# RE-FEM Final Policy Study

- Supporting Women Entrepreneurs Across Europe

### **Overview of RE-FEM**

The RE-FEM project - "Upskilling pathways for REsiliency in the post-Covid era for FEMale Entrepreneurs" - was co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme, engaged seven European countries (Bulgaria, Finlnad, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Spain) to identify systemic barriers and propose actionable solutions to support women entrepreneurs (WEs) and their supporters (trainers, mentors, business supporting organisations).

# **Key Findings**

- 1) Shared Challenges across Europe: Across all countries, structural and cultural barriers persist. These include limited access to gender-sensitive finance, inadequate training and mentorship, weak social protection for self-employed women, poor institutional coordination, and entrenched gender stereotypes.
- 2) Areas of Opportunity: Emerging good practices, pilot initiatives, and increasing political will indicate potential for improved support environments. Finland and Spain have more mature ecosystems; other countries are still developing support structures.
- 3) An analysis of existing policies and strategies supporting WEs revealed varying levels of support and areas needing improvement in each country.

# **RE-FEM partners propose the following Policy Recommendations**

- Access to Finance: Simplify procedures, diversify funding, and develop gender-responsive instruments (microloans, grants, crowdfunding).
- Digitalisation: Expand digital access, skills training, and Al-supported tools, especially in rural and underserved areas.
- Education, Training & Mentorship: Provide long-term, practical training, visible role models, peer learning, and storytelling.
- Work-Life Balance & Care Infrastructure: Improve childcare access, with flexible work arrangements, and social protection for self-employed women.
- Visibility & Gender Stereotypes: Launch campaigns, leadership programs, and education reforms to challenge stereotypes and promote women's representation in entrepreneurship.
- Inclusive Policymaking & Coordination: Enhance cross-institutional collaboration, co-create policies with WEs, and implement gender impact assessments.
- Rural Inclusion: Develop context-sensitive outreach, mentoring networks, community hubs, and fiscal incentives for women in rural areas.
- Data & Evaluation: Strengthen sex-disaggregated data collection, monitoring, and impact evaluation for evidence-based policymaking. Include WEs at every stage of data collection and policy design.

- **Crisis Resilience:** Promote adaptive capacity, business continuity planning, and crisis-specific financial support.
- EU & International Level: Facilitate access to EU funding, international networks, and policy alignment with EU gender equality frameworks.

#### Conclusions

The RE-FEM project underscores the importance of a supportive policy environment for the success and resiliency of women entrepreneurs. The findings emphasise that one-size-fits-all approaches are insufficient. Coordinated, evidence-based, and inclusive policies can foster equitable and thriving entrepreneurial ecosystems across Europe.

### **Access the Full Study**

For a comprehensive analysis and detailed recommendations for the project countries, download the full Final Policy Study <u>here</u>.

Access the Project Page: refem.eu

