



Maternity Leave Reform: Reconciling Parenthood and Rural Innovations

Policy Brief Germany

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Maternity Leave Reform

"Rural entrepreneurship is stunted by insufficient coverage during maternity leave. The self-employed have a right to adequate financial compensation and health protection during maternity leave."

Executive Summary

Current legislative gaps regarding maternity leave expose self-employed women, particularly those in start-ups requiring continuous management, to considerable financial and health risks during pregnancy and early parenthood. Women play a key role in the sustainable transition of agriculture and in fostering the development of innovative, resilient rural communities. When it comes to rural women specifically, the FLIARA study finds that statutory maternity pays and leave for self-employed women are essential for them to realise their innovative ideas and reduce interruptions in entrepreneurial activities. Urgent reform of German federal maternity leave legislation is necessary to improve the quality of life and job opportunities in rural regions.

The Challenge and Opportunity

- Currently Germany does not provide statutory maternity pay and leave for the self-employed, which hampers women to become rural innovators and realise their innovative solutions and products.
- Women that continue their activities regardless may return to work prematurely, with corresponding health risks.
- This situation undermines sustainable development of rural areas and jeopardises essential services rural communities rely on.
- A particular challenge exists for agricultural entrepreneurs, as their businesses require continuous management.
- While a farm relief system is in place for maternity protection, important gaps exist.

Providing adequate maternity leave and pay for self-employed women would unlock greater women-led innovation potential in agriculture and rural areas, fostering sustainable development and economic growth.

Policy Solutions

What's Needed in Germany

- A clear legal framework establishing maternity pay and leave for the self-employed, combined with the securement of long-term, sustainable funding.
 - A potential funding source is mandatory contributions by self-employed individuals to the existing maternity protection compensation fund ("Umlagekasse U II"), which is currently financed solely through employer contributions.
 - Special attention is due to conditions of self-employed in agricultural sectors, as existing measures don't always work in practice. The German farm relief system includes farm and household support during pregnancy and early motherhood.
- However, gaps appear in staffing shortages, when eligibility is unclear (for non-main operators or part-time farmers), and when informal/alternative models of family farming are concerned.¹
- To remediate this situation in the farm relief system it is advisable to:
- Expand staffing and resource capacity. This is an employment opportunity for women and other persons (re-)entering the labour market.
 - Broaden eligibility criteria: include part-time farmers, secondary farm operators, diversified farms and non-traditional farming.
 - Simplify and streamline access for pregnancy and maternity cases, with easy extension of help when needed

¹ A 2024 survey by the agricultural magazine TopAgrar of its readers shows that 40% of respondents' farm relief applications did not yield in receiving support <https://www.topagrar.com/betriebsleitung/news/das-meinen-top-agrar-leser-zu-betriebshilfe-in-schwangerschaft-und-mutterschutz-20003362.html>, <https://www.topagrar.com/betriebsleitung/news/wer-schmeisst-den-hof-wenn-ich-schwanger-bin-20002976.html>

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Supporting Evidence & Good Practices

Women interviewed as part of the **German FLIARA study** mentioned inadequate financial compensation during maternity and parental leave as a hindrance to their continued rural and agricultural entrepreneurship. Others mentioned relying on family support during pregnancy and early motherhood, and several started their innovation only after their children reached a certain age.

Trailblazing work in Germany is done by initiatives “**Maternity Leave for All!**” (which was started by a FLIARA innovator) and the “**Alliance Maternity Leave for Self-Employed**”. The latter includes lobbies of ecologically-minded farmers, wine producers, craftswomen, midwives, doctors and many others. <https://mutterschutzfueralle.de/> <https://mutterschutz-fuer-selbststaendige.de/das-buendnis/#wer>.

Good Practices in Europe

The Maternity Leave for All! initiative lists following European examples:

- 🏠 Netherlands: Maternity benefits are calculated based on the number of hours worked. This approach ensures that benefits align with the actual workload of self-employed individuals.
- 🏠 Sweden: For pregnant women starting a business, maternity benefits are based on a comparable, industry-standard income. This method provides financial stability during the early stages of entrepreneurship.
- 🏠 Austria: Self-employed women can choose between receiving a weekly allowance ("Wochengeld") of approximately €420 per week or funding for hiring business assistance during maternity leave. **This flexible model is of particular relevance for rural entrepreneurs.**

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Conclusion & Call to Action

To ensure women's economic participation in rural areas it is essential **adequate maternity pay and leave are accessible to all professions**. This will safeguard health and professional activities before and after childbirth and foster sustainable development of rural areas. This requires an urgent implementation of the parental leave reforms, which include maternity leave for the self-employed, set out in the 2025 German coalition agreement.

Further Reading

FLIARA Deliverable 3.3: Women-led Innovations in Agriculture and Rural Areas, Lessons Learned Report and Fact Sheets on Female Innovations – German Case Study Report <https://zenodo.org/records/14045390>

Factsheet on the FLIARA innovator that started the 'Maternity Leave for All!' initiative <https://fliara.eu/innovator/johanna-roh/>
Position Paper of the 'Maternity Leave for All!' Initiative of October 2025 https://mutterschutz-fuer-selbststaendige.de/wp-content/uploads/BMfS_Foerderungspapier_Oktober-2025.pdf



About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

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Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

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