

GRASS CEILING

Rules of the Parental Leave Champions Award



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 101083408

Title: The GRASS CEILING Parental Leave Champions Award (PARCA) – Terms of Reference

Date published: 30 September 2025

Author(s): Giuseppe Sirignano (Copa-Cogeca)

...



Funded by
the European Union

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 Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

A

bstract

The Parental Leave Champions Award (PARCA) is a key initiative of GRASS CEILING, a three-year project funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe programme. Its aim is to promote gender equality in rural areas by recognizing men, organizations, and initiatives that champion parental leave and foster supportive environments for women innovators and families in rural communities.

Through PARCA, GRASS CEILING will highlight and give visibility to positive examples of advocacy, flexible work arrangements, peer support, and cultural change that strengthen both families and communities.

E

xecutive Summary

In many rural areas, women face barriers to accessing parental leave, childcare, and full participation in the workforce. At the same time, men's uptake of parental leave remains limited, reinforcing unequal caregiving roles and placing disproportionate burdens on women. By celebrating men and organizations that embrace shared caregiving responsibilities, the PARCA award seeks to challenge stereotypes, normalize men's involvement in parental care, and advance equality in rural innovation and entrepreneurship.

The PARCA Award has the following objectives:

1. To showcase and reward men, organizations, and initiatives that actively promote and practice parental leave in rural areas.
2. To encourage cultural change by highlighting best practices that reduce stigma and normalize caregiving responsibilities among men.
3. To reinforce gender equality in rural communities, fostering environments where women innovators can thrive.

Applications will be open online from 1 October 2025 to 7 November 2025. The Award winner will be invited to the GRASS CEILING Final Showcase Event at the European Parliament in Brussels on 4 December 2025.



C ontents

Abstract 1

Executive Summary 1

Contents 2

Grass Ceiling 3

Rules of the Parental Leave Champions Award..... 4

 2.1. Promoting Positive Male Engagement in Parental Leave4

 2.2. Chapter I: General Terms5

 Article 1- General Terms.....5

 2.3. Chapter II: The Award.....5

 Article 2 – Nature of the Award5

 Article 3 – Eligibility Criteria5

 Article 4 – Advocacy for parental leave.....6

 Article 5 – Promotion of flexible work arrangements.....6

 Article 6 – Peer support and mentoring.....6

 Article 7 – Impact on gender equality and team culture7

 2.4 Chapter III: The application7

 Article 8 – Application form and documents.....7

 Article 9 – Procedure for deliberation.....7

 Chapter IV: The Jury7

 Article 10 – Composition7

 Chapter V: Result and Award8

 Article 11 - Ceremony.....8

 Article 12 – GDPR.....8

Annexes..... 9

 Annex I Data Protection Information Sheet9

01 Grass Ceiling

The aim of this Award is to promote the important role that men can play in European rural areas through their active engagement in parental responsibilities and to identify initiatives undertaken by men and organizations that contribute to advancing gender equality and supporting women-led innovation in rural areas.

GRASS CEILING (Gender Equality in Rural and Agricultural Innovation Systems) is a multi-actor project funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe program. The project is a three-year initiative, running from January 2023 to December 2025.

The core aim of the project is to empower rural women and increase the number of socio-ecological innovations led by women in farming, the rural economy, and rural communities. This is based on the understanding that rural areas are key drivers of innovation and sustainable development, yet the contributions of women in these sectors have often been under-recognized.

The project works to address the "grass ceiling", the barriers that hinder the full participation and recognition of women's leadership in agriculture and rural innovation. To achieve its objectives, the project is focused on:

- **Understanding barriers:** Conducting in-depth research to analyse the current position of women in European agriculture and the specific barriers they face.
- **Practical empowerment:** Establishing a network of nine "Living Labs" across Europe to provide training, coaching, and a support system for women innovators. These labs are designed to be a space for co-creation of knowledge between women, academics, and policymakers.
- **Policy and advocacy:** Developing tools and policy recommendations to influence national and EU-level policies, making them more gender-inclusive and supportive of women-led innovation.

By bringing together a consortium of 25 partners across Europe, including universities, businesses, and non-profits, GRASS CEILING is actively working to build a more equitable and resilient future for rural communities. The project contributes directly to key European policy goals, including the EU Gender Equality Strategy and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. Within the project's grant agreement, a key task is "GRASS Ceiling" awareness raising on women-led innovation, which includes an innovation award designed to recognise the role of man in who played a key role in creating positive environments and taking specific actions to encourage women-led innovation in these areas.

02 Rules of the Parental Leave Champions Award

2.1. Promoting Positive Male Engagement in Parental Leave

As part of the GRASS CEILING project in the frame of our final conference, we will launch our GRASSCEILING Parental Leave Champions Award (PARCA). It has been created to increase the visibility of men who actively contribute to more gender-equal rural areas by promoting and taking up parental leave.

In the EU, parental leave is less accessible for women, especially in rural areas. About 34% of women aged 20–49 are ineligible compared to 23% of men, mostly due to unemployment or inactivity. Rural women are far likelier to work part-time (26.5%) than rural men (6%) and face higher poverty or exclusion (22.5% vs. 20.4% in 2023), largely because of scarce care services and strong gender roles.

Despite progress in EU policy, men’s participation in parental leave remains limited. This often places disproportionate burdens on women and hinders gender equality in rural innovation and entrepreneurship. However, a growing number of men and organisations are setting positive examples: advocating for policy change, embracing flexible work arrangements, and normalising the use of parental leave.

The award aims to acknowledge innovative approaches and exemplary behaviours by men, enterprises, organisations, and allies who have taken concrete actions to create supportive environments for women innovators and for families in rural contexts. By recognising these contributions, the award seeks to encourage broader cultural change, demonstrate the benefits of shared caregiving, and foster more inclusive, resilient communities.

Through this award, GRASS CEILING will celebrate these pioneering efforts. The recognition, support, and dissemination of best practices in this area are essential to advancing gender equality, ensuring healthier work-life balance, and enabling rural innovation to thrive.

In 2025, Copa-Cogeca and the GRASS CEILING consortium wish to highlight these contributions under the theme: “Parental Leave Champions: Men Driving Equality in Rural Communities.”

2.2. Chapter I: General Terms

Article 1- General Terms

The aim of this Award is to promote the important role that men can play in European rural areas through their active engagement in parental responsibilities, and to identify initiative undertaken by men and organisations that contribute to advancing gender equality and supporting women-led innovation in rural areas.

2.3. Chapter II: The Award

Article 2 – Nature of the Award

1. The award winner shall receive a prize of a certificate reflecting the objectives of the award. The expenses for the winner to come to Brussels to receive the award will be covered by the project.
2. The award winner shall benefit from publicity and communication about the Award, which shall be widely promoted at EU level by GRASS CEILING and by the consortium members.
3. The award winner shall be presented and promoted as an example of positive engagement and best practice in promoting parental leave responsibilities.
4. The award winner shall also have their initiative presented on the GRASS CEILING website and social media channels.

Article 3 – Eligibility Criteria

1. This call for entries is open to both individuals and legal entities that meet the specific criteria outlined below.
2. All participants must be located within a rural area of a Member State of the European Union and [countries associated via the Horizon Europe programme](#).
3. The applicant must be an individual man, or an organisation, or a collective initiative who has demonstrably contributed to promoting or practicing parental leave in rural areas. For companies, only micro and small SMEs¹ **whose main activities operate in a rural area in the European Union (or a Horizon Europe participating country²) are eligible to apply.**

¹ 'Enterprise' is considered to be any entity engaged in an economic activity, irrespective of its legal form. This includes, in particular, self-employed persons and family businesses engaged in craft or other activities, and partnerships or associations regularly engaged in an economic activity. The category of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises ('SMEs') is made up of these types of enterprises:

- **MEDIUM-sized enterprise:** employs **fewer than 250 persons**, and which have an annual turnover not exceeding EUR 50 million, and/or an annual balance sheet total not exceeding **EUR 43 million**.
- **SMALL Enterprise:** employs fewer than 50 persons and whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed **EUR 10 million**.
- **MICRO Enterprise:** employs fewer than **10 persons and** whose annual turnover and/or annual balance sheet total does not exceed EUR 2 million.

² Full list non non-EU Member States that are participating in Horizon Europe: https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf



Rules of the Parental Leave Champions Award

4. The applicant must be responsible for the initiative or activity described (individual action, workplace policy, organisational change, or community initiative).
5. The application must be submitted in accordance with Articles 3 to 5.
6. Participants must comply and accept the conditions stipulated in the Award rules.
7. The Award shall be granted according to the following **criteria**:
 - Advocacy for Parental Leave
 - Visible Use of Parental Leave
 - Promotion of Flexible Work Arrangements
 - Peer Support and Mentoring
 - Impact on Gender Equality and Team Culture

Article 4 – Advocacy for parental leave

The award will recognise men and organisations that have actively promoted the importance of parental leave, both within their workplace and in public discourse.

Eligible actions may include:

- Campaigning for or introducing parental leave policies.
- Publicly advocating for men’s right and responsibility to caregiving.
- Removing barriers or stigma associated with men taking leave.
- Encouraging colleagues and peers to consider caregiving as integral to family and community life.

Article 5 – Promotion of flexible work arrangements

The award will recognise efforts to promote or implement flexible work arrangements that enable men to balance professional responsibilities with caregiving.

This may include:

- Establishing or championing flexible schedules, remote work, or job-sharing models.
- Ensuring equal opportunities for men to take leave without career penalties.
- Creating supportive organisational cultures where caregiving is normalised.

Article 6 – Peer support and mentoring

The award will highlight men who have supported peers, colleagues, or community members in taking parental leave and engaging in caregiving.

This may include:

- Mentoring younger colleagues by sharing personal experiences of leave.
- Creating peer networks for men on parental leave.
- Offering guidance and encouragement to reduce stigma.
- Promoting solidarity initiatives where men support each other in balancing care and work.

Article 7 – Impact on gender equality and team culture

The award will recognise positive impact on workplace and community culture, measured by:

- Demonstrated improvement in gender equality outcomes (e.g., increased uptake of leave by men).
- Reduction of stereotypes around parental roles.
- Stronger team cohesion and mutual support in organisations.
- Initiatives that influence broader societal perceptions of men’s role in parenting.

2.4 Chapter III: The application

Article 8 – Application form and documents

1. The candidate must prepare and send their application in English available in [JotForm](#) on GRASS CEILING website and on social media.
2. Audio visual material may be submitted in the candidate’s mother tongue, accompanied by a transcript if language isn’t English.
3. The “Your submission has been received” email shall serve as proof of the proposal’s submission.
4. Incomplete applications and/or applications received in languages other than English shall not be accepted.

Article 9 – Procedure for deliberation

1. All applications received shall be analysed by the Jury before deliberating on the attribution of the Award. The deliberation must be made based on the criteria indicated in Articles 3.
2. All the members of the Jury must be present in the meeting of the Jury or must delegate the competence to someone from the same organisation.
3. All applications received that do not comply with the rules set out in Articles 8 (e.g. not written in English or not respecting the procedure) shall be considered invalid and therefore shall not be eligible for the Award.

Chapter IV: The Jury

Article 10 – Composition

1. The Jury shall be composed of three members that are part of the of the Copa-Cogeca working groups.
2. The Jury shall be composed of:
 - a. A member of the Research and Development working group
 - b. A member of the Rural Areas working group
 - c. A member of the Gender equality working group

Chapter V: Result and Award

Article 11 - Ceremony

1. The Award will be communicated to the winner by the GRASS CEILING Coordinator by 17 November.
2. The award winner shall also be informed about the ceremony, the procedure for the award ceremony and any other relevant details.
3. The winner (2 representatives) will be invited to the GRASS CEILING Final Showcase event at the European Parliament on 3-4 December in Brussels.
4. The GRASS CEILING Project coordinator will reimburse the winner:
 - a. Return travel (car mileage or economy public transport, including flights) through the most direct route to Brussels from winning organisation/individual official place of residence.
 - b. Hotel accommodation in Brussels (2 nights, up to 137 euro per night); Subsistence rate (up to 102 euro per day)
5. The winner will provide the project manager with a reimbursement form that includes invoices and receipts.
6. The award winner shall keep the Jury's decision secret until the date of the ceremony. The official award ceremony shall take place in Brussels on 4 December as part of the GRASS CEILING final conference.

Article 12 – GDPR

Personal data will be collected, processed, and stored in line with EU General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR ([Regulation EU 2016/679](#)). Participants will be required to provide explicit consent via the Data Protection Sheet (Annex IV). Information provided by applicants will be handled securely and used solely for project-related purposes. All selection criteria and procedures are publicly available to ensure fairness.

Contact

For any queries, please write an email to generalaffairs@copa-cogeca.eu.

03 Annexes

Annex I Data Protection Information Sheet

In compliance with articles 12, 13 and 14 of Regulation (EU) 2016/679

Dear Participant,

Your involvement in the GRASS CEILING project as an applicant in the **Parental Leave Champions Award (Parca)** implies the need for the project to process some of your personal data.

The EU General Data Protection Regulation (hereinafter GDPR) imposes on data controllers an obligation of transparency, which is to provide data subjects with detailed information on the processing of their personal data.

Therefore, in compliance with the GDPR, we inform you that your data will be processed by Copa-Cogeca (GRASS CEILING Project partner) lawfully and fairly, only where necessary, using paper and electronic means, adopting adequate technical and organisational security measures, for purposes related to your participation in the GRASS CEILING project.

Your data will be processed by duly authorised Copa-Cogeca employees (promotion, admissibility check, longlist and shortlist) and 2 Board Members (final award selection from shortlist up to 9 finalist), and some external suppliers (e.g., providers of hosting/cloud services), and will not be used for sending commercial communications or for profiling purposes.

Your data could be transferred to other GRASS CEILING partners only in aggregated/pseudonymised form and will be used for evaluation of the application and selection process purposes.

You may exercise your rights at any time in accordance with the GDPR, such as requesting access to data, correcting them if there are errors, deleting them (e.g., if they are no longer necessary), processing limitation and portability, as well as filing a complaint with *Autorité de protection des données*.

Before freely expressing your consent in a conscious manner, we invite you to read carefully the following detailed information. Should you have any doubt, please do not hesitate to contact us: we will provide you with all the necessary clarifications.

WHO WILL BE IN CHARGE OF DATA PROCESSING? IDENTITY AND CONTACT DETAILS OF THE CONTROLLER

The controller is: Copa-Cogeca

Address: Rue de Treves 61, Brussels, Belgium

E-mail: privacy@copa-cogeca.eu

Registered e-mail: mail@copa-cogeca.eu

WHO IS THE CONTROLLER'S REFERENCE PERSON FOR DATA PROTECTION ISSUES?

The COPA-COGECA contact is: Patrick Pagani; Registered e-mail: patrick.pagani@copa-cogeca.eu.

WHAT DATA WILL BE COLLECTED?

Your name, surname, function in your organisation, email and items included in the application form.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN WITH MY DATA? PURPOSES OF THE PROCESSING FOR WHICH THE PERSONAL DATA ARE INTENDED

Your personal data will only be processed for the purposes of the GRASS CEILING project, in particular to manage your participation in the activities of being selected Additional Dynamo, consisting in participating in online workshop(s), participating in one in-person workshop and participating in the final conference of GRASS CEILING project in Brussels 2025 within the GRASS CEILING project.

Your image and voice may be recorded during GRASS CEILING meetings, workshops and interviews, with your express consent. The recordings may be published on the GRASS CEILING website and on the partners' websites, and on social media accounts. You are totally free to withdraw consent at any time. In that case, the recordings will be removed, or your image and voice will be blurred in order to make you non-recognisable.

WHAT IS THE LEGAL BASIS FOR THE PROCESSING?

The legal basis for the processing of your personal data is your express consent, as foreseen by art. 6, par. 1, lett. a) of the GDPR.

WHO WILL HAVE ACCESS TO MY DATA? RECIPIENTS OR CATEGORIES OF RECIPIENTS OF YOUR PERSONAL DATA

Beside Copa-Cogeca, some other subjects will have access to your personal data, insofar as it is needed for the GRASS CEILING project. This will happen in full compliance with applicable laws and regulations at EU and national level.

These subjects include: Technology providers (i.e., providers of hosting services).

In compliance with the data minimisation principle, any time that identifying data are not necessary, the other GRASS CEILING partners will not receive your personal data, but will only receive anonymous aggregated data, which will be entered into the GRASS CEILING database without any personal data, for statistical purposes.

WILL MY DATA BE TRANSFERRED OUTSIDE THE EU? OR TO INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS?

No, your personal data will not be transferred outside the European Union.

HOW LONG WILL MY PERSONAL DATA BE KEPT? PERIOD FOR WHICH THE PERSONAL DATA WILL BE STORED

Your personal data will be kept by Copa-Cogeca for 5 (five) years after the project end; it is the period during which there is an obligation by AEIDL to demonstrate to the European Commission that the project tasks have been fully carried out. In any case, your data will be stored for no longer than necessary in consideration of the purposes for which it has been processed.

WHAT ARE MY RIGHTS? RIGHTS OF THE DATA SUBJECT

As data subject, you have all the rights specified in sections 2, 3 and 4 of Chapter III of the GDPR. In particular, you have the following rights:

- to request from the controller access to and rectification or erasure of personal data or restriction of processing;
- to object to processing;
- to request data portability;
- to withdraw consent at any time, without affecting the lawfulness of processing based on consent before its withdrawal;
- to lodge a complaint with the competent Supervisory Authority.

You also have the right to withdraw from the GRASS CEILING project at any time without any prejudice. However, the data collected and processed up to that moment will remain available to Copa-Cogeca in compliance with the rules and storage periods indicated above. These rights can be exercised by writing/sending an e-mail to general.affairs@copa-cogeca.eu.

AM I OBLIGED TO PROVIDE MY PERSONAL DATA? CAN I REFUSE?

Providing the requested personal data is necessary for your participation in the GRASS CEILING project to be involved in the RUWI Award. If you fail to provide the required data, or only provide part of it, it will be impossible for you to be involved in RUWI Award application process as part of the GRASS CEILING project.

AUTOMATED DECISION-MAKING

No automated decision will be made on the basis of your personal data collected for the GRASS CEILING project. Your data will not be used for profiling purposes.