Women’s entrepreneurship in rural and island areas and outermost regions

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The European Parliament adopted by 404 votes to 102, with 67 abstentions, a resolution on women’s entrepreneurship in rural and island areas and outermost regions.

Women in rural and island areas and outermost regions play a key role in the dynamism of local economies, the viability of the agricultural sector, and the preservation of cultural heritage, constituting a fundamental pillar for territorial cohesion, social sustainability and economic resilience in rural areas. However, they continue to face **legal, financial, cultural and infrastructural obstacles** that limit women’s entrepreneurship and the full achievement of their economic independence. More specifically, they are affected by the lack of access to affordable childcare, adequate transport links, digital infrastructure, and gender-sensitive support systems and leisure opportunities.

Empowerment and funding

Parliament called for improved access to all funding, particularly **innovation funding**, tailored support programmes for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and opportunities within the green and digital economies, ensuring that women entrepreneurs can participate fully in emerging markets. It called for the scaling up of access to private investment, and the promotion of free-market opportunities. Women entrepreneurs must fully benefit from the EU’s ‘Competitiveness Compass’ strategic roadmap, which aims to restore Europe’s dynamism.

Members underlined that the lack of accessible and affordable **childcare** services remains one of the main barriers to women’s full participation in entrepreneurship and employment in rural, remote and island areas. They called on the Member States to prioritise investment in early childhood education and care in programmes funded by the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Financial support mechanisms should be prioritised as well as the development of programmes that ensure women have access to education (STEAM) and in fields such as digitalisation, finance and business administration, including through market-driven initiatives and private sector partnerships.

The Commission is called on to introduce a ‘**female founders fund**’, to provide targeted financial support and investment opportunities for female-led businesses. Furthermore, the Commission and the Member States are called on to ensure that women’s entrepreneurship in rural and island areas and outermost regions is adequately supported under the post-2027 multiannual financial framework (MFF), including funding through relevant programmes such as the CAP, including POSEI, Horizon Europe, the LEADER programme and Digital Europe.

Parliament also called for targeted measures to improve women’s access to land, finance, education and training, including flexible options, especially for aspiring female farmers and business owners.

Underlining the importance of mobilising all actors in the financial system to improve women’s access to funding, Parliament encourage the establishment of a **European charter for equal access to finance**.

Social protection

Members stressed that limited access to healthcare, including access to sexual and reproductive health rights and services, and mental health services, disproportionately affects women living in rural and island areas and outermost regions, exacerbating existing inequalities and undermining the full exercise of their fundamental rights. Member States are called on to ensure **equal, affordable and timely access** to and continuity of essential healthcare services in these territories, promoting innovative solutions such as mobile clinics, local units, telemedicine, strengthening primary healthcare clinics and, where relevant, cross-border care arrangements.

Member States should also ensure effective access to social protection for **self-employed** women and assisting spouses and partners in agriculture and craft micro-enterprises, including adequate pensions and family-related leave and access to maternity, parental and pension rights in line with the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Violence

The resolution condemned all forms of gender-based violence as a violation of women's fundamental rights and a barrier to women's autonomy and economic empowerment, including through entrepreneurship. Member States should prioritise targeted support, protection measures and accessible resources for rural women affected by violence, ensuring their safety, dignity and access to justice.

Overall, Parliament reiterated the need for the EU to adopt a comprehensive and integrated strategy for women's entrepreneurship in rural and island areas and outermost regions, setting out clear objectives, measurable targets, and coordinated measures across the EU's various funding instruments. It requested that this strategy be allocated specific, stable and adequate financial resources, as well as dedicated funding mechanisms adapted to the particularities of these territories, in order to ensure equal access, promote innovation and digitalisation, and strengthen the EU's economic, social and territorial cohesion, as well as to ensure adequate support from the Member States.