



# How women-led innovations can contribute to EU Rural Vision 2040

## Policy Brief

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Image courtesy of Santiago Sánchez Porcel. La Ruta de Santiago, Spain.



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# How women-led innovations can contribute to EU Rural Vision 2040

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*"Women-led innovations are already shaping the sustainable, inclusive and vibrant rural futures envisioned by the EU. Their recognition and support is a strategic necessity."*

## Executive Summary

Women across rural Europe are key drivers of innovation, leading transformative initiatives in sustainable agriculture, rural entrepreneurship, community-based services, and cultural revitalisation. Their contributions align closely with the objectives of the EU Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (EU Rural Vision 2040), which aims to foster Stronger, Connected, Resilient, and Prosperous rural territories by 2040.

This Vision presents a comprehensive roadmap for the revitalisation of Europe's rural areas, positioning them as attractive, inclusive, and dynamic places to live and work. Supported by a Rural Action Plan, it outlines concrete flagship initiatives and support mechanisms in areas such as digitalisation, climate resilience, participatory governance, and local economic diversification.

Yet, despite their central role, women's contributions often remain undervalued or invisible, hindered by persistent barriers in access to resources, decision-making spaces, and institutional support. Projects such as FLIARA demonstrate that gender-sensitive, structured approaches are effective in identifying, amplifying, and scaling women-led rural innovations across Europe. These approaches offer concrete, adaptable models that can inform and strengthen broader rural policy frameworks.

Policymakers are urged to embed gender equity into the heart of rural development strategies, recognising women not only as beneficiaries but as active agents of sustainable transformation.



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## The Challenge

- 👤 Women innovators in rural areas remain underrepresented in policy frameworks and rural development programmes.
- 👤 Structural barriers such as limited access to land, finance, training, and recognition hinder the full potential of women-led initiatives.
- 👤 Informal innovation often thrives in rural contexts but remains largely unrecognised by formal systems, lacking the institutional frameworks needed to support its expansion and integration into mainstream rural development strategies.
- 👤 Gender is still insufficiently addressed in most national rural innovation strategies and EU rural instruments.

## Policy Solutions

### Select and support women leading sustainability innovations in rural areas

- 👤 Identify women innovators across diverse rural typologies (remote, peri-urban, depopulated, etc.) and sectors (agriculture, circular economy, social services, cultural heritage).
- 👤 Apply intersectional and sustainability criteria such as those tested in EU-funded projects like FLIARA.
- 👤 Use participatory methods, such as narrative interviews and consent-based profiling, to empower women to share their innovation journeys.

### Demonstrate their relevance to the EU Rural Vision 2040

- 👤 Map women-led innovations against the Vision's four pillars:
  - 👤 **Stronger:** Local economic diversification, short value chains, intergenerational farming.
  - 👤 **Connected:** Use of digital tools for marketing, knowledge exchange, and e-commerce.
  - 👤 **Resilient:** Agroecological practices, water-saving technologies, and renewable energy.
  - 👤 **Prosperous:** Creation of local jobs, community services, and social cohesion.
- 👤 Recognise these contributions in local, national, and EU-level rural development plans.

### Create inclusive innovation ecosystems

- 👤 Ensure that women innovators are actively included in CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) networks, AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System), Smart Villages and digital hubs.
- 👤 Provide accessible and flexible funding instruments, adapted to small-scale and early-stage innovations.
- 👤 Facilitate partnerships with local authorities, research institutions, and civil society to scale impact.

### Promote visibility, exchange, and peer learning

- 👤 Publish innovation profiles using standardised templates, integrating storytelling and visual elements.



- Select ambassadors with communication skills and diverse innovation pathways to lead by example.
- Organise community of practice events and mentorship schemes that prioritise experience-sharing and informal learning.

## Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

The EU Rural Vision 2040, supported by its dedicated Rural Action Plan, provides a roadmap for future-ready rural areas based on four core pillars: Stronger, Connected, Resilient, and Prosperous. The Vision aligns with broader EU policy frameworks such as the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork Strategy, and the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025, reinforcing the need for inclusive and sustainable rural transformation.

Findings from the FLIARA project confirm that women-led innovations are tangible drivers of this agenda. They foster ecological transition, enhance social cohesion, and revitalise local economies. However, such innovations often develop without institutional support, relying instead on personal resilience, family networks, and informal collaborations.

One example is the [FLIARA Conceptual and Analytical Framework \(D1.1\)](#), which demonstrates that rural innovation must be understood through a gendered and territorial lens. It presents a multidimensional approach to sustainability and highlights the systemic barriers women face in rural ecosystems.

Similarly, the [FLIARA Initial Guidelines \(D1.4\)](#) operationalise this framework, offering a structured method to identify, assess and showcase women-led innovations. These include:

- A selection matrix covering sustainability dimensions and territorial typologies.
- Semi-structured interview protocols that enable women to narrate their trajectories.
- Tools for visibility (e.g. innovation profiles, ambassador networks, social media strategies).

Other initiatives—such as the EIP-AGRI focus groups on gender and innovation, Horizon Europe projects on rural inclusion, or national-level Living Labs—can also serve as references for adapting and institutionalising support for women-led rural innovation.

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## Conclusion & Call to Action

Women-led innovation is a strategic asset for achieving the EU Rural Vision 2040. Their initiatives offer tested, locally embedded models for a greener, fairer, and more resilient rural Europe.

### CALL TO ACTION:

- EU and national policymakers** must mainstream gender into rural innovation strategies and instruments.
- Local authorities and CAP networks** should create tailored support for women-led initiatives, particularly in under-served territories.
- Research and innovation actors** must co-create knowledge with rural women and prioritise inclusive innovation ecosystems.
- Civil society organisations** should enable peer networks, mentorship, and visibility platforms for women innovators.

Investing in women-led innovation is essential to realising the ambitions of the EU Rural Vision 2040.



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## Further Reading

[FLIARA Project Website](#)

[D1.1 Conceptual and Analytical Framework](#)

[D1.4 Initial Guidelines for Case Study Assessment and Selection](#)

[D4.1 Strategic Action Plan](#)

[FLIARA Innovators and Ambassadors](#)

## 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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