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WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

COUNTRY REPORT

ITALY





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58.8 mil

Population

56.20%

Females' with tertiary education level

51.11%

Share of females

9.40%

Females' unemployment rate

62.55%

Females' with low education level

5.20%

Females' long-term unemployment rate

Development of social enterprises

Italy has one of the longest histories of social entrepreneurship development in Europe, spanning over 40 years. This extensive experience has resulted in an advanced legal framework with clear definitions, criteria, and other essential aspects. The social entrepreneurship sector in Italy primarily consists of social enterprises (regulated by Law 155/2006) and social cooperatives (Law 318/1991). A key shift in the sector was achieved in 2017 through the introduction of the Social Enterprises Reform Act, which has redefined features of social enterprises by providing the possibility for non-profit organisations to qualify as social enterprises, defining new tax regime and financial support, and other features (Legislative Decree 112/2017). Social enterprises belong to the third sector, regardless of the legal form they assume (Law 106/2016).

Currently, Italy has one of the largest variety of legal forms: social cooperatives, associations and foundations, mutual aid societies, limited liability companies, and traditional cooperatives (e.g., community cooperatives). Moreover, social cooperatives in Italy are classified in two types: A-type – supplying social, health and educational services, and B-type – integrating disadvantaged groups into the labour market through agricultural, manufacturing or other commercial activities. In general, Italy's legal framework for social entrepreneurship is dedicated and supportive, although it can be characterised as quite complex.

The main social impact areas

Social cooperation (social care), innovation, support of people with disabilities, support of economically disadvantaged people.

The main economic sectors for social enterprises

Sport, cultural and artistic activities, socialising and spare time activities, social assistance and civil protection, labour relations and lobby representation.

Ecosystem – women in social entrepreneurship

Considering the diverse and comprehensive nature of social entrepreneurship in Italy, measuring its extent is quite challenging. Nonetheless, some estimations have been made to provide an overview of the sector. According to the latest data from the ISTAT census, there were 363,499 non-profit organisations in 2020. Among these, associations constituted the largest share (85.2%), followed by other legal forms (8.4%), social cooperatives (4.1%) and foundations (2.3%). However, there is no clear distinction specific to social enterprise activities within these NGOs.

Furthermore, there is no data on social enterprises led by women. Currently, the only estimates are provided by the Italian Social Enterprise Monitor – on average, 36.8% of social enterprise management teams consist of women, while 6.8% have all-women founding teams.



Key findings on women social entrepreneurship

In Italy, both structural barriers and social-cultural issues hinder women's participation in the labour market and entrepreneurship, where the presence of women is significantly lower than that of males. However, this gender disparity is less pronounced in social entrepreneurship, particularly in sectors such as instruction, care and social assistance, where one out of every three social enterprises are led by a female.

In recent years, the Italian government has launched several substantial measures to support and promote female entrepreneurship. Although these measures are not specifically targeted at social enterprises, they can also be utilised by social entrepreneurs.

Generally, women in Italy are considered the main "family caregivers", often leading them to sacrifice their careers. Women have had to either pause their work or accept jobs with reduced responsibilities due to family obligations. The existing child-related paid leave systems display a clear imbalance between women and men, and access to affordable childcare and financial support is limited. These issues create obstacles for women in finding the time and resources needed to establish their own enterprises.

INNOVATION, ETHICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE ARE THE MAIN FORCES INSPIRING ITALIAN WOMEN TO START A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE.

Key obstacles

- One of the main challenges is childcare responsibilities, managing family commitments, fear of failure, and the lack of sufficient public and private services that support women in dedicating more time to their work.
- The lack of financial support for those who start a social enterprise or difficulties in accessing existing funds (too complex public financing, lack of capacity to access it).
- Complexity of recent social entrepreneurship related legislations.
- Social enterprises cannot compete with traditional businesses in public tenders due to the requirement of providing pre-finance from their own resources.
- An obstacle specific to social enterprises working with persons with disabilities – if persons with disabilities start receiving a salary, they lose their state-provided pension. This can create a barrier to their emancipation and hinder their ability to fully participate in the workforce.

Key knowledge and skills need

- There is a need for training opportunities and knowledge promotion in the field of financial management, bureaucracy, business development and technical skills related to entrepreneurship.
- In addition to business-related and linguistic skills, it can be beneficial for a social entrepreneur focusing on disabilities to have competence in the psychological and educational fields.
- Due to the nature of social enterprises, the recruitment and selection of workers is very important. Social enterprise workers have to be able to work taking into consideration social needs and the aims of the social enterprise.



Drivers and opportunities

- In most cases, women are naturally driven by their personal experiences to establish a social enterprise, e.g. due to the disabilities of some family members, as seen in the case of La Casa di Toti in Italy.
- Soft skills emerged as one of the strengths among the women, they showed a good level of confidence with essential capacities, such as team building, innovation, creativity and image management.
- It was highlighted that accessing European funds presents a significant opportunity for the receipt of controlled economic support for SE initiatives in Italy.

Policy recommendation to empower women

It is crucial to have enhanced financial and economic incentives dedicated to social entrepreneurship at the government level.

For instance, properties confiscated from criminal organisations (mafias) could be revalued and utilised as locations for social enterprises initiated by women who are victims of violence or immigrant women. This support should not be limited only to the field of disabilities, as there are other needs that can be addressed.

National/regional authorities should prioritise investigating and understanding the problems of families with members who have disabilities. These families often take the lead in establishing social enterprises, and in addition to running their enterprise, they have to tackle the day-to-day issues within their families.

In certain regions of Italy (e.g. Sicily), the implementation of services/ programmes helping with childcare would be particularly beneficial.

<p>POLICY MAKERS AND PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General Directorate of the Third Sector and Corporate Social Responsibility (chaired by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies) 	<p>ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS REPRESENTING SE SECTOR</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consorzio SIS - Sistema Imprese Sociale • IRIS NETWORK - Research Institutes on Social Enterprise • Single National Register of the Third Sector (RUNTS) • Consortium Sol.Co., Sicilian Social Enterprise Network • ABN - Social Network • CRT Foundation • Ashoka 	<p>MENTORING, incl. LEGAL ADVICE/CONSULTATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consulenza Service (by Chamber of Commerce Como-Lecco)
<p>DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS, PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formacamera (by Chamber of Commerce Rome) – organising different type of trainings • W.O.W. in rete, Accademia D'impresa (by Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Crafts and Agriculture of Trento) - training activity for female entrepreneurs, aspiring entrepreneurs and managers • WomenUp (by LVenture) - Free training to support women entrepreneurs • I Have a Choice – brief two female entrepreneur courses. 	<p>KEY FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROGRAMMES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women's Enterprise Fund (by the Ministry of Economic Development, 2021-2026) • Pilot Project UniCredit - EIB (2019-2024) – credit line for SMEs, including women-led businesses • Smart&Smart - support for innovative start-ups, 100 million EUR allocated to female's star-ups • Fondo Donna Impresa (by the Ministry of Economic Affairs (MISE), 2021-2026) – support for new and existing businesses to encourage female's entrepreneurship • ON - Nuove imprese a Tasso Zero - supports SMEs made up by young people (aged 18-35) or women of all ages 	<p>FISCAL ARRANGEMENTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ON - Nuove imprese a Tasso Zero - subsidy programme for young people or women for development micro and small enterprises

Used sources:

- European Commission (2020), Social enterprises and their ecosystems in Europe – Italy, Author: Borzago, C.
- ISTAT (2022), [Struttura e profili del settore non profit](#)
- OECD (2022), [Designing Legal Frameworks for Social Enterprises: Practical Guidance for Policy Makers](#), Annex D. Case study – [Law on Social Cooperatives in Italy](#)
- POWER Country Report of Italy (analysis of data and expert interviews) by Quality Culture
- Salatino, G. (2018), [A spotlight on Italy: The new regulation of the "social enterprise"](#), The Philanthropist Journal
- The [Euclid Network](#) Knowledge Centre, [Ecosystem mapping: Country factsheet, Italy](#)



SUCCESS STORIES





ITALY

Repubblica Degli Stagisti Success Story



ELEONORA VOLTOLINA (CEO)

Sector: Young people and labour market

[facebook.com/RepubblicaDegliStagisti?locale=it_IT](https://www.facebook.com/RepubblicaDegliStagisti?locale=it_IT)

www.repubblicadeglistagisti.it

LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS

N/A

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS (RESULTS ACHIEVED)

“La Repubblica degli Stagisti” works with over 34 companies and impacts the quality of over 6,000 paid internships.



INTRODUCTION TO THE CEO

Eleonora Voltolina is a journalist and a social entrepreneur. She founded La Repubblica degli Stagisti e The Why Wait Agenda.

THE MAIN AIM

“La Repubblica degli Stagisti” helps young workers in finding paid internship opportunities. La Repubblica degli stagisti born as the first newspaper with the aim of exploring the internship issue and giving interns a voice.

They created the Intern Charter, a manifesto that each company that collaborates with them must respect.

QUOTATION FROM THE CEO

“L'ITALIA È UNA REPUBBLICA FONDATA SULLO STAGE”



ITALY

Repubblica Degli Stagisti Success Story



RICCARDA ZEZZA (CEO)

Sector: Training and innovative solution
for the development of human capital

www.lifeed.io

LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS

N/A

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS (RESULTS ACHIEVED)

Lifeed is used by more than 20,000 people in 80 companies in more than 23 countries worldwide.



INTRODUCTION TO THE CEO

Riccarda Zezza is the founder of Lifeed and the author of MAAM (Maternity as a Master), a programme for companies and employees that, through a series of courses and seminars, aims to redefine maternity as a valuable learning period (just like a Master). This programme is born after her book MAAM. She is a blogger for Alley Oop - IL Sole 24 Ore.

THE MAIN AIM

Lifeed is a social impact EdTech company that creates innovative solutions for human capital development and involves the corporate world as an actor of change. Since 2015, it transforms life transitions and care activities, such as parenting, caregiving, and crisis, into opportunities for personal and professional growth.

QUOTATION FROM CEO

“DAL 2015 NOI STUDIAMO COME VITA E LAVORO POSSANO GENERARE SINERGIE, RICARICARSI A VICENDA E TRASMETTERE COMPETENZE”



ITALY

Uno Ecosistemi Success Story



**VALENTINA
SCANZIANI (CEO)**

Sector: sustainability, circular economy

www.ecosistemi.uno

LESSONS LEARNED AND TIPS

N/A

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS (RESULTS ACHIEVED)

N/A



INTRODUCTION TO THE CEO

Valentina Scanziani is the co-founder of Stella Onlus, a non-profit association that supports humanitarian projects in Togo, and is a member of the Ashoka Support Network, a network of 350 people in 22 countries, which offer economic and professional support to social entrepreneurs, helping them to maximise the impact of their business.

THE MAIN AIM

Uno is a community of senior consultants from the non-profit, private and institutional sectors, who are called to offer ecosystem-based solutions to complex social challenges. Uno conceives and implements interventions that generate social and environmental impact and that are at the same time economically sustainable.

QUOTATION FROM THE CEO

**“CIRCOLARITÀ, INTRAPRENDENZA, UMANITÀ.
#SIAMOUNO”**

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