

## Fibank's Smart Lady program continues its support for female entrepreneurs

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Back in 2018, Fibank (First Investment Bank) launched its special Smart Lady program in support of Bulgarian business women.

Smart Lady is aimed at:

- start-up female entrepreneurs;
- development of enterprises owned by women;
- existing businesses run by women.

The broad range of the program includes not only bank products at preferential terms, but also a number of financial and non-financial solutions. Its purpose is to stimulate development, while providing support and reliable funding.

Since its inception in 2018, the program has granted loans in the amount of almost BGN 130 million, helping more than 1,000 women pursue their goals and make their dreams come true. Targeted sectors include transport, finance, agriculture, education and even the traditionally "less feminine" industry and construction. Over the years, Smart Lady has conducted or contributed to a number of seminars, trainings, forums and mentoring programs for women entrepreneurs, specially tailored to enhance their capacity to manage and expand their businesses.

Smart Lady also conducts coaching meetings for program participants, where they can upgrade their skills or find business partners.

In 2021, a special Sustainable Lady fund was created as part of the program in support of innovative green projects involving new or existing businesses run by women. These include startups with projects for smart solutions aimed at nature conservation, combating climate change and environmental pollution. Twelve sustainable projects have been funded so far.

Anna-Maria Markova, Sustainable Lady Fund grant-winner in the Startup Business category, shares in her interview: *"Aerospheric" is a project whose concept occurred to me at the women entrepreneur mentoring program in which I had the privilege to participate. In the project's initial phase, a training and visitor center will be constructed in a former school building located about an hour's drive from Sofia, on a property that we own. The center will serve as a destination for aviation enthusiasts of all ages and will provide seminars, training sessions and participation in a variety of activities. The second phase of the project envisages a consulting business focused on aviation companies and airports in the Eastern Europe region. With this phase, the innovative approach of the project comes: namely, the provision of services that are unique for Bulgaria and aim to reduce the carbon footprint of companies operating in the sector.*

Applications are currently being accepted for participation in the 2024 National Mentoring Program for Women Entrepreneurs, implemented with the support of Smart Lady and Fibank. Candidates can find out more about the program, as well as submit their applications, at: <https://mentorite.bg/>

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