
Guest editorial: Exploring entrepreneurship policy in a global context: a gender perspective

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1. Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship has gained significant attention during the past 20 years as a potential catalyst for economic growth, innovation and social development. However, crafting effective policies to support women entrepreneurs requires a nuanced understanding of the socio-cultural, economic and institutional context within which they operate. In this regard, [Welter and Baker \(2017\)](#) emphasize the pivotal role of context in influencing entrepreneurial activities, including those of women. Context encompasses various dimensions such as historical legacies, cultural norms, legal frameworks, access to resources and institutional support systems ([Welter and Baker, 2017](#)). These factors interact to shape women's entrepreneurial experiences, opportunities and challenges within a national setting. Context itself appears deeply gendered ([Welter, 2019](#)).

To be effective, policies aimed at supporting women's entrepreneurship must be tailored to address the specific contextual dynamics of each country. Cross-country variations in socio-cultural norms, economic structures and institutional frameworks thus necessitate diverse policy approaches. For example, women in both developing and developed countries face significant barriers to accessing capital; however, their capital needs may be different. Thus, although evidence shows that in developing countries policies that include microfinance initiatives and skills training programs enhance women's entrepreneurial outcomes ([Coleman, 2005](#); [Kabeer, 2005](#)), in developed countries, other initiatives may be necessary. Adherence to patriarchal norms is another significant barrier, which is mainly present in developing countries and might hinder women's entrepreneurship. Further, [Faria and Barbosa \(2019\)](#) found that women's entrepreneurship rates, educational levels and the political representation of women were significant determinants of government support programs for women entrepreneurs. Additionally, in countries with well-developed welfare systems, parental leave policies that are helpful for employees may not be as advantageous for entrepreneurs ([Neergaard and Thrane, 2011](#)). Moreover, the legal and regulatory environment plays a vital role in shaping women's entrepreneurial activities. For example, countries with supportive legal frameworks that ensure gender equality, property rights and access to justice tend to have higher rates of women's entrepreneurship ([Brush et al., 2006](#)). Given the above, as well as other differences noted in the literature, straight-forward comparisons of findings between countries may not be possible. However, comparative studies analyzing the effectiveness of different policy interventions across countries can provide valuable insights for policymakers in designing strategies for their country ([Verheul et al., 2005](#); [Fleck et al., 2011](#)). However, it is essential to recognize there is no "one-size-fits-all approach" for policymakers to follow. As a recent Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) report on women's entrepreneurship policy shows, each country's unique context demands customized policy solutions that address specific challenges to leverage existing opportunities ([Halabisky et al., 2021](#)).



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2. Purpose of the special issue

This special issue (SI) gathers a collection of high-caliber research that explores entrepreneurship policy from a gender perspective and, in so doing, offers valuable insights into the gendered nature of entrepreneurship policy. In compiling the SI, our overall objective was to provide scholars with a much deeper understanding of the nature of entrepreneurship policy, its embedded gender biases, its generally (although not exclusively) perceived ineffectiveness, the importance of linking policy instruments to the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem, the importance of including women at the design stage and the need to ensure that relevant monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are built into all policies from the outset. One of our aims was to highlight issues relating to culture, skills, finance, networks and regulations and show that current public policies for entrepreneurship are often inadequate to address the gender gap. Further, we aimed to provide valuable insights into theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches appropriate to the study of entrepreneurship policy from a gender perspective, potentially including new theories and methods. Accordingly, we sought scholarly contributions capable of addressing a range of pertinent research questions, including but not limited to – How and to what extent is current entrepreneurship policy gendered? How can policy frameworks be evaluated or improved upon? How does context affect entrepreneurship policy? What existing theoretical frameworks and methods are appropriate to the critical and robust exploration of entrepreneurship policy from a gender perspective?

3. Special issue process

We issued a formal “Call for Papers” in early 2022, which was promoted via the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research* website, international entrepreneurship websites, relevant research fora and the guest editors’ personal research networks, with a submission deadline of 1st December. Interested authors were given the option of submitting a short abstract for consideration and feedback by the guest editing team ahead of submitting their final paper. Several authors took up this option, which helped ensure full papers were appropriately aligned to the SI theme. In total, 35 submissions were received, of which 11 were desk rejected by the guest editing team, leaving 24 for formal double-blind peer review. Following a rigorous review and “revise and resubmit” process over the subsequent months, 13 papers were eventually selected for editing and final inclusion in the SI. At this point, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to the authors and the reviewers for their hard work, their diligence and their patience, which has helped us deliver a robust set of high-quality research papers for this collection. To the authors, we are honored that you have chosen to share your research work with us. To the reviewers, we are grateful for your constructive expert commentary, which has undoubtedly enhanced the papers in this collection.

4. Thematic overview of the selected papers

In exploring entrepreneurship policy from a gender perspective, our selected papers in this SI have drawn on a diverse range of contexts, data sets, sample types, sample sizes, methodological approaches, theoretical frameworks and research questions. Collectively, they address four key themes: *context*, *policy influence and efficacy*, *policy–finance nexus* and *scholars’ communication and engagement with policymakers*.

4.1 Context

The first prominent theme emerging from the papers – *context* – proved the most popular across the paper collection, involving six papers, highlighting the multiplicity of context and

its influence with respect to policy. Within the overarching theme of context, these papers covered a range of topics including opportunity-necessity entrepreneurship in multiple country contexts, rural settings, the tech sector, migrant contexts, embeddedness and entrepreneurial intentions (EI) in the context of low-income countries.

In our first paper – *The implications of economic freedom and gender ideologies on women’s opportunity-to-necessity entrepreneurship* by [Hechavarría et al. \(2024\)](#), – the authors explore the relationship between economic freedom and gender ideologies on the allocation of women’s opportunity-to-necessity entrepreneurship across countries. Drawing on multiple database sources, resulting in 729 observations from 109 countries (2006–2018), they examine how a country’s policies facilitating voluntary exchange (economic freedom) and a country’s propensity for gendered separate spheres (gender ideologies) affect the distribution of women’s opportunity-to-necessity entrepreneurship. Findings reveal that economic freedom positively affects the ratio of women’s opportunity-to-necessity entrepreneurship and that this effect benefits efficiency and innovation economies more than factor economies. Furthermore, gender ideologies of political equality positively affect the ratio of women’s opportunity-to-necessity entrepreneurship, with this effect being most pronounced for efficiency economies. This paper addresses calls to better understand variations within women’s entrepreneurship rather than engaging in men-women comparisons. The authors contribute to the current body of knowledge by demonstrating how economic freedom and gender ideologies shape the distribution of contextual motivation for women’s entrepreneurship cross-culturally.

Our second paper focuses on the rural context. The paper *Women’s contribution to rural development: implications for entrepreneurship policy* by [Ahl et al. \(2024\)](#) examines how women entrepreneurs contribute to rural development. Using a qualitative design, interviewing 32 women entrepreneurs in rural Sweden, the authors analyze motives, strategies and outcomes. The analysis divides the interviewees into two groups: one that does not draw on any specific rural resources and one that is dependent on location and associated resources. The two groups seem to be similar in terms of motivations but differ in terms of strategies employed; both contribute to enhancing rural “resilience” in terms of, e.g. job creation. Findings show that work and life are more integrated in the rural context and that the contributions of women entrepreneurs to enhancing rural life are substantial, multidimensional and indispensable. However, findings also show that rural development policy tends to be inadequate even though there are many good reasons for supporting women-owned rural businesses: they create jobs in areas where these may be hard to come by, thus also generating tax income for municipalities, and they create numerous economic spill-over effects. However, as women tend to use farmland as a resource rather than merely farm it, policymakers need to redefine what constitutes an agricultural business, making more women eligible for support.

Our third paper focuses on the context of tech entrepreneurship and gender. The paper, *Contextualising gender policy in tech entrepreneurship: a cross national and multiple-level analysis*, by [Callerstig et al. \(2024\)](#) shows that the gender context is important for policy implementation. Addressing the issue of the gender gap in technology entrepreneurship, the authors examine how national contexts affect policy and policy implementation. Using the theory of gendered institutionalism and examining the national macro level through analysis of policy documents, the meso level through interviews with managers of technology incubators and the micro level through interviews with female technology entrepreneurs in four countries with different levels of gender equality (Sweden, Norway, Ireland and Israel), they find that the existing masculinist nature of entrepreneurship is a major challenge in all national contexts. Based on their findings, they argue for a shift from focusing solely on women’s access to resources to changing the structures that perpetuate gender inequality. For this shift to occur, it is essential to recognize the implicit biases and challenge male norms

that are deeply embedded in current policy frameworks that claim to be neutral at the macro and meso levels. At the micro level, attention should also be shifted from blaming individual women for the problems they face to focusing on structural issues. It is also important to recognize that informal gender rules have a strong impact on formal policies, regardless of national gender regimes.

Empowering migrant women's entrepreneurship: stakeholder perspectives from the entrepreneurial ecosystem by [Aman et al. \(2024\)](#) focuses on the context of migrant women's entrepreneurship. It explores how the entrepreneurial ecosystem's structure, policy and programs advance diversity and inclusion to foster migrant women's entrepreneurship in Finland. The authors also explore how migrant women entrepreneurs contribute to the dynamics and sustainability of the host country's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the authors draw on interviews with multiple entrepreneurial ecosystem actors, including social community groups, NGOs, government administrations and local municipalities, together with the experiences of two migrant women entrepreneurs. Findings demonstrate an interplay between Finland's entrepreneurial ecosystem and diversity, equality and inclusion activities with respect to the development of migrant women's businesses, which is influenced by impeding and fostering dynamics. The authors argue that the development of migrant women's businesses depends on the ecosystem's structure, policies and programs as well as the individual agency and proactivity of the entrepreneurs themselves in lobbying the required actors for their interests. Findings also indicate that migrant women entrepreneurs contribute to the sustainability of the ecosystem through businesses which aim to solve particular societal challenges. The authors contribute to the literature by providing novel insights into migrant women entrepreneurs' engagement in the entrepreneurial ecosystem, their interconnectedness and dynamism.

Our next paper explores contextual embeddedness. *Pursuing entrepreneurial opportunities is not a choice: the interplay between gender norms, contextual embeddedness and (in)equality mechanisms in entrepreneurial contexts*, by [Stoker et al. \(2024\)](#), presents a conceptual framework built on liberal and post-modern feminist perspectives and existing literature. The paper addresses the question "How do women entrepreneurs become embedded across multiple entrepreneurial contexts" and aims to contribute to understanding of how gender norms, contextual embeddedness and (in)equality mechanisms interact within contexts and shape the entrepreneurial journey of opportunity-driven women entrepreneurs. The paper draws on three illustrative contexts, namely entrepreneurship education, business networks and access to finance, to highlight the various challenges opportunity-driven women entrepreneurs face throughout their ventures. The authors argue for more systemic research beyond a women-centered perspective and propose new policy interventions to disrupt systemic gender disparities and to create a more inclusive business environment for every entrepreneur, whether established or nascent. They suggest moving toward entrepreneurial environments which proactively promote the understanding of different viewpoints to combat the mechanisms that create gendered inequalities. They posit that adopting a universal strategy may, concomitantly, support women by fostering equitable entrepreneurial environments and help men constrained by rigid gendered norms.

Our sixth and final paper in this thematic category focuses on the context of low-income countries. *Gender and entrepreneurial intentions in low-income countries: the relative roles played by anticipated financial returns versus perceived barriers for university students in Sierra Leone*, by [Bradley and Fry \(2024\)](#), examines the extent to which female and male university students express different EI. The paper draws on data from a field survey in Sierra Leone and employs multiple mediation analyses to determine whether students' perceptions of the anticipated financial returns to occupational choices and their perceptions of the barriers to entrepreneurship drive a gender gap in EI. Findings suggest that female students express higher EI than their male counterparts. Further, the gender gap in EI for

STEM- and business-educated students in Sierra Leone is predominantly influenced by anticipated financial returns to occupational choices rather than perceived barriers to entrepreneurship, a more frequently studied antecedent to EI. The authors discuss the implications of their study for future research on entrepreneurship in the African context and call on scholars to pay attention to the contextualization of entrepreneurship research.

4.2 Policy influence and efficacy

The second theme to emerge from our SI papers is *policy influence and efficacy* as articulated in three papers that deal with topics such as how policy influences women's entry into entrepreneurship, policy efficacy in Sub-Saharan Africa and how policy impacts women's empowerment in cooperative social ventures. The first of these papers – *Breaking barriers and bridging gaps: the influence of entrepreneurship policies on women's entry into entrepreneurship*, by [Raza et al. \(2024\)](#) – examines how entrepreneurship policies, in conjunction with formal and informal gender equality, influence women toward self-employment when compared to men. The authors draw on symbolic interactionism, institutional theory and gender institutions to develop and validate a comprehensive multi-level model. Formal gender equality metrics are derived from the World Economic Forum, consisting of economic participation and opportunity, political empowerment, educational attainment and health and survival. Informal gender equality is measured by gauging job availability for women (in comparison to men) data, sourced from the World Values Survey and the European Values Survey over the period 1981 to 2014. Data on entrepreneurship policy are derived from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor database, spanning 66 countries over the period 2006–2017. Findings indicate that in societies where both formal gender equality and entrepreneurship policies are robust, policies promote women's entrepreneurial activity (albeit not to the same level as men's entrepreneurial activity). On the contrary, where policies are combined with strong informal gender equality, better outcomes are observed for women. The study's findings contribute to the literature by highlighting the important role of policymakers in promoting gender equality in both formal and informal contexts.

The second paper in this category – *Gender-based policies and women's entrepreneurship: an fsQCA analysis of sub-Saharan African countries*, by [Adegbile et al. \(2024\)](#) – scrutinizes the efficacy of entrepreneurship policies tailored to women's entrepreneurship within Sub-Saharan Africa. Despite governmental endeavors to enact inclusive policies addressing issues such as discrimination, inheritance and property rights, as well as bolstering access to training, prevailing policies across Africa typically lack robust support for women's entrepreneurship. Employing fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA), the researchers examine secondary data drawn from diverse sources. Their findings reveal that women's entrepreneurship is influenced by the complex interplay of various gender-based policies. They ascertain that two configurations are pivotal in adequately fostering women's entrepreneurship. Firstly, a synergistic alignment of gender-based policies emphasizing 'access to credit' and signing of contracts. Secondly, a composite of policies facilitating "signing of contracts," "business registration" and "opening a bank account," serving as significant precursors to promoting women's entrepreneurship. The researchers assert that these distinctive components are indispensable for nurturing women's entrepreneurship in the Sub-Saharan African context, highlighting the contingent efficacy of policies targeting women entrepreneurs in relation to the effectiveness of other policies. However, policymakers are advised to tailor the selection of policy configurations to suit the specific conditions of their respective countries, considering resource constraints that may preclude the implementation of all recommended policies.

The final paper in this category – *The impact of local entrepreneurial initiatives on women entrepreneur empowerment: the case of cooperative social ventures in Morocco*, by

Jabbouri *et al.* (2024) – investigates how women’s empowerment in resource-scarce and male-dominated local contexts can be improved through NGOs’ interventions. The authors take advantage of the Empowering Women in the Atlas Initiative (EWA) to collect rich longitudinal data through 51 semi-structured interviews of women entrepreneurs in three local production cooperatives. The EWA project deploys workshops and training sessions on topics such as business idea development, entrepreneurial finance and environmental awareness with the aim of helping women overcome isolation, develop their ventures and establish themselves as successful rural women entrepreneurs. The processing and analysis of data by using a grounded theory approach gives rise to several contributions, including the development of a multidimensional empirically grounded model uncovering the social, economic and psychological dimensions of women’s empowerment and a unique hierarchical perspective within the cooperative organization. Six mechanisms are revealed by which women’s empowerment may be impacted by the NGO’s initiative – networking, entrepreneurial mobility, opportunity identification, entrepreneurial passion, entrepreneurial profit and entrepreneurial innovation. These findings also feed into specific policy recommendations.

4.3 Policy-finance nexus

The third theme we identified in our SI collection focuses on the *policy-finance nexus*. Two papers fell into this category. The first of these – *Talking with venture capitalists: gender perceptions in investment decisions*, by Karlstrøm *et al.* (2024), – investigates the role of Norwegian investors’ perceptions of gender in their decision-making. Using a qualitative design, the authors interview ten decision-makers of the foremost venture capital funds in Norway. The research shows that despite living in one of the most equal countries in the world, venture capitalists in Norway continue to blame external factors for the industry’s gender imbalance, even though both male and female investors associate masculine characteristics with successful entrepreneurs. Investment decisions are thus highly impacted not only by homophily but also by role congruity. Indeed, network affiliation plays an important role in perpetuating a gender imbalance. Norwegian investors primarily invest in entrepreneurs who belong to their existing networks, and since the venture capitalist industry is male-dominated, it is no surprise that investments continue to be the same. To combat the skewness of investment decisions, policymakers need to design policy instruments that consider the barriers faced by women, as women may decide against even approaching venture capitalists because they already “know” the result. Venture capital firms, for their part, should include more women investors. It is also important to consider that there are other more important values than fast growth and profit.

The second paper in this category – *Awareness of finance support programmes: the role of networks, gender and ethnicity*, by Mwaura and Knox (2024) – investigates factors which influence awareness of government and industry programs designed to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in accessing finance. Drawing on expectations states theory, the study seeks to understand the impact of gender, ethnicity and network membership on owner-managers’ awareness. Using a quantitative design, the study draws on quarterly data sourced by the UK SME Finance Monitor. Data pertaining to approximately 45,000 SMEs over 10 waves (Quarter 3 2017 to Quarter 4, 2019) were used to test a series of hypotheses. Using regression analysis, findings indicate that membership in networks is effective in increasing awareness of finance support programs, particularly government programs. However, and in contrast to existing literature on access to finance, findings indicate no significant difference in awareness of government or industry programs between male and female owner-managers. Findings also reveal that awareness of government and industry programs is lower for minorities and that within-network minority females remain disadvantaged relative to their

white native counterparts. The findings have implications for the women's and ethnic minority enterprise policy literature in terms of contributing important insights into the nuanced nature of policy awareness.

4.4 Scholars' communication and engagement with policymakers

The fourth and final theme to emerge from our SI collection, and one that potentially offers valuable insights toward a future research and practice agenda, relates to *communication* and how scholars might *effectively engage with policymakers* to ensure a more equitable policy landscape. Here, we identified two papers. The first of these – *Ideas for bridging the academic-policy divide at the nexus of gender and entrepreneurship*, by [Carlson and Jennings \(2024\)](#) – focuses on how scholars working at the gender-entrepreneurship intersection can enhance the chances of their research being accessed and acted upon by policy practitioners. The authors apply Cunliffe and Pavlovich's (2022) "public organization/management studies" (OMS) approach by forming a co-authorship team and engaging in a mutually respectful process of knowledge co-generation. Their findings generate four categories of ideas related to: (1) policy practitioners – who they are and what they are seeking from academic research; (2) policy research priorities – including examples of academic studies offering insights into these priorities; (3) proposed joint actions – what scholars and policy practitioners can do to increase policy-relevant research on gender and entrepreneurship; (4) applying the public OMS approach – with critical reflections. The paper contributes by demonstrating how the OMS approach can be utilized to enhance both access to and take up of policy-related research in this field and highlighting the vital role of academic-practitioner collaboration in this process.

The second paper in this thematic category, and the final article in our SI collection – *Institutional pluralism and the implementation of women's enterprise policy*, by [Mallett et al. \(2024\)](#) – demonstrates the importance of learning from the past and using historical methods for more effective implementation of women's enterprise policy. The authors emphasize that the organizations involved in policy implementation should be understood in a context shaped by institutional pluralism, i.e. the plurality of material practices, assumptions, values and rules that shape the implementation of women's enterprise policy. Through an analysis of the Phoenix Development Fund, the first UK Government intervention to support inclusive enterprise, they identify approaches to dealing with the plurality of institutional logics – dominance, integration and constellation – and introduce a novel concept of institutional bridging. Through institutional bridging, actors strategically develop commonalities and linkages between potentially competing institutional logics. Experience with this strategy shows that while it was novel and effective in providing targeted support to disadvantaged communities, it was not effective in building sustainable support and change in long-term mechanisms. Further engagement with the history of women's enterprise policy is needed to prepare for effective, targeted, inclusive and sustainable implementation in the future.

5. Contributions of the special issue

The papers included in this SI make several unique contributions to the literature. First, those papers specifically addressing "context" contribute by reporting on the multifaceted nature of issues of relevance to women's entrepreneurship policy. Using a range of methodologies (e.g. conceptual, interviews, country wide longitudinal analysis, content analysis of webpages and policy documents), these studies contribute insights primarily in the developed countries (Sweden, Finland, Norway, Ireland and Israel) and to a lesser extent in developing countries (e.g. in Africa). Second, the conceptual paper proposes new policy interventions to disrupt gender disparities that go beyond the notion of "fixing the women." Third, the papers addressing entrepreneurship incidentally in developed countries demonstrate that context

matters for policy development and implementation and that policymakers must consider the socioeconomic circumstances of countries where it is being implemented. These papers also add new insights into the importance of women's entrepreneurship for rural sustainability and the need for the provision of good public services. They also highlight how entrepreneurial ecosystems, policies, programs and individual agency all play a significant role in supporting migrant female entrepreneurs. Fourth, papers addressing how policy influences women's entry into entrepreneurship and policy efficiency provide new insights into the interaction between national entrepreneurship policies and gender contexts for both formal and informal gender equality. The findings from these papers also highlight how empowerment can act as a policy instrument to develop women's entrepreneurial activities in rural settings and male-dominated contexts and the success of policy initiatives in developing economies. Fifth, the papers addressing the policy-finance nexus demonstrate that gender-based perceptions such as homophily and role congruity are involved in VCs' assessment of entrepreneurs. Further, while findings suggest that business network membership increases awareness of government-led finance support programs, minority women remain disadvantaged relative to native white women in this regard. Finally, the papers which investigate scholars' communication and engagement with policymakers introduce significant insights into the ways in which academia and policy practitioners can work more effectively together on the gender-entrepreneurship nexus and on our understanding of the implementation phase of women's enterprise policy.

6. Reflections and implications

The research presented in this SI has several implications for policymakers. First, there is a need for researchers to distinguish between necessity entrepreneurship and opportunity entrepreneurship, as there are important implications for policy associated with each. While it might be expected that necessity entrepreneurship exclusively takes place in developing countries, the papers presented in this SI suggest that this is not necessarily the case. It is therefore important to investigate why and to what extent necessity entrepreneurship takes place in developed countries and to identify the consequences of this for society. Likewise, there is a need to further investigate opportunity entrepreneurship in developing countries to understand what form it takes and its potential. We continue to see many entrepreneurs in developed countries sourcing their products from developing countries. Since this may be perceived as colonialism, there is a need to address potential alternatives and the role that women entrepreneurs can play in changing the landscape of entrepreneurship. Second, as evidenced by the papers in this SI, there continues to be a dearth of research on women's role in rural entrepreneurship, both in developed and developing countries. This raises issues for policymakers, including, for example, what strategies are employed by women in rural settings in terms of the sustainable development goals? Allied to this, it would be useful to know how women entrepreneurs operating in rural environments are innovative in terms of business focus and strategies, particularly with respect to sustainable solutions (e.g. the use of pesticides and reduction of CO₂) and how these experiences might impact future policy. Third, according to the [Nordic Council of Ministers \(NIKK, 2022\)](#), interest in sustainability and climate issues is frequently coupled with the person who is the caregiver in the home. As this is most often the woman, it is problematic that so few women entrepreneurs, as demonstrated in this SI, are involved in developing solutions in these areas. This is particularly important as women's solutions in general tend to differ from those of men. Therefore, policymakers should pay attention to these facts.

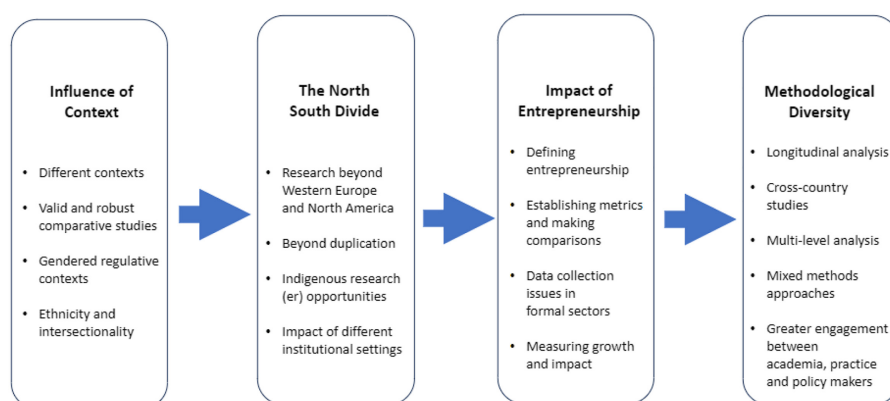
Finally, the papers making up this SI led us to reiterate conclusions from previous studies, namely that, next to undifferentiated policy, there is a need for targeted policy for female

entrepreneurs and, despite the risk that the target may be missed due to high heterogeneity (in motivations, aspirations and projects), that these measures should be tailored to the context. In this regard, we must remember that solid policy knowledge can only be created if rigorous policy evaluation is carried out.

7. Conclusions and call to action

While the collection of papers forming this SI report on entrepreneurship policy from a relatively narrow perspective, namely the gendered nature of entrepreneurship policy, they demonstrate that a multifaceted set of issues impact women's entrepreneurship, including but not limited to technology, rural entrepreneurship, financing, empowerment, support and norms. Based on our review of the SI papers, we identify four significant areas that we believe deserve more in-depth exploration and development to enhance the quality and significance of research on women entrepreneurs. These areas are shown in [Figure 1](#) and described below.

- (1). *Influence of context*: the papers making up this SI indicate that there is a need for researchers to investigate women's entrepreneurship in different contexts and to take account of these differences when attempting to make valid and robust comparisons. We suggest that future research could support entrepreneurship policy better by drawing on gendered regulative contexts more broadly, including the welfare state, gender equality legislative frameworks, as well as informal institutions including norms and practices relating to the division of work and care within the household. Furthermore, the role of ethnicity is identified as an important and much-needed avenue for future research by some of the papers in this SI. We would broaden this suggestion by stressing the need for intersectional approaches that focus on, for example, gender, age and sexuality and their differential impact on policies and diverse policy needs.
- (2). *The North-South divide*: the papers in this SI suggest that more research is needed to illustrate women's entrepreneurial practices in developing and developed countries outside of Western Europe and North America. However, we would not advocate merely duplicating research conducted in developed countries in developing country contexts. Rather, we suggest there is a need to conduct unique research that portrays a depth of understanding into how women develop entrepreneurship and interact



Source(s): Authors' own creation

Figure 1.
Four areas to enhance
research on women
entrepreneurs

with their context. For example, research in developing countries might focus on pertinent issues relevant to these contexts, including access to venture capital, the impact of the welfare system, different uses of capital, sustainability business models and women's entrepreneurial role in climate challenges. Taking existing research as a starting point, we also call on indigenous researchers to take up the mantle and research women's entrepreneurship in settings of extreme poverty and explore how systems of oppression may affect researchers' ability to conduct and report research findings. Indigenous researchers are best placed to do this given their ability to draw on their local understanding and knowledge to address problems in the female ecosystem and put forward novel and innovative solutions.

- (3). *Measuring the impact of entrepreneurship*: the papers making up this SI also highlight that future research should investigate how entrepreneurship and its impact are measured. Measuring entrepreneurship presents several challenges due to its multifaceted nature. Firstly, there is the issue of defining what constitutes an entrepreneur. Definitions vary widely, from those who start new businesses to individuals within organizations driving innovation (intrapreneurs). This variability complicates the establishment of uniform metrics and comparisons across contexts. Secondly, data collection poses significant difficulties. Entrepreneurs often operate in informal sectors or start ventures that are not immediately registered with official bodies, leading to underreporting (Desai, 2019). Thirdly, as identified in previous research, entrepreneurship is influenced by cultural, economic and institutional contexts, but this also makes it challenging to develop metrics that are universally applicable (Reynolds *et al.*, 2005; Thurik *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, measuring the growth and impact of entrepreneurial ventures is complex. Measurements such as turnover and number of employees, innovation, social and environmental impact or personal satisfaction require different measurement approaches, and they do not necessarily capture the why and how of growth and impact (Sobel, 2008). Additionally, longitudinal studies are needed to capture the lifecycle of entrepreneurial activities and measure the long-term success of policy measures. However, such studies are resource-intensive and logistically challenging. These challenges further highlight the need for multidimensional and context-sensitive approaches to effectively measure entrepreneurship.
- (4). *Methodological diversity*: finally, following Henry *et al.* (2016) and Foss *et al.* (2019), the papers in this SI demonstrate that the methods used to research women's entrepreneurship and policy are diverse, including those drawing on a range of data sets, sample types and methodological approaches. Despite this, we argue that there is room for even greater methodological diversity in future entrepreneurship research that could serve the development of gender sensitive entrepreneurship policy. In particular, the papers in this SI call for greater use of longitudinal analysis and cross-country examinations as well as more robust multi-level analysis and the use of qualitative as well as quantitative data analysis. We further suggest that mixed-method approaches could also provide a robust evidence base, particularly in contexts where evidence on women's entrepreneurship is still scarce. Collaboration between research, practice and policymakers is also suggested by the papers in this SI as a means of advocating engaged scholarship for inspiration (e.g. Rouse and Woolnough, 2018). Future research could continue to address this lacuna as a valuable means of influencing women's entrepreneurship policy at a governmental level.

While good practice studies from local contexts around the world help us understand the richness of women's entrepreneurship research and strengthen the impact of policy research,

we encourage researchers to form research consortia and collaborate to create stronger evidence for policymakers on how they can make informed decisions on women's entrepreneurship policy. Few universities have large groups of scholars whose focus and interests embrace gender and women's entrepreneurship. Working collaboratively across institutions has the potential to generate impact at a level greater than that which can be achieved individually. Given calls for evidence-based policy decisions, grounded on or influenced by rigorously established evidence, greater collaboration provides an opportunity for researchers in women's entrepreneurship to become more involved in providing the evidence to support policy development, revision and evaluation. Indeed, we firmly believe that it is only when scholars stand united that they can make the greatest impact.

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