



Supporting Women's Return to Rural Areas and Promoting Female Entrepreneurship

Policy Brief

Romania

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"When women return, communities thrive—supporting their skills, networks, and ideas is key to rural Romania's sustainable future."

Executive Summary

Women returning to rural Romania—often with international work and/or study experience—drive sustainable innovation in local communities. Targeted support through grants, reintegration programs, and peer networks can enhance rural entrepreneurship and development while fostering knowledge exchange between returnees and local women—a key condition for sustainable innovation. This brief proposes dedicated policies to support the return migration of women to rural areas, addressing reintegration barriers and enabling sustainable innovation across ecological, social, and cultural dimensions.

The Challenge

As shown in FLIARA report D3.3 on rural innovation in Romania, many successful innovative women had previously lived, studied, or worked abroad before returning to rural communities. This trend includes both women returning to their home villages and urban-born women choosing rural life. Their diverse experiences position them as crucial agents of sustainable rural transformation. Supporting these returnees with targeted measures can enhance rural development and foster innovation by promoting the exchange of knowledge and skills with local communities—an essential condition for context-sensitive, sustainable solutions.

- 🏠 **Barriers to reintegration:** lack of tailored policies to support women returning to rural areas and insufficient support for women aiming to implement ecologically, socially, and culturally sustainable projects

- 🏠 **Limited access to education and skill development:** few scholarship or training opportunities aligned with sustainable rural development and women's professional interests or gaps
- 🏠 **Weak reintegration mechanisms:** absence of structured peer-to-peer knowledge exchange between returnees and local women and lack of formal reintegration programs connecting returnees to local communities
- 🏠 **Poor rural infrastructure:** inadequate public and school transport systems and limited access to quality education services in rural areas, posing a barrier for families
- 🏠 **Underutilized potential in local governance:** lack of mechanisms to engage returnee women with relevant skills in local governance or institutional development.
- 🏠 **Fragmented support networks for women entrepreneurs:** Insufficient networking opportunities or support systems for women entrepreneurs at local, regional, or translocal levels
- 🏠 **Inadequate financial support for innovation:** limited availability of accessible, small or medium-sized, non-repayable grants and excessive administrative burdens in funding applications and reporting processes.

Policy Solutions

To support women's return to rural areas and promote female entrepreneurship, policies must address three key areas. First, national-level interventions are essential to facilitate return migration through targeted scholarships, reintegration programs, and accessible, low-bureaucracy grants that encourage women to start innovative rural initiatives. Second, local and regional efforts should focus on strengthening female entrepreneurship by expanding support networks, enabling access to resources, and fostering collaboration through women-led associations and translocal networks. Finally, improving the attractiveness of rural life for women—particularly those returning or migrating from urban areas—requires investment in public infrastructure, such as transport and education services, and the inclusion of women in local governance. Ensuring women are part of decision-making processes at the community level is vital to shaping inclusive, responsive rural development.

👤 **National scholarship programs:** new scholarships for rural women to acquire skills and education, supporting their return and local involvement. A priority focus is recommended on (a) developing the skills needed for sustainable rural development, taking into account both (b) areas of increased interest for women and (c) areas where women are underrepresented.

👤 **Reinsertion and integration programs:** It is recommended to implement programs that support the reintegration of women in rural communities and the effective use of their skills. Including peer-to-peer knowledge exchange programs that link returnees with women in the community/region for mentoring and facilitate exchange of best practices.

👤 **Start-up grants and funding for rural innovation:** It is proposed to provide financial support to women returnees to launch start-ups or innovative rural projects,




with a focus on small and medium grants that are non-reimbursable, easy to access and have low administrative/reporting requirements. **Empowering women entrepreneurs:** encouraging rural entrepreneurship by strengthening support networks and access to resources for women returnees. Local/regional or translocal women's networks are supported to integrate and connect women entrepreneurs.

👤 **Attract women with relevant skills and experience to work with local government and institutions.**

👤 **Rural infrastructure improvement,** with a focus on expanding and adapting local and school public transportation to meet the needs of women and families. Lack of access to adequate transportation and quality educational services is a major barrier to women's relocation and active involvement in rural life.



Practical Tips

-  Develop measures to assess key competencies gained by the women before returning in order to better tap into their potential within each community.
-  Approach the tailored solution systemically by pairing the capacities of the women with the needs of rural communities (eg. Childcare, eldercare, etc.).
-  Use real case studies from rural Romania and the FLIARA network to show what the supports and good practices look like in practice.

Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

Start-up Nation Program for Romania





The Start-up Nation Romania program offers grants for newly established companies, including start-ups, small businesses, and SMEs, with a focus on entrepreneurship. The program includes two pillars: one for local applicants (Pillar I) and one for those returning from the diaspora (Pillar II). It provides non-reimbursable funding of up to 100,000 lei for creating one job, or up to 200,000 lei for creating two jobs, covering up to 95% of eligible project expenses. In 2022, the program allocated a total budget of 520 million lei for local entrepreneurs and 20 million lei for the diaspora. Managed by the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, it promotes smart, sustainable growth through digitalization, innovation, and job creation. This program can be an essential policy tool to support women entrepreneurs returning to rural areas, fostering economic development and job creation in these communities.

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Conclusion & Call to Action

The return of women with international experience to rural Romania is a powerful driver of sustainable innovation. These women bring valuable skills, global perspectives, and a strong commitment to local development. Yet, without the right conditions, their potential remains underutilized.

To harness this transformative force, the following actions are needed:

-  Implement national reintegration programs tailored to women returning to rural areas, including mentorship, peer exchanges, and skill recognition.
-  Expand access to non-repayable start-up grants for sustainable rural initiatives led by women, with minimal bureaucracy.
-  Invest in local infrastructure and governance inclusion, ensuring returnee women help shape community development.
-  Build and support women-led networks that connect returnees with local women to exchange knowledge and co-create resilient solutions.

Now is the time to act—supporting returning women is investing in Romania's rural future!



Further Reading

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

<https://fliara.eu/innovators/>

FLIARA Deliverables: <https://zenodo.org/communities/fliara>

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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