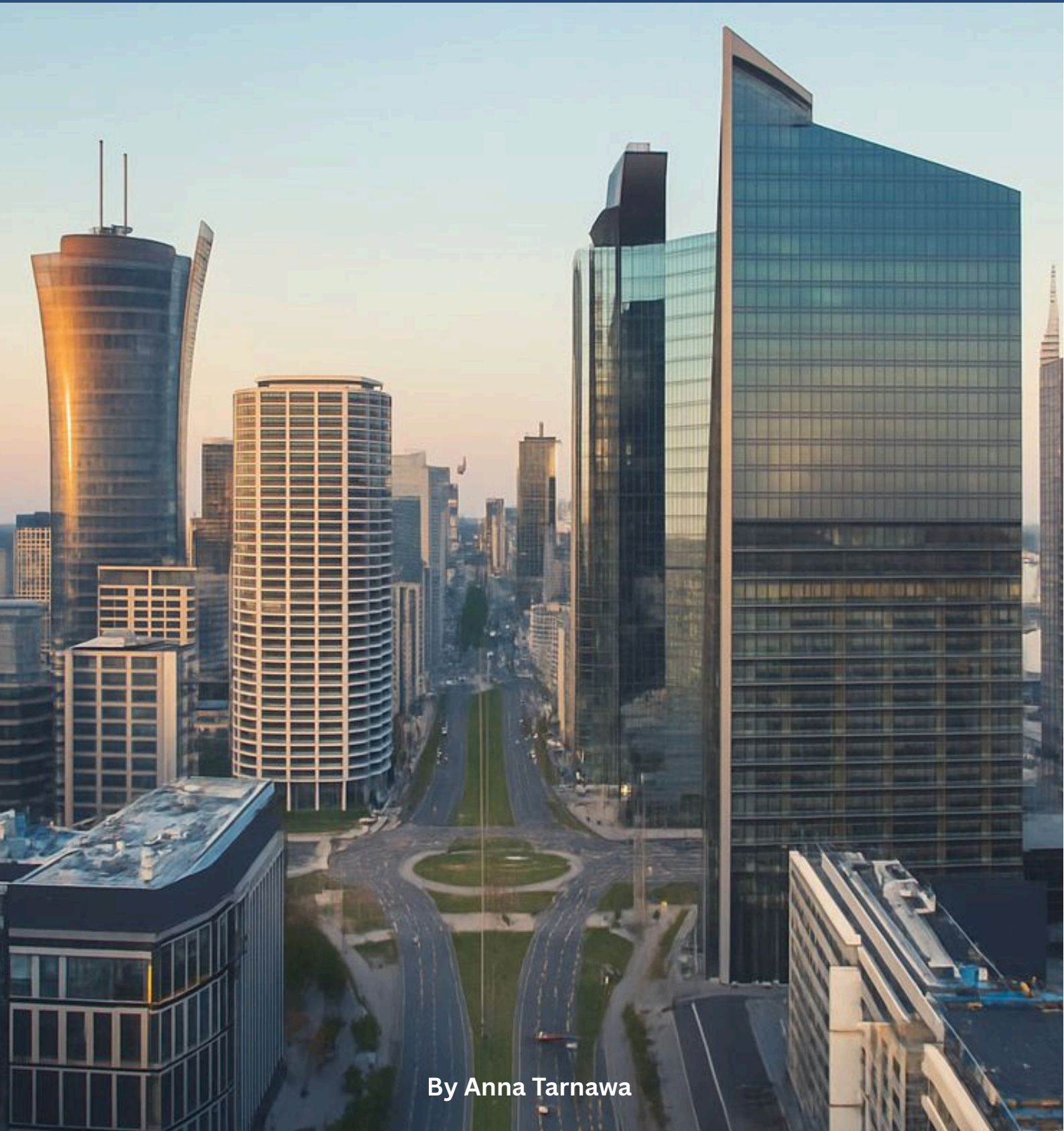




Global  
Entrepreneurship  
Monitor

# FILLING IN THE GAPS:

## Using GEM to grow entrepreneurship in Poland



By Anna Tarnawa

# Introduction

Government statistics on newly registered startups offer valuable baseline information. But this only tells part of the story. Missing are the motivations, attitudes, aspirations, and societal perceptions that influence whether a business gets off the ground or succeeds long term, along with data on individuals who have begun organising their ventures but have not yet registered them.

GEM fills this gap by providing deep, longitudinal insights into the human side of entrepreneurship – what drives people to start businesses, what holds them back, and how those dynamics evolve over time.

Poland can attest to the value of these insights. As described in this story, GEM data has helped shape national programmes and initiatives that not only support startups, but also promote inclusive, evidence-based innovation policy.

## Using GEM data to understand the entrepreneurial ecosystem

GEM Poland is a partnership between the University of Economics in Katowice and the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP), a public institution that has been supporting entrepreneurship, innovation, and the competitiveness of Polish enterprises – particularly SMEs – for 25 years through national and international programmes. As a key authority in fostering a business-friendly environment, PARP plays a central role in implementing state policy related to entrepreneurship and innovation.

Since 2011, PARP has systematically gathered insights from GEM to better understand the evolving dynamics of entrepreneurship in Poland. The Polish economy was developing steadily and achieving solid performance compared to other European countries. In the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor study, among the three groups of economies distinguished by their stage of development – factor-driven, efficiency-driven, and innovation-driven – Poland was classified as an efficiency-driven economy, with aspirations to join the group of innovation-driven countries. The question remained: how can these aspirations be realised?

GEM research revealed a key insight: entrepreneurial maturity is closely linked to levels of cooperation, innovation, and internationalisation. In 2011, the level of early-stage entrepreneurship in Poland was nearly twice as high as the rate of established business ownership, according to the GEM Adult Population Survey. At the same time, entrepreneurs' involvement in internationalisation and innovation remained insufficient, constraining the growth potential and competitiveness of Polish businesses. Entrepreneurs mainly collaborated through subcontracting or client referrals, with less focus on joint projects or knowledge sharing. Support institutions, especially in innovation and internationalisation, were still at an early stage, offering more potential than readiness.

Also of note is that GEM has documented a structural shift in Polish entrepreneurship. In 2017, the Established Business Ownership (EBO, in business for more than 42 months) rate surpassed Total early-stage Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA – less than 42 months in business), reaching 10% vs. 9%, for the first time in the history of GEM data in Poland. After 2017, the EBO rate continued to rise year by year, except during 2020–2022 when it was disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, while the TEA rate declined.

By 2024, early-stage activity had fallen to 2.5% (a 6.5 percentage point decline from 2011), while established ownership rose to 12.8% (up 8 percentage points). The sharpest declines in early-stage activity also occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic and again in 2022 following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, both of which weakened entrepreneurial intentions.

Still it has to be noted that 2023 and 2024 brought signs of recovery in the early stage entrepreneurship indicator, according to The Entrepreneurship Survey Report – GEM Poland 2025. Fortunately, the data shows no major gap in entrepreneurial activity between Polish women and men, a positive indicator for gender equity in entrepreneurship.

## Building a smarter startup ecosystem

Startup development is an integral part of building an innovation-driven economy. Innovative ideas from early-stage entrepreneurs are often the source of breakthrough technologies. Backed by GEM research, PARP has introduced financial grants, acceleration and incubation programmes, internationalisation support, and legal and advisory services, all designed to foster the growth and development of startups and strengthen the institutional ecosystem. The following are examples of such programmes.



Scale UP was designed to accelerate the development of young innovative companies. It was focused on providing intensive support to high-potential start-ups, helping them scale their operations and reach new markets. The programme offered mentorship, access to funding, technical infrastructure of big companies engaged in this programme, and networking opportunities to foster growth and innovation.

Poland Prize aimed to attract foreign entrepreneurs to Poland. It offered support in the form of grants, mentorship, and assistance in establishing business operations in the country. The programme sought to enhance the Polish startup ecosystem by integrating international talent and fostering cross-border collaboration.



Startup Platforms have been offering free, comprehensive incubation services, grants, mentoring, and assistance in developing business ideas (available in eastern Poland).

Acceleration Programmes have been helping to develop Polish startups ready to test products with corporate partners. The start-ups have been offered access to mentors, technical infrastructure, business development services, and funding.



## Examples of current startup support



### **STARTUP PLATFORMS FOR NEW IDEAS (FEPW)**

This consists of six platforms in Eastern Poland offering free incubation, mentoring, legal, accounting, marketing support, and grants for prototype development (MVP). Grants up to 600,000 PLN are available post-incubation.



### **STARTUP BOOSTER POLAND – SMART UP (FENG)**

The programme supports early-stage startups via acceleration and post-acceleration programs, offering expert mentoring, corporate partnerships, VC access, and grants up to 400,000 PLN.



### **INNOVATOR'S LABORATORY (FENG)**

It provides individual mentoring to innovators for testing and developing ideas into startup businesses. By 2026, over 1,000 innovators are expected to receive professional guidance.

GEM findings on women's entrepreneurship played a pivotal role in the creation of the [Small Grants Scheme for Entrepreneurial Women](#) to assist women-led businesses. This was a support instrument funded under the [Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014–2021](#), a programme designed to reduce economic and social disparities within the European Economic Area (EEA) and to strengthen bilateral relations between Norway and beneficiary countries.

The Small Grants Scheme for Entrepreneurial Women was aimed at boosting business competitiveness by developing or implementing innovations in three areas: eco-friendly technologies, inland or marine water innovations, and technologies improving quality of life. Projects might have also strengthened cooperation between Polish and Norwegian companies. Support included advisory services, product or technology development, mentoring, and investments in tangible and intangible assets for innovation, including environmental costs. Maximum funding per project was €200,000. A total of 392 applications were submitted, of which 56 projects were recommended for support, amounting to nearly €7.3 million.

Building on this, PARP is now developing a new programme called the [Green Business and Innovation](#), focused on supporting entrepreneurs. As part of the programme, there is a dedicated budget for women entrepreneurs in the green economy. This initiative will be financed under the [Norway Grants 2021–2028](#), with the aim to reduce social and economic disparities and strengthen cooperation with 15 EU member states. GEM will continue to serve as a diagnostic tool to guide programme design and implementation by providing insights on women and men-led businesses and by tracking entrepreneurs' attitudes toward sustainability.



GEM data has also been used as contextual input for three major national strategies:

- 1** [The Strategy for Responsible Development 2020 \(up to 2030\)](#), adopted in 2017, NES data on public policy towards entrepreneurship were used (page 105 and 397).
- 2** [The 2030 Productivity Strategy, adopted in 2022](#), used NES data for the diagnostic document (pages 49 and 50) as well as on addressing fear of failure (page 13).
- 3** [The National Innovation System, Opportunities and Challenges, published in 2023](#), used NES data on the effectiveness of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Poland (pages 7–8).

Additionally, GEM findings have informed PARP's own strategic direction, both the current strategy adopted in 2015 and a new one now in development.

## From data to dialogue: How GEM Poland shapes evidence-based policy

While Poland's Central Statistical Office provides useful statistics about the survival rate of newly registered businesses via the Labour Force Survey, GEM fills a critical gap by offering insights into the attitudes, aspirations, motivations, and barriers that influence entrepreneurial behavior.

Krzysztof Gulda, President of Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, stated: "GEM is a unique source of knowledge about how Poles think about entrepreneurship and how they decide to start businesses. It shows us not only hard numbers, but also the motivations, barriers, and aspirations of entrepreneurs. This is an invaluable resource for PARP, policymakers, business support institutions, and entrepreneurs themselves – as it helps to better understand the realities of doing business in Poland and to more effectively support the growth of companies at every stage of their development."

All support instruments designed by PARP are evidence-based, drawing on GEM data alongside other sources of information. GEM serves as a crucial resource not only for programme design but also for shaping public policy and national strategies. Its insights are regularly referenced during conferences, expert panels, and policymaking processes.

Importantly, from 2019–2025, GEM Poland Reports have been presented and discussed during meetings of the Council for Entrepreneurship, chaired by the President of Poland Andrzej Duda, further underscoring their relevance at the highest levels of national economic planning. Of note, the Council consisted of key entrepreneurs, representatives of universities – including professor Przemysław Zbierowski from University of Economics in Katowice and a member of the GEM Poland Team. Professor Zbierowski has highlighted GEM data in discussions.

The GEM Poland team has found that three key ingredients are essential for achieving meaningful impact.

- 1** **Patience** – A long enough time series is critical to uncovering trends and drawing well-founded conclusions.
- 2** **Perseverance** – Ongoing commitment is needed to overcome challenges related to data collection and funding.
- 3** **Openness** – A willingness to embrace ideas emerging both within the GEM community and from broader global trends has proven vital, not only for maintaining relevance, but also for finding joy in the work.

These lessons have helped position GEM Poland as a trusted source of entrepreneurial insight for 15 years and a valuable contributor to national policy development. GEM Poland expects to build on this impact in the years ahead.

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