

It's a wrap for the HER FUND Project

A pan-European network of gender-conscious investors to support female-led companies for growth and sustainability

After two years of collaboration and innovation, the **HER FUND project** officially comes to an end, marking a significant milestone in advancing gender-conscious investment and supporting women-led startups across Europe.

Funded under the **Horizon Europe programme**, HER FUND has worked to reduce gender and regional disparities in innovation by improving access to funding and strengthening connections between **Better Connected Innovation Ecosystems (BCIEs)** and **Less Connected Innovation Ecosystems (LCIEs)**.

Building a more inclusive investment ecosystem

Over its duration, HER FUND successfully brought together **9 partners from 7 European countries**, forming a pan-European network of investors, accelerators, ecosystem builders and innovation stakeholders committed to inclusive entrepreneurship.

The project has delivered a wide range of impactful actions and results, including:

- The creation of a **pan-European Hub bringing together stakeholders across Europe and beyond**
- The launch of the **HER FUND Digital Platform**, connecting founders, investors and ecosystems
- The implementation of **training, mentoring and coaching programmes** supporting both women entrepreneurs and new business angels
- The production of **strategic reports, policy recommendations and practical guidelines** to improve access to capital
- The development of **HER FUND Talks**, a podcast amplifying women's voices in business and finance

Together, these achievements have contributed to strengthening the visibility, readiness and growth potential of women-led startups across Europe.

The HER FUND Impact Portfolio: A lasting legacy



To capture the full scope of its achievements, the consortium has released the **HER FUND Impact Portfolio – Results, Ecosystem & Investor Engagement**, the project's official media press kit.

This document provides a comprehensive overview of HER FUND's journey, highlighting its key results, community-building efforts and long-term impact.

More than a summary of activities, the Impact Portfolio reflects the broader ambition of HER FUND: to support women-led innovation, foster inclusive investment practices, and create lasting connections across Europe.

A strong final event : “Women who build Europe” The European Female Founders Summit in Brussels

The *European Female Founders Summit – Women Who Build Europe* held on **17 March 2026** in Brussels marked a key milestone in HER FUND’s final phase. The Summit brought together innovators, policymakers, investors and ecosystem leaders from across Europe around a shared objective: accelerating women-led innovation and strengthening inclusive investment ecosystems.



More than a gathering, the Summit served as a platform for translating strategy into action. Discussions addressed some of the most pressing challenges faced by women entrepreneurs today, including access to funding, the role of inclusive policy frameworks, the importance of mentorship ecosystems, and the need to empower the next generation of women innovators.

The programme featured high-level keynote contributions from [MEP Tsvetelina Penkova](#) and [MEP Sirpa Pietikäinen](#), who reaffirmed the importance of strong European policy commitment to inclusion and gender equality in innovation. Their interventions highlighted the need for coordinated action at EU level to ensure that women-led startups can fully contribute to Europe’s competitiveness.

This perspective was further reinforced by [Demetris Skourides](#), Chief Scientist of the Republic of Cyprus for Research, Innovation and Technology, who demonstrated how inclusion is not only a social imperative but also a driver of productivity, innovation and long-term economic growth.

The Summit also hosted high-level policy discussions bringing together key European actors such as [Andreea Ticheru](#) (European Commission, DG RTD), [Lilyana Pavlova](#) (former Vice-President of the European Investment Bank) and [Miguel Aguiar](#) (CEO, Startup Portugal). Moderated by [Milena Stoycheva](#) (the Edge R&BD), these exchanges explored how to better align policy, investment and ecosystem support to unlock the full potential of women-led innovation across Europe.

From an investment perspective, dedicated sessions such as “Invest in the Future”, moderated by [Corinne Trang](#) (Wonderfund), brought together leading voices including [Jenny Tooth OBE](#) (UK Business Angels Association), [Ekaterina V.](#) (Morningside Hill Capital Management), [Lucia Davidova](#) (ADDSEN) and [Maria Pournari](#) (EDIH Health Hub – IED). These discussions provided concrete insights into investment strategies, barriers and opportunities for supporting women founders.



A defining outcome of the Summit was the clear consensus that gender inclusion is a key driver of Europe’s innovation capacity and global competitiveness. The message resonated strongly throughout the event:

When women are part of the driving force, Europe grows stronger.

HER FUND Final general assembly

On **18 March 2026**, the HER FUND partners gathered in Brussels at INESC HUB for the Final General Assembly, marking the official conclusion of the project. This final meeting provided an opportunity to reflect on two years of collaboration, review key achievements and consolidate the project's results and deliverables.



What comes next

While HER FUND officially concludes, its impact continues.

HER FUND concludes at a moment when the need for inclusive and gender-conscious investment in Europe remains as pressing as ever. While important progress has been made, structural barriers to funding for women-led startups persist, particularly in less-connected innovation ecosystems. The challenge now is no longer to demonstrate the need for change, but to ensure that the momentum generated is not lost.

Over the past two years, HER FUND has laid the groundwork for a more connected and inclusive investment landscape. It has built relationships, strengthened capacities, and created tools that reduce fragmentation between ecosystems. However, the long-term impact of these efforts depends on their continuity beyond the project's duration.

This transition was symbolically and concretely marked in Brussels during the **European Female Founders Summit**. A key outcome of the Summit was the signing of a **Memorandum of Understanding between HER FUND and European Female Founders**, committing to the continuation of an open, pan-European network dedicated to supporting women entrepreneurship and cross-border collaboration.



In parallel, the **Advocacy Paper on the sustainability of the HER FUND Network (Deliverable 5.2)** sets out strategic recommendations to ensure that this network remains active, scalable and impactful in the years to come.

Looking ahead, the next phase is not about rebuilding, but about scaling what has already been proven to work. Initiatives such as **SCALE'HER** will build on HER FUND's foundations, shifting the focus from ecosystem creation to the acceleration and growth of women-led startups, particularly in high-impact sectors such as digital and deep tech.

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CONTACT

Coordinator – Anne-Charlotte Joubert
The Edge
contact@herfund-project.eu