Women entrepreneurship
Key findings: Italy

**Who wants to be an entrepreneur?**

Entrepreneurship is crucial to economic development, promoting social integration and reducing inequalities. *OECD Entrepreneurship at a Glance* presents an original collection of indicators that measure the state of entrepreneurship, providing an important reference for policy insights and policy making.

*Perceived risks are higher for women*

One important determinant of entrepreneurship relates to the relative risk involved, or rather assessment of risk. This is to a large extent determined by risk of failure but also reflects other factors, such as social security safety nets, access to finance, access to child-care, and indeed potential rewards; which helps to explain the significant differences across countries on how the entrepreneurial risk is perceived. One pattern however, is remarkably consistent: women, the world over, are less prone to taking the entrepreneurial plunge.

Italy is no exception to this pattern (Figure 1), with 37% of men and 23% of women declaring that they would take the entrepreneurial risk and start up their own business than work for someone else. These values are some of the lowest among G7 countries and lie well below the OECD average.

![Figure 1. How is the entrepreneurial risk perceived?](image)

Source: OECD based on Gallup data.

*...reflecting perceived gaps in opportunities for: training...*

Most countries in the OECD area exhibit a significant gender gap with regards to access to training to create and grow a start-up, a characteristic that is especially true for Italy (Figure 2), where only 19% of men and 12% of women declare having access to training. In fact, shares of both men and women are the lowest among G7 countries.
Figure 2. Is it possible to access training on how to start or grow a business?
Percentage of individuals who consider they have access to formal or informal training on how to start or grow a business, 2013

Source: OECD based on Gallup data.

...and finance

Similar gender gaps exist across the world regarding access to finance. Only 4% of Italian women declare that access to money is not a barrier to starting a business, while the share for men (10%) is more than double (Figure 3). Both shares are in stark contrast with the OECD area averages (27% and 35% for women and men respectively).

Figure 3. Is it possible to access money to start a business?
Percentage of individuals who consider they have access to money (own savings or any other source) they would need if they wanted to start or grow a business, 2013

Source: OECD based on Gallup data.

...as well as lower rewards from entrepreneurship

Potential rewards are also an important determinant of risk assessment in most countries. Earnings from self-employment are typically lower for women than for men. Italian women entrepreneurs earned 55.5% less than their male counterparts in 2011-12. This is by far the largest gender gap among G7 countries, and almost twice the OECD average (Figure 4). Furthermore, between 2006-7 and 2011-2 the gender gap in self-employment earnings in Italy increased by around 7.5 percentage points, in contrast to the downwards trend observed in most other OECD countries.
**But perceptions towards entrepreneurship show little gender bias**

An interesting supplement to the findings in Figures 1 to 4 is the extent to which entrepreneurship is perceived as virtuous in a country. In Italy compared to the OECD average, relatively few people consider entrepreneurs as good role model (Figure 5). As in most other OECD countries, however, also in Italy more women (58%) than men see entrepreneurs as good role models (52%).

**Current trends in women entrepreneurship**

Self-employment rates are often used as an important indicator of entrepreneurialism. The shares of employed Italian women who are self-employed with employees (3.6%) or are own-account workers (12.4%) are the highest among G7 countries, and lie significantly above the OECD average (Figure 6 and Figure 7). It is likely that many of the own-account workers represent “necessity” rather than “opportunity” entrepreneurs, consistent with the low shares of individuals declaring a preference for taking the entrepreneurial risk.
Differences across countries partly reflect ‘push’, notably limited paid employment opportunities, as well as ‘pull’ factors. In most OECD countries, however, the gap between the proportions of male and female entrepreneurs with employees (3.5 percentage points on average) is similar to the gender gap between the shares of own-account workers (4.1 percentage points on average, Figure 6 and Figure 7).

**Figure 6. Share of employed women and men who are self-employed with employees**
Percentage, 2014


**Figure 7. Share of employed women and men who are own-account workers**
Percentage, 2014


Italian women entrepreneurs work predominantly in the services sector, as is the case in most other OECD countries (Figure 8). In many countries, however, evidence for young female entrepreneurs points to considerable diversity.
Figure 8. Self-employed whose activity is in services
Percentage, 2014

Source: OECD Gender Data Portal.

Further reading
