.

5. Canada Already Has the Capacity to Act

Organizations reported that Canada already possesses many of the supports required to help women entrepreneurs expand across provincial and territorial boundaries, including advisory services, financing, procurement initiatives, supplier diversity programs, trade missions, and market development supports. The consultation suggests that the primary opportunity lies not in creating entirely new programs, but in improving coordination, connectivity, and navigation across the existing ecosystem.

Recommendations

1. Accelerate efforts to reduce interprovincial trade barriers and harmonize regulatory requirements across jurisdictions.
2. Establish a national **“Sell Across Canada”** initiative to connect women entrepreneurs with customers, buyers, distributors, procurement opportunities, and supply chains across Canada.
3. Invest in trade readiness, market development, and business scale-up supports that help entrepreneurs navigate expansion into new provincial and territorial markets.
4. Increase participation of women-owned businesses in public procurement, supplier diversity initiatives, and domestic supply chains.
5. Develop targeted approaches to address the unique barriers facing rural, remote, northern, and underserved entrepreneurs.
6. Strengthen national coordination and knowledge mobilization to better connect existing ecosystem supports, improve market access, and support domestic trade as a pathway to business growth and economic resilience.

Key Conclusion

Women entrepreneurs are not struggling to start businesses; they are struggling to scale them.

As Canada works to strengthen economic resilience, improve productivity, diversify markets, and build a more integrated domestic economy, helping more women-owned businesses expand across provincial and territorial boundaries represents a significant and largely untapped economic opportunity. Canada has the capacity to act. The opportunity is to turn fragmented markets into a more seamless pathway to growth.

Introduction

In June 2026, Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada (WEOC) was invited to provide input to the Office of the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc on interprovincial trade and its impact on small and medium-sized businesses in Canada.

To inform these discussions, WEOC conducted a rapid national consultation between June 8 and June 13, 2026 with organizations supporting women entrepreneurs across Canada. The consultation sought to identify barriers, opportunities, and recommendations related to interprovincial trade, market access, business growth, procurement, supply chains, labour mobility, and economic participation.

Contributions were received from 11 organizations representing British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories. Participating organizations included Agricultrices du Québec, Centre for Women in Business, Immigrant Entrepreneur Canada, PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise, Réseau des Femmes d'Affaires du Québec (RFAQ), S.U.C.C.E.S.S., Thebacha Business Development Services, WeBC, WeMB, Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan (WESK), and Yukonstruct Society. Together, these organizations support women entrepreneurs across diverse regions, communities, and industries, including urban, rural, remote, northern, agricultural, newcomer, Indigenous, service-based, and growth-oriented sectors of the economy.

Input was gathered through a structured consultation survey, direct stakeholder outreach, and follow-up correspondence. Responses included both quantitative data and qualitative insights based on organizations' direct experience supporting women entrepreneurs. Additional stakeholder contributions from WESK and RFAQ provided perspectives related to exporting, tariffs, domestic market expansion, and interprovincial trade missions.

The purpose of the consultation was to:

- Inform discussions with the Office of the Honourable Dominic LeBlanc regarding interprovincial trade and economic growth;
- Identify barriers and opportunities affecting women entrepreneurs seeking to expand across Canada; and
- Contribute to the evidence base being developed through WEOC's Centre of Excellence for Women's Entrepreneurship.

The findings presented in this summary report reflect the perspectives of organizations working directly with women entrepreneurs across diverse regions and sectors and are intended to inform future policy discussions, ecosystem coordination, and initiatives designed to strengthen women's participation in Canada's domestic economy.

Finding 1: Canada Functions as Multiple Markets for Women Entrepreneurs

The strongest and most consistent finding emerging from this consultation is that women entrepreneurs often experience Canada not as a single domestic market, but as a collection of separate provincial and territorial markets with differing requirements, systems, costs, and pathways to growth.

Participating organizations identified regulatory requirements (90%), transportation and logistics challenges (80%), product standards and certification requirements (70%), and taxation and compliance obligations (70%) as the most significant barriers affecting women entrepreneurs seeking to expand beyond their home province or territory.

Most Significant Barriers Identified

Barrier	% of Organizations
Regulatory Requirements	90%
Transportation & Logistics	80%
Product Standards & Certification	70%
Taxation & Compliance	70%
Access to Customers & Markets	60%
Professional Credential Recognition	50%
Supply Chain Participation	50%
Procurement Requirements	40%
Labour Mobility	20%
Insurance Requirements	20%

Organizations consistently described a fragmented business environment where entrepreneurs must navigate differing regulations, certifications, licensing requirements, compliance obligations, taxation frameworks, procurement systems, and distribution networks as they enter new markets.

Respondents emphasized that these barriers rarely occur in isolation. Instead, women entrepreneurs often encounter multiple overlapping requirements that increase both the cost and complexity of expansion. For many small and medium-sized businesses, the cumulative burden of navigating different systems across jurisdictions can slow growth, reduce profitability, and limit participation in larger commercial opportunities.

The consultation also revealed important regional and sectoral differences. Organizations supporting product-based businesses identified certification requirements, food processing regulations, labelling standards, transportation costs, and distribution challenges as major barriers to growth. Agricultural organizations further emphasized that women-owned farming and food businesses face unique challenges associated with food processing requirements, interprovincial sales regulations, labelling standards, and market access, particularly for small-scale producers seeking to expand beyond their home province. Organizations supporting service-based businesses highlighted professional credential recognition, labour mobility, and relationship-based market access challenges. Northern organizations emphasized transportation infrastructure, shipping costs, supply chain constraints, and limited logistics options as particularly significant barriers to participating in broader Canadian markets.

Importantly, no participating organization indicated that interprovincial trade barriers were insignificant. While respondents differed in the degree of impact, there was broad agreement that existing barriers affect the ability of women-owned businesses to scale, access new customers, participate in supply chains, compete for procurement opportunities, and expand across Canada.

Several organizations further noted that entrepreneurs can sometimes find it easier to access international markets than domestic ones. Respondents described examples where businesses exporting to the United States or the United Kingdom encountered fewer practical challenges than those attempting to navigate multiple provincial requirements, distribution systems, or procurement processes within Canada.

Quantitative Insight

Sixty percent of participating organizations rated interprovincial trade barriers as significant or very significant (4 or 5 on a 5-point scale), while the median barrier rating was 4 out of 5. No organization rated barriers as insignificant. Together, these findings suggest a high degree of consensus that interprovincial trade barriers continue to represent a meaningful constraint on business growth.

What This Means

The consultation suggests that Canada's internal trade challenge extends beyond regulation alone. Women entrepreneurs face a combination of regulatory, logistical, administrative, and commercial barriers that collectively increase the cost and complexity of growth. The result is a business

environment in which entrepreneurs often experience Canada as multiple markets rather than one integrated economy.

As governments work to strengthen economic resilience, improve productivity, and build a more connected domestic economy, reducing these barriers represents an opportunity to unlock growth, improve competitiveness, and expand participation by women-owned businesses across Canada.

Key Takeaway

Canada has one economy on paper, but many women entrepreneurs continue to experience it as multiple markets in practice.

Finding 2: Interprovincial Trade Is Primarily a Scale-Up Challenge

A central finding emerging from the consultation is that interprovincial trade barriers are barriers to business growth.

Participating organizations consistently reported that women entrepreneurs are successfully starting businesses, developing products and services, generating customer demand, and establishing local markets. The greatest challenges emerge when businesses attempt to scale beyond their home province or territory.

Notably, respondents rarely identified issues associated with business formation, incorporation, or startup activity. Instead, organizations described barriers related to market expansion, customer acquisition, procurement, supply chain participation, distribution, logistics, certification, and growth financing. This suggests that interprovincial trade is best understood as a scale-up issue rather than a startup issue.

The pattern was particularly evident among organizations supporting growth-oriented businesses. Organizations reporting the highest barrier ratings—including PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise Canada, WeMB, WeBC, Yukonstruct, Centre for Women in Business, and Immigrant Entrepreneur Canada—were also among those most actively engaged in supporting market expansion, procurement readiness, business growth, trade development, and scale-up activities.

Growth Becomes More Difficult Beyond Provincial Borders

The entrepreneur experiences shared through the consultation reveal a remarkably consistent pattern:

1. A business is established.
2. Demand for its products or services exists.
3. Opportunities emerge in other provinces.
4. The entrepreneur attempts to expand.
5. New barriers arise.

Multiple organizations shared examples of businesses that had already generated customer demand but encountered barriers when attempting to expand into new markets. These barriers included distribution challenges, logistics costs, certification requirements, procurement processes, access to supply chains, and market-entry requirements that increased the cost and complexity of growth.

PARO identified Silka Foods and TheMelCollective as examples of businesses navigating the complexities associated with scaling beyond local markets. Their experiences highlighted the importance of mentorship, financing, networks, business development support, and market access pathways as entrepreneurs move from startup to scale-up.

Northern organizations reported similar experiences. Yukonstruct and Thebacha Business Development Services described entrepreneurs that were ready to access broader markets but encountered significant transportation costs, shipping challenges, supply chain barriers, and logistical constraints that made expansion more difficult and costly.

The Scale-Up Gap

Taken together, these examples suggest the existence of a "scale-up gap" within Canada's entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Canada has invested significantly in encouraging entrepreneurship and supporting business creation. However, entrepreneurs attempting to transition from local businesses to regional, national, and export-oriented firms frequently encounter a fragmented growth environment characterized by differing regulations, transportation systems, procurement processes, certification requirements, and market access pathways.

This gap is particularly important because it affects businesses that have already demonstrated viability, generated demand, and shown potential for growth.

Why This Matters

Growth-stage businesses are among the most important contributors to productivity, innovation, job creation, supply chain participation, and economic expansion. When businesses are unable to efficiently access customers, buyers, distributors, procurement opportunities, and markets across Canada, opportunities for economic growth are lost.

The consultation suggests that many women-owned businesses are ready to grow but are encountering barriers at precisely the point where additional investment, hiring, market expansion, and economic impact become possible.

As Canada seeks to improve productivity, strengthen domestic supply chains, increase economic participation, and build a more integrated domestic economy, supporting business scale-up may represent one of the greatest opportunities to unlock additional growth.

Quantitative Evidence

The scale-up nature of these barriers is reinforced by the consultation data:

- 60% of organizations identified access to customers and markets as a major barrier.
- 50% identified supply chain participation barriers.
- 40% identified procurement barriers.
- 60% reported already delivering programs designed to support market expansion and business growth.

Multiple organizations highlighted buyer connections, business matching, trade missions, supplier diversity, and market development as priorities.

These findings indicate that barriers become most pronounced when entrepreneurs attempt to access larger markets and growth opportunities.

Key Takeaway

Women entrepreneurs are not primarily asking for help starting businesses. They are seeking support to scale businesses that are already generating demand, creating value, and contributing to Canada's economy. Strengthening pathways for growth across provincial and territorial boundaries may therefore represent one of the most effective ways to increase productivity, participation, competitiveness, and economic impact among women-owned businesses.

Finding 3: Market Access Matters as Much as Regulatory Access

While regulatory harmonization emerged as a consistent priority throughout the consultation, participating organizations repeatedly emphasized that reducing regulatory barriers alone will not be sufficient to unlock growth. Women entrepreneurs also require practical pathways into markets, customers, buyers, distributors, supply chains, procurement opportunities, and business networks.

In fact, the consultation suggests that market access challenges may be as significant as regulatory barriers for many entrepreneurs seeking to expand beyond their home province or territory.

Quantitative findings reinforce this conclusion:

- 60% of participating organizations identified access to customers and markets as a significant barrier.
- 50% identified supply chain participation barriers.
- 40% identified procurement barriers.

Multiple organizations identified business matching, buyer connections, trade missions, supplier diversity initiatives, and procurement pathways as priorities for government action.

Together, these findings suggest that growth is constrained not only by rules and regulations, but also by limited access to commercial opportunities.

The Challenge Is Not Demand

A recurring theme throughout the consultation was that many women entrepreneurs already have products, services, and customers. The challenge is accessing new markets efficiently and cost-effectively.

Immigrant Entrepreneur Canada described a woman entrepreneur manufacturing specialty products in Ontario who began receiving interest from customers and retailers in other provinces. Demand existed, but expansion required identifying distributors, navigating logistics, understanding provincial requirements, and building relationships in unfamiliar markets.

The Centre for Women in Business highlighted examples of businesses attempting to enter larger provincial markets where distribution systems, procurement pathways, and commercial relationships became significant barriers to growth. For example, a woman-owned company seeking access to major Ontario retail chains was required to work through a distributor that retained approximately 30 percent of sales revenue, substantially reducing profitability.

These examples suggest that entrepreneurs often encounter commercial barriers that are not captured by traditional discussions of interprovincial trade.

Relationships Are Economic Infrastructure

An important finding emerging from the consultation is that business relationships themselves function as a form of economic infrastructure.

Organizations repeatedly highlighted the importance of:

- Buyer connections;
- Distributor relationships;
- Supplier networks;
- Procurement opportunities;
- Business-to-business matching;
- Trade missions;
- Peer networks; and
- Industry introductions.

Many respondents emphasized that entrepreneurs entering new provincial markets frequently lack the networks and relationships necessary to identify opportunities, establish credibility, and secure customers.

PARO identified business matching and national networking as critical supports for women entrepreneurs expanding across Canada. RFAQ highlighted interprovincial trade missions as a mechanism to help women entrepreneurs establish relationships, develop new customers, and access markets outside their home province. WeBC emphasized the importance of interprovincial cohorts and networks that allow entrepreneurs to learn from trusted peers and enter new markets more efficiently.

Procurement and Supply Chains Remain Underutilized Opportunities

Several respondents identified procurement and supply chain participation as significant growth opportunities that remain difficult for women entrepreneurs to access.

The Centre for Women in Business highlighted opportunities associated with supplier diversity, defence procurement, transportation, automotive, uniforms, and major projects. Respondents emphasized that many women-owned businesses are procurement-ready but continue to face challenges connecting with buyers and translating readiness into contracts.

Similarly, organizations reported that women entrepreneurs often encounter barriers when attempting to enter larger supply chains, become approved vendors, or secure commercial relationships with larger organizations.

These findings suggest that improving market access is not simply about helping businesses find customers. It is also about helping businesses participate in the broader economic systems through which contracts, procurement opportunities, supplier relationships, and growth opportunities are distributed.

Beyond Barrier Reduction

The consultation revealed a notable shift in how organizations think about interprovincial trade.

Respondents did not simply call for fewer barriers.

They called for:

- More customers;
- More buyers;
- More business connections;
- More procurement opportunities;
- More trade missions;
- More supplier diversity initiatives;
- More distribution pathways; and
- More mechanisms that connect entrepreneurs to opportunity.

This distinction is important.

Reducing barriers helps entrepreneurs enter markets.

Market access initiatives help entrepreneurs succeed in those markets.

Both are necessary.

Why This Matters

Canada's economic growth depends not only on the movement of goods and services but also on the movement of opportunities.

When entrepreneurs can more easily connect with customers, buyers, suppliers, distributors, and procurement opportunities across provincial and territorial boundaries, businesses grow faster, supply chains become stronger, and economic activity becomes more integrated.

At a time when governments are focused on productivity, domestic supply chains, economic resilience, and inclusive growth, improving market access may be one of the most effective ways to help women-owned businesses participate more fully in Canada's economy.

Key Takeaway

Reducing interprovincial barriers is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Women entrepreneurs need access to markets as much as they need access to jurisdictions. Strengthening buyer connections, procurement pathways, supply chain participation, business networks, and market development opportunities may be as important to growth as regulatory reform itself.

Finding 4: Domestic Trade Is Both a Growth Strategy and a Resilience Strategy

While much of the consultation focused on barriers to interprovincial trade, respondents also identified a significant opportunity: strengthening domestic trade as a pathway to business growth, market diversification, export readiness, and economic resilience.

The consultation suggests that interprovincial trade should not be viewed solely as a barrier-reduction exercise. It should also be viewed as a growth strategy that can help women entrepreneurs access new customers, diversify revenue streams, reduce exposure to external market disruptions, and build the capacity required for future export success.

For many women entrepreneurs, domestic market expansion is not separate from export development; it is often the first stage of a broader export strategy. Before entering international markets, businesses frequently seek to validate products, establish distribution networks, navigate regulatory requirements, strengthen operations, and build sales capacity across Canada. Success in interprovincial markets helps businesses develop the experience, scale, and confidence required to compete internationally.

This finding is particularly important given the current economic environment. Canadian businesses are operating in a context characterized by tariff pressures, supply chain disruptions, geopolitical uncertainty, and changing trade relationships. As governments seek to strengthen economic resilience, diversify markets, and reduce vulnerability to external shocks, domestic market expansion represents an increasingly important opportunity.

Women Entrepreneurs Are Looking to Canada First

Recent survey data provided by Women Entrepreneurs Saskatchewan (WESK) offers important insight into how entrepreneurs are responding to these conditions.

Among entrepreneurs currently exporting or planning to export:

- 62% identified Canada as their primary expansion market;
- 39% identified the United States as a target market; and
- 39% identified international markets beyond North America.

These findings suggest that many women entrepreneurs view domestic expansion as their most immediate and accessible growth opportunity.

At the same time, entrepreneurs reported experiencing:

- Increased costs of goods (48%);
- Reduced profit margins (30%);
- Supply chain disruptions (20%); and
- Reduced desire or ability to export (10%).

Taken together, these findings indicate that domestic market expansion is becoming increasingly important as businesses respond to global uncertainty and seek opportunities closer to home.

WESK findings suggest that women entrepreneurs are increasingly viewing Canada itself as their next growth market, reinforcing the importance of domestic market development as part of Canada's broader economic resilience strategy. As businesses respond to tariff pressures, supply chain disruptions, and global uncertainty, strengthening opportunities within Canada may represent one of the most immediate and accessible pathways to growth.

Domestic Markets Can Strengthen Business Resilience

Historically, discussions about business growth have often focused on exports and international expansion. However, respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that entrepreneurs can fully access opportunities within Canada before looking abroad.

For many women-owned businesses, expanding into another province may represent a lower-risk growth pathway than entering an international market. Respondents also noted that digital tools, AI adoption, and supply chain modernization can help reduce geographic barriers and improve access to domestic markets, particularly for entrepreneurs operating in northern and remote regions. Domestic expansion allows entrepreneurs to:

- Build operational capacity;
- Develop new customer relationships;
- Test products and services in new markets;
- Strengthen distribution systems;
- Establish supply chain partnerships; and
- Gain experience operating at a larger scale.

This can increase business resilience while creating a stronger foundation for future growth.

Interprovincial Trade as a Pathway to Export Growth

Additional stakeholder input from Réseau des Femmes d'Affaires du Québec (RFAQ) reinforce this perspective.

RFAQ noted that many women entrepreneurs operate in service-based industries where barriers to interprovincial expansion may be lower than those faced by product-based businesses. The organization also highlighted plans to undertake interprovincial trade missions designed to connect women entrepreneurs across provincial markets.

According to RFAQ, domestic market expansion can serve as an important stepping stone toward international trade. By entering new provincial markets, entrepreneurs gain experience developing customer relationships, expanding operations, building networks, and navigating growth challenges. These capabilities can later support export readiness and international expansion.

This reframes interprovincial trade as part of Canada's business growth pipeline.

A Team Canada Opportunity

The consultation suggests that strengthening interprovincial trade aligns closely with broader national economic priorities.

As Canada seeks to:

- Improve productivity;
- Strengthen domestic supply chains;
- Diversify markets;
- Increase economic resilience;
- Accelerate nation-building projects; and
- Build a more integrated domestic economy,

women entrepreneurs represent an important but underutilized source of growth.

Organizations consistently emphasized that women-owned businesses are ready to expand, hire, innovate, participate in procurement opportunities, enter supply chains, and contribute to economic development. Improving access to domestic markets may therefore generate benefits that extend beyond individual businesses to support broader economic objectives.

Why This Matters

The consultation indicates that interprovincial trade is increasingly serving two functions simultaneously.

It is a growth strategy because it helps businesses access new customers, markets, and opportunities.

It is also a resilience strategy because it helps businesses diversify revenue streams, reduce dependence on external markets, and respond to global uncertainty.

As governments consider future internal trade reforms, strengthening domestic market opportunities for women entrepreneurs may represent one of the most practical and immediate ways to increase economic participation, productivity, and competitiveness.

Key Takeaway

Interprovincial trade should not be viewed solely as a mechanism for reducing barriers. It is also a mechanism for creating growth. At a time of global uncertainty, many women entrepreneurs are looking first to Canada as their next market. Strengthening domestic trade pathways can help businesses grow, improve resilience, prepare for export, and contribute to a stronger Canadian economy.

Finding 5: Canada Already Has the Capacity to Act

A notable finding emerging from the consultation is that Canada does not lack organizations, expertise, programming, or delivery capacity to support women entrepreneurs seeking to grow across provincial and territorial boundaries. Rather, respondents consistently identified an opportunity to better coordinate, connect, and leverage existing assets across the entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Sixty percent of participating organizations reported that they currently deliver programming, services, or initiatives designed to help entrepreneurs expand beyond their home province or territory. These supports include business advisory services, market readiness programming, trade missions, supplier diversity initiatives, business matching and networking, mentorship and coaching, procurement supports, financing, market development activities, and national and regional growth programs.

Collectively, participating organizations support entrepreneurs across urban, rural, remote, northern, agricultural, Indigenous, newcomer, service-based, and growth-oriented sectors of the economy. The consultation suggests that the primary opportunity lies not in creating entirely new programs, but in strengthening coordination, connectivity, and navigation across the existing ecosystem.

Existing Capacity Is Significant

The consultation identified a diverse range of organizations already supporting market expansion.

PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise Canada operates a national network through PARO ConneX and more than 400 Prosper Circles, providing business matching, networking, training, counselling, financing, and market development opportunities.

WeBC partners with Export Navigator and the Trade Accelerator Program to help entrepreneurs access new markets and prepare for growth.

The Centre for Women in Business delivers supplier diversity initiatives, trade missions, mentorship programs, business advisory services, and growth acceleration programming throughout Atlantic Canada.

Yukonstruct provides entrepreneurship education, mentorship, business coaching, and startup-to-scale supports for entrepreneurs operating in northern markets.

Agricultrices du Québec is building networks that connect women agricultural entrepreneurs and facilitate collaboration across provincial boundaries.

S.U.C.C.E.S.S. provides government-funded advisory services and market expansion support for women entrepreneurs, including newcomer entrepreneurs seeking to grow their businesses.

Together, these organizations represent a significant national asset.

A Missing National Growth Pathway

The consultation revealed that significant supports already exist across Canada. Organizations described trade missions, supplier diversity initiatives, advisory services, mentorship programs, business matching, financing, procurement supports, and market development activities that help entrepreneurs grow within their respective regions.

However, respondents also highlighted a less visible gap. While entrepreneurs can often access support within their home province or territory, there is currently no consistent national pathway that helps businesses move from local success to national growth.

As businesses expand into new provincial and territorial markets, they frequently encounter new systems, networks, requirements, programs, and support structures. The entrepreneur journey often becomes fragmented at precisely the point where businesses are ready to scale.

The findings suggest that the opportunity is not simply to create additional programs, but to better connect existing programs into a more seamless national growth pathway that helps women entrepreneurs access markets, buyers, supply chains, procurement opportunities, financing, and business supports across Canada.

The Challenge Is Coordination, Not Creation

A recurring theme throughout the consultation was that Canada does not necessarily need to create entirely new programs. Instead, respondents repeatedly emphasized the need to:

- Strengthen collaboration between organizations;
- Share market intelligence and best practices;
- Improve referral pathways;
- Coordinate trade and market development activities;
- Expand successful models;
- Improve knowledge sharing;
- Connect entrepreneurs to existing opportunities; and
- Align efforts across regions.

The consultation suggests that entrepreneurs frequently encounter different supports depending on where they live, despite facing similar growth challenges.

As a result, market expansion supports are often fragmented across jurisdictions, sectors, and organizations.

An Evidence Gap Exists

While delivery capacity is strong, the consultation also identified a significant knowledge and coordination gap.

Only 20% of participating organizations reported involvement in formal research, surveys, consultations, or studies related to interprovincial trade, market access, supply chains, procurement, or business scaling.

At the same time, organizations demonstrated substantial practitioner knowledge based on direct client experience, market development activities, advisory services, and program delivery.

This suggests that valuable insights currently exist throughout the ecosystem but are not being systematically collected, analyzed, or shared.

The consultation therefore identified not only a trade gap, but also an evidence and coordination gap.

The Opportunity for National Coordination

Taken together, the findings point toward the need for a national mechanism capable of connecting policy, evidence, programs, delivery organizations, entrepreneurs, and market opportunities.

WEOC's emerging Centre of Excellence for Women's Entrepreneurship presents an opportunity to serve this role.

Respondents consistently identified functions that align closely with the Centre of Excellence vision, including:

- Gathering evidence and market intelligence;
- Identifying barriers and opportunities;
- Supporting policy development;
- Coordinating ecosystem partners;
- Sharing best practices;
- Supporting business matching and market connections;
- Convening National Pathways Working Groups;
- Strengthening procurement and supply chain participation;
- Supporting interprovincial trade readiness; and
- Connecting entrepreneurs to growth opportunities.

Importantly, the consultation suggests that WEOC's emerging Centre of Excellence should be viewed as a coordination platform that helps existing organizations work more effectively together while improving the flow of knowledge, opportunities, and support throughout the ecosystem.

Why This Matters

Many of the barriers identified through the consultation cannot be addressed by individual organizations acting alone. They require collaboration across governments, industry, ecosystem organizations, and entrepreneurs.

The consultation demonstrates that the foundations for this work already exist.

The opportunity now is to strengthen coordination, scale proven approaches, and create a more connected national support system that helps women entrepreneurs grow across Canada.

Key Takeaway

Canada does not need to build an entirely new ecosystem to support interprovincial growth. The infrastructure, expertise, and delivery capacity already exist. The greatest opportunity lies in strengthening coordination, knowledge sharing, market connections, and national alignment so that women entrepreneurs can more easily access opportunities across provincial and territorial boundaries.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Accelerate Internal Trade Harmonization for Small and Medium-Sized Businesses

The Government of Canada should continue to work with provinces and territories to accelerate the harmonization and mutual recognition of regulations, certifications, licensing requirements, and professional credentials that affect small and medium-sized businesses operating across provincial and territorial boundaries.

Priority should be given to sectors identified through the consultation as facing the greatest barriers, including agriculture and agri-food, food production, consumer products, services, procurement, and supply chain participation.

Potential Actions

- Advance mutual recognition agreements for goods, services, and professional certifications.
- Reduce duplicative registration and licensing requirements.
- Harmonize product standards, labelling, and compliance requirements where possible.
- Establish measurable implementation targets and public reporting mechanisms.

Expected Outcome

Reduced administrative burden, lower compliance costs, and improved access to markets for women-owned businesses seeking to expand across Canada.

Recommendation 2: Establish a National “Sell Across Canada” Market Access Initiative

The Government of Canada should establish a national market access initiative focused on helping small and medium-sized businesses identify opportunities, navigate requirements, and access customers beyond their home province or territory.

The consultation suggests that market access barriers are often as significant as regulatory barriers.

Potential Actions

- Create a centralized interprovincial trade information portal.
- Develop provincial market-entry guides and sector-specific resources.

- Support buyer-seller matching and business-to-business connections.
- Expand interprovincial trade missions and domestic market development initiatives.
- Create referral pathways between regional ecosystem organizations.

Expected Outcome

Increased market participation, customer acquisition, and domestic business growth.

Recommendation 3: Invest in Trade Readiness, Market Development, and Business Scale-Up Supports

The Government of Canada should strengthen support for businesses that are ready to grow beyond their local markets but require assistance to become market-ready.

The consultation consistently identified interprovincial trade as a scale-up challenge rather than a startup challenge.

Potential Actions

- Support interprovincial trade readiness programs.
- Expand business advisory and growth coaching services.
- Provide market expansion planning supports.
- Develop cohort-based expansion programs.
- Integrate AI adoption, supply chain readiness, and market development supports into growth programming.

Expected Outcome

Improved business readiness, stronger growth outcomes, and increased participation in domestic and international markets.

Recommendation 4: Increase Participation of Women-Owned Businesses in Procurement and Supply Chains

The Government of Canada should strengthen pathways that connect women-owned businesses to procurement opportunities, major projects, and supply chains.

Respondents identified procurement and supply chain participation as significant opportunities for economic growth.

Potential Actions

- Expand supplier diversity initiatives.
- Increase engagement between buyers and women-owned businesses.
- Improve access to procurement navigation supports.
- Support participation in defence, infrastructure, transportation, manufacturing, and other strategic sectors.
- Develop mechanisms to connect women-owned businesses to major projects and nation-building initiatives.

Expected Outcome

Increased supplier diversity, stronger domestic supply chains, and greater participation by women-owned businesses in Canada's growth sectors.

Recommendation 5: Develop Targeted Supports for Rural, Remote, Northern, and Underserved Entrepreneurs

The Government of Canada should recognize that entrepreneurs operating in rural, remote, northern, newcomer, Indigenous, and underserved communities often face amplified barriers to interprovincial growth.

A one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to address these challenges.

Potential Actions

- Support transportation and shipping cost mitigation measures.
- Expand market development initiatives in rural and northern regions.
- Simplify access to funding programs.
- Provide targeted supports for micro-businesses and newcomer entrepreneurs.
- Strengthen participation in domestic supply chains and procurement opportunities.

Expected Outcome

More equitable access to growth opportunities and increased economic participation across regions and communities.

Recommendation 6: Support a National Coordination and Knowledge Mobilization Platform

The consultation demonstrated strong ecosystem capacity but identified a need for greater coordination, evidence sharing, and national alignment. WEOC's Centre of Excellence for Women's Entrepreneurship could serve as a national coordination mechanism focused on evidence, market intelligence, ecosystem collaboration, and growth pathways.

The Government of Canada should support the development of WEOC's Centre of Excellence for Women's Entrepreneurship as a national coordination mechanism focused on evidence, market intelligence, ecosystem collaboration, and growth pathways.

Potential Functions

- Gather and synthesize evidence related to women entrepreneurs and domestic trade.
- Convene National Pathways Working Groups focused on growth barriers and opportunities.
- Coordinate ecosystem organizations and regional partners.
- Support knowledge sharing and best practice dissemination.
- Facilitate business matching, market intelligence, and market access initiatives.
- Provide a structured mechanism for ongoing engagement between government and the women's entrepreneurship ecosystem.

Expected Outcome

Improved policy coordination, stronger ecosystem alignment, enhanced knowledge mobilization, and increased participation by women entrepreneurs in Canada's domestic economy.

Strategic Consideration

Taken together, these recommendations represent a balanced approach that combines barrier reduction with growth enablement. The consultation suggests that women entrepreneurs are ready to expand across Canada, but require both a more seamless operating environment and stronger pathways into markets, procurement opportunities, supply chains, and growth sectors.

Implementing these recommendations would support broader federal objectives related to productivity, economic resilience, supply chain development, domestic market integration, and inclusive economic growth.

Conclusion: A Team Canada Opportunity

This consultation demonstrates that women entrepreneurs are ready to grow across Canada.

The findings suggest that interprovincial trade should not be viewed solely as a trade policy issue. It is also a business growth issue, a productivity issue, a market access issue, and increasingly, an economic resilience issue.

For many women entrepreneurs, expanding into other Canadian markets represents both a growth strategy and a resilience strategy. Yet as businesses move beyond their home province or territory, they often encounter fragmented systems, barriers, and gaps in support that increase the cost and complexity of growth.

Importantly, Canada already possesses many of the assets required to act. The opportunity is not to create entirely new programs, but to better connect existing supports, strengthen market access, improve coordination, and create a more seamless pathway to growth across Canada.

Women entrepreneurs are not struggling to start businesses; they are struggling to scale them.

As Canada works to strengthen economic sovereignty, diversify markets, build domestic supply chains, and improve productivity, enabling more women-owned businesses to grow across provincial and territorial boundaries represents a significant economic opportunity and a nation-building opportunity for Canada.



Women's Enterprise
Organizations of Canada