

# **Italian women's entrepreneurial intention: impact of context embeddedness and public policies**

## **Objectives and literature**

In Italy, the number of women that is or ought to be entrepreneur is still half of the man. If we look at the Italian Register of Innovative Startups (MISE), only 20% of companies is founded and managed by female. Data from Italian Academic Spinoffs register (Netval) is aligned with the previous evidence. Women are still less incentivized to start a new business, and this is why women's entrepreneurship is still a phenomenon under investigation. Scholars are intended to understand whether gender differences discriminate in entrepreneurial attitude and intention. If we look at GEM (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor) data, Italy represents an exception in the general gender gap trend registered in Europe. While Europe is notable for having low TEA rates (total early stage entrepreneurial attitude) and a wide gender gap, women have a relatively low likelihood of starting a business, on average 25% of women do so for necessity. Italy accounts for motives of less than 10% of female entrepreneurs. Italy presents less than 25% of women think they have the ability to start a business. Why women are so less inclined than male counterpart to start a new business?

Entrepreneurship is an intentionally planned behavior (Shapiro and Sokol 1982; Krueger et al. 2000; Schlaegel and Koenig 2014). As suggested by Thompson (2009, p. 674), "individuals with entrepreneurial intent may be distinguished from those who merely have an entrepreneurial disposition by the facts of their having, first, given some degree of conscious consideration to the possibility of themselves starting a new business at some stage in the future, and then, second, having not rejected such a possibility." The existing literature defines entrepreneurial career intentions as related to starting an entrepreneurial career (Laspita et al. 2012). Several models aim to explain

entrepreneurial attitude and intentions. Ajzen's intention-centered 'theory of planned behaviour' and 'Shapiro's model of entrepreneurial event' provides a well-grounded explanation and predictions of variety of planned behavior. However, even though these models represent a step forward in entrepreneurial behavior research, they have not been as influential as the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Krueger, Reilly & Carsrud, 2000; Moriano, Gorgievski, Laguna, Stephan & Zarafshani, 2012; Van Gelderen, Brand, Van Praag, Bodewes, Poutsma & Van Gils, 2008). Many empirical studies on entrepreneurship have tested TPB and it is proven that this methodology is appropriate in studying entrepreneurial intention (Law and Breznik., Izquierdo&Buelens, 2008, Lüthje& Franke, 2003, Kolvereid&Moens, 1997, Souitaris et al., 2007, Fayolle et al., 2006). In fact, TPB has been widely adopted as one of the most powerful tools to test consumers' behavioural intentions (Ajzen, 2001), because TPB model described how behavior is formed. So, the theory results the best practice also to explain the effect of gender to study the particular case of female university students' intentions towards entrepreneurship (e.g. Diaz-Garcia & Jimenez-Moreno, 2010; Maes, Leroy & Sels, 2014; Verheul et al., 2012). According to the TPB, three are the main dimensions to evaluate studying the entrepreneurial intention: attitude, perceived control and social norm. Attitude refers to the degree to which a person has a favourable or unfavourable evaluation or appraisal of the behaviour in question; Perceived Control is defined as "people's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour of interest" (Ajzen, 1991); Subjective norms has to be with "the perceived social pressure to perform or not to perform the behaviour" by the individual (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000), in other words, the perceived extra personal influences on the decisionmaker (Krueger & Brazeal, 1994).

In this paper the aim is to investigate the role of gender on the entrepreneurship intention in university students and to understand if the perception of gender discrimination is a determining factor on entrepreneurial intention in Italy. Through the Italian 2016 Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS) database, the relation between gender and entrepreneurial intention is investigate.

## **Method and expected results**

We identified the main factors able to influence the entrepreneurial intention. Analyzing the three pillars of TPB (*attitude, social norms and perceived control*), we identified personal satisfaction (attitude), families and friend's influence (social norms) and the desire to actively contribute to social life, personal reasons and only in part of the career environment as the main factors explaining the entrepreneurial intention among students.

We make use of data from the 2016 Global University Entrepreneurial Spirit Students' Survey (GUESSS). GUESSS is an international research project started in 2003 by the Swiss Research Institute of Small Business and Entrepreneurship at the University of St. Gallen. The GUESSS project investigates and compares entrepreneurial attitudes and activities of students in more than 50 countries in the world. The data are collected biannually using online survey. Each country has a coordinator responsible for enlisting universities for this study. Data from Italy for the year 2016 constituted the basis for the analysis. The GUESSS 2016 database shows that on 4176 valid responses for Italy, 55,2 % of the sample (2307 answers) is represented by male, while the 44,8% is represented by female (1869 answers). See table for general details.

2016 Italian GUESSS database describes some criticism which the women perceive before starting an entrepreneurial activity. First of all, they make choices closer to the emotional side than rational sphere (the proactive role in society, personal reasons, the influence of friends and relatives in the choices, personal satisfaction). Moreover, the 63,7% of the sample affirms to be risk adversity.

	ITALY	NORTH of ITALY	SOUTH of ITALY
Total sample	4176 55,2% Male, 44,8% Female	3470 58% Male 42% Female	706 46,7% Male 53,3% Female
% Female	44,8% of the sample	78,2% (of 44,8%)	21,9% (of 44,8%)
Master Degree	Engineering 50,7 % Law and Economics 24,7%	Engineering 45% Law and Economics 30,2%	Engineering 87%

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, at the moment of the submission data elaboration are still going on. Main aim is to highlight which factors mostly influence the career choice of women students to start a business and if northern region of Italy present differences compared to the Southern one. The reason behind this assumption is that the northern region is characterized by a high degree of entrepreneurship, while the southern one is mostly backward economy resulting in a higher rate of unemployment.

What we expect is that in the northern regions the impact of the female entrepreneurial intention is not as relevant, and the degree of innovative female start-ups is in line with the regional figure. On the other hand, the degree of innovative starts up driven by one or more women exceeds the degree of innovative start up driven by man in region where European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), in order to improve the employment rate and promote women's work, allocates more funds for the birth of new innovative start-ups, led by young people or women.

Expected results will be of particular interest as they could be helpful in brings out the role that policies can have in the development of a country.

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