



Innovating from the Ground Up: Digital Policy Pathways to Support Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas

Policy Brief

Ireland

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Innovating from the Ground Up

Digital Policy Pathways to Support Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas: Leveraging digitalisation to empower farm and rural women can be achieved on a number of levels.

Executive Summary

Digital technological advancements have the potential to advance farming and enhance rural regions. To ensure this materialises, it is crucial that future policies leverage the transformative power of digital technologies to empower and support women-led innovations in rural and agricultural communities. More specifically, digitalisation, including infrastructural development, access to digital tools, support platforms and training in digital literacy can enable rural and farm women to harness technology for personal, professional and economic empowerment. Digitalisation can effectively bridge gender gaps by allowing access to key resources, including agricultural advisory services, digital technologies in farming, business training and markets and finance. In doing so, it can significantly enhance rural women's livelihoods and in turn rural communities.

The Challenge

Despite a National Broadband Plan in Ireland, Census data from 2022 shows a stark divide in **high-speed broadband coverage** in Ireland, with urban areas having near complete access, but rural areas, particularly those more socially deprived, experiencing limited or no coverage. Average coverage was approximately 42% in socially disadvantaged rural areas and 50% in the more affluent rural area (Dempsey and Hoy, 2024).

🏠 In many cases the traditional gender roles in farming and rural business, may influence women's participation in technology adoption. Women may be less likely to engage in new

technologies if they are viewed as male dominated, or if they do not feel encouraged to adopt a new technology.

- 👤 Innovations carried out by women on farms and in rural businesses can **require technology to enhance efficiency** (e.g. machinery, software packages), but investment to support these technical needs is lacking and can be a considerable challenge for many women.
- 👤 A **lack of training** in key areas of technology and AI use is a challenge for women on farms and in rural areas. These range from machinery use to software implementations in business. Training if available can often be generalised, or not accessible for women with caregiving responsibilities.
- 👤 Many **digital and farm machinery tools** are predominantly designed for male use; therefore, women can be discouraged from using them. If a gendered or lighter option is available it can often be more expensive, creating a barrier for women.
- 👤 The CAP Strategic Plans across the EU aim to establish **Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) Coordination Groups** to enhance the flow of knowledge related to new technologies and innovations. However, women's participation in these groups remains significantly limited, which marginalises them from accessing this crucial source of knowledge and innovation.

Policy Solutions

Challenging Gender stereotypes around digitalisation

- 👤 Fund or support **campaigns of visibility** around women's use of digitalisation in rural business or leading on-farm innovations. Use media, case studies, awards and speaking opportunities to highlight women engaged in digitalisation and their success in doing so.
- 👤 **Mobilise local champions and influencers** who can advocate for women utilising digital options in their business and on their farm. Such role models can create an awareness around the issue, changing attitudes and empowering young girls and other potential innovators.

Improving Digital Infrastructure:

- 👤 Starting with access to **highspeed broadband and good mobile phone** connections could make considerable difference for rural women innovators. The National Broadband Plan, although a considerable improvement is still not providing high speed internet to thousands of rural farms and regions. If highspeed fibre broadband is not an option then satellite options could be considered.

Affordable Access to Devices:

- 👤 **Dedicated subsidies, grants or partnerships with tech companies** could help women starting or scaling up a small to medium on farm or off-farm rural business and make smartphones, computers and other digital devices more affordable and accessible. This also goes for on-farm machinery, new equipment, equipment or software which is too expensive but could potentially launch a business or farm diversification.
- 👤 Use programmes such as **LEADER and the CAP Strategic Plan** to provide funding calls specifically for women to access digital devices or improved infrastructure.

Access to Digital Platforms for Market Linkages and Networking

- 👤 Networks, supply chains and cooperatives can all assist in creating market linkages for women entrepreneurs in farming, food production and rural businesses. These can become powerful tools for women to connect to markets, share knowledge, market information and business skills. These range from WhatsApp and Facebook groups to Agri-extension apps



and online marketplaces. Finance and training could be key to opening up this digital market for women.

Artificial Intelligence for Women:

- As we begin to experiment with **Artificial Intelligence**, this world has the potential to create an amazing impact for rural women in farming and business. The power of AI could have potential ranging from on-farm issues to smart tools and weather predictions. It could assist in business administration, accessing foreign languages and international markets. The possibilities here are endless. But training and access for rural and farm women is essential and can come in the form of training grants or microloans for women using AI to community-based training programmes, or specific programmes. Tax breaks or funding to companies that build in AI tools and training or partner with rural women's cooperatives.

Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

Technology emerged as a vital driver of progress and innovation among rural women in business and farming, as highlighted across all the FLIARA interviews carried out in Ireland. Reliable broadband was consistently identified as the most crucial tool, with many women citing the National Broadband Scheme as a turning point, although connectivity gaps still exist in some areas. The COVID-19 pandemic marked a shift, with women turning to the internet for sales, marketing, education, and business continuity. Many now view broadband not as a luxury, but as a foundational business need. Beyond connectivity, women adopted a range of technologies, from farm machinery and accounting software to video production and social media, to streamline operations and expand their reach.

Several women reported using technology to overcome physical barriers in agriculture, broaden market access, and deliver training online, often gaining international audiences. While some initially struggled with digital skills, many taught themselves through YouTube or online searches, highlighting the importance of accessible learning. Mentorship, particularly through women's business networks, also played a critical role in building confidence with technology. Video conferencing platforms like Zoom enabled live and recorded training sessions, while continuous learning, including international training helped women stay ahead in their sectors. Overall, technology and digitalisation not only supported their innovations but fundamentally reshaped how these women operate, grow, and sustain their businesses.

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Conclusion & Call to Action

Digitalisation holds transformative potential for rural women in business and in farming, empowering them with access to wider markets, financial services, and vital information that was once beyond their reach. By bridging the digital divide, we not only enable these women to grow their enterprises but also uplift entire communities through inclusive economic development. As digital tools become more accessible and user-friendly, rural women can step into leadership roles, drive innovation, and contribute significantly to sustainable growth. Therefore, investing in digital literacy and infrastructure for rural women is not just a technological advancement, it is a crucial step toward gender equality and economic resilience.

Call to Action

- Improve digital infrastructure for rural women engaged in farming and rural business.
- Support digital literacy programmes.





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-  Prioritise digital inclusion in rural development agendas and pay particular emphasis to AI technology.
-  Promote mentorship and training initiatives that connect rural women entrepreneurs with digital tools and e-commerce platforms.

Further Reading

Digital Entrepreneurship for Women: <https://www.dewproject.eu/>

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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.

Contact

Email: info@fliara.eu

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Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

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