



# Providing Adequate Childcare and After School Activities

## Policy Brief EU member states

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# Providing Adequate Childcare and After School Activities

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*Provision of adequate childcare and after school activities levels the playing field and ensures that rural economies fully benefit from the innovative contributions of women farmers and entrepreneurs.*

## Executive Summary

Combining work and family is one of the most salient obstacles for women innovators. Inadequate provision of good quality, affordable childcare and after school activities hold women back. Policy should therefore include adequate and affordable childcare provision as well as after school activities.

## The Challenge

- 🏠 Women in the FLIARA project reported maintaining work/life balance as one of the most salient obstacles for their innovative projects. One reason is the lack of available childcare in rural areas, or the need to pick up children early from school.
- 🏠 Since women typically assume the primary responsibility for childcare, this inhibits women's opportunities to devote themselves fully to their innovative projects.
- 🏠 As a result, rural economies do not fully benefit from women's innovative contributions.
- 🏠 Consequently, childcare provision is crucially important for gender equality and rural viability.
- 🏠 Childcare policies vary across EU member states, thus providing unequal conditions for parents across Europe. There is a need for countries lagging behind to step up their policies.

## Policy Solutions

We propose EU members states regulate social policy on the national level. The *only* country where women innovators in the FLIARA project did not identify work/family conflict as a major problem was Sweden. Swedish policy is therefore the inspiration for the policy solutions:

### Provide good quality childcare facilities/preschools in rural areas

- 👤 Provide full-time daycare/preschool for children aged one or older, until school starts.
- 👤 Make daycare/preschool available in all areas where people live.
- 👤 Staff daycare/preschool with qualified personnel with adequate education.
- 👤 Serve the children lunch.

### Make sure that teachers are well qualified

- 👤 If not already in place, consider including programs for the education of preschool teachers and leisure time pedagogues at universities or vocational schools.

### Provide meaningful after school activities for school age children

- 👤 Provide meaningful after-school activities for school age children at, or nearby, the school so parents can work a normal full-time day.
- 👤 Make sure that the staff is well qualified and have an adequate education.

### Make childcare affordable

- 👤 Make fees low and income tested so that everyone can afford them. Subsidize the cost through the tax system.

## Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

For inspiration, we describe the Swedish system, which works well. Swedish municipalities are mandated to offer full-time preschool to every child aged 1 or older, and after school activities in “leisure-time centres”, often located in the school, when parents are working or studying. Schools and preschools serve a hot lunch and snacks. Fees are income tested and publicly subsidized. Parents of preschool children pay 3% of their income for the first child, 2% for the second and 1% for the third. The fourth is free. There is a cap: the highest fee in 2024 was 147 euro per month. Students pay nothing. Fees become lower when the child is 3, at which time all children have the right to 3 hours of free preschool per day irrespective of the working status of the parent. Most municipalities also have services for those working nights or for shift workers. Some preschools are privately owned, or run by a parent cooperative, but they are financed in the same way as the public ones, through a voucher system, and follow the same regulations.

To become a certified preschool teacher in Sweden one must attend a 3,5-year long education at university level. Sweden is one of very few countries that have a professional preschool teacher education at university level. The education for leisure time pedagogues is three years long. Both receive a bachelor's degree.

Preschools and leisure time centres have a double purpose: they enable all adults to engage in full time work or studies, and they provide all children with a good quality education and care. 86% of children aged 1-5, 90% of children aged 2-5, and 95% of those aged 3-5 attend preschool in Sweden (school starts at six). Children typically attend leisure time centres until they are old enough to walk home from school by themselves.

Sources:



“About preschool (Om förskolan på engelska) - Utbildningsguiden” available at: <https://utbildningsguiden.skolverket.se/forskolan/om-forskolan/about-preschool-om-forskolan-pa-engelska> (accessed 27 April 2025).

“Fritidshemmet - Utbildningsguiden” available at: <https://utbildningsguiden.skolverket.se/languages/english-engelska/fritidshemmet> (accessed 27 April 2025).

“LFÖRY - Stockholms universitet” available at: <https://utbildning.su.se/english/education/course-catalogue/lf/lfory> (accessed 27 April 2025).

“Studies in School-Age Educare - Stockholms universitet”. available at: <https://utbildning.su.se/english/education/course-catalogue/education-subjects/human-social-and-political-sciences-and-law/studies-in-school-age-educare> (accessed 27 April 2025).

After-school activities are especially beneficial for rural areas. These programs can provide essential support to children and families in communities that often face higher rates of poverty and fewer resources compared to urban areas. After-school activities offer safe, structured environments where children can engage in educational and recreational activities, which can help bridge the gap in access to quality education and extracurricular opportunities.




For rural women entrepreneurs, this creates a unique opportunity to start businesses that cater to these local needs. With a growing demand for structured and enriching after-school programs, women could leverage their insights and experiences to develop innovative services tailored to children's educational and recreational needs. This could include a variety of offerings such as arts and crafts, sports, tutoring, and STEM activities. Additionally, government support and funding for these programs would lower entry barriers, making it easier for women to launch and sustain their businesses. By addressing the specific needs of rural communities, these businesses can thrive while contributing to the overall development and well-being of the area.

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## Conclusion & Call to Action

The data from FLIARA demonstrates how work/family conflict is a major obstacle for women's contributions to rural development. The time demands put on women in lieu of adequate childcare provision and after school activities hold women back. Policy must offer affordable solutions that make the combination of work and family possible.

### CALL TO ACTION

-  EU member states should provide high quality daycare/preschool facilities and after school activities for school age children in rural areas.
-  Services should be subsidized and affordable for everyone.
-  The staff should be well educated.



## Further Reading

Preschool: "About preschool (Om förskolan på engelska) - Utbildningsguiden" available at: <https://utbildningsguiden.skolverket.se/forskolan/om-forskolan/about-preschool-om-forskolan-pa-engelska> (accessed 27 April 2025).

Leisure time centres: "Fritidshemmet - Utbildningsguiden" available at: <https://utbildningsguiden.skolverket.se/languages/english-engelska/fritidshemmet> (accessed 27 April 2025).

Preschool teacher program at Stockholm University: "LFÖRY - Stockholms universitet" available at: <https://utbildning.su.se/english/education/course-catalogue/lf/lfory> (accessed 27 April 2025).

Leisure time pedagogue education at Stockholm University: "Studies in School-Age Educare - Stockholms universitet". available at: <https://utbildning.su.se/english/education/course-catalogue/education-subjects/human-social-and-political-sciences-and-law/studies-in-school-age-educare> (accessed 27 April 2025).

## 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](mailto:info@fliara.eu)



# Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

[www.fliara.eu](http://www.fliara.eu)



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