

## Maria Nowak Research Fellowship 2025

### *Call for Proposals to EMN Members*

The Maria Nowak Research Fellowship, a flagship initiative of the European Microfinance Network (EMN), supported by the European Commission and the European Investment Fund, invites proposals for its 2025 edition.

This is the second edition of the initiative. Launched in 2024, it aims to **influence and promote research on the inclusive finance sector in Europe, while also benefiting the EMN's members.**

As part of this initiative, the selected **EMN member will receive free consultancy support to tackle a research assignment.** A designated researcher, commissioned in agreement with the selected member, will undertake an assignment based on the member's needs for a period of up to 1 year. EMN will cover the assignment costs of up to **10,000 euros**, encompassing both the research assignment and travel and accommodation expenses for visits to the organisation (if necessary).

Moreover, the initiative seeks to contribute to the broader academic landscape of microfinance in Europe. The data collected during the assignment will be utilised by the researcher to draft an academic paper. As part of this initiative, EMN members are expected to grant the researcher permission to use the collected data for this purpose.

#### **Hear from last year's selected member:**

*"Through our participation in the EMN's Maria Nowak Research Fellowship, we will examine how cooperative banks can strengthen their systemic role in building community resilience against climate challenges. Our research focuses particularly on developing innovative financial solutions for underserved rural populations, including vulnerable groups such as ROMA communities, migrants, elderly, youth, and women in mountainous areas.*

*As a locally rooted cooperative bank that has directly witnessed the devastating impact of climate incidents on our community, we are deeply committed to transforming these challenges into opportunities for sustainable development. Our experience with both storms IANOS and DANIEL has shown that cooperative banks must evolve beyond traditional banking services to become key partners in climate adaptation and community resilience. We are deeply grateful to EMN for the opportunity to conduct this vital research."*

***Cooperative Bank of Karditsa, 2024 Fellowship Recipient***

With the support of

## Scope of the call:

EMN members are invited to submit their research proposals focusing on target groups facing significant barriers to financial inclusion and/or entrepreneurship. These groups (not to be intended as mutually exclusive) include:

- Women
- Migrants and refugees
- Youth not in education, employment, or training (NEET)
- Rural populations
- People with disabilities
- Seniors

Proposals should contribute to one or more of the following key objectives:

1. **Building evidence on impact:** research aimed at generating evidence and insights on the impact of microfinance activities on the above-mentioned target groups.

2. **Designing new services:** research that lays the groundwork for developing new activities or strategies tailored to the needs of the target groups. For example, research can help:

- Design dedicated financial and non-financial services for specific groups (e.g. training programmes for women entrepreneurs, BDS for migrant clients, etc.) or explore ways to adapt current services to better reach marginalized communities.
- Identify gaps in current service offerings and proposing innovative solutions to address them.

3. **Driving innovation:** research that explores new approaches to reinforce / expand and the scope of microfinance activities. Examples of research topics under this goal include:

- Supporting climate resilience and biodiversity through green finance initiatives.
- Facilitating access to essential services such as housing, education and/or health.
- Enhancing entrepreneurs' resilience and financial health through coaching, mentoring, and training programs.
- Leveraging digital innovations to improve financial inclusion for marginalized communities.

The list of suggested topics above is not exhaustive, and proposals on alternative topics are welcome.

Examples of assignments that may be undertaken include, but are not limited to:

- Conducting impact studies.
- Performing data analysis.
- Providing managerial insights for the development of new products or tools.
- Benchmarking existing practices across countries.
- Carrying out market assessments.

## Eligibility:

The call is open to all EMN members: microfinance practitioners, entrepreneurship support organisations, national networks, and investors. Joint proposals from more than 1 member are also accepted (no budget increase).

## Process & deadlines :

- **3rd March 2025:** deadline for submission of research proposals by EMN members. Proposals will be assessed by the EMN Research Committee. Clarifications might be requested in order to make the selection.
- **18<sup>th</sup> March 2025:** results are communicated to EMN members.
- **April 2025:** EMN will issue a call for proposal for a research project addressed to academia/research centres. Selected member will contribute to the preparation of the Terms of Reference.
- **May/June 2025:** One researcher/pool of researchers is selected. Selected member and researcher will be presented at the EMN Conference in Cagliari (October 2025).
- **July 2025/June 2026:** Researcher conducts the research assignment and prepares a preliminary draft for the academic paper. Researcher presents the results of their work during the 2026 EMN Annual Conference.

## How to apply:

To apply for this year's edition, please **complete the form by the 3rd March 2025** and send it to [n.benaglio@european-microfinance.org](mailto:n.benaglio@european-microfinance.org) and [f.preve@european-microfinance.org](mailto:f.preve@european-microfinance.org)

The EMN Research Committee will select the member who will receive the assignment based on:

- **Research question:** Is the research need clear (scope clearly defined)? Are the research questions clearly formulated and coherent?
- **Relevance:** Is the proposal tackling the call main topic (underserved population)?
- **Feasibility:** Is the research proposal feasible in terms of timeline and budget planned? What type of in-kind support will be provided to the researcher (e.g., staff dedicated to support the researcher, access to data and clients/staff/relevant stakeholders, etc.)
- **Impact for the organisation:** Which use would the organisation make of the results? What will change for the organisation? Would the organisation have conducted this research also without this grant?

For any questions on the initiative please reach out to [n.benaglio@european-microfinance.org](mailto:n.benaglio@european-microfinance.org) and/or [f.preve@european-microfinance.org](mailto:f.preve@european-microfinance.org)