



# GRASS CEILING

The GRASS CEILING Rural Women  
Innovators (RUWI) Award –  
Terms of Reference





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# Title: The GRASS CEILING Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award – Terms of Reference

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## Dissemination Level

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| <input type="checkbox"/>            | <b>CO:</b> | Confidential, only for members of the Consortium (including the Commission Services) |
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# T able of contents

Executive summary .....	4
GRASS CEILING .....	5
Award Terms and Conditions .....	6
Participants and desired profile .....	6
What the Award will entail .....	8
Open call specifications .....	9
Award Process.....	11
Confidentiality and GDPR.....	12
Contact.....	12
Annex I Data Protection Information Sheet .....	13

## Executive summary

The **Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award** is an integral part of GRASS CEILING, a three-year project funded by the European Union under the Horizon Europe program, and its core aim is to **empower rural women and increase the number of socio-ecological innovations led by women in farming, the rural economy, and their communities.**

Despite their critical role, the contributions of women in agriculture and rural innovation have often remained largely invisible. The persistent "glass ceiling," or in this context, a "GRASS CEILING" has limited the recognition and advancement of women's leadership in these sectors. This project is focused on addressing this imbalance by creating a context where women can drive socio-ecological transitions—developing innovations that respond to both social and environmental challenges and strengthen the resilience of rural areas.

Through the RUWI Award, we aim to contribute directly to this objective by **recognising and giving the due visibility to women-centred innovative projects in agriculture and rural areas.** This initiative is designed to highlight and celebrate the work already underway in rural communities, thereby advancing the goals of gender equality and a more sustainable future for Europe.

The RUWI Award has the following objectives:

1. To provide a platform for **visibility**, ensuring that the achievements of women in rural areas are recognised and celebrated.
2. To **inspire** a new generation of women to lead and innovate, showing them that their ideas and projects have a tangible place in the future of our communities.
3. To **promote** broader change, by highlighting best practices that can be replicated, supported, and scaled across Europe.

These Award are focused on finding and celebrating innovators who are already making a difference, reinforcing the idea that local action is the engine of rural development. Through this initiative, the project aims to do more than simply award prizes; it seeks to build a more inclusive and equitable future for all rural communities.

Applications are open online via <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/grass-ceiling-rural-women-innovators-award> from 01/10/2025 until 31/10/2025. Following the dedicated selection process described in this call, the attendance and participation of the award recipient at the **GRASS CEILING Final Showcase Event** held at the European Parliament in Brussels **on 3-4 December 2025** will be supported by the project in line with the condition set out in *Section 2: Award Terms and Conditions*.

# 01 GRASS CEILING

**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, the European Green Deal, 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 make visible the innovative work carried out by women in rural areas**. As part of this, the project will also organize a complementary award to recognize men who have played a key role in creating positive environments and taking specific actions to encourage women-led innovation in these areas.

# 02 Award Terms and Conditions

The GRASS CEILING Project will launch one (1) open call for Rural Women Innovators Award (1<sup>st</sup> October to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025).

This document serves as the official call for applications for the inaugural **Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award**, 2025 edition, which will be awarded in a competitive process.

Applicants for these Award must be individuals or legal entities as defined in the next section called “Participants and desired profile” and must meet the established criteria.

This Award will recognise projects or organisations aimed at:

- Introducing **women-led innovations** in the **agricultural, fisheries, forestry, or economic diversification sectors of rural areas**. The goal is to create a more sustainable and efficient sector by producing high-quality products and services that meet consumer demand and integrate effective marketing and promotion strategies.
- Recognising **any actors or organisations who have played key roles in creating positive environments** and taking specific actions to **encourage women-led innovation in rural areas**.
- Celebrating the contributions of **women** who are at the forefront of the transition to a modern and sustainable rural economy.

Projects that are eligible for consideration may include, but are not limited to, the following areas:

- Technological advancement, value chain innovation, sustainable practices, market diversification, or social innovations to empower women in rural areas.
- Communication, strengthening conditions, and creating an environment for the visibility of the work of women in rural communities. This could include communication campaigns, mentorship programs, or other initiatives.

**Activities related to facilitating or taking parental leave for men are NOT eligible** for this category.

## Participants and desired profile

This call for entries is open to both individuals and legal entities that meet the specific criteria outlined below.



## The GRASS CEILING Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award – Terms of Reference

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](#).

The award is open to submissions from:

- **Women** who are leading or have led innovative related to the agricultural, fisheries, forestry, or economic diversification sectors in rural areas.
- **Men and women** who have played a key role in supporting women-led innovation in rural areas.
- **Women or stakeholder organisation who have participated in GRASS CEILING project.**
- Members of the **Rural Pact Community Group on Women in Rural Areas**.
- Other **organisations and projects**.

### *Types of eligible participants:*

- **Individuals (single or group)** who are the primary leaders or founders of the proposed initiative/organisation or have been instrumental in creating positive environments, mentoring, or otherwise supporting women-led projects.
- **Legal Entities:** Companies, non-profit organizations, cooperatives, and associations.
  - In the case of legal entities, the submitted project must be led or founded by a woman or a team with a woman in a key leadership role.
  - For companies, only micro and small SMEs<sup>1</sup> **whose main activities operate in a rural area in the European Union (or a Horizon Europe participating country<sup>2</sup>) are eligible to apply.**

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<sup>1</sup> '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.

Source SME definitions: [COMMISSION REGULATION \(EU\) No 651/2014, OF 17 June 2014](#)

<sup>2</sup> 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](https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/docs/2021-2027/common/guidance/list-3rd-country-participation_horizon-euratom_en.pdf)



## The GRASS CEILING Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award – Terms of Reference

### *Types of Activities - detail*

Different areas for fostering women-led innovation could be (non-exhaustive list):

- Contribution to local and regional economic development (e.g. jobs sustained or created, added value, diversification of income in rural areas).
- Creation of sustainable business models or new markets (e.g. agri-food value chains, short value chains, eco-tourism, digital services, family/community-based care services).
- Strengthening resilience of rural economies against shocks (e.g. climate, demographic, or market).
- Mentorship and skill development, including initiatives that directly equip women with the knowledge and tools they need to succeed, including digital tools and technologies.
- Networking and community building, creating supportive social infrastructure.
- Policy and advocacy, recognising the effort to influence the system for gender-inclusive policies at the local or regional level.
- Financial and resource accessibility, removing practical barriers, including initiatives to secure funding for women's project.
- Gender norms and stereotypes, including using communication, education, or community events to challenge traditional gender roles.

### What the Award will entail

- The Award will be communicated to the winner by the GRASS CEILING Coordinator to the winner by 21 November.
- The winner (2 representatives professionally linked to the project/initiative) will be invited to the GRASS CEILING Final Showcase event at the European Parliament on 3-4 December in Brussels.
- The GRASS CEILING Project coordinator will reimburse the winner<sup>3</sup>:
  - Return travel (car mileage or economy public transport, including economy airfares) through the most direct route to Brussels from winning organisation/individual official place of residence.
  - Hotel accommodation in Brussels (2 nights, up to 137 euro per night).
  - Subsistence rate (up to 102 euro per day).

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<sup>3</sup> The Winner can calculate the most direct route to Brussels and how much you will be reimbursed following EU rules here: [Calculate unit costs for eligible travel costs - European Commission](#). The Winner can find how much you can claim in the official EU tables: [Commission Decision C\(2021\)35](#)



## The GRASS CEILING Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award – Terms of Reference

The winner will have to make the corresponding hotel and transportation reservations and payments. The winner will provide the Project Coordinator (South East Technological University (SETU)) with valid invoices, receipts, and relevant/necessary justifications for reimbursement in line with the conditions set out in this call.

- The Winner will be **recognised at a dedicated segment at the Showcase Event** and via **extensive media dissemination** through the GRASS CEILING Project.

### Open call specifications

**Call launch:** announcement and dissemination of the open call for the Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award on **October 1, 2025**.

**Application period:** the call for the Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award will be open for one month. All submissions must be received within the specified period to be considered. **Submission window: October 1, 2025, to October 31, 2025 (midnight).**

**Evaluation and notification:** The selection process will follow a clear and objective timeline to ensure all applications are reviewed fairly.

- Evaluation period: **From November 1, 2025, to November 14, 2025**, a dedicated team provided by AEIDL will review and score all eligible applications based on the established criteria.
- Notification of results: All applicants will be formally notified of the results via email by **November 21, 2025**.

### *Evaluation criteria*

Applications will be assessed based on six dimensions (100 points max.):

#### **1. Empowerment and gender equality (30 points)**

- Barriers the initiative has had to overcome in improving the situation of rural women and women in farming.
- Degree to which the initiative empowers rural women as leaders, entrepreneurs, or innovators.
- Promotion of community-led equality in rural communities.

#### **2. Social impact (15 points)**

- Favour initiatives with a social economy dimension, especially those reinvesting value into community well-being and the inclusion of vulnerable groups to promote equity.
- Contribution to improving quality of life in rural communities (e.g. essential services, social cohesion, improved living conditions, better nutrition).



## The GRASS CEILING Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award – Terms of Reference

- Contribution to solidarity networks and social capital that enable rural areas to adapt to demographic, economic, or environmental challenges.

### **3. Environmental and climate contribution (15 points)**

- Contribution to biodiversity, ecological transition, or low-carbon rural development.
- Alignment with climate-smart and sustainable farming practices.
- Educational and behavioural change regarding knowledge dissemination of sustainable practices.

### **4. Economic impact and value creation (10 points)**

- Contribution to local and regional economic development (e.g. jobs sustained or created, added value, diversification of income in rural areas).
- Creation of sustainable business models or new markets (e.g. agri-food value chains, short value chains, eco-tourism, digital services, family/community-based care services).
- Strengthening resilience of rural economies against shocks (e.g. climate, demographic, or market).

### **5. Innovation and creativity (15 points)**

- Novelty of the solution in addressing rural socio-ecological or economic challenges.
- Creative use of resources, networks, or partnerships.
- Potential for disruptive change, related to the impact and the power to shift traditional norms, challenge old business models or inspire widespread change.

### **6. Sustainability, Scalability, replicability (10 points)**

- Clear pathways for continuation, growth, or integration into local/regional development strategies.
- Potential for the model to be replicated in other rural regions or Member States.
- Active mechanisms for dissemination of lessons learned and good practices, fostering peer-to-peer learning and wider uptake.

The weights of every criterion are detailed in the Annex II.

# The GRASS CEILING Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award – Terms of Reference

## Award Process

### Application stage

Applicants are required to submit via **EUSurvey** link: <https://ec.europa.eu/eusurvey/runner/grass-ceiling-rural-women-innovators-award>

- Application should include a brief proposal that provides a clear overview of the project/initiative.
- The requested information that will be requested in the EUSurvey is summarised in Annex II.

### Selection stage

The selection procedure will follow the 4 stages:

1. **Admissibility:** The application process begins with an initial review to ensure submissions are complete and meet the eligibility criteria.
2. **Long listing:** Eligible applications will then be evaluated by a panel of reviewers, who will score them based on predefined criteria to ensure alignment with the project's objectives.
3. **Shortlisting:** Following the scoring phase, the highest-ranking applications will be shortlisted for further consideration.
4. **Selection:** A shortlist of 9 Finalists will be ranked by a two-member evaluation board.
5. **Award:** The result will be communicated to the sole winner. who will then invited to attend the GRASS CEILING Final Showcase event at the European Parliament.

### Process

Timing [GRASS CEILING project months]	Activity	Description	Actor
[M33] Mid-September 2025	Approval methodology	Agreed by the GC	AEIDL
[M33] October 1 <sup>st</sup> 2025	Launch of AD open call		AEIDL (queries & secretariat, dissemination)
[M34] October 1st to 31st, 2025	Applicants fill their proposal via online EUSurvey	AEIDL centralises the receipt of form by AWARD email	Applicants
[M35] First week of November 2025	Initial Review	Applications will undergo an initial screening for completeness and eligibility.	AEIDL
[M35] First Week of November- June 2025	Longlist	A team designed for the selection will use the score set out in Annex II.	AEIDL
[M35] Second Week – November 2025	Shortlist (up to 9 finalists)	2 AEIDL Board members rank 9 finalists and select the winner	AEIDL-Appointed Evaluation Board
[M35] Third week – November 2025	Publication for results		Grass Ceiling Coordinator, CIHEAM



## The GRASS CEILING Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award – Terms of Reference

### *Roles*

- **Admissibility check:** to be carried out by AEIDL based on these Terms of Reference.
- **Longlisting:** to be carried out by an AEIDL official using the scoring matrix based on these Terms of Reference.
- **Shortlisting and Scoring:** A panel of reviewers will score eligible applications against the above-mentioned predefined criteria to produce a shortlist of up to 9 candidates.
- **Selection:** 2 independent members from the [AEIDL Board](#) will select the winner for both categories using the scoring matrix translating these terms of reference.

### *Filtering and admissibility requirements:*

This will be part of the screening of the applications by AEIDL based on Annex I.

### *Conflict of interest*

No individual having a role in any stage of selection process is allowed to submit their application for any of the RUWI categories.

## Confidentiality and 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 [GRASSCEILINGaward@aeidl.eu](mailto:GRASSCEILINGaward@aeidl.eu)

## 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 **Rural Women Innovation Award (RUWI)** 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 AEIDL (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 AEIDL 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: AEIDL

Address: Chaussee Saint-Pierre 260

E-mail: [privacy@aeidl.eu](mailto:privacy@aeidl.eu)

Registered e-mail: [info@aeidl.eu](mailto:info@aeidl.eu)

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

The **AEIDL** contact is: Robin Salter; Registered e-mail: [rsa@aeidl.eu](mailto:rsa@aeidl.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 2027 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 AEIDL, 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).



## The GRASS CEILING Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award – Terms of Reference

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 AEIDL 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 the AEIDL researchers in compliance with the rules and storage periods indicated above. These rights can be exercised by writing/sending an e-mail to [GRASSCEILINGaward@aeidl.eu](mailto:GRASSCEILINGaward@aeidl.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



## The GRASS CEILING Rural Women Innovators (RUWI) Award – Terms of Reference

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.