



Policy Recommendation Paper

Reducing the Environmental Footprint of Female Entrepreneurship

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Executive Summary

This Policy Recommendation Report presents the final strategic outcomes of the *Women Going Greener* project, which aimed to empower women entrepreneurs in adopting sustainable business practices. Based on 18 months of collaborative work between Italy, Greece, and Serbia, and culminating in a transnational Hackathon held in Lecce, Italy, this report highlights the barriers, opportunities, and concrete policy proposals to support the green transition of women-led SMEs.

Key Highlights:

- Women entrepreneurs face barriers to green finance, knowledge, and procurement.
- Inclusive green policies must integrate a gender lens.
- This report proposes 5 actionable policy areas and outlines next steps for dissemination and advocacy.

Policy Snapshot

5 Key Recommendations at a Glance

1. **Green Skills Development** – Launch micro-credentials and sector-specific training tailored for women.
2. **Access to Green Finance** – Establish simplified and targeted funding tools.
3. **Inclusive Green Policy** – Mandate gender-sensitive environmental policy-making.
4. **Public Procurement Reform** – Introduce incentives for women-led sustainable businesses.
5. **Local Support Ecosystems** – Create green business desks with coaching and technical assistance.

1. Introduction

The *Women Going Greener* project is a strategic initiative co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union, under Key Action 2 – Small-Scale Partnerships in Adult Education. The project tackles two major challenges of our time: the global climate emergency and the gender gap in entrepreneurship, particularly in the field of sustainable business.

Despite increasing recognition of the green economy's potential, women entrepreneurs remain significantly underrepresented in this transition. This disparity is due to a complex combination of limited access to green finance, insufficient training opportunities, lack of policy support, and cultural biases.

The project consortium includes three partner organisations from Italy (Rinascita), Greece (WEnCoop), and Serbia (Elektropionir), each bringing expertise in social innovation, green energy, and women's empowerment. Over 18 months, the partnership developed training materials, implemented capacity-building workshops, organised research and consultation activities, and convened a high-level Hackathon event to collect and consolidate policy recommendations.

This Policy Recommendation Report is the key deliverable of Activity 5 of the project. It aims to summarise findings from all project phases and formulate clear, actionable, and evidence-based policy proposals to promote the green transition of women-led SMEs in Europe.

2. Objectives of the Policy Recommendation Report

The purpose of this report is threefold:

1. To summarise the outcomes of the *Women Going Greener* Hackathon held in Lecce, Italy, on March 26, 2025.
2. To synthesise insights gained from previous project activities (focus groups, training, interviews, and research).
3. To present policy recommendations for local, national, and EU-level decision-makers to improve the institutional framework that supports women-led green entrepreneurship.

This report also contributes to the wider discourse on gender equality, sustainable development, and inclusive economic growth, aligning with the European Green Deal, the Gender Equality Strategy, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

3. Methodology

The recommendations are the result of a bottom-up, participatory approach involving diverse stakeholders. The process included:

- **Desk Research** on the legal and policy frameworks concerning female entrepreneurship and sustainability in Greece, Italy, and Serbia.
- **Focus Groups** with women entrepreneurs to identify barriers, needs, and expectations in the green transition (Activity 2).
- **Training Program** implementation in Thessaloniki, Greece, with 15 women participants testing newly developed green skills modules (Activity 3).
- **Interviews** with 30+ women leading green transitions in their businesses, highlighting best practices and personal challenges (Activity 4).
- **Hackathon:** A co-creation event involving women entrepreneurs, public officials, and civil society stakeholders to discuss and propose policy solutions (Activity 5).

This holistic methodology ensured that the proposed recommendations are grounded in the lived experience of women entrepreneurs while informed by comparative policy analysis and strategic foresight.

4. Stakeholders Consulted

The following groups and individuals actively contributed to the creation of this report through participation in the Hackathon and/or previous project phases:

- Women entrepreneurs from the sustainable tourism, agriculture, social enterprise, and textile sectors
- Local and regional policymakers from Apulia Region and municipalities in Lecce province
- Representatives from chambers of commerce, women's business networks, and NGOs
- Trainers, mentors, and adult education providers
- The broader local community engaged through the public hackathon event on March 26, 2025

5. Key Findings from the Hackathon and Project Activities

5.1 Barriers Identified

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor the EACEA can be held responsible for them.

- **Lack of Green Skills:** Many women entrepreneurs lack access to structured and practical training on sustainability, circular economy, energy efficiency, and green certifications.
- **Financing Gap:** Green funds and incentives are not easily accessible or tailored to small women-led enterprises. Bureaucratic procedures often create additional obstacles.
- **Fragmented Policies:** There is a lack of coordination between gender, environmental, and economic policies. Few frameworks explicitly address the intersection of gender and sustainability.
- **Low Visibility and Representation:** Women-led green enterprises are rarely promoted as role models or prioritised in procurement and innovation policies.
- **Digital Divide:** In rural and underdeveloped areas, women face compounded barriers due to poor digital infrastructure and limited access to digital upskilling.

5.2 Opportunities and Strengths

- Women demonstrate a high level of commitment to environmental values, particularly in sectors like agriculture, tourism, crafts, and education.
- The rise of social enterprises, energy cooperatives, and ethical consumerism offers new entry points for women into the green economy.
- EU policy frameworks, including the Green Deal and Cohesion Policy, provide opportunities for alignment and resource mobilisation.

6. Policy Recommendations

6.1 Enhance Access to Green Knowledge and Skills

- Develop inclusive green entrepreneurship curricula, with gender-sensitive content, accessible formats, and local relevance.
- Promote lifelong learning programs for sustainable business development, especially in rural and disadvantaged regions.
- Provide free or subsidised micro-credentials in areas such as carbon footprint assessment, green marketing, circular product design, and energy audits.

6.2 Improve Access to Green Finance

- Establish dedicated green financing mechanisms for women-led SMEs, including microgrants, revolving funds, and equity instruments.

- Simplify application procedures for sustainability funding and provide capacity-building services to support successful applications.
- Encourage banks and local authorities to develop gender-sensitive financial products aligned with sustainability targets.

6.3 Foster Gender-Responsive Green Policy Frameworks

- Conduct gender impact assessments for all new environmental and SME-related legislation.
- Include gender indicators and monitoring tools in local and national green transition strategies.
- Establish intersectoral working groups that bring together experts on gender equality, environment, and entrepreneurship.

6.4 Promote Inclusive Public Procurement

- Introduce quotas or scoring mechanisms that reward women-led, environmentally responsible businesses in public tenders.
- Develop supplier databases of certified green women-led enterprises and ensure they are accessible to public and private buyers.
- Train procurement officers on inclusive and sustainable sourcing criteria.

6.5 Create Local Ecosystems for Green Women Entrepreneurship

- Launch “Green Business Support Hubs” or “Green Women Desks” at municipal level, offering technical advice, legal counselling, and peer support.
- Facilitate participation in green clusters, cooperative models, and innovation labs to foster collaboration and visibility.
- Provide incentives for business incubators and accelerators that specifically support women-led green startups.

7. Implementation and Follow-up

To ensure the effective implementation of these recommendations, the following steps are proposed:

- Disseminate this report to key stakeholders across municipal, regional, and national levels, as well as EU bodies and relevant networks.
- Organise policy roundtables and advocacy events in each partner country to present the recommendations and gather institutional feedback.
- Publish simplified versions of the recommendations for the wider public and disseminate them via the EPALE platform and Erasmus+ Project Results Platform.
- Monitor progress in each country and collect follow-up data on policy uptake and practice change.
- Build synergies with other Erasmus+ projects and Horizon Europe initiatives on gender and sustainability.

8. Conclusion

The *Women Going Greener* project has demonstrated the transformative potential of integrating gender equality and sustainability in the field of entrepreneurship. As Europe accelerates its green transition, it must also ensure that this transition is just, inclusive, and equitable.

By supporting women entrepreneurs, particularly those committed to environmentally sustainable practices, we can drive innovation, create resilient local economies, and contribute to achieving the European Green Deal and UN SDGs.

We call upon local authorities, national governments, and European institutions to translate these recommendations into action. The future of Europe's green economy must be built by and for all its citizens – especially women.

9. Signatories

Rinascita Società Cooperativa Sociale (Italy)

Energy Cooperative WEnCoop (Greece)

Energetska zadruga Elektropionir Beograd (Serbia)