



D3.2 - Inventory of Female-Led Innovations

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

CO	Project Coordinator
EC	European Commission
EU	European Union
CEA	Controlled Environment Agriculture
PESTE	Political, Economic, Social, Technological and Environmental analysis
SIGI	The Social Institutions and Gender Index
EAGF	European Agricultural Guarantee Fund
ECVC	European Coordination Via Campesina
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
OECD	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
Project partners	
Galway	UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY
TU Delft	TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITEIT DELFT
TEAGASC	TEAGASC - AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
UNICAL	UNIVERSITA DELLA CALABRIA
LWL	LONGFORD WOMENS LINK CLG
UTU	TURUN YLIOPISTO
UL	UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
CE	CONSULTA EUROPA PROJECTS AND INNOVATION SL
HNEE	HOCHSCHULE FUR NACHHALTIGE ENTWICKLUNG EBERSWALDE
ELARD	ASSOCIATION EUROPEENNE LEADER POUR LE DEVELOPPEMENT RURAL
UOULU	OULUN YLIOPISTO
ECOLISE	RESEAU EUROPEEN POUR DES INITIATIVES COMMUNAUTAIRES SUR LES CHANGEMENTS CLIMATIQUES ET LE DEVELOPPEMENT DURABLE
MENDELU	MENDELOVA UNIVERZITA V BRNE
LNU	LINNEUNIVERSITETET
HLK	HOGSKOLAN FOR LARANDE OCH KOMMUNIKATION I JONKOPING - HLK SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION



1. INTRODUCTION

The FLIARA project aims to create an inclusive and empowering innovation ecosystem for rural women, ensuring they are recognised, supported, and celebrated in their accomplishments. As part of this process, the key objective of the project's third work package (WP3) is to deepen our understanding and knowledge of the pathways to success and the challenges facing female-led sustainability innovations in farming and rural areas. More specifically, WP3 will

- a) Develop the methodology for case study execution and identify the sustainability innovation themes to use for case study selection (D3.1 and D3.2).
- b) Identify women-led innovations for case study and to select twenty women to act as Innovation Ambassadors (M.1 and M.2).
- c) Analysis of female-led sustainability innovation case studies and comparative analysis based on the assessment framework (D3.3, D3.4 and D3.5).

WP3 is divided into five different deliverables, with the first two deliverables (D3.1 and D3.2) connected to T3.1 (Research Guidelines and Thematic Selection). D3.1 will include guidelines for case study selection, in addition to an overview of the case study analysis and the comparison process. D3.2 runs alongside D3.1 and provides a process for the identification of case study sub-themes via a multifaceted approach. All case study empirical work will be carried out within D3.3, while D3.4 and D3.5 will assess and compare the results of the 20 case studies carried out in 9 different EU countries by 10 project partners (Figure 1).

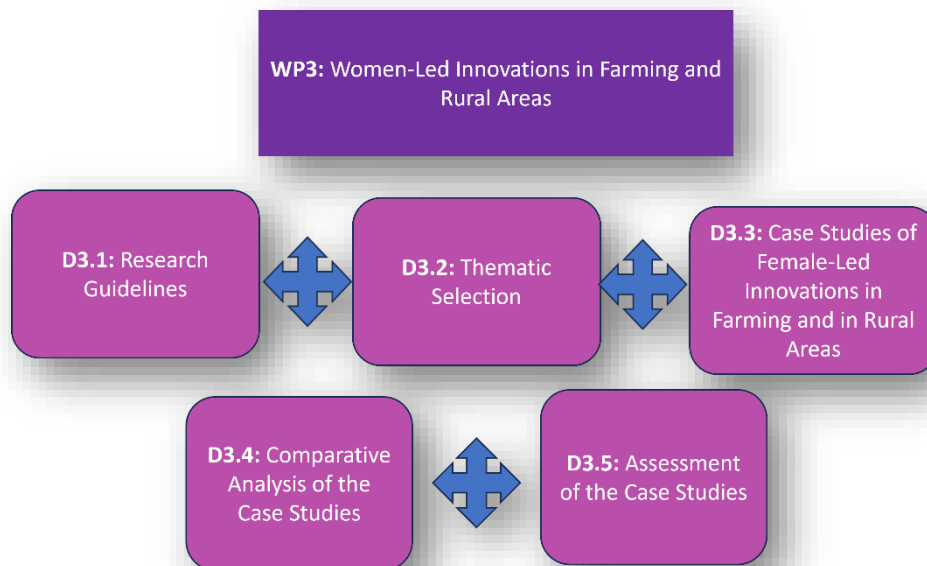


Figure 1: Overview of WP3 Deliverables



1. DELIVERABLE 3.2 OVERVIEW

This deliverable serves as an essential component in our exploration of women-led innovations within the agricultural and rural domains. Its main goal is to identify and define important sub-themes that are essential for choosing the FLIARA project partner case studies. The deliverable serves as a fundamental continuation of the knowledge gained from Work Package 1 (WP1) and Work Package 2 (WP2) and is a vital component of the overall research framework, seamlessly feeding into Deliverable 3.1: Research Guidelines and Thematic Selection.

The deliverable takes a multifaceted approach, combining an exploration of the work carried out in WP1 and WP2 alongside a review of relevant literature, thorough collection of women-led innovations from partner countries, and a desktop analysis that focuses on the unique dynamics of our project partners' countries. When taken as a whole, these elements offer a strong basis upon which to build in the later stages of our investigation, allowing for well-informed choices and the deliberate selection of case studies that will enlighten and enhance the conversation on women's contributions to agricultural and rural innovation.

The key aims of this deliverable are:

- a) to identify important sub-themes that are essential for choosing the FLIARA project partner case studies.
- b) to build an inventory of innovations to act as a long list which the FLIARA case studies will be selected from.

The above aims will be achieved through the following format:

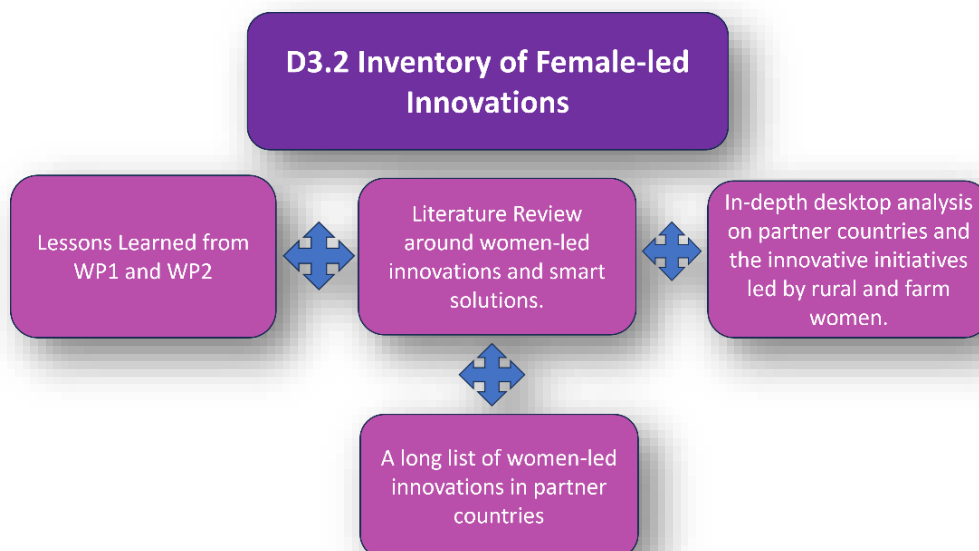


Figure 2: WP3 Overview



D3.2 outlined in Figure 2 commenced with an exploration of the work carried out in WP1 and WP2, revolving largely around the FLIARA Conceptual Framework, the FLIARA Knowledge Review, the FLIARA Selection and Assessment Framework and the Future Vision Manifestations. Both the conceptual framework and the knowledge review provided an excellent starting point to commence an exploration of additional literature relevant to women-led innovations. The literature review within WP3 is designed to provide a nuanced understanding of current interactive innovative endeavours spearheaded by women in agriculture (WP3a) and rural areas (WP3b). The focus extends to critical domains such as access to capital resources, environmental sustainability, climate action, ecological transitions, as well as community and social innovations.

The deliverable's methodology involves a review of diverse information sources, ranging from newsletters and reports to web-based evidence, culminating in a rich tapestry of insights. The concentration on innovations and smart solutions within specific thematic areas aligns with our commitment to addressing pressing challenges in the agricultural and rural landscape. This analytical process, combined with the outcomes from Work Packages 1 and 2, informs the selection of thematic areas for in-depth investigation within Work Package 3.

A crucial aspect of this deliverable involves a scoping review of women-led innovation within the case study countries. This strategic undertaking aims to construct a comprehensive inventory of innovations, forming a long list from which the final case studies will be selected. The FLIARA inventory of female-led innovations identified 18 sub-themes where women are active in innovations on farms and in the rural. We see that women are engaged in all four sustainability dimensions – economic, environmental, cultural, and social sustainability. The full long list of women-led innovations identified by the FLIARA project partners holds a total of 538 innovative practices led by women in our ten partner countries.

2. BUILDING ON PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

This deliverable builds on insights from WP1 and WP2 in the FLIARA project. Below we lay out the insights of the prior knowledge from these Work Packages.

2.1 LEARNING FROM THE FLIARA CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In rural areas, historical and political context shapes unique developmental trajectories that have profound implications for gender equality and sustainability. Rural women, diverse in their needs and opportunities, grapple with stereotypes and predefined societal roles. The FLIARA Conceptual Framework emphasises a gender perspective that recognises women-led innovations as embedded within complex socio-cultural contexts. Reconstruction of policies, innovation ecosystems, sustainability, gender roles, and associated norms is proposed to steer rural areas toward sustainability and gender equality, with six interlinked perspectives guiding the FLIARA project, namely, Rural, Gender, Resilience, Sustainability, Innovation, and Policy and Governance.



From a resilience perspective, understanding the dynamics of change and stability in women-led innovations is crucial, emphasising the political nature of resilience and its impact on power dynamics. The sustainability perspective addresses challenges faced by rural women across economic, social, cultural, environmental, and institutional dimensions. The innovation perspective considers female-led innovation journeys, innovation ecosystems, and the scaling of innovations as pivotal aspects of the framework. Finally, the policy and governance perspective assert that effective policies can facilitate female-led innovations, advocating for positive actions, feminist governance, and policy benchmarking to enhance gender equality within policy frameworks, recognising progress in the EU but acknowledging historical patriarchal influences.

In carrying out the thematic selection for D3.2 the conceptual framework acknowledges the distinct contexts, which shape the development paths of many rural areas. In doing so it highlights the profound implications of these trajectories for gender equality and sustainability. The factors of the conceptual framework alluded to above showcase an extensive and diverse approach for the FLIARA project, ensuring that case study topics are selected with an advanced understanding of the intricate relationships between historical, political, gender-related, and sustainability concerns in rural areas.

2.2 LEARNING FROM THE FLIARA KNOWLEDGE REVIEW

The FLIARA Knowledge Review provides a comprehensive exploration of female-led innovation in farming and rural settings, examining key drivers, successful instances, and existing gaps in the innovation ecosystem. It emphasises the rural context, acknowledging diverse perspectives on 'rural,' discussing the transformation of rural landscapes, and highlighting the connection between agriculture and rural regions. The review addresses gender issues in rural areas, emphasising the impact of patriarchal norms on the roles and contributions of rural women, including challenges related to traditional gender roles, farm succession, and divisions of labour.

The report also delves into sustainable rural development, recognising global concerns and the diverse applications in local contexts. It explores the contributions of rural women to environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability in rural communities. Rural innovation is recognised as a driver of sustainable growth, with a focus on women's often-overlooked contributions in rural areas and agriculture. The review identifies gaps in innovation ecosystems and explores social and behavioural drivers of female-led innovation. Female entrepreneurship is highlighted as a common pathway for sustainable rural development, discussing economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits, along with motivations and challenges faced by rural women entrepreneurs. Lastly, emerging opportunities in digital and ecological entrepreneurship are examined, considering their impact on rural communities, particularly for women, and their potential for driving innovation and sustainability.

The review acts as a guiding framework for the thematic selection of the FLIARA case studies. It highlights the interdependence of rural areas and agriculture emphasising the



importance of a diversified rural space and how it consistently changes. As such, in selecting case study themes, it is essential to address gender dynamics that are influenced by patriarchal standards, such as problems with traditional gender roles and farm obligations. The review recognises global challenges and highlights the various ways that rural women contribute to environmental, economic, social, and cultural sustainability while promoting themes relevant to sustainable rural development. It also emphasises finding gaps in innovation ecosystems and understanding the social and behavioural aspects that impact female-led innovation as means of closing existing gaps. In light of the fact that female entrepreneurship is critical to the long-term development of rural areas, social, cultural, environmental, and economic issues warrant consideration as key themes for case study development. The assessment's conclusion emphasises how important it is to consider the emerging opportunities in digital and ecological entrepreneurship as well as how they can affect rural communities, particularly for women. In essence, the literature review provides a complex perspective that guides the thematic selection process by emphasising the significance of contextual awareness, addressing gender dynamics, encouraging sustainability, filling in gaps in innovation, and exploring new opportunities.

2.3 LEARNING FROM FUTURE VISION MANIFESTATIONS

The Future Vision Manifestations (D2.2) underscores the inherent openness and divergence of futures shaped by human choices, acknowledging the complexity of futures research due to the absence of future data and the lack of a definitive theory. The approach does not predict a singular future but involves planning, designing, and assessing various potential futures, providing empowerment by expanding present-day choices. FLIARA's objective is to unveil diverse sustainable futures for farms and rural areas, utilising methods like scenarios, futures images, and visions to map paths, depict future states, and represent normative ideals.

In Task 2.1, activities identified a comprehensive array of rural sustainability challenges and corresponding visions across nine regions, involving 93 stakeholders. A total of 322 sustainability challenges were identified, with issues such as lack of infrastructure, social capital deficits, bureaucratic policies, population decline, economic diversification challenges, and gender and social inequalities ranking high among the identified problems.

The visions developed for the nine regions aim to address these challenges and enhance sustainability in rural areas. Respondents prioritised challenges for inclusion in the visions within the FLIARA project, with infrastructure and social capital deficits identified as the most common issues, followed by concerns about population decline, policy inefficiencies, a lack of sustainability awareness, and the marginalisation of local culture and traditions. A total of 109 visions, stemming from these challenges, included 762 vision elements. The predominant elements comprised environmentally friendly land and resource management, comprehensive infrastructure, collaborative networks, innovative funding models, social engagement opportunities, and aesthetically pleasing, environmentally friendly settings, constituting a quarter of all vision elements. Other



frequently mentioned elements involved diversified tourism, easy access to land and nature, local ownership, and openness to newcomers, as well as aspects related to community centres, sustainable agriculture, education, facilitators, circular and bioeconomy transitions, streamlined bureaucracy, and youth engagement.

The future Vision Manifestation highlights FLIARA's deliberate method to selecting case study themes, emphasising that several potential outcomes are considered in lieu of a single forecast for the future. The emphasis is on using scenarios, pictures, and visions to assist farmers and rural communities in imagining sustainable futures. Three hundred and twenty-two sustainability concerns across nine regions have a significant impact on case study themes. The most significant problems are gender inequality, population decrease, bureaucratic practices, lack of social capital, and economic diversity. With a focus on social capital, infrastructure, falling population, inefficient policies, understanding of sustainability, and cultural marginalisation, these concerns are addressed in the visions developed for these locations. These issues gave rise to innovative finance strategies, collaborative networks, social interaction, ecologically responsible land management, and aesthetically spectacular surroundings. This information provides helpful guidance for selecting case study subjects that align with the acknowledged sustainability issues and expected solutions.

3. WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN AGRICULTURE AND RURAL AREAS: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature section has a particular concentration on innovations and smart solutions around access to capital resources, environmental sustainability, climate action and ecological transitions, in addition to community and social innovations. Innovation in rural areas is increasingly recognised as one of the key methods of stimulating growth and development (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008). Rural Innovation is here defined as: “The introduction of something new (a novel change) to economic or social life in rural areas, which adds new economic or social value to rural life” (Mahroum et al., 2007, p.6). More specifically we see agricultural innovation as when farms restructure internal resources to enhance the production of high-quality goods or diversifying agricultural activities into both agricultural domains (like crop and animal breeding) and non-agricultural sectors (such as rural tourism) (De Rosa et al., 2021).

Women are inclined to engage in farm diversification innovations, especially those with public-facing aspects such as direct marketing and agri-tourism (Pinto-Correia et al., 2015; Trauger, 2004). In addition, they often undertake smaller-scale innovations that align with their caregiving responsibilities (Seuneke and Bock, 2015). Thus, potentially causing their innovative contributions to be overlooked by both agricultural subsidies and rural development initiatives. Women can lead innovation and diversification in rural areas by creating new activities, products, and services, leveraging their awareness of local needs, as well as specific interpersonal and communication skills (Franić and Kovačiček, 2019).



However, women-led innovations are often overlooked in statistics because Eurostat primarily focuses on 'managers' or 'sole holders' of farms, rendering women invisible (Sutherland, 2023). Especially if they are not categorised as the 'sole holder' and are instead classified as 'family labour,' irrespective of their contribution to decision-making on family farms. The under-reporting of women's involvement in decision-making on EU farms varies across countries, with the percentage of women sole holders ranging from 5% in the Netherlands to 45% in Latvia and Lithuania, averaging 29%. Furthermore, Eurostat does not monitor ethnicity or race concerning farm management, leaving the predominant whiteness of EU farmers unrecorded and unaddressed (Sutherland, 2023).

The insights gleaned from the extensive knowledge review detailed above lay the groundwork for a nuanced exploration of various topics or a deeper examination of already-discussed themes. This inquiry centres on key facets within the realms of innovation and sustainability, particularly relevant to women in farming and rural areas. These focal points include a range of advancements, including revolutionising **access to capital resources** to address financial challenges faced by women in agriculture, pioneering **environmental sustainability** through eco-friendly farming practices, trailblazing **climate action initiatives** for resilient responses to climate change impacts, advancements in **ecological transitions** promoting sustainable farming methods, **community-driven innovations** emphasising collaborative solutions within local contexts, and **socially impactful innovations** contributing to equality and empowerment for women engaged in agriculture. This comprehensive exploration seeks not only to expand our understanding of the connection between innovation, sustainability, and the experiences of women in farming but also to inform the selection of thematic areas for investigation within WP3.

3.1 WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS AND ACCESS TO CAPITAL RESOURCES

Securing access to capital is pivotal for the success and sustainability of women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas. Despite some progress, persistent challenges hinder women from obtaining the necessary financial resources. In the EU, a widely acknowledged credit gender gap raises concerns (Pavlova and Gvetadze, 2023). Various hypotheses about its root causes include women's potential aversion to credit, gender-based discrimination, and structural differences between businesses led by men and women. These distinctions might contribute to women being less inclined to seek and secure credit. However, the European Investment Bank indicates that companies led by women in the EU demonstrate a greater willingness to introduce innovative products (Machel, 2023).

When it comes to the measurement of The Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI), most of the EU-countries are in the lowest percentile 0-10 percent (OECD, 2019). However, some partner countries in FLIARA stand out above 10 percent: Ireland, Spain, and the Czech Republic. SIGI is an initiative of OECD, and it serves as a comprehensive measure to assess the impact of discriminatory social institutions on gender equality and women's empowerment. The SIGI evaluates various dimensions, including family code, physical integrity, son preference, civil liberties, and access to resources, providing a



quantitative tool for cross-country comparisons and identifying areas that require targeted efforts for gender equality. As such, the SIGI is an essential quantitative instrument for cross-national comparisons that shines a light on areas that require specific efforts to eliminate gender inequities, such as access to financial resources, for women seeking finance for inventions.

Women's innovation in agriculture can only be implemented if supported by the necessary capital and training (Arachoviti et al., 2022). Women are unfortunately underfunded with only 2-3 percent of all capital targeted towards women start-ups, and between 2019 and 2020, the numbers fell. Subsidies provided through the EAGF (European Agricultural Guarantee Fund), the biggest programme under the EU budget, are gender-blind by design, as they follow enshrined principles of non-discrimination and equality between men and women (European Court of Auditors, 2021). As such, procuring capital can pose additional struggles for entrant women farmers, who tend to rent land in a higher capacity than men as they are less often beneficiary of farm inheritance (Shortall and Marangudakis, 2022). Likewise, women seeking funding for start-up rural businesses are often hampered by difficulties in accessing finance (Ní Fhlatharta and Farrell, 2017).

Italian women farmers bring forth a diverse array of innovations, leading to several advantages such as cost reduction and increased farm income (De Rosa et al., 2021). Their focus is not solely on acquiring external funds but rather on leveraging existing resources, rather it pivots towards a strategic leveraging of existing resources. This perspective illuminates the diverse pathways and ecosystems within which women navigate their innovative journeys. It underscores that the trajectories of women innovators are unique, shaped by distinct experiences, challenges, and opportunities. For example, an objective could be to establish competitiveness in the modern food supply chain or alternative food networks, offering niche and novel products. These innovations are driven by a quest for alternative niches and regional markets, marked by a value proposition that aligns with the needs of an expanding consumer base, complemented by effective support from EU rural development policies.

In this regard, indicators seem to show that female-led farms in Italy perform better economically than male-led farms in regions marked with a strong entrepreneurial spirit, even though male-led farms perform better economically in the rest of the country, which includes the vast majority of the country's provinces (Fusco et al., 2022).

Addressing the gender gap in access to capital requires a gendered understanding of women-led innovations and a multifaceted approach that involves policymakers, financial institutions, development organisations, and the private sector working collaboratively to create an inclusive and supportive ecosystem for women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas.



3.2 WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Environmental sustainability is a crucial aspect of women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas. In the EU, women exhibit stronger support for environmentally conscious practices, actively monitoring CO₂ emissions and establishing energy efficiency goals (Machel, 2023). Notably, women-led enterprises frequently boast elevated environmental, social, and governance scores.

Consequently, in these farms, implementation of innovation involves either new techniques, new knowledge, and/or new institutions and organizations (De Rosa et al., 2021). A plethora of innovations geared towards environmental sustainability has emerged in recent times, encompassing a diverse array of practices. Noteworthy examples include the adoption of organic farming methods (De Rosa et al., 2021) and strategic soil conservation approaches (Villamor et al., 2014). Additionally, the infusion of novel knowledge, such as the incorporation of traditional wisdom and methods (Oedl-Wieser, 2018), has played a pivotal role. These innovations are bolstered by the establishment of robust knowledge networks and the implementation of new organisational frameworks. In essence, this multifaceted approach to environmental sustainability underscores the dynamic synergy between cutting-edge practices, traditional wisdom, and effective organisational structures, collectively contributing to a more resilient and ecologically conscious landscape.

While governments take the lead in environmental preservation, achieving lasting success requires collaboration across all levels of society, with an additional focus on women (Kakade et al., 2024). Despite their substantial contributions to environmental protection throughout history, societal biases have frequently obscured the pivotal roles played by women. Recognising the direct impact of women's actions on environmental sustainability, international organisations consistently emphasise their significance. Overcoming existing gender related challenges empowers women to unlock their full potential, transforming them into influential drivers of environmentally friendly behaviours and decision.

Women play a significant role in agriculture, and their innovations often focus on sustainable practices that adapt to climate change and balance economic, social, and environmental considerations (Oedl-Wieser, 2018). Italian women farmers innovate to achieve better quality of life and comply with environmental prescriptions (De Rosa et al., 2021). They act in the modern distribution channels (dominated by big retailers), introducing innovations aimed at improving relationships with other actors of the food chains.

Women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas are increasingly aligned with environmental sustainability goals. These initiatives recognise the interconnectedness of ecological health, social well-being, and economic prosperity, working towards a more sustainable and resilient future for rural areas.



3.3 WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS AND CLIMATE ACTION

Women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas often play a crucial role in climate action by addressing the challenges posed by climate change and contributing to sustainable and resilient practices. The European Investment Bank funds initiatives addressing entrenched gender inequalities, concurrently enhancing the resilience and adaptability of women globally (Machel, 2023). This ensures their access to and participation in the low-carbon and climate-resilient infrastructure and services generated through the bank's investments.

Water management for rural women (just as for urban) is essential for sanitary reasons and a corner stone for gender equality worldwide (Figueiredo and Perkins, 2013). However, for innovations in the EU, women are invisible. There is a general focus on farm water management, but women are not seen in this conversation.

Women lawyers and activists play a crucial role for climate action and their innovative ways challenge sustainable inequalities through legal channels, securing significant settlements against manufacturers and setting environmental law precedents (Women on Business Partners, 2023). Their advocacy extends beyond environmental justice, encompassing vulnerable communities disproportionately affected by, for example, hazardous chemicals. This demonstrates how legal expertise can effectively drive environmental activism, shaping both public policy and corporate practices for the rural.

Farmers' experiences of climate change diverge between men and women due to their roles, rights, and opportunities shaped by factors like gender norms, socio-cultural background, religion, and ethnicity (Huyer et al., 2021). These variables frequently account for gender disparities in agricultural production, influencing access and control over critical resources and inputs such as land, labour, credit, information, and technology. Consequently, these differences contribute to variations in the vulnerability and adaptive capacities of men and women in addressing climate risks.

Developing or choosing climate-resilient crops, which can withstand the effects of climate change, including temperature shifts, precipitation variations, and increased extreme weather events, is a commonly recommended strategy for enhancing climate resilience among both male and female farmers (Acevedo et al., 2020). However, women are more inclined to embrace these strategies when they are informed about climate adaptation options. Beyond gender, factors such as marital status, education, and age, when combined with gender, also influence the adoption of climate-resilient crops.

A significant limitation in current research is that many studies only include women as household heads, and the varying definitions of household headship mean that the perspectives of these women may not accurately represent those of women living in male-headed households.



3.4 WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS AND ECOLOGICAL TRANSITIONS

Ecological transitions in the context of women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas involve a shift toward more sustainable and ecologically friendly practices. Women often play a central role in promoting ecological transitions, which encompass various aspects of farming, biodiversity conservation, resource management, and community development. These initiatives are vital for building resilient and regenerative agricultural systems.

To transform the EU food system, challenges in the agrifood sector persist, including the underrepresentation of women in the sector, especially in decision-making roles, leading to gender bias in funding for women entrepreneurs (EIT Food, 2022a). Addressing these issues, along with reducing regional disparities and promoting gender-inclusive education and training in the agrifood sector, is crucial for advancing innovation and resilience through the EU's Innovation Agenda.

The smaller sized farms in the EU (peasants' agroecological farming) have generally a smaller ecological footprint than an industrial farm (ECVC, 2017). Smaller farms are less resource intensive and use much less fossil fuels for their production and distribution. As many of these farms are family-run, or smaller sized farms, where women's role is crucial in the ecological transition. In addition, women-led agroecology farming takes the transition even further by focusing on innovations that promote equality (ECVC, 2022).

Nonetheless, a lot of hope is set to technical advances for ecological transitions (see for example Fletcher (2023), and Trærup (2022)), for example, in the bioeconomy. However, as digitalisation advances, the traditionally male-dominated bioeconomy sector becomes increasingly interconnected with the male-dominated tech sector (Roos et al., 2021). Although the digital transformation and automation of physical jobs theoretically could reduce gender bias, evidence suggests the opposite (Larasatie et al., 2020). While digitalisation eliminates the physical dimension, it introduces other skills and attributes that are also male dominated, such as university degrees in digital technology. Consequently, the digital transformation may reinforce existing power structures. Historical trends indicate that as a sector becomes more mechanised, it tends to be associated more with masculinity (Heggem, 2014).

Discussions about controlled environment agriculture (CEA) frequently centre on vertical farming operations in urban areas, overshadowing the conventional greenhouse production in rural settings (EIT Food North-West, 2022). This oversight by the public, private sector, and policymakers is a contributing factor to the lack of visibility of women in the discourse surrounding CEA.

Achieving ecological transitions necessitates inclusive and systemic innovation involving all stakeholders in the food value chain. However, this collaborative approach, as emphasised by, for example, EIT Food (2022b), researchers (Acevedo et al., 2020), and the European Environment Agency (2023), is yet to be observed.



3.5 WOMEN-LED COMMUNITY INNOVATIONS

Women-led community innovations in agriculture and rural areas are diverse and multifaceted, addressing a range of challenges while promoting sustainable, inclusive, and community-driven development. These initiatives empower women, strengthen social bonds, and contribute to the overall well-being of rural communities. Women-led initiatives allow for continuous improvement and adjustment based on the evolving needs of the community.

Women-led community innovations have the tendency to be formed as cooperatives or collective enterprises. For example, we see women-led collective purchase organisations throughout the EU, motivated by a wish for more sustainable, local food and its nutritional values (Śpiewak et al., 2022). We also see women associations formed in the rural, farm-based, that work to improve the living and working conditions in rural areas (Franić and Kovačiček, 2019).

The active involvement of women in community organisations serves as a powerful strategy for empowerment and innovation when rooted in sustainable and socially embedded formal or informal networks (Huyer et al., 2021). Participation in these collective efforts not only enhances women's voice and agency but also augments their access to and control over resources. Women's organisations and community groups, functioning as platforms for capacity development and empowerment, facilitate collective action in areas like revolving credit, production enhancement, entrepreneurship, and information dissemination, acting as catalysts to amplify women's influence and reshape their self-perception. Integrating their role in disseminating change and innovation, these groups become pivotal platforms for gender-inclusive scaling within their memberships and through interconnected networks of organisations.

3.6 WOMEN-LED SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

Women-led social innovations in agriculture and rural areas involve initiatives that address social challenges, promote inclusivity, and contribute to positive social change. These innovations go beyond traditional agricultural practices, emphasising the well-being of communities, gender equity, and social sustainability. Research generally affirms that women-led enterprises, operating in various sectors and areas, can play a vital role in social sustainable development for the local community (Mahajan and Bandyopadhyay, 2021). Cases in the EU identified as women-led innovations focus on for example childcare services on farms (Sarkki et al., 2021), farm-based healthcare (Franić and Kovačiček, 2019), and employment of marginalised women (Sarkki et al., 2021).

Women-led innovations in rural areas typically fall into categories such as social innovations, hence those focused on preserving local traditions and culture, or innovations related to tourism (Torres, 2019). While acknowledging the significance of women's role in rural innovation, it is essential to offer thorough critiques of narratives that disproportionately associate women with social innovation over other forms of rural



innovation. This is crucial in challenging stereotypes that wrongly position women as primarily responsible for leading rural social issues.

Green care, serving as a comprehensive framework for care initiatives conducted in close proximity to nature, represents a significant facet of the innovative endeavours spearheaded by women in agriculture and rural communities. This is primarily due to the fact that caregiving responsibilities continue to be predominantly associated with women (Franić and Kovačiček, 2019), making these innovative approaches more accessible and socially acceptable for women residing in rural areas.

Social innovations that are women-led may initially appear to occur in everyday practices, but a closer look reveals their connections to institutions, cognitive frames, and value hierarchies (Sarkki et al., 2021). This is because introducing new everyday practices inevitably involves addressing underlying structural challenges, such as patriarchal values, biased gender roles, and male-dominated politics and the economy, where issues of gender equity are deeply rooted.

In summary, women-led social innovations in agriculture and rural areas play a vital role in addressing social challenges, fostering inclusivity, and creating positive social change. These initiatives contribute to building stronger and more resilient rural communities.

4. METHODOLOGY

D3.2 employed a dual-pronged methodological process, culminating in the creation of an inventory of women-led innovations, essentially for conducting the FLIARA case studies. The approach includes:

- a. An In depth-desktop analysis in each partner country
- b. Creation of an inventory of women-led innovations in each partner country

This section delineates both methods in detail, offering a comprehensive understanding of the processes involved. The outlined methodology not only elucidates the generation of an extensive inventory of women-led innovations across partner countries but also sheds light on the systematic organisation of the collaborative country context desktop analysis conducted by our partners in each respective country.

4.1 DESK-TOP ANALYSIS OF THE COUNTRY CONTEXTS

To delineate a comprehensive overview of women-led innovations in each partner country, a meticulous desktop analysis was conducted by each project partner. This endeavour facilitated the establishment of a national context highlighting innovative and intelligent solutions driven by women in rural areas and agriculture. Consequently, the exercise identified key themes specific to women-led innovations in each partner country. These national contexts serve a dual purpose, aiding project partners in comprehending both the commonalities and distinctions among countries.



To execute this task, the WP3 lead team tasked project partners in each country with reviewing a minimum of 10-15 books, articles, or reports in their national or international language that pertained to their country's situation. Additionally, a thorough analysis of national statistical data was mandated, with project partners utilising resources such as the Eurostat database. The template for conducting the desktop analysis is provided in Appendix C. Due to the length of the desk-top analysis for all countries, the full results are provided in Appendix D, but a synopsis of these are provided in the findings section below.

4.2 CREATING AN INVENTORY OF WOMEN--LED INNOVATIONS

In Task 3.2, twenty case studies will be carried out by the FLIARA partners, comprising of two hundred interviews of women leading innovations on farms and in rural areas. To sample the required amount, a larger database was created, the so-called long list. The long list ensures the interviews meet the four criteria laid out in Task 1.4 (Rural context, Women-led, Innovative, Sustainability). However, it also provides further evidence of the sustainable innovative activity currently in place and being led by rural women across the EU. (Figure 3). To meet the required 200 interviews each country was asked to provide a short list of the double number of female-led innovations for each thematic area (the typology of rural areas and the sustainability dimensions). Once the twenty case studies are complete, twenty women representing a variety of innovations in farming (WP3a) and rural areas (WP3b) across Europe will be selected by project partners to take part as Innovation Ambassadors (MS3.2) in the FLIARA Community of Practice Networking Events in WP4 to promote and sustain female-led and female-engaged enterprise and entrepreneurship (Figure 3).

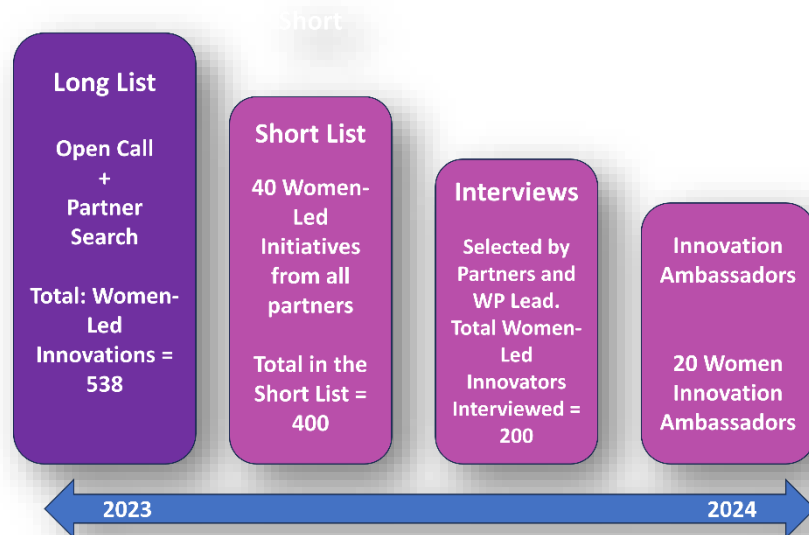


Figure 3. Inventory Process



4.2.1 CREATING THE INVENTORY OF INNOVATIONS

To compile an extensive inventory of innovations, a dual-pronged strategy was employed, consisting of a) an Open Call extended to women-led innovators across all partner countries, inviting them to submit their own details and innovation information (See Appendix A), and b) a Desk-Based Study conducted by each partner to uncover a comprehensive list of women-led innovations occurring on farms and in rural areas.

Relating to the desk-based study, the WP3 team developed a template (Excel Sheet – See in Text Form in Appendix B) based on the case study selection criteria outlined in Deliverable 1.4. All partners used the template to identify and document women who are leading sustainable innovations in their respective country, including Ireland (University of Galway, LWL, and Teagasc), Netherlands (TU Delft), Italy (UNICAL), Slovenia (UL), Czech Republic (MENDELU), Sweden (LNU and HKL), Finland (UOULU and UTU), Germany (HNEE), Romania (ECOLISE and ELARD) and Spain (CE). The partners were asked to coordinate and write one long list per country.

4.2.2 THE INVENTORY DESK-BASED STUDY

The desk-based study involved collecting innovations via local, national, and regional media, and grey literature as well as collaborations with organisations such as Local Action Groups and CAP Networks. The partners' own local knowledge was also important, to identify suitable case study examples. This collaborative effort ensures that our database remains comprehensive and representative, ultimately strengthening our capacity to identify and analyse pertinent case studies that align with the FLIARA project's objectives. During the creation of the long list, FLIARA partners selected women-led innovations in farming and rural areas observing all four dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic, social, and cultural). In line with the Grant Agreement, an emphasis has been placed on environmental, economic, and social themes, with a lesser number of cultural innovations being explored.

To ensure equitable distribution of innovations across various rural typologies and sustainability dimensions, a working document was furnished, referencing Tables 4.4-4.6 from Deliverable 1.4. Partners were encouraged to download and utilise this document as a guide throughout their inventory-related activities. Furthermore, partners were prompted to proactively consider the selection criteria delineated in Deliverable 1.4 at this early stage, ensuring that the chosen women-led innovations aligned with the groundwork previously conducted in WP1 and WP2.

4.2.3 THE OPEN CALL

The aim of the FLIARA Joint Call was to enhance the scope of the database gathered by project partners by incorporating a more extensive collection of innovations led by women across the research countries. The Joint Call sought to illustrate the varied ways in which women exhibit innovation within their enterprises or practices.



The Joint Call was distributed via social media and through ELARD and ECOLISE, leveraging their extensive networks within the research countries to ensure comprehensive coverage (Appendix A).

Female innovators across our 10 partner countries were given the opportunity to complete a survey to provide information about their innovative practice or enterprise. This information was used to insert the respondents into the long list of female innovators gathered by partners. Moreover, an option was provided for women innovators to be considered for interviews, offering them the choice to engage in these conversations as they complete the survey. This supplementary feature aims to contribute a qualitative dimension to the project, facilitating a more in-depth exploration of the diverse experiences of women innovators.

5. RESULTS FROM THE DESK-TOP ANALYSIS AND THE INVENTORY CREATION

The methodological outcomes of D3.2 encompass two primary components: a) the desk-based analysis and b) the compilation of the inventory of women-led innovations. Presented below are the consolidated findings derived from the analyses of the extensive list and the desktop analysis (Full analysis Appendix D), incorporating input from the ten partner countries.

5.1 DESK-TOP ANALYSIS RESULTS

The aim of the desktop analysis is to create a picture of the national context on innovation and smart solutions led by women in rural areas and in agriculture. Information relating to each partner country has been gathered on the specific rural context of each country; women in rural areas; agriculture and the rural economy; sustainability and women-led innovations in rural areas and agriculture; and national policies which support women in rural areas (Template Appendix C).

While there are unique aspects to each country's situation, the desktop analysis highlight shared challenges and efforts in promoting the empowerment of women in rural areas and in farming across different contexts. Amongst the variations in the definition of 'rural' across the partner countries, similar challenges to rural areas are evident, such as demographic challenges including depopulation, ageing populations, and migration to urban centres.

Agriculture is a significant component of rural economies in all partner countries, with specific types of farming noted for their impact on sustainable rural areas, including small-scale family farming, organic farming, agritourism, farm diversification and niche farming, for example, reindeer herding in Finland. Women remain underrepresented in the agricultural sector across the partner countries, but in many countries, the involvement of women in agriculture is increasing. In Italy, for example, a cultural shift beginning in the 1970s began a feminisation of agriculture, with women becoming



particularly ingrained in the management of economic activity on farms and holding important roles in family farms and businesses. This is not the case in all partner countries, however, as in the Netherlands, the figures show that the share of farms managed by females is very low (5.6% of all farms) and that this share is declining.

There are commonalities in the wider challenges faced by rural women, including discrimination, marginalisation, negative stereotypes, limited access to childcare, limited access to capital resources, and gender imbalances in decision-making. Each country has identified organisations which support the empowerment of women, addressing barriers and promoting gender equality. These organisations commonly provide training, support, advocacy and networking opportunities. Many countries have specific organisations to support women-led innovations in rural areas and in farming, such as the German Rural Women's Association (Deutscher LandFrauenverband), which supports social and institutional innovations through lobbying by getting projects funded or setting topics on the political agenda.

Evident across the desktop analysis of each partner country is the important role rural women play in bringing sustainable innovations to rural areas. The impact of female-led innovations and entrepreneurship in rural areas is emphasised throughout. The economic contribution of female-led enterprises and innovations is critical to rural economies, particularly in the Netherlands, for example, where 50% of self-employed people in rural areas are women. Female-led innovation is pertinent to environmental sustainability also, with many countries mentioning the role of women in necessary ecological transitions. In Germany, the central discussions on gender and innovation in rural areas and farming focus on women as the driving forces for innovative farming, as many female farmers are promoting sustainable farming practices. Community and social innovations are continually connected to female-led innovations in rural areas also. There is a recognition of women promoting cultural sustainability through heritage tourism, traditional crafts and traditional agricultural practices across multiple partner countries including Ireland, where the most notable areas of cultural sustainability concerning rural women in Ireland are indigenous knowledge and practices, and cultural festivals and events.

Each country identified policies which directly or indirectly support female-led innovation in rural areas and in agriculture. For example, the use of the LEADER programme in Finland to attract different communities and people of different backgrounds and ages, including women, to take part in local development efforts is highlighted. Many countries have identified policies and supports which have been specifically tailored to encourage women-led innovations in rural areas and in agriculture. In Spain, the Support Programme for Women's Business Development in Rural Areas provides funding and training to women initiating their own businesses in rural areas. This programme facilitates networking opportunities and mentorship to assist women in overcoming the challenges of starting and managing businesses in rural localities. In Italy, the Più Impresa - Imprenditoria giovanile e femminile in agricoltura, is a fund dedicated to women who intend to take over the running of the farm, or who are already in agriculture and intend to develop their business.



The desktop analyses of each partner country present the similarities and diversities of rural areas across the FLIARA partner countries, the common issues women in rural areas face such as access to capital resources, as well as the various ways in which women-led innovations are supported in order to address environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability in rural areas and farming. Below are the brief summaries of the desktop analyses carried out for each partner country. The full desktop analyses for each partner country may be found in Appendix D).

5.2.1 IRELAND

Ireland's desktop analysis defines rurality based on data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO), which characterises a rural area as any settlement with a population of less than 1,500 persons. According to the Irish Census (2022) there are approximately 30% of Ireland's population, around 1.5 million people, residing in rural areas. The average age in rural areas is 41.2 years, particularly higher in isolated rural regions. The income disparity in rural areas ranges from €42,167 to €29,424, with isolated rural areas having the lowest average income. In contrast, urban regions exhibit an income range of €46,458–€34,626. Rural areas also have a higher number of self-employed individuals (170,300) compared to urban areas (153,400).

Ireland's women's associations and networks adopt a cooperative strategy, uniting various female actors to support underrepresented groups in the pursuit of gender equality. Notably, non-gender-segregated organisations (e.g., Local Enterprise Offices and Teagasc Advisory Services) which contribute to empowering women in rural areas and farming. Additional services from entities like Local Action Groups, ACORNS Programme, Women's Collective Ireland, National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC), Ceres Network, and Women's Agriculture Advisory Stakeholder Group provide innovative support for women-led innovations, fostering collaboration, knowledge transfer, and access to funding.

In 2020, Ireland had 135,037 farms with an average size of 33.4 hectares. The distribution of farm managers by age class included 3,341 women below 44, 7,592 in the 44-64 age bracket, and 7,168 older than 65. Notably, only 16.2% of named successors with succession plans were female, while 81.6% were male.

Examining gender in rural businesses, reports such as the Gem Entrepreneurship Report reveal that women constitute just over 20% of Irish entrepreneurs, falling below the European average of 34.4%.

The sustainability dimensions in Ireland span the economic, social, environmental, and cultural realms. Economic examples include rural innovation hubs, tourism, and hospitality. The cultural dimension emphasises indigenous knowledge, practices, and cultural events. Social aspects encompass social entrepreneurship and digital inclusion, while the environmental dimension focuses on renewable energy, the circular economy, and sustainable agriculture. These sustainability sub-themes prioritise innovation,



environmental sustainability, and social initiatives to support, diversify, and develop farming and rural areas.

National policies actively contribute to supporting female-led innovations in farming and in rural areas, directly and indirectly eliminating barriers to essential supports and services. The subsequent policies outlined in the analysis illustrate the mechanisms through which they endorse and support women-led innovation and smart solutions in farming and rural areas.

5.2.2 NETHERLANDS

Rurality in the Netherlands is typically based in villages near cities, with only a few remote islands. Cultural differences exist between urban and rural regions, highlighted by a Calvinist bible belt with distinct properties. Spatial planning has controlled urban sprawl, protected farmland and concentrating suburbs. There is a slight under-representation of women in rural areas, with 15.4% of the female population and 16.3% of the male population living in rural areas. There is a legacy of organisations representing rural and farm women in the Netherlands dating back to the early 20th Century. These organisations focus on female empowerment and strengthening the position of female farm managers.

50% of self-employed people in rural areas are females in the Netherlands, higher than women in other areas of the country. There are many regulations and grants that support entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas/agriculture, but none with reference to gender. The number of farms held by women in the Netherlands is low (5.6%), with the share of farmland held by women even lower, impacting the size of direct payments female farmers are eligible for, leading to further restrictions.

There are several issues in national and regional debate surrounding women and rural sustainability. Issues such as access to capital resources including land, the serious gender imbalance in farming, access to childcare, as well as women's role areas like the cultural preservation of rural areas, climate adaptation and ecological transitions.

5.2.3 ITALY

In Italy, 63.8 percent of the total municipalities are classified as rural areas, and 17.1 percent of the population resides in these areas. Issues of education and employment are clear in rural Italy in relation to gender. The female employment rate is about 20 percent lower than male employment across all territorial typologies. The level of education is also unbalanced between genders, but in favour of females. This is particularly evident in towns/suburbs and rural areas the percentage of females with tertiary education is almost double.

Women are active in creating sustainable innovations for rural areas. Female-led rural innovations in Italy often engage in diversified production, agritourism, and social projects. They tend to use more labour, have lower yields, and lower incomes. Women-led businesses also contribute to diverse economic activities, emphasizing local social



and cultural and projects, organic produce, short supply chains, and building relationships with distributors and consumer groups. Agritourism, particularly involving women, is on the rise nationwide.

The innovations of rural women are supported by broader female innovation supports, and more specific policies for young female farmers or female-led enterprises in mountainous areas. All the three main national agricultural organisations also have a women's association/movement/network operating at national, regional and local level.

5.2.4 FINLAND

Rural areas in Finland are facing significant demographic issues, with many rural areas seeing young, educated women leaving for better opportunities, resulting in an ageing, unbalanced population and weakening local rural economies. In agriculture, small family-owned farms dominate, combining various livelihoods. Reindeer herding, traditionally male-dominated, has seen an increase in women participants. The Rural Policy Committee plays a crucial role in the development of rural Finland, focusing on ensuring equitable service delivery to an aging and dispersed population, enhancing the competitiveness of non-farm rural firms, and improving the business environment.

Female entrepreneurship is seen as crucial to the strengthening of Finnish rural economies. Many cases of women-led innovation focus not only on environmental, social, cultural or economic dimension of sustainability, but are cross-cutting. However, women are faced with barriers such as unequal access to capital resources, childcare burdens, self-perceptions, and the gender impacts of policies.

Many organisations which aim to promote gender equality, support rural women, female farmers and female entrepreneurs have been established in Finland to address these barriers. Gender equality has also been a focus in Finland's welfare state, ensuring equal benefits for women in areas like farmers' pensions and maternal leave.

5.2.5 SLOVENIA

Slovenia defines rural through the Rural Development Programme as the entire country, except for sixteen settlements with more than 10,000 inhabitants, which are specifically defined as not being 'rural'. It also indicates the three types of settlements in the Country, with rural settlements 85,6% of all settlements in Slovenia along with the two types of rural municipalities (82 rural municipalities with a shrinking population and 61 rural municipalities with a growing population).

The main networks/associations identified by Slovenia include the Association of Farming Women of Slovenia which raises awareness of women's rights and has 35 associations with 3,000 members. There is also funding opportunities available for rural women associations in 2023 (€144,000). Other women association in Slovenia include Rural Women's Council, Association of Slovenia Rural Youth and Local Action Groups. Slovenian Farming Advisory System has designated advisors specifically for rural women.



In relation to rural businesses and women's representation, Slovenia indicates that 30.1% of female entrepreneurs are represented in early stages of entrepreneurial activity. The slightly higher share of women is in social enterprise sector.

In 2020, Slovenia had 68,927 farms with an average size of 7 hectares. The age bracket of farm managers in 2020 in Slovenia highlights that there were 630 females younger than 35, 9,960 in the 35-65 age bracket and 9,510 were older than 65. The desk-top analysis also highlights that in 2020 826 or 22,5% of all organic farms were females owned/managed organic farms and that 238 or 24.9% females managed the subsidiary activity of tourism on farm.

Women in rural areas are rarely seen as innovators in Slovenia. Most policy measures are openly aimed at the social inclusion of women. Indirectly, women in rural areas are supported through the promotion of employment and the preservation of jobs in rural areas, support for activities under the LEADER intervention, support for the establishment of agricultural businesses by young farmers, participation in EIP projects and support for investment in the establishment and development of non-agricultural activities.

5.2.6 SPAIN

The population density in rural areas of Spain varies considerably, with many villages experiencing depopulation due to migration to urban centres. Geographic isolation is also an important issue, as well as the lack of access to healthcare and education, leading to unemployment. Economic activities in remote areas in Spain are heavily reliant on agriculture, forestry, and traditional crafts. Gender distribution in rural areas is a significant factor, with a notably low femininity index in Spain.

Women play a vital role in the sustainability of rural communities in Spain. They are involved in all aspects of rural life, from farming and food production to childcare and eldercare. However, women in rural areas often face discrimination and marginalisation. They tend to be underrepresented in leadership positions, and they often have lower incomes than men.

There are multiple organisations through Spain which provide training programmes, advocacy, networking and support for female entrepreneurs in rural areas and women in farming. These associations also support innovation in a number of ways, such as the development of new products and services catering to the needs of rural women and their families, utilisation of new technologies to enhance rural business, and the creation of opportunities for women in the workforce. There is also policy support for innovative rural women in Spain. Specific policies have been put in place with the aim of fostering the development of innovations and enterprises, particularly those led by women in rural areas.



5.2.7 GERMANY

The concept of rurality in Germany refers to sparse residential development, low settlement density, and a high proportion of agricultural and forestry land. These areas are usually peripheral to large urban centres and have a low number of inhabitants in the surrounding area. The spectrum ranges from very sparsely populated peripheral areas to high-density metropolitan centres.

Women innovators in rural areas are supported by two main women's organisations with a specific rural focus, each having quite large membership rates. These organisations aim to empower women through education and support. They support social, institutional and environmental innovations for and by women through their lobbying and advocacy work in ensuring equal conditions for women in rural areas. Women in farming are also supported by the female chapter of the German Farmers Association.

The central discussions on gender and innovation in rural areas and farming focus on women as the driving forces for innovative farming and marketing practices. Gender equality in the farming sector, and life and work situation of women on farms are also key issues being debated.

5.2.8 ROMANIA

Romania provides a comprehensive overview of the diverse characteristics found within its rural contexts. Romania stands as the second-highest country in the European Union with 46.1% rural areas, housing 9.1 million rural inhabitants, constituting 47.9 % of the country's population. The analysis delves into various definitions of rurality and demographics, noting a 51.4% female population in the total of 19 million residents as of 2023. Notably, Romania faces challenges such as an aging population, depopulation, and limitations in quality of life, health services, education, employment, and more in rural areas. Alarmingly, 27.2% of the rural population are early leavers from training and education, which, together with other factors, contributes to 48.5% of the people living in rural areas in Romania being at risk of poverty or social exclusion, more than double than the EU average of 23.9%.

Romania boasts key women's networks and associations operating nationally, including EcoRuralis, advocating for peasant women's rights and interests, and the National Rural Development Network, emphasizing funding and innovation. Other women's networks/associations include Women's Neighbourhood of Saschiz Association which is a Community Supported Agriculture (CSO) initiative linking local producers and consumers, the European Youth Village, the Association of Rural Women and Families, Doamnele Bucovinene and the Association of Rural Women "Olga Sturdza", the Center for Community Mediation and Security, and the League of Women Mayors of Communes (under the umbrella of the Association of Romanian Communes). These associations/networks address rural and community development, domestic victim support, and initiatives like CSOs. Additionally, female mayors in the League of Women, Mayors of Communes (LWMC) amount to 166 communes.



Within the family labour force (sole holder + family members) in farming, 33.8% are females. Data from 2016 indicates that 34% of farm managers were women. Another finding in the analysis highlights an overarching concern with 60% of all unpaid family workers being women in Romania.

Sustainability efforts in Romania focus on adopting innovative and smart solutions, emphasizing digital inclusion, climate action, ecological transition practices, and community and social innovations. Women-led innovations, particularly in farming, family farming, and agroecology, are highlighted through various platforms, events, and media channels.

Several policies support women in rural areas, such as the National Strategy for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity and Treatment, concentrating on sexual and reproductive health, work-life balance, and women's participation in decision-making. The National Strategic Plan, part of the Common Agricultural Policy, promotes gender equality by involving women in entrepreneurship and creating new pathways in the job market.

5.2.9 CZECH REPUBLIC

Rural areas close to cities in the Czech Republic are experiencing the influence of urbanisation, while the inner and border peripheral rural regions are experiencing the benefits of agricultural diversification and growing tourism attractions.

There are no formal barriers for women in terms of career path and their involvement in political life in the Czech Republic. However, there are still prevailing gender stereotypes positioning women as caretakers and men as the main earners. There are several women's organisations with a focus on the empowerment and representation of rural women in the Czech Republic, many of these being clustered under the Czech Women's Lobby.

Rural women in the Czech Republic contribute greatly to the sustainable development of rural areas and agriculture. However, a lack of necessary services in combination with increasing digitalisation pose challenges to female innovators in rural areas. The Czech Republic faces gender inequality issues such as income disparities, a higher risk of poverty for women, low female representation in decision-making, and domestic violence. The issues faced more significantly by rural women in the Czech Republic, such as discrimination in the labour market, are prioritised by non-governmental organisations, but support remains insufficient and unsystematic, hindered by historical and societal factors.

5.2.10 SWEDEN

Sweden highlights the three rural types of municipalities. The analysis also indicates how twenty percent of the population reside in rural areas.



The main women's networks/ associations operating at national level in rural areas include Government authorities which support rural life and development. However, gender equality is not the authorities main mission. Sweden highlights innovations and smart solutions around access to capital, climate action and community and social innovation including networks/associations like Almi, LEADER, Coompanion, The Swedish Forest Owners Associations, Winnet and many more which are mentioned in the country desk-top analysis.

Examining gender in statistical data for 2020, Sweden illustrates the number of female managers in various age brackets. There were 364 managers under 44, 5,991 in the 44-65 age range, and 2,757 managers over 65, totalling 9,724 female farm managers in 2020. The analysis also delves into rural businesses, highlighting the ten most common women-owned enterprises, including forestry, hairdressing, mixed farming, restaurants, accounting/bookkeeping, physical well-being activities, business management consulting, physiotherapy, literary and artistic creation, and other personal services. Additionally, it concludes that women constitute 30% of the population of business owners.

Sustainability is a recurring theme in Sweden's analysis, addressing the impact of climate change on the environment and expressing optimism about technology mitigating these challenges. The analysis also sheds light on the limited representation of women in sectors like media, emphasizing the necessity for innovation and diversification in that domain. Gender mainstreaming in policies is deemed essential for ensuring equal inclusion of both women and men. Sweden's desk-top analysis provides comprehensive insights into the findings related to rural women in farming and rural areas.

5.2 INVENTORY RESULTS

The FLIARA project partners conducted a comprehensive desk-based inventory aimed at pinpointing women-led innovations in farming and rural areas across its ten partner countries: Ireland, Slovenia, Netherlands, Sweden, Italy, Romania (focus only on innovations in rural areas), Czech Republic, Germany, Finland, and Spain. The EU inventory and results from the Open Call unveiled a total of 538 innovative practices and enterprises lead by women, specifically in the realms of farming and rural environments. Below we lay out the analysis of these practices focusing on who is involved in the innovation, the rural typology, the duration of the innovation, and the sustainability dimensions with their sub-themes.

The inventory revealed 244 farm innovations and 292 rural innovations, with women leading these initiatives either independently, within their families, or as part of a team. Among the women who are leading an enterprise or innovative practice 255 operated individually, 154 were family-involved, and 106 collaborated within a team or group setting. These diverse approaches highlight the innovation exhibited by women across the partner countries in managing farms and rural areas. The subsequent graph, Figure 2, illustrates the distribution of women establishing innovative practices or enterprises in rural regions across the partner countries.

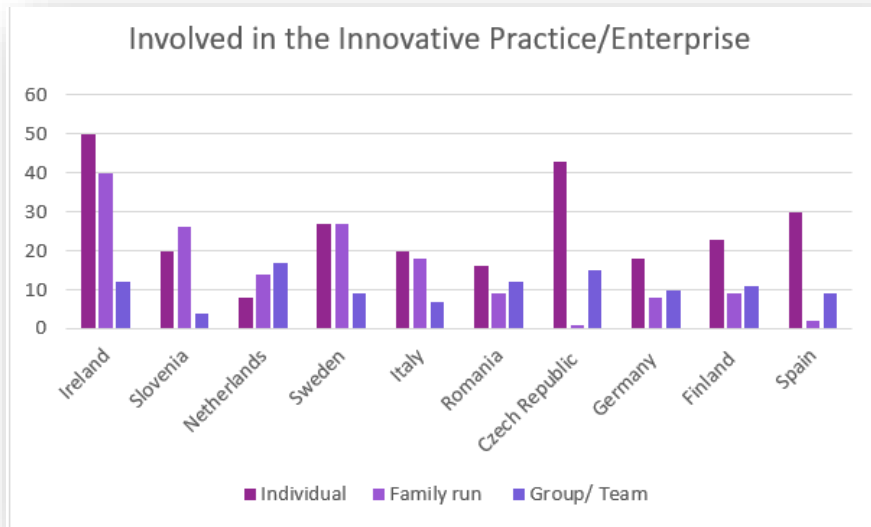


Figure 4. Involvement in the practice/enterprise

From carrying out the desk-based research it is evident that the rural context around the EU varies. From analysing the 538 identified innovative practices and enterprises in the FLIARA inventory it provided insights into the diverse rural contexts in which these initiatives flourish. Notably, 145 were established in remote rural areas, 204 in rural villages, and 117 in rural areas close to cities. While most women-led innovations were concentrated in rural villages, the distribution across different rural regions highlights the diverse impact of women in innovating farming and rural landscapes across the EU. The graph below, Figure 3, illustrates the specific rural context for each region.

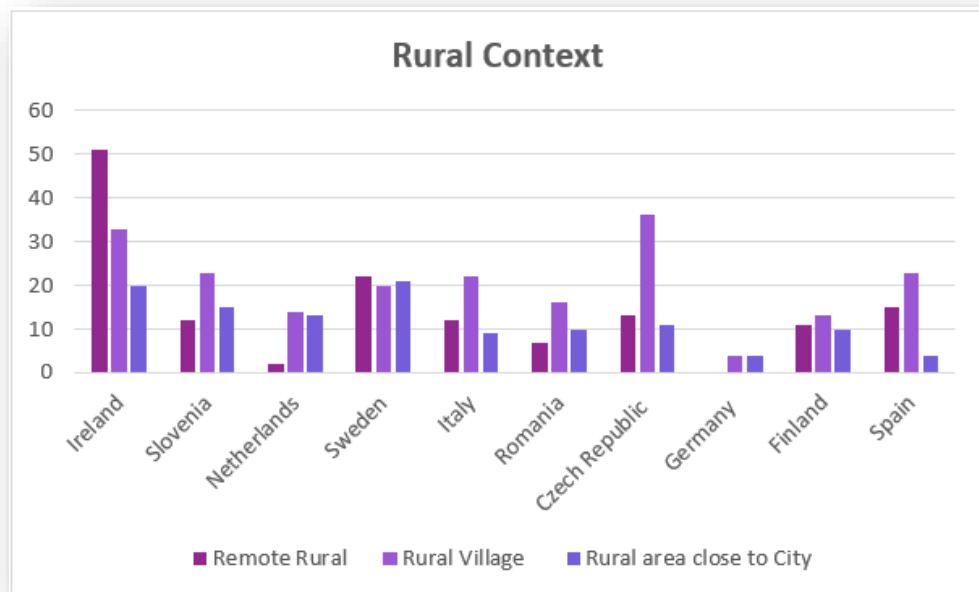


Figure 5. Typology of the Rural Context

Delving into the duration of these innovative practices, partners were asked to identify the length of time each initiative had been established. The results indicate 29 initiatives were within the 1-2 years bracket, 120 were in the 3-6 years bracket, 85 within the 7-10 years bracket, and 185 were established for over ten years. This data underscores that a significant majority of the practices identified through the desk-based research have been operating for over a decade.

Of the 538 women-led rural and farming sustainability innovations identified across the FLIARA partner countries, the majority of the innovations identified were economic sustainability innovations. In each country, excluding the Netherlands, Germany and Romania, more economic sustainability innovations were captured than any other type of innovation, see Figure 4.

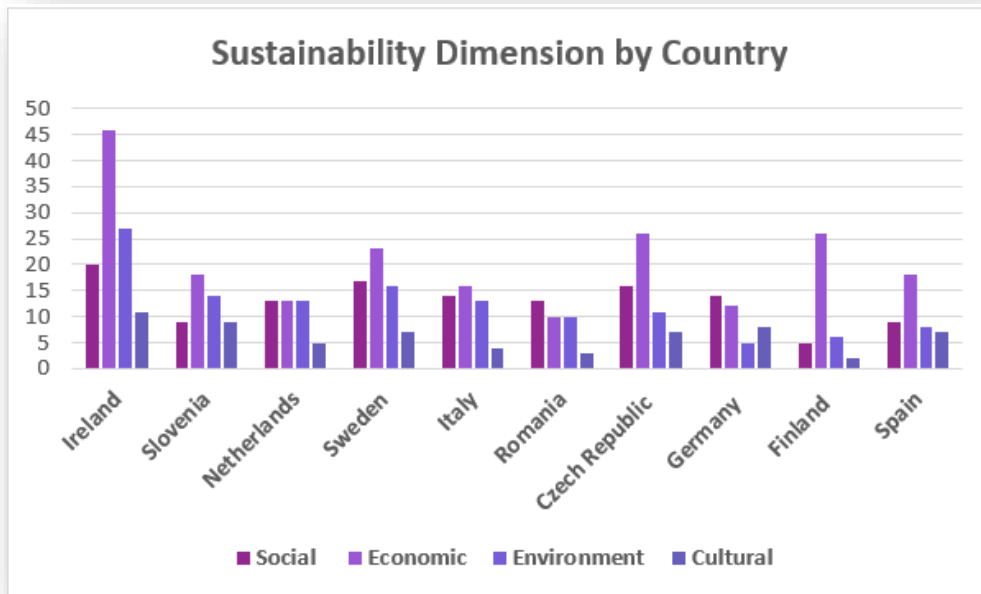


Figure 6. Sustainability Dimension by Country

The women-led innovations identified in each partner country have been divided into common sub-themes within each of their sustainability dimensions. As seen in Figure 5 below, the economic sustainability enterprises or practices gathered by partners for the inventory of women-led innovations in farming and rural areas came under six sub-themes; sustainable resource management; value chain development; rural innovation hubs and incubators; community-based enterprises; rural tourism and hospitality; and value-added processing. 155 out of a total of 208 economic innovations identified were community-based enterprises, making this the largest category gathered through a desk-based search.

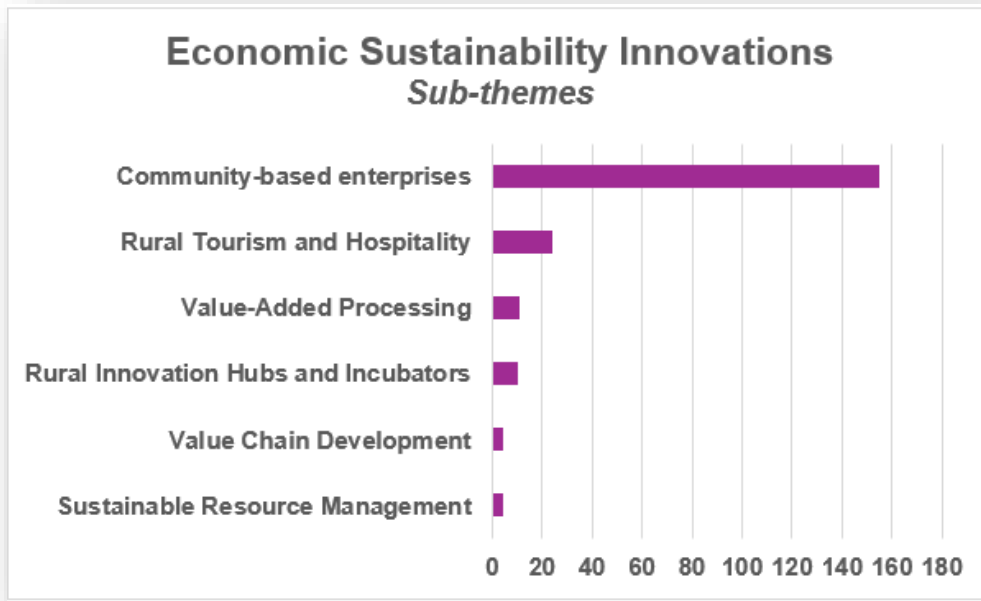


Figure 7. Economic Sustainability Innovations - Sub-Themes

The six sub-themes identified among the environmental sustainability innovations were environmental/ecological education; sustainable agricultural practices; circular economy; organics; waste management and recycling; and renewable energy/energy efficiency. The distribution is shown below in Figure 6. Sustainable agricultural practices were the most common type of environmental innovation identified, with 53 of the 123 environmental innovations identified being in this category.

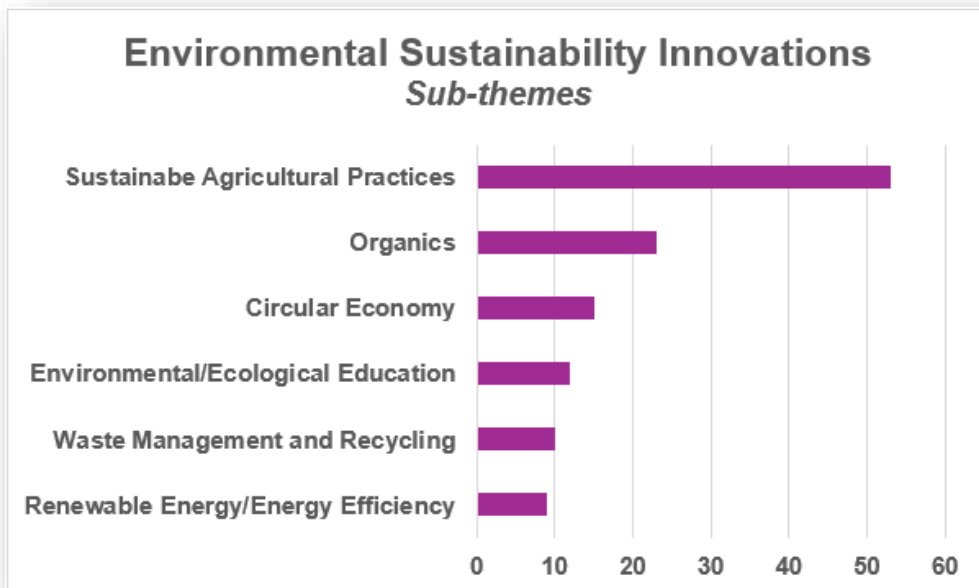


Figure 8. Environmental Sustainability Innovations - Sub-Themes

The social innovations identified across the 10 FLIARA partner countries come under the sub-themes of: digital inclusion; social services and infrastructure; women's empowerment/influencers; education and skills; community-based healthcare; and social enterprises. Social enterprises were highly represented within the women-led social innovations found, as 55 of the 130 social innovations belonging to this sub-theme. Figure 7 below depicts the distribution of the innovations among the sub-themes.

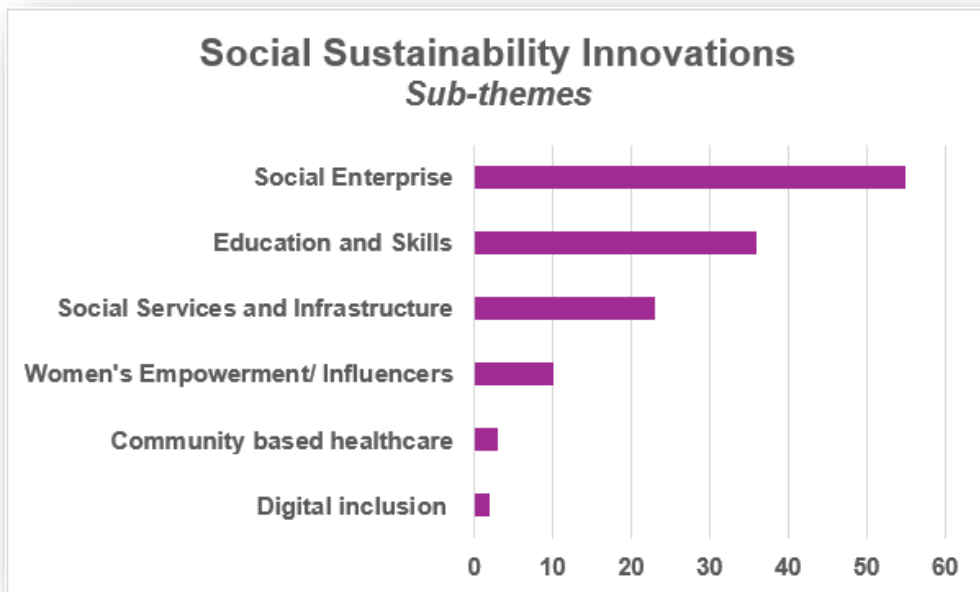


Figure 9. Social Sustainability Innovations – Sub-Themes

Finally, the rural and farming enterprises or practices which mainly impact cultural sustainability came under five main sub-themes; cultural tourism and experiences; cultural preservation and documentation; cultural festivals and events; community cultural centres and museums; and traditional agricultural practices. Cultural tourism and experiences were the most common women-led innovations in rural areas or in farming which impact cultural sustainability, with the lowest number being found in cultural festivals and events. The distribution of these sub-themes are presented in Figure 8 below.

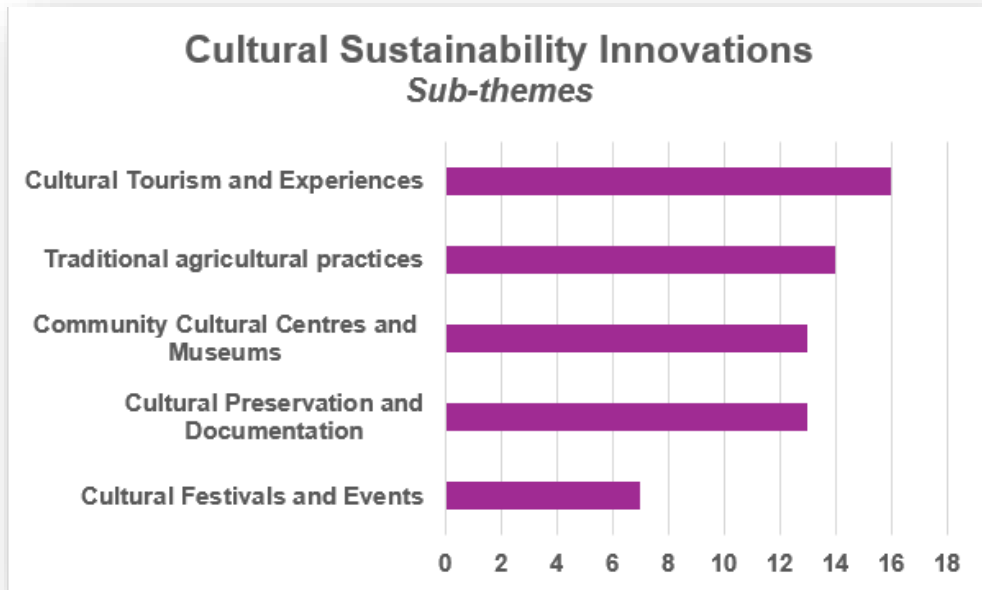


Figure 10. Cultural Sustainability Innovations – Sub-Themes



6. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the FLIARA Inventory of women-led innovations serves as a valuable tool for guiding the selection of partner case studies, drawing upon a comprehensive methodology outlined in D3.2. Through an intricate process encompassing a review of prior work (WP1 and WP2), an in-depth literature review on women-led innovations and smart solutions, a meticulous desk-top analysis of individual partner country contexts, and the compilation of an inventory spotlighting women-led innovations in the project’s countries, we have delineated key themes evident in Table 1.

Table 1 encapsulates the diversity of women-led innovation themes, spanning economic, environmental, social, and cultural sustainability dimensions. The identified sub-themes reveal the active involvement of women in agricultural and rural innovation, showcasing their prowess in areas such as circular economy, community-based enterprises, sustainable farming practices, climate-resilient crops, social services, cultural preservation, and more.

The synthesis of literature, our extensive long list, and desk-top analysis collectively demonstrate the pervasive influence of women innovators across various sustainability dimensions. The cross-cutting theme of education and training further underscores the interconnectedness of these dimensions, emphasising their synergy in achieving a sustainable future. However, our analysis also brings attention to three sub-themes, water management, sustainable transportation, and smart solutions, absent in our long list, but previously identified within the literature review.

In addition to providing insights into these overlooked areas, our efforts have yielded a robust long list comprising 538 innovative practices led by women in our ten partner countries. This extensive compilation forms a rich resource from which the final sample for Task 3.2 can be judiciously chosen. Overall, the FLIARA Inventory not only facilitates case study selection but also contributes significantly to recognising and amplifying the impactful contributions of women in fostering innovation for sustainable development in rural and agricultural contexts.

Table 1. Women-Led Innovation Themes Identified

Sustainability Dimension	Sub-Themes Found in Our Analysis	Missing Sub-Theme Identified in Literature
Economic	Circular Economy	
	Community-Based Enterprises	
	Rural Innovation Hubs and Incubators	
	Rural Tourism and Hospitality	
	Value Chain Development	
	Value-Added Processing	



Environmental	Climate-resilient crops	Controlled environment agriculture such as vertical farms
	Circular Economy	
	Lawyers for climate action	
	Environmental/Ecological Education	
	Sustainable farming practices including organic farming and soil conservation	Sustainable transportation
	Sustainable resource management including waste, energy, and recycling	Water management
Social	Social Services and Infrastructure	
	Green Care	
	Social infrastructure and digital inclusion	
	Education and Skills	
	Social Enterprises	
	Women's Social Empowerment/Influencers	
	Community Based Healthcare	
Cultural	Cultural preservation and documentation	
	Heritage and cultural tourism including museums, events and community cultural centres	
	Traditional agricultural practices	
	Traditional crafts	
	Cultural Festivals and Events	
Multiple dimensions	Education and training	



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APPENDIX A: THE FLIARA OPEN CALL

Call for Innovative Women

In Farming and Rural Areas from our Partner Countries

Czechia • Ireland • Italy • Spain • Finland
Netherlands • Slovenia • Germany • Romania • Sweden

OPEN CALL

Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas
Note: Future correspondence from the FLIARA Project will be through English.

What is FLIARA about?

FLIARA is a project funded by the EU that aims to improve the understanding of the needs and challenges faced by women who lead innovative practices in farming and rural areas in the EU.
FLIARA will raise awareness of the current innovations led by women and their crucial role in achieving EU policies for sustainable rural futures. It will showcase the innovative abilities of women in farming and rural areas, with a specific emphasis on sustainability in terms of the environment, economy, society, and culture. Read more about the project at www.fliara.eu

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. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

We are looking for you, if...

- You are a rural woman leading an innovative practice or enterprise on a farm or in a rural community.
- Your farm or rural innovation has an environmental, social, economic and/or cultural sustainability aspect.

By taking part:

- Access all FLIARA project materials and outcomes, including training tools derived from fellow women innovators' experiences in farming and rural settings.
- Stay informed about FLIARA's gender innovation events and workshops spanning the EU.
- Contribute to FLIARA's advocacy for policy enhancements backing women and their innovative endeavours in farming and rural contexts.
- You will be joining like-minded women that will directly impact positive change in the lives of women in farming and rural areas.

Click here to connect!

APPENDIX B: DESK-BASED STUDY QUESTIONS

The desk-based study for each project partner was carried out using the following series of questions:

- Name of business/innovation/practice
- Innovation in Rural Area or Farming
- Sustainability dimension (environmental, economic, social or cultural)
- Name of person
- Who else is involved in the innovation?
- Country
- Location
- NUTS 3 region found through: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/nuts/nuts-maps>
- Territorial Typology found through: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCl/#?vis=urbanrural.urb_typology&lang=en
- Type of rural context. See WP2 deliverable 2.1 for more information.
- Sector Description of the practice/business. Approx. 150 words



- Duration (e.g. year of establishment if ongoing practice, duration if fixed term project)
- Is the innovation initiative funded?
- Description of the innovation. Approx 100 words
- Does the innovation lead to novel practices, values, products, services or governance arrangements?
- Success indicators you find. Approx 100 words
- What effects does the innovation at local, regional, or national level? Approx 100 words.
- Social media and/or website Found through/ Referred by:
- Contact is established?
- Additional information
- Relevance/Overlap with other dimensions of sustainability (environmental, economic, social, cultural)

APPENDIX C: TEMPLATE FOR DESK-TOP ANALYSIS

Task 3.1a – Desk-top analysis – [Add your country here]

The **aim with this task** is to create a picture of the national contexts on innovation and smart solutions led by women in rural area and agriculture. We need these national contexts to understand similarities and differences among countries. This activity will also help us to do the comparative analysis of the case studies, task 3.4.

For this task we ask you to review at least 10-15 books/articles/reports in your national language or in international language (that are referred to your country situation) and make an analysis of national statistical data referred to in headline 1 and 3. Some data at national and regional level are available on Eurostat data see for example

[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistical-atlas/gis/viewer/?mids=BKGCNT,C99M01,CNTOVL&o=1,1,0.7&ch=GRP,C14,C02,AGR,TYP¢er=47.81494,24.64857,4&lci=C99M01&](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistical-atlas/gis/viewer/?mids=BKGCNT,C99M01,CNTOVL&o=1,1,0.7&ch=GRP,C14,C02,AGR,TYP¢ er=47.81494,24.64857,4&lci=C99M01&) .

Based on the texts, a desk top analysis on women in agricultural and rural areas of the country. The report should be 3500-5000 words in total. Write in the boxes below. Please, upload the report in the WP3 folder on Teams. **The deadline is 20th of November.**

1 *Rural context in the country*

What are the main characteristics in your country when it comes to rural villages, rural remote areas, and rural areas near to the city? See page 13-14 in D.14. We want to understand whether it at country level are relevant differences in how we view rural. Include socio-demographic data, for example population by gender/age, education and gender employment rate by degree of urbanisation, see for example <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/cache/RCl/#?vis=degurb.gen&lang=en>



2 Women in rural areas

Which are the main women's networks/ associations operating at national level in rural areas (e.g., women farmers network)? What are their aims, their organisations, and activities? How is innovation supported by these networks/associations? What kind of innovation (economic, environmental, social, or cultural) do they support?

3 Agriculture and rural economy

Considering gender in statistical data and include number of farmers, age of farmers, structure of farms, agriculture workers (see tables below). Also add statistics on the rural economy with a focus on businesses. You are very welcomed the add comments to the tables if you want to clarify something (use the word-function).

	2010	2020
Number of farms		
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)		
Average size of Farms		

Agricultural holdings by economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro)

	2010	2020



Less than 14,000 euros		
From 15.000 to 49,000 euros		
From 50,000 to 249.000 euros		
From 250.000 to 499,000 euros		
500,000 euros and over		

Number of farm managers by age class 2010-2020

	2010		2020		2010(%)		2020(%)		2010-2020(%)	
	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total
Younger than 40										
41-65 years										
Older than 65										
Total										

Farm labour force in person 2010-2020

Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons	
2010	2020



Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
Non-family labour force, in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total

Additional comments on the data. Include information on for example small-scale farming (0-10 ha), organic farming, multifunctional agriculture (see for example data on other gainful activities), precision farming.

Please add below any statistics that you find about rural businesses in your country. This could be for example number of businesses, proportion of women owners, what kind of business there are (size, employers, type/sector/industry). We can't find any comprehensive statistics of this so even though it may vary between countries what data we get we still find it useful to receive it. Add a table of your own below the box if you want to. If possible, also add insight on the opportunities for tourism, services, social enterprises in the rural and the expectancy of growth.

4 Sustainability and women-led innovations in rural areas/agriculture



Consider the subthemes shown in the tables in Annex 2 of D1.4 - which are the main issues discussed nationally in newspapers, grey literature but also in scientific articles in relation to the 4 dimensions of sustainability in relation to rural areas? Is there a specific focus on the role of women in this discussion? Do you see any other themes in the discussion? What innovations (cultural, social, environmental, economic) supported/promoted by women in rural/agricultural areas emerge from your analysis? Is there a discussion on gender and innovation in rural/agricultural areas and what are the main issues being debated?

5 National (regional and local) policies supporting women in rural areas

Are there policies that support innovation and smart solutions promoted by women in rural areas/agriculture? Consider national policies and, if any, regional/local policies.

6 References used in the analysis



APPENDIX D: DESKTOP ANALYSIS – ALL PARTNER COUNTRIES

DESK-TOP ANALYSIS – IRELAND

The following report provides an overview of the Irish context on innovation and smart solutions led by women in rural areas and agriculture.

1. RURAL CONTEXT

Defining the rural

While there is no universally agreed definition of the rural within an Irish context, those put forward by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) are widely used. These include, defining a rural area as any settlement with a population of less than 1,500 persons (CSO, 2019). Additionally, the CSO address variation within the rural context by categorising rural areas as either Rural Areas with High Urban Influence, Rural Areas with Moderate Urban Influence or Highly Rural/Remote Areas.

Population

According to the Irish Census 2022, just below 30% of Ireland's population, or roughly 1.5 million people, live in rural areas. An in-depth analysis by O'Driscoll et al. (2022) of population change in rural areas from 2016-2022 illustrates that rural areas, particularly remote and peripheral areas in the midlands and west of Ireland, have been experiencing consistent population loss. This analysis reflects that urban areas have also experienced population loss, demonstrating that the loss of population is not confined to rural areas. However, the Irish rural areas that are surrounding cities are gaining population.

Age and Gender

According to the CSO's most recent division of age and gender statistics by urban and rural areas (2019), the average age was 41.2 years higher in rural areas, especially isolated rural areas. Both urban and rural areas had an increase in the average age, although distant rural areas saw the most increase, 1.6 years, than any other area. In addition, this CSO investigation from 2019 discovered that gender distribution in rural areas was not equal. All sorts of rural areas showed a high male to female ratio; however, the extreme remote rural areas were found to have the highest ratio of males to women, with a sex ratio of 98.5, among the 25–44 age range.

Income

Household income was lowest in rural areas, according to the most current rural breakdown of the Survey of Income and Living Conditions (CSO, 2017). In rural areas, the average income varied from €42,167 to €29,424; the lowest average income was found in isolated rural areas. In contrast, the income range in urban regions was €46,458–€34,626. The "at risk of poverty rate" was highest in rural areas (17.5% - 19.7%), with distant rural areas having the highest percentage. The State's average "at risk of poverty rate" was 15.7%.

Employment



The most recent rural breakdown of the CSL Labour Force Survey (CSO, 2019) indicated that participation rates (number of persons aged 15 and over in the labour force expressed as a percentage of the total population aged 15 or over) were lowest in rural areas, ranging from 64-54.9%, with the lowest percentage reflecting remote rural areas. The participation rates in urban areas were 64.9-64.0%. A higher number of persons were self-employed in rural areas (170,300) compared to urban areas (153,400).

2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

The nationwide goals and initiatives of the women's networks and associations listed below are outlined for rural areas. These organisations adopt a cooperative strategy by bringing together a variety of female actors and supporting these underrepresented groups in the fight for gender equality. Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge the non-gender segregated organisations, which support women-led innovation in rural areas and in farming, such as Local Enterprise Offices and Teagasc Advisory Services.

Enterprise Ireland

Enterprise Ireland is the official agency of the Irish government responsible for enterprise development. It consists of 39 international offices and is committed to fostering the growth of Irish-owned companies by providing essential support and investments for start-up or expanding enterprises in international markets. As such, it plays a key role in stimulating economic growth and generating sustainable employment opportunities in communities across Ireland.

Innovation Supports

The organisation's multifaceted support system includes access to markets, the enhancement of capabilities, and the provision of funding and grants. These supports not only address global challenges but also contribute to sustainable development Nationwide. By creating an environment encouraging business expansion, Enterprise Ireland facilitates international growth, fostering sustainability, innovation, and competitiveness among Irish enterprises. Additionally, it empowers businesses to increase their sales and marketing efforts, thereby furthering their reach and impact.

Local Enterprise Offices

Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) promote entrepreneurship and foster business start-up and growth at a local level across Ireland, ultimately contributing to job creation on a local, regional and national level. LEOs are dedicated to offering accessible, high-quality support for business development throughout the country.

Innovation Supports

LEOs provide an array of essential services. These include financial support, mentoring, advisory services, and training programmes. LEOs guide entrepreneurs by directing them to relevant State resources if their business requires such assistance. It is noteworthy that these supportive measures are inclusive of gender considerations. LEOs are committed to ensuring that their services are available to all, with a specific emphasis on extending support to individuals and communities in rural areas seeking to initiate or enhance businesses.



Local Action Group's (LAGs)

Local Action Groups (LAGs) play a pivotal role in steering rural and community development programmes on behalf of the Government, with 29 LAGs dispersed across Ireland. Many LAGs collaborate with Implementing Partners to effectively carry out diverse projects and programmes such as the LEADER Local Development Strategy.

Innovation Supports

LAGs play a crucial role in offering extensive support to communities and individuals, acting as valuable hubs for information on funding opportunities, especially through programmes like LEADER. They also actively contribute to enterprise development, education, training, employment, and overall community enhancement, making Local Action Groups vital facilitators for holistic community growth and empowerment.

Teagasc

Teagasc is a national body, which provides research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry, and rural communities. Teagasc contributes to the overall goal of improving the wellbeing of rural residents while championing practices that ensure the long-term sustainability of farming and the broader rural environment.

Innovation Supports

Through a multifaceted, client-focused approach, Teagasc actively engages in knowledge transfer, creating awareness of opportunities to foster the development and expansion of farms and rural regions. Teagasc extends its services to individuals involved in agriculture and rural development, providing not only advisory and training support but also valuable education opportunities.

ACORNS Programme

The government initiative ACORNS (Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Start-Ups) backs early-stage female entrepreneurs in rural Ireland through a six-month programme featuring interactive sessions led by successful women entrepreneurs (ACORNS, 2023). The programme fosters connections and networks among rural female entrepreneurs, emphasizing the belief that entrepreneurs learn best from each other.

Innovation Supports

The programme is centred around interactive round table sessions that are facilitated by female entrepreneurs, known as 'Lead Entrepreneurs', who have started and successfully grown businesses in rural Ireland.

The Women's Agriculture Advisory Stakeholder Group

The Women's Agriculture Advisory Stakeholder Group (2021) represents a collective initiative with the core objective of promoting and supporting women engaged in farming. The group promotes gender equality, with a primary focus on ensuring women's equal access to resources, opportunities, and involvement in decision-making processes within the farming sector (Women in Agriculture Stakeholders Group, 2021). The group also places a strong emphasis on empowerment, achieved through knowledge exchange,



skill development, and the creation of networking opportunities. Advocacy is integral to their mission, with members actively championing policies and initiatives that facilitate women's participation and leadership in farming.

Innovation Supports

The group facilitates educational programs and workshops to provide women with essential skills and knowledge. Networking opportunities are also facilitated to encourage women to connect, share experiences, and learn from one another. Access to training and resources promotes innovation in farming practices, improving productivity, profitability, and generating environmental and social benefits.

Women's Collective Ireland

Women's Collective Ireland (WCI) is a national organisation dedicated to representing and advocating for the interests of both urban and rural women across Ireland. Comprising 17 Women's Community Development Projects across the country, WCI is committed to promoting gender equality at both local and national levels (Women's Collective Ireland, 2014). The organisation aims to identify the unique needs of women and ensure their voices are heard.

Innovation Supports

The organisation offers a platform for women to collaborate, learn, and share experiences in a safe space, discussing challenges and opportunities in urban and rural settings. WCI provides training and educational support to enhance skills, potentially opening doors to employment and career advancement. Tailoring services to women's unique needs, the organisation offers childcare, information centres, and affordable counselling services.

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC)

The National Women's Council of Ireland (NWC) is a prominent organisation dedicated to advancing women's rights and gender equality throughout the country. They are committed to advocacy, actively engaging in endeavours that influence policy and legislation, ensuring that gender equality and women's rights remain at the forefront of public discourse (National Women's Council of Ireland, 2023). They conduct in-depth research to provide evidence-based insights into issues affecting women and utilise this research to inform policies and practices. The network has produced many publications and reports specifically showcasing the challenges and opportunities for rural women in Ireland.

Innovation Supports

NWC fosters innovation across several domains to advance gender equality in Ireland. This includes promoting women's economic empowerment through advocacy for equal pay, improved work conditions, and access to economic opportunities, thus fostering innovation in business and economic practices. They campaign for gender sensitive environmental policies, highlight issues impacting women such as domestic violence and healthcare access, support social innovation aimed at creating a more just society for women, and champion cultural innovation by challenging gender norms and stereotypes.



They also facilitate networking and collaboration among women's organisations, nurturing a supportive and connected community.

Ceres Network

The Ceres Network is a 'Women in agri-business leadership network' established by ten accomplished female professionals from various backgrounds in the Irish sector, including academia, consulting, and agri-business. Ceres is dedicated to advocating for women's leadership and diverse perspectives within the agri-business leadership network (Ceres Network, 2023). Ceres aims to create a platform for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and peer support within the agri-business community.

Innovation Supports

Ceres offers support to women in the agri-business sector through a series of dynamic, engaging, and thought-provoking events. Serving as a platform, it facilitates connections among women in the industry, fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and peer support. This enables women interested in critical thinking and leadership in Irish agri-business to come together, contributing to the creation and development of innovative support networks within the industry.

3. AGRICULTURE AND THE IRISH RURAL ECONOMY

The following provides an overview of the relevant statistics related to agriculture and the rural economy.

Number of Farms and Average Size

	2010	2020
Number of farms	139,860	135,037
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	4,568,938	4,509,256
Average size of Farms	32.7 hectares	33.4 hectares

Agricultural Holdings by Economic Size of The Farms (Standard Output In Euro)

	2010	2020
Less than 15,000 euros	85,881	71,040
From 15,000 to 50,000 euros	32,725	36,054
From 50,000 to 100,000 euros	11,156	10,328
Over 100,000 euros	10,098	15,709
500,000 euros and over	n/a	n/a

Number of Farm Managers by Age Class 2010-2020

	2010		2020		2010(%)		2020(%)		2010-2020(%)	
	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total



Younger than 44	2,816	33,245	3,341	28,039	8.4	23.8	11.9	21.5	3.5	-2.3
44-64	8,229	69,672	7,592	62,863	11.8	49.9	12.1	48.2	0.3	-0.7
Older than 65	6,300	28,043	7,168	44,135	22.4	20.1	16.2	33.9	-6.2	13.8
Total	17,345	139,556	16,900	130,216	12.4	100	12.9	100	0.5	-6.7

Farm Labour Force in Person 2010-2020

Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
71,936	26.4	272,016			244,484
Non-family labour force, in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
2,156	13.1	16,379			34,096

Below are some additional data and interpretations on the data for Irish agriculture and women's involvement in Irish agriculture.

Small-Scale Farming

According to the 2020 Census of Agriculture by the CSO, there was a 1.0% increase in the proportion of female farm holders from 2010 to 2020. Among female farm holders, 29% manage farms under 10 hectares, 25% handle farms between 10 and 20 hectares, and only 3% have farms exceeding 100 hectares. In 2020, the percentage of male farm holders was higher for larger farm sizes. Around 91% of those managing farms above 50 hectares were male. For smaller farm sizes, the percentage of male farm holders decreased: 89.3% for 30–50 hectares, 87.2% for 20–30 hectares, 85.1% for 10–20 hectares, and 81.1% for less than 10 hectares.

Farm Succession by Gender

As of 2020, less than half (46.1%) of farm holders had a succession plan in place and 98.2% of these had named a family member as the successor. Of the farm holders with succession plans in place, 16.2% (9,759) of the named successors were female and 81.6% (49,024) were male.



Distribution of Gender by Farm Type

The highest proportion of female farm holders were on Mixed Field Crops (23.7%), Other (19.7%) and Specialist Sheep (17.1%) farms. The lowest proportion of female farm holders (7.8%) was on Specialist Dairying farms. For the remaining farm types, Specialist Beef Production, Specialist Tillage, Mixed Grazing Livestock, and Mixed Crops and Livestock, female farm holders accounted for 12.5%, 11.9%, 10.0% and 9.9% of farm holders respectively.

Organics

According to the CSO 2020 Census of Agriculture, there were 1,686 organic farm holdings, representing 1.3% of all farm holdings in 2020. Organic Agricultural Area Utilised (AAU) accounted for 73,799 hectares (ha) of the 4,498,987 hectares in the state, or 1.6%. Specialist Beef Production and Specialist Sheep farm types accounted for just below three quarters of the organic farm types in 2020, 59.8% were Specialist Beef Production and 13.8% were Specialist Sheep. The following farm type categories each had less than 5% organic farm holdings; Mixed Field Crops (2.4%), Specialist Dairying (2.4%), Specialist Tillage (3.9%), Other (4.2%) and Mixed Crops and Livestock (4.7%). There were 293 female holders of organic farms, or 17.4%. 82.6% of organic farm holdings had a male holder, similar to the proportion of male holders of all farm holdings, which was 86.6%. The median age of holders of organic farms was 54 in 2020 while the median age of farm holders of all farms was 57

Gender and Rural Business

Female Entrepreneurship in Ireland

The Gem Entrepreneurship Report (2021) showed that the rate of early-stage entrepreneurial activity has been increasing among women in Ireland in the past few years (from 7.5% in 2018 to 9% in 2019, to 11.3% in 2021). As a result, Ireland is placed third across participating European countries, just behind the Netherlands and Latvia. The gender gap for more established businesses (more than three years) is more pronounced running at a male to female ratio of 2.4:1 (GEM. 2019). Overall, women officially made up just over 20% of all Irish Entrepreneurs, (Mastercard, 2022) and below the European average of 34.4% (Wegate, 2021). There is however a strong qualification to this statistic, namely that there are 160,700 family businesses operating in Ireland, employing 900,000, just below a third of the national labour force, (O’Gorman and Farrelly, 2020). Statistics outlining the specific entrepreneurial leadership role of women in these family operations, where roles and function are often unofficial, are not unavailable. It is likely that a large number have hidden significant female direction, making the true figure of female entrepreneurs in Ireland much greater than that officially reported.

Opportunities in Rural Business

In 2019, a study from The Royal Irish Academy (RIA) gathered contributions from a cross-section of over 200 rural community stakeholders, government agencies, government support agencies and academics on various aspects of rural development. Stakeholder feedback illustrated that rural enterprises include the following providers of



commercial services: “start-ups, lifestyle entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs, rural family firms, small and medium sized enterprises (SME), and multinational corporations” (RIA, 2019, p.11). Stakeholders also noted that there is potential for the growth of Irish rural businesses in the marine/blue ocean economy, agricultural specialisation, food production, ICT (Information and Communication Technologies), renewable energy, service provision, childcare, tourism, and social enterprise (RIA, 2019).

Tourism

Tourism is Ireland’s largest indigenous industry and the largest employer in rural areas (ITIC, 2023). The sector comprises 20,000 businesses, with the majority being small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). According to the latest data from the Central Statistics Office (CSO), around a quarter of a million people are employed in the industry, with 70% of them located in rural Ireland (CSO, 2021). Recent tourism growth is concentrated along the West of Ireland, with the remote rural counties of Kerry and Donegal showing the largest growth in the tourism sector (ibid.).

Social Enterprise

According to a 2023 report from the Department of Rural and Community Development titled "Social Enterprises in Ireland," there are 4,335 social enterprises in the country. Urban areas host 57% of Irish social enterprises, while rural areas accommodate 43%. Despite this, when considering the population distribution in urban and rural areas, the ratio of social enterprises in rural regions (10.5 per 10,000 inhabitants) surpasses that in urban areas (8.3 per 10,000 inhabitants). The majority of rural social enterprises focus on addressing local issues, with 84% having a local focus, compared to 68% in urban areas. Childcare constitutes the primary sector of activity for all social enterprises in Ireland, with 28.7% in rural and 25.7% in urban areas. Social enterprises concentrating on local development and community infrastructure follow closely, comprising 22.8%, as opposed to 11.8% in urban areas.

4. SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

Sustainability and sustainable development is a multifaceted concept, which is outlined by the Brundtland Report as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Heron, 2023, p. 3). This process encompasses various dimensions, including social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability. This analysis delves into the sub-themes associated with each dimension of sustainability, providing a comprehensive understanding of the sustainability challenges faced in an Irish context, their relevance to rural areas and the role of women.

Economic Sustainability

Projections for Ireland's economic sustainability in the aftermath of global events like the Covid-19 pandemic suggest a substantial slowdown in economic growth in the coming decades (Irish Fiscal Advisory Council, 2020). This challenge to sustainability primarily stems from a dearth of job opportunities, lower labour productivity, and an aging population (ibid.). These issues are notably pronounced in rural areas, emphasising the pivotal role that rural Ireland can play in the overall economic sustainability of the country



(CEDRA, 2014). Recognising and supporting the economic contributions of rural women, encompassing employment, enterprise development, and participation in the rural economy, is imperative for ensuring the economic sustainability of rural Ireland (NWC1, 2021). This significance is particularly evident in rural innovation hubs and incubators, as well as in rural tourism and hospitality sectors.

Rural Innovation Hubs and Incubators

Rural innovation hubs and incubators range in type and characteristics, shaped by the specific requirements of the rural area in which they are based and therefore addressing the specific issues of economic sustainability in rural areas (Bosworth et al., 2022). Rural hubs help to overcome social, institutional and geographical boundaries to enterprise development, thereby positively impacting economic sustainability. A lack of employment opportunities and skills to facilitate entrepreneurship have been identified as central concerns in Irish rural areas (Murtagh et al., 2023). Rural innovation hubs and incubators support rural entrepreneurship development and can increase employment opportunities in rural areas, addressing the main issues of economic development in rural areas (CEDRA, 2014). Rural hubs also facilitate the female-led rural entrepreneurship, which is crucial to the economic sustainability of rural Ireland. Hubs address the challenges experienced by female entrepreneurs and women in the rural workforce by providing women the ability to work remotely, create connections with peers and can contribute to non-financial gains such as a sense of purpose and self-identity (Herbert, 2023).

Rural Tourism and Hospitality

Economic sustainability in rural Ireland is often woven into discussions of environmental, social and cultural sustainability. Innovations that may be culturally, socially or environmentally sustainable, various types of tourism for example, can also have economic benefits while contributing to other aspects of sustainability, particularly in rural areas (Collins and Fahy, 2011). The rural tourism and hospitality sector is critical to the economic sustainability of rural areas that many locations in rural Ireland would not be economically viable without this sector (Anderson et al., 2015). The tourism and hospitality sector serves as a means of revitalising rural economies by countering depopulation, attracting individuals back to rural areas, and highlighting the intrinsic value and impact of residing in natural rural landscapes as opposed to densely populated urban environments (Lane et al., 2022). Women are an inherent part of economic sustainability via the tourism sector. Across Ireland, women are particularly overrepresented in the tourism industry, and past and present, have been to the forefront of Irish tourism and hospitality development (ITIC, 2023).

Cultural Sustainability

Policies and strategies such as “Our Rural Future,” Ireland’s Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 stress the importance of rural areas in ensuring the cultural sustainability of Ireland, as heritage and culture are heavily dependent on the contribution of rural areas. Rural women in particular are “key enablers of vibrant and sustainable rural communities” (RIA, 2019, p.3) in many ways, including their role in the cultural cohesion of rural areas. The most notable areas of cultural sustainability concerning rural women in Ireland are indigenous knowledge and practices, and cultural festivals and events.



Indigenous Knowledge and Practices

Preserving or implementing traditional farming practices has emerged as a cultural sustainability issue in Ireland. Practices such as haymaking and dry-stone wall building are still being practiced and preserved in many rural areas in Ireland (Moran and Rau, 2017). Other traditional practices such as field burning and turf cutting are being examined for their viability (Carroll et al., 2021). The protection of traditional crafts and skills has also been seen as a current issue. Schemes such as the All-Ireland Heritage Skills Programme aim to preserve the wisdom and knowledge of traditional heritage building methods and skills that are at risk of being lost (Heritage Council, 2022). Women are intrinsically linked to the protection and passing on of indigenous knowledge and practices. For example, there has been attention on the recording of women's traditional botanical knowledge in rural areas for use in folk medicine or 'cures,' particularly in rural and Gaeltacht (Irish speaking) areas in the West of Ireland (Shannon et al., 2017). It was found that knowledge of these 'cures' or medicinal remedies are now viewed as an important cultural asset, rather than vital for survival (ibid.).

Cultural Festivals and Events

Ireland has a rich history and connection to festivals, with almost every town and village in Ireland hosting at least one, and many hosting numerous (Dunne, 2023). Cultural festivals and events in rural Ireland have significant value in the development of rural areas more broadly, as they engage with and influence local development activities (Mahon and Hyyryläinen, 2019). Festivals and cultural events are particularly important to the cultural sustainability of rural areas, as festivals reproduce collective identities and foster cultural and social cohesion (Moore and Quinn, 2023). As well as fostering local development, boosting rural economies, and generating tourism, festivals serve as a space for cultural capital acquisition, and the embodiment of shared cultural practices (Rossetti and Quinn, 2023). Reflecting this, the National Inventory for Intangible Cultural Heritage was launched in 2019 with the aim of promoting, protecting, and celebrating Irish culture and heritage practices, festivals, customs, crafts, and traditions at local, national, and international level (Heritage Council, 2023). Women hold a significant role in ensuring the cultural sustainability of Irish rural areas through cultural events and festivals, as women are seen to be more involved and have higher participation in small-scale festivals (Rossetti and Quinn, 2021). Women across Ireland are responsible for some of the most innovative and successful cultural experiences on offer in the country (Tourism Ireland, 2023).

Social Sustainability

Issues of social sustainability in Ireland encompass a variety of sectors, as the social sustainability of rural areas is influenced by a multitude of factors including the presence of necessary infrastructure, access to information and communication technology, access to necessary services (RIA, 2019). Women play a key role in the social sustainability of rural areas, as women are most likely to bring about social change in their rural communities (ibid.). Two of the main areas of social sustainability for rural areas in Ireland are social entrepreneurship and digital inclusion.



Social Entrepreneurship

The “Social Enterprises in Ireland” 2023 report from the Department of Rural and Community Development highlights that 49% of social enterprises in Ireland have been operational for more than 20 years. There is also significant growth in this sector however, as the report details that 16% of all social enterprises have been established in the last 4 years. Social enterprises can be highly effective in addressing the diverse socio-economic challenges faced by rural Ireland (Doyle, 2019). Social enterprises provide customised services to regions across Ireland by identifying gaps in service provision in an area. These enterprises can address two to three dimensions of sustainability simultaneously (social, economic, and environmental) (Olmedo et al., 2019). In 2019, the Department of Rural and Community Development published Ireland’s first National Social Enterprise Policy which recognises that social enterprises are a feature of the broader entrepreneurship ecosystem. Our Rural Future, Ireland’s Rural Development Policy, also highlights social enterprises as crucial to the sustainable development of rural Ireland. Women play a significant role in social sustainability through social entrepreneurship. Female social entrepreneurs are numerous and have been found to be driven by ‘prosocial motivations’, which often outweigh financial motivations (Humbert and Roomi, 2018, p.316).

Digital Inclusion

For socially sustainable development, a community must possess structural and infrastructural capacity (Doyle, 2019). Digital infrastructure is key to the sustainable development of Ireland’s rural areas. The digital divide between rural and urban areas in Ireland is a significant issue, leaving rural communities unable to access the social benefits of digital technologies, such as accessing information, entertainment and staying connected (Pirhonen et al., 2020). This digital divide also impacts rural women. Even though Irish women have one of the highest ICT use and purchase rates in comparison to other European countries (Lopez-Martinez et al., 2021), there is a notable underrepresentation of women in the ICT sector, indicating that Ireland has a lack of digital inclusion (Department of Education, 2022).

Environmental Sustainability

There is a growing acceptance of the importance of considering the needs and role of women in environmental sustainability in Ireland. A lack of inclusion of women in decision-making roles, and a lack of consideration of the role of women is detrimental to the long-term success of decisions and actions in environmental sustainability (Touhy, 2019). The National Women’s Council of Ireland (NWCI) highlight that rural women have a crucial role in furthering environmental sustainability in rural areas, but also in ensuring that environmental sustainability measures work for women (NWCI, 2023). Studies such as the Transport Infrastructure Ireland report, ‘Travelling in Her Shoes’ (2020), illustrate that conversations around the issues of environmental sustainability in Ireland are increasingly considering the role and needs of women. The most notable sub-themes of environmental sustainability concerning rural women in Ireland are renewable energy, the circular economy and sustainable agriculture.



Renewable Energy

The exploration of renewable energy sources is one of the most notable trends in environmental sustainability efforts in Ireland. The Irish Government has committed to securing 70% of all electricity from renewables by 2030. Ireland is the highest-ranked country in the world for the share of electricity demand that is being provided by renewable sources, mainly onshore wind (IDA Ireland, 2023). Farming and rural areas more widely are central to the conversation of renewable energy currently ongoing in Ireland. Renewable energy infrastructure such as solar and wind farms are mainly being constructed in rural areas, on farmland or in forestry areas (Teagasc, 2017). Biomass energy production using organic waste from the agricultural sector, for example manures, has also been shown to hold huge potential for the renewable energy sector of Ireland (Jiang et al, 2021).

Women are at the forefront of renewable energy development in Ireland, with bodies such as Renewable Energy Ireland (2023) stating that women are building and leading renewable energy efforts in Ireland, across all levels in multiple technologies. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) recognises the importance of engaging women in the renewable energy sector in Ireland, encouraging the advancement of women in the sector by hosting Women in Energy events and encouraging mentorship and networking programmes for women in energy (Gannon, 2019). A report from the National Economic and Social Council (2023) stresses the importance of attracting and supporting young farmers and female farmers for environmental sustainability, as they tend to be more likely to adopt new approaches and methods.

Circular Economy

Ireland's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has noted many emergent trends connected to the growing circular economy in Ireland, including green public procurement, corporate social responsibility, and non-financial reporting (EPA, 2023). Our Rural Future, Ireland's rural development policy, outlines the potential rural areas hold regarding the circular economy, stating that rural Ireland is well positioned to see employment growth in areas of the circular economy, through socially responsible public procurement contracts for example. The role of women in the circular economy in Ireland is often illustrated through circular textile systems. It has been shown that textile reuse in Ireland is heavily biased towards women, as in 2021, 38% of women bought clothing items with organic or recycled material and 37% of women bought second hand or vintage clothing (EPA, 2022). It was also found that women are more likely to alter or repair their clothing, as well as being more likely to donate or pass clothing on (ibid.). The involvement of women in circular textile systems is evident in rural areas. For example, Roscommon Women's Network have pioneered the CycleUp project, a social enterprise that provides training in textile upcycling to women in rural areas and creates new items from unwanted clothing or fabric (Masterson, 2023).

Sustainable Agriculture

There is considerable policy, research, and media attention on sustainable farming in Ireland, examining sustainable farming methods, indicators, motivations and supports (Lynch et al., 2019). The conversation around sustainable agriculture in Ireland has grown to explore how farmers can be economically sustainable while introducing



environmentally sustainable farming methods (Hayden, 2022). The fear of low economic return has been seen to leave farmers in Ireland unwilling to adopt conservation measures on their farms (Serebrennikov et al., 2020). Dessart et al. (2019) found that multiple behavioural factors influence the adoption of sustainable farming practices for Irish farmers. The main factors that impacted the decision to adopt sustainable practices were risk tolerance, environmental concern, and economic objectives. Women play a significant role in environmental sustainability through the adoption of sustainable farming practices. The empowerment of women in the agricultural sector is vital for the sustainability of farming and the wider Agri-food sector in Ireland (O'Brien, 2023). Unay-Gailhard and Bojnec (2021) found that farms managed by young women are more likely to adopt Agri-environmental conservations schemes. This is particularly evident in organic farming in Ireland, as organic farmers are younger and more likely to be women (Unay-Gailhard and Bojnec, 2021).

5. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

National policies in Ireland actively contribute to supporting female-led innovations in rural areas and agriculture, both directly and indirectly, by eliminating barriers to accessing essential supports and services. The subsequent policies outline the mechanisms through which they endorse innovation and smart solutions led by women in rural areas and agriculture.

Ireland's CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) Strategic Plan

Ireland Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) Strategic Plan (CSP) for 2023-2027 delineates ten core objectives focused on various aspects. These include ensuring equitable income for farmers, enhancing competitiveness, positioning farmers more effectively in the food supply chain, addressing climate change, championing environmental conservation, preserving landscapes and biodiversity, supporting generational renewal, promoting job growth and equality in rural areas, safeguarding food and health quality, and fostering knowledge and innovation (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2023).

Supports for Women-led Innovation in Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan

Ireland's CSP identifies specific measures tailored to assist women farmers. These initiatives are part of the On-Farm Capital Investment Scheme, which includes grant aid investments designed to support young and women farmers. Additionally, women ranging from the age of 18 to 66 can access specialised women farmer support and can avail of the opportunity to benefit from a 60% grant allocation designated for young and women farmers. For women to avail of these grant aid supports the relevant requirements and conditions must be met. The CSP offers female focused knowledge transfer groups for women to influence peer-to-peer learning while addressing shared challenges and gender balance. Ireland's CSP also commits to including representatives of organisations representing women in the Monitoring Committee to strengthen the equality dimension in implementing CSPs.



'Our Rural Future' (Rural Development Policy 2021-2025)

Our Rural Future, the Rural Development Policy for Ireland 2021 to 2025, adopts a comprehensive, place-based strategy to develop rural regions toward a sustainable future (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2021). The policy outlines the thematic objectives needed to achieve this vision; optimising opportunities for rural communities with widespread access to high-speed broadband; supporting the enhancement of employment and career prospects in rural areas; facilitating the regeneration, repopulation, and development of rural towns and villages; strengthening the participation, leadership, and resilience of rural communities; enhancing public services in rural areas; promoting a just transition to a climate-neutral economy; ensuring the sustainability of Agriculture, the Marine, and Forestry; fostering the resilience of our islands and coastal communities; and nurturing our cultural heritage.

Supports for Women-led Innovation in 'Our Rural Future' (Rural Development Policy 2021-2025)

The policy recognises the significance of inclusivity, particularly addressing the concerns and challenges faced by marginalised groups, such as women and girls, in rural communities. Two specific actions within 'Our Rural Future' are dedicated to advancing women's participation. Action 88 emphasises the necessity of conducting research to better understand the needs and challenges of women and girls in rural regions, recognising that unlocking the full potential of rural areas requires effective engagement with women and girls. Action 131 highlights the importance of supporting generational renewal, specifically targeting young farmers and women in agriculture, as highlighted in the CAP. This includes a range of initiatives, such as financial incentives and taxation measures, aimed at addressing the gender equality imbalances within the farming sector.

Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy

Impact 2030 centres on leveraging research and innovation to tackle the multifaceted challenges (societal, economic, and environmental) that Ireland confronts (Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, 2022). Its primary objective is to underscore the transformative potential of the research and innovation ecosystem in shaping organisational frameworks and influencing enterprises throughout the island, fostering collaborative approaches. By capitalising on existing knowledge and strengths, while actively engaging with emerging technologies, the initiative seeks to cultivate long-term sustainability across Irish society, the economy, and the environment.

Supports for Women-led Innovation in Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy

A key focus in this strategy is advancing equality, diversity, and inclusion in research and innovation. This involves enhancing the representation of women as they advance in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) careers, recognising and highlighting their talents. To achieve this, the plan involves providing funding through targeted calls for women entrepreneurs and women researchers from third level institutions. This strategic initiative aims to foster a more inclusive and diverse landscape within the innovation and entrepreneurial ecosystem.



National Action Plan for Women in Business

The National Action Plan for Women in Business was launched in 2020 with the aim of promoting gender diversity and increasing the participation of women founding, leading, developing and growing Irish enterprises or businesses (Enterprise Ireland, 2023). The Plan specifically focuses on women in business and highlights the four objectives and twenty-four actions it aims to adopt to increase gender diversity across the enterprise sector.

Supports for Women-led Innovation in the National Action Plan for Women in Business

The Action Plan comprises four objectives designed to encourage and empower women in business or enterprise. These objectives include boosting the presence of women-led established companies expanding globally, elevating the number of women in middle and senior management and leadership positions in Irish companies, fostering an increase in women entrepreneurs, and promoting the growth of women-led start-ups with high growth potential (ibid.) The overarching goal of this plan is to enhance the representation of women in the business and enterprise sectors. By tailoring supports specifically for women and fostering collaboration with public and private sector organisations, the plan aims to bring about sustainable improvements that challenge existing gender inequalities for women in the realms of enterprise and business.

Climate Action Plan 2023

The Climate Action Plan provides a roadmap to take decisive measures aimed at reducing emissions by half by 2030 and achieving net-zero emissions no later than 2050 (Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, 2023). The overarching goal is to establish a low-carbon society that harnesses renewable natural resources, thereby enhancing energy security, job creation, and regional and rural development. The plan presents a framework, support, and guidance to assist communities and individuals in navigating this systemic change, transforming the way we work, travel, heat our homes, use energy, and manage our land.

Supports for Women-led Innovation in the Climate Action Plan 2023

The Climate Action Plan outlines the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities, with a particular emphasis on women and girls who are often affected due to pre-existing inequalities. To address this vulnerability, the plan strives to enhance engagement and participation among women, young people, and other marginalised groups throughout climate and environmental processes. A fundamental principle of the Climate Action Plan is the incorporation of gender-sensitive climate action. Collaborating with the Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), the plan strengthens the contribution and participation of women by facilitating climate discussions through training and capacity building. The objective is to amplify the participation and support for women, ultimately empowering their voices and advocating for a human rights-based approach to global climate action. Through these initiatives, the Climate Action Plan aims to promote innovative and intelligent solutions championed by women in the face of climate challenges.

Ireland's SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) National Implementation Plan 2022-2024



The National Implementation Plan endeavours to integrate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework into the workings of both national and local governments (Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, 2022). This integration seeks to establish a coherent system-wide approach and to foster enhanced dialogue and interconnected thinking among policymakers spanning various sectors. The objectives of this plan include embedding the SDG framework within Government Departments to ensure greater Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development, integrating the SDGs into the operations of Local Authorities to support their localization, fostering partnerships for the Goals, enhancing the incorporation of the Leave No One Behind principle into Ireland's Agenda 2030 implementation, and establishing reporting mechanisms.

Supports for Women-led Innovation in Ireland's SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) National Implementation Plan 2022-2024

Ireland's SDG National Implementation Plan strives to alleviate all forms of discrimination against women, highlighting women as influential agents of change. This involves actively involving women in decision-making processes to enable their impact on conflict and post-conflict situations. The overarching goal is to ensure that women's voices are not only heard but also valued. The plan specifically targets areas such as equal pay and the promotion of women in leadership positions. Moreover, it endeavours to foster the active participation of women in diverse fields, including sports, technology, and consultations. The Implementation Plan adopts an inclusive approach, seeking to empower all women, including those from the Traveller and Roma communities. To achieve this, targeted supports are provided to facilitate effective engagement with these groups, recognising the importance of inclusivity in driving sustainable development.

Harnessing Digital - The Digital Ireland Framework

The overarching goal of the Digital Ireland Framework is to propel digitalisation across policy, service delivery, and stakeholders throughout the country (Department of the Taoiseach, 2023). This initiative embraces an inclusive strategy, positioning Ireland as a digital leader at the forefront of European and global digital advancements. The strategy outlines specific targets and workstreams essential for accomplishing the four dimensions outlined within the framework. The dimensions encompass the digital transformation of businesses, enhancement of digital infrastructure, cultivation of skills, and the digitization of public services.

Supports for Women-led Innovation in Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework

An objective within the strategy is to foster an ecosystem conducive to female digital entrepreneurs, with a specific emphasis on increasing the presence of women-led start-ups and promoting greater representation of women in leadership positions within digital companies. Additionally, the strategy underscores the importance of ensuring accessibility for individuals of all working ages, thus creating a diverse workforce. This requires the establishment of mechanisms aimed at attracting women to the workplace.

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DESK- TOP ANALYSIS – NETHERLANDS

1. RURAL CONTEXT

Rurality in the Netherlands is often based in villages and rural areas close to cities. Only on a few islands, connected by a few ferries a day, can be considered as remote. Notwithstanding this, there are large cultural differences between urban and rural areas. For example, a bible belt of the Calvinist protestant religion stretching from the South-West to the North-East of the Netherlands presents distinctive cultural properties. One of the political parties that has many supporters in this region and is often the largest party in several rural municipalities is SGP, which is supported by 2% of the national electorate in total. This party was initially founded more than a century ago to oppose female voting rights. Even now, and after some legal cases they have lost, no female has ever been put on their voting list for the national parliament. There are a few females in municipal councils, who have justified their candidacy on the ground that there were



no male candidates and they had to step in as a duty to the good cause. Note that there are also other political parties representing another part of the Calvinist electorate that are more positive to female-led initiatives in the political domain; one of them, CU, has a female party leader and has a larger electorate.

Netherlands spatial planning has contributed to containing urban sprawl, which means that farmland has been protected and that suburbs have been built in a much more concentrated way. This has resulted in some villages (such as Zoetermeer or Jutphaas and Vreeswijk) being extended towards cities while others (such as Hazerwoude or Odijk) stayed relatively rural. However, within many rural communities there are people who are from an urban origin (locally nicked as 'import', suggesting that they are still outsiders) and there have been some tensions between newcomers and the original population. From the 1970s on, scholars have studied these differences in values using anthropological research methods, which involved moving into a village and studying what was happening between new-settlers and original residents, and a range of other methods.

At a neighbourhood level, CBS (Netherlands Statistics) measures urbanisation rates based on the average number of addresses within a one-kilometre radius. This points to a small underrepresentation of females (48.9% of the population is female in non-urbanised areas) in areas with the lowest level of urbanisation. In the four other levels of urbanisation, the female population accounts for 50.3% as an average or a slightly higher percentage of the population. To put it differently, in these non-urbanised areas live 15.4% of the female population of the Netherlands against 16.3% of the male population of the Netherlands. In the still, rural category above this, it is 15.8% for both genders.

2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Vrouwen van Nu, an association meaning Contemporary Women, has 22,000 members in 315 municipalities covering 11 of the 12 provinces in the country, except Limburg where ZijActief Limburg has a comparable role. It started in 1930 as 'Nederlandse Bond van Boerinnen en andere Plattelandsvrouwen' (Netherlands Union of Peasant Women and Other Rural Women) with support of the Worldwide Association of Rural Women that was founded a year before, in 1929. It is a non-confessional organisation and belonged to the general pillar (see below for the Dutch sociological term of 'pillarization'). Its mission statement is 'Women's power for a better world; using the power of women to strengthen the environment'. Their activities had such a success that in 1947 they moved beyond rural areas and founded a branch in the City of Groningen on urban women's demand (Bleker, 2022), while main emphasis was kept on rural areas. They organise a mix of activities for personal development of its members, including social activities, outdoor life and theme-focused discussions. They also publish a list of achievements on their website, including that their president was appointed as the first female professor at what is currently the University of Wageningen in 1952. In the beginning of the nineties, the association boasted on more than 90,000 members. The organisation is proud that former queen Beatrix (just like her mother queen Juliana in the past) is patroness of the association and celebrated its 90th anniversary together.



In the Christian pillar, in the 1930s, an **association for Christian Rural Women** has been founded. This organisation has merged with other Christian Women's organisations and renamed itself into Passage. The national association will be dissolved as of January 1st 2024. Several, local branches, however, will continue to exist, mostly in rural areas.

The Catholic rural women's organisation, **ZijActief**, has a national federation but is not covering the whole country in respect to local departments. Furthermore, ZijActief Limburg is organised apart from for other provinces/regions (and has more members active in 63 departments than the other regions of ZijActief in total).

The farmers organisation LTO, an acronym for **Land- en Tuinbouw Organisatie Nederland**, has a network called 'Vrouw en bedrijf' (Woman and farm) that aims to strengthen the social-economic position of female farm-managers and farm-partners to boost agricultural enterprise, to increase awareness among women in the farming sector, to promote female leadership and to exchange knowledge and experience. They have addressed the issue of the very low number of female farm managers and their weak legal position regarding farm-ownership. The chair of this network in LTO Noord is (according to her LinkedIn page) involved as Co-leader in a Grass Ceiling living lab, a position that may be comparable to the FLIARA ambassadors in WP4. Not only in the Northern part of the Netherlands, but also in Limburg there is a network of farm women (LLTB Netwerk Agrarische Vrouwen) related to the provincial farmers union.

Vrouwen van Nu, ZijActief Limburg, ZijActief Nederland, and LTO Noord Vrouw en Bedrijf (and previously Passage) are all member of the Nederlandse Vrouwenraad (Netherlands Women's Council, established in 1898), the umbrella organisation of about 50 women organisations in the Netherlands, which also nominates the UN women representative for the Netherlands delegation at the UN General Assembly.

Rural areas have developed more traditionally than urban areas. During the 20th Century, Netherlands society has been organised into pillars (Bosch, 2010): Protestant pillar, Catholic pillar, Socialist pillar, a general or liberal pillar of people who did not feel to belong to the other pillars, etc. Depillarization developed from the 1970s and 1980s (Bosch, 2010) but rural areas seems to lag behind in this development. In 1917, pillarization regarding to education was grounded in the Constitution as a deal to achieve general election rights. People's social interaction developed within these pillars. Each pillar had separate schools, broadcasting companies, newspapers, magazines, sports clubs (in which protestants are active in Saturday competitions and others in Sunday competitions) and other organisations including political parties. So, traditionally there was no network covering all farmers, but a different network for protestant farmers or catholic farmers has existed, and a general organisation outside the confessional pillars. Farm workers may have been organised by communists (in Groningen) or socialist organisations next to confessional organisations, such as trade unions. According to each pillar, many females came together as a subgroup of the pillar. Those female organisations were, in character, highly institutionalised bubbles. Elites in these pillars promoted vertical connections within these pillars over horizontal connections as between rural women or female farmers of different backgrounds; only the elites would organise connections between pillars, for example, in coalition governments. Most of the older organisations have their origins in one of these pillars and sometimes have been merged within the pillar (so with a non-rural organisation) and not with another rural



organisation from another pillar. Many networks and associations have been built-up from the ground independently, which may fit the organisation of an individual protestant church as some women organisations in rural communities have grown in relation to local churches. In a study published in 1975, Emma Brunt-De Wit (against the background of upcoming feminist action in the cities) studied four of these organisations in a village of the bible belt close to urban areas and found remarkable differences from the urban context, and also from this perspective of pillarization. Many of these organisations' main power turned out to lie in its organisation of rural women at a local level, not in national discourses.

3. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL ECONOMY

Key farm data in the Netherlands

	2010		2020	
	All farmers	Female farmers	All farmers	Female farmers
Number of farms	72,320	4,420 (6.1%)	52,640	2,930 (5.6%)
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	1,872,350	55,850 (3.0%)	1,817,900	60,900 (3.4%)
Average size of farms (ha)	25.89	12.64	34.53	20.78
Standard output (€ million)	18,930	467 (2.5%)	24,874	670 (2.7%)
Average standard output per farm	€ 261,753	€ 105,730	€ 472,527	€ 228,689
Average standard output per hectare UUA (€/ha)	€ 10,110	€ 8,367	€ 13,683	€ 11,003

Source: EUROSTAT, Farm indicators by age and sex of the manager, economic size of the farm, utilised agricultural area and NUTS2 region [ef_m_farmang]

Agricultural holdings by the economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro)

	2010			2020		
	All farmers	Female farmers		All farmers	Female farmers	
Less than 14,999 euros	15,210	1,960	12.9 %	6,390	880	13.8%
From 15.000 to 49,000 euros	11,250	1,070	9.5%	7,720	690	8.9%
From 50,000 to 249,000 euros	23,890	940	3.9%	12,710	730	5.7%
From 250,000 to 499,000 euros	13,370	280	2.1%	12,150	310	2.6%
500,000 euros and over	8,600	170	2.0%	13,680	320	2.3%

Source: EUROSTAT, Farm indicators by age and sex of the manager, economic size of the farm, utilised agricultural area and NUTS2 region [ef_m_farmang]



Number of farm managers by age class 2010-2020

	2010		2020		2010(%)		2020(%)		2010-2020(%)	
	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total
Younger than 35	230	2,610	180	2,430	8.8%	100%	7.4%	100%	-21.7%	-6.9%
Younger than 40	n.a.	n.a.	370	4,830	n.a.	n.a.	7.7%	100%	n.a.	n.a.
34-44 years	830	14,850	480	6,160	5.6%	100%	7.8%	100%	-42.2%	-58.5%
41-65 years	n.a.	n.a.	1,940	36,540	n.a.	n.a.	5.3%	100%	n.a.	n.a.
45-65 years	2,280	41,650	1,650	32,780	5.5%	100%	5.0%	100%	-27.6%	-21.3%
Older than 65	1,080	13,220	630	11,270	8.2%	100%	5.6%	100%	-41.7%	-14.8%
Total	4420	72320	2930	52640	6.1%	100%	5.6%	100%	-33.7%	-27.2%

Source: EUROSTAT, Farm indicators by age and sex of the manager, economic size of the farm, utilised agricultural area and NUTS2 region [ef_m_farmang]

Farm Labour Force in persons 2010-2020

Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
54699	36.9%	148045	38442	34.11%	112710
Non-family labour force, in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
20562	32.3%	63706	17899	28.73%	62305

Source: CBS Landbouw; arbeidskrachten naar regio

Farm Labour Force in Annual Working Units 2010-2020

Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons	
2010	2020

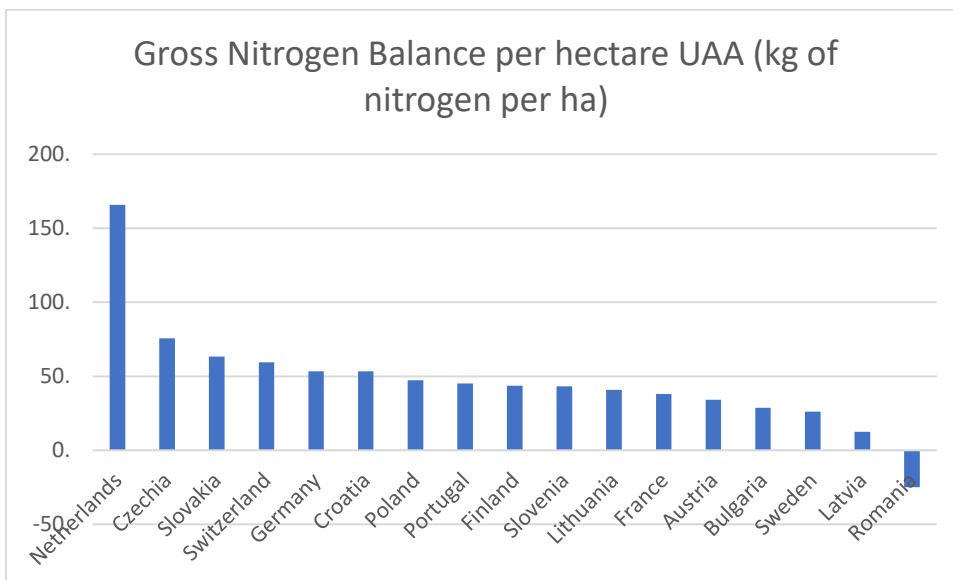


Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
26703	27.9%	95549	20895	26.8%	78071
Non-family labour force, in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
12312	26.8%	45858	11542	25.0%	46183

Source: CBS Landbouw; arbeidskrachten naar regio

Additional Information

Next to gender issues, there are other issues in agriculture.



Source Eurostat, Gross nutrient balance, aei_pr_gnb

The figures show that the share of farms managed by females is very low (5.6% of all farms) and that this share is declining. Furthermore, the share of farmland managed by females is even lower and the same holds for production measured in standard output. As direct payments in the common agricultural policy are based on the area managed by a farm, this means that female farmers get a substantially lower contribution from EU direct payments, which is the main support the EU provides for farmers. The female labour force in farming is declining, both in absolute terms and relative to the total labour force. The overall picture is of a traditional gender imbalance in farming in the Netherlands.

As unemployment levels in the Netherlands are low, it may be possible to develop a hypothesis that females moved away from the farming sector to other labour sectors that provide more opportunities to have a leading role. The main pathway of farms is towards larger farms and producing raw products for the world market. This tendency of



modernisation marginalised the traditional role of females in farms, which was of adding value to raw products to serve local markets, such as producing cheese on a dairy farm. These roles have been overtaken by industry. The yearly report that the Netherlands is again second on the list of exporters of agricultural products shows that farming is not changing. The minister (Ministerie LNV, 2023) writes in a letter to parliament that this is a matter of pride. It is currently however debated whether this orientation to the world market should not be a matter of pride but of shame, based on the insight that it shows that necessary changes in the farming sector in the Netherlands be more part of localised networks of food production and consumption are lacking. In contrast to in France, where major farmers' organisations are involved in local food planning, this is not the case in the Netherlands where food planning is the domain for alternative 'minority farmers' (Liu et al, 2023, page 14). The Eurostat figures on gross nitrogen balance are alarming and affect biodiversity negatively suggesting that a restructuring of the farming sector is needed. Such a process of restructuring may provide a chance for a different type of farmers and so can be also a chance for female-led initiatives.

Rural Business

EUROSTAT has a range of statistics at the country level based on the degree of urbanisation categories (1) cities, (2) towns and suburbs and (3) rural areas of Local Administrative Units (LAU2). In the Netherlands, these LAU2 are municipalities. These figures (Eurostat dataset: Self-employment by sex, age, country of birth and degree of urbanisation: lfst_r_e2sgacu) show that 50% of self-employed people in rural areas are females in the Netherlands. In cities and towns and suburbs more males than females are self-employed. These figures enable us to analyse the share of self-employment in the population. Females have more often short tenured jobs of less than one year and males more often have jobs of 60 months or longer. In the Netherlands, this pattern is almost the same by degree of urbanisation. For the EU as a whole, the picture of more females than males in jobs with less than a year cannot be found, and there is more difference in long-term tenure between rural areas (fewer females) and cities (relatively more females, although still less than males). (Employment by sex, age, job tenure and degree of urbanisation: lfst_r_egadu, Eurostat)

4. SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

There are several issues in national and regional debate.

- The nitrogen crisis as indicated above. During the election time several political parties promoted a 50% decline in farm animals in the Netherlands. This is highly debated as other parties, prefer a more business-as-usual approach in the farming sector by which change will happen at a much slower speed. Relevant also is that farmers opposition is partly supported by companies that sell feed (nitrogen) to farmers and who will certainly have a negative business outlook as the stock of cattle will be reduced seriously (Van der Ploeg, 2020). As farmers are currently predominantly male, it is about defending current gender balance. There are a couple of organisations of (potential) new entrants (like



Toekomstboeren working from agroecological principles) into farming. These have quite a different gender balance than traditional farmers.

- The lack of perspective for young farmers and the lack of successors for old ones. Here most commenters aim to overcome standard gender stereotypes, but this is not always successful. One of the issues is the high price of land.
- The cultural debate taking place, arguing that rural and regional cultures have been ignored and urban cultures are ruling. In this problematization, more reactionary gender stereotypes are proposed as being 'rural' that should be defended from the 'urban' domination.
- The Netherlands as a very densely populated country, having to make strategic decisions with respect to allocating various functions to locations.
- The Netherlands has a very condensed agriculture production with by far the most amount of animals packed in large (mega) stables. This causes problems when livestock becomes infected, causing the (preventive) death and resulting in social and health issues.
- The way how grand challenges can be accommodated within the limited supply of land. Climate change in the Netherlands is leading to periods of (very) limited rainfall and other moments of heavy rainfall with floods as a result. Therefore, the water system of the Netherlands needs to be made climate adaptive and robust in different areas with different approaches: Climate changes can be addressed by higher water levels in the peat polders of the provinces of Noord-Holland, Zuid-Holland, Utrecht, Fryslan, Groningen and Overijssel with more water retention to stop the diminishing of the peat and sinking of the land. While on the sandy grounds in the eastern and southern part of the Netherlands (higher grounds), brooks need to change to store more water for periods of less rain (water retention). Often these debates are very technical and forget the social dimension, including the gender dimension.
- After World War 2, there was a growing focus on improving intensive agriculture, because of the adagio 'No more hunger'. This has led to a gradual but major loss of biodiversity, and soil deprivation in the rural areas. For fertile soils, the landscape needs to become more diverse with hedges, diverse and local trees, shrubs and flowers improving biodiversity (both flora and fauna), which demands room in the landscape, which cannot be used for food production and cannot always be compensated with subsidies (interviews).
- In rural areas there is a conflict on the balance between nature and food production, like the discussion between the protected species (wolf) and cattle (sheep), and the perceived impact this has on rural lives.
- Use of rural areas to site new housing. In politics, it has been considered to expand each existing village by an 'extra street' to build more houses, tackling housing shortage and to build houses for the younger generation, who want to live in the area which they were born, but have not enough money for these larger and more expensive homes.
- A political debate (both in policy implementation and as part of the election campaign) on the abolishment of private contributions to childcare and make this 'free'. Currently, private companies offer childcare services, being likely to be tempted to top-up their services on those willing to pay more (and if the government pays all basic services, there will be more room in the household



budget to do so). Other parties stand for making childcare public, which probably will face some implementation challenges. Note that there are also farms that offer childcare and daycare for handicapped persons as an auxiliary service and a source of income.

5. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

There are many regulations and grants that support innovations in rural areas/agriculture in general (without reference to gender). There are no publicly funded regulations solely addressing females, but all of these are open for females to use. However, as indicated, there is no level playing field. Based on path dependency (and practices that support the reproduction of these paths to the future) female participation is very low.

There is an emancipation report that has been issued by the minister responsible for emancipation at the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (Ministerie OCW, 2022). In this report, there is a specific emphasis on actions to promote women in entrepreneurship and technical jobs (and ICT). The focus of these actions is not on rural areas, and farming is not part of the technological sectors mentioned here. So, gender action in rural areas and farming seems not to be on the radar of the responsible minister. A motion to oblige a gender test for new policies has not received a majority in parliament on 08/12/2022 (Handelingen, 2023).

The Ministry of Agriculture (Nature, and Fishery) has given increasing attention to gender issues. Bock et al. (2000) have, for example, executed an emancipation impact assessment of a specific grant scheme. They found that women made less use of these grants, which they explained from the structural inferior position of women, and they suggested some improvements in the grant schemes. Furthermore, Bock (2004), in a later study, suggests that the current support system for entrepreneurs does not adapt to female styles and types of entrepreneurship and needs restructuring to positively influence female entrepreneurship. Many females take rather 'small' steps to be recognized as 'real' entrepreneur, while the support systems consider that being an entrepreneur requires taking gigantic risks. The programmes provide a safety net that is needed to support risk-taking. In a study on side activities and rural female entrepreneurship, Markantoni and van Hoven (2012) show that 'our main finding is that side activities are an important part of women's everyday life, needs, identity and lifestyle. Even though side activities often entail a sacrifice of personal and family time, women experience such activities as a personal achievement and empowerment' (page 514). In short, framing those activities as "side" ones does not do justice to the degree of significance women give to them. The situation sketched by Brunt-De Wit in 1975 that the practice of female action is not addressed by policy discussions in rural areas (female action is often urban and rural policies lack a gender component) seems uninterrupted for the last 50 years.

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DESK TOP ANALYSIS - ITALY

1. RURAL CONTEXT

We have considered statistical data (Eurostat and ISTAT - National Statistical Institute) to analyse a broad range of issues impacting rural areas, towns and suburbs, and cities in Italy. We have considered the European classification of municipalities based on the degree of urbanisation.

Population, area and density

Since 2011, the European classification of municipalities based on the degree of urbanization distinguishes three levels: 1) Cities or Densely populated areas; 2) Towns and suburbs (intermediate density areas); 3) Rural areas (thinly populated areas).

In Italy, 63.8 percent of the total municipalities are classified as rural areas; 17.1 percent of the population resides in these areas. Small towns and suburbs constitute 33 percent of the municipalities, with 47.7 percent of the population residing there. 35.3 percent of the population lives in cities, which make 3.2 percent of the municipalities of the county (Table 1).

60.8 percent of the territory of Italy is classified as rural. The "most rural" regions (with over 80 percent of the area classified as rural) are Valle d'Aosta, the Autonomous Province of Bolzano, Molise, and the Autonomous Province of Trento. Other regions with high percentages of rural territory (higher than the country's average) are Abruzzo, Piedmont, Basilicata, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Sardinia, Calabria, Tuscany, Liguria, Campania, and Marche. Other regions have a high percentage (higher than the Italian average of 33.0 percent) of small towns and suburbs; these regions are Apulia, Sicily, Veneto, Lombardy, Lazio, and Umbria. Regions with a relatively large portion of their territory occupied by urban areas (above the Italian average of 6.2 percent) are, in order, Apulia, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, Umbria, Campania, Sicily, Liguria, and Tuscany.

Table 1 – Municipalities, territorial area, resident population, and density by degree of urbanization of municipalities and region for the year 2020 (percentage values calculated on the respective total).

Regions	Degree of urbanisation												
	Rural areas (thinly populated areas)			Towns and suburbs (intermediate density areas)				Cities (densely populated areas)					
	municipalities (%)	Area (%)	Population (%)	Density (%)	municipalities (%)	Area (%)	Population (%)	Density (%)	municipalities (%)	Area (%)	Population (%)	Density (%)	



					(%)				(%)			
Piemonte	80	76,6	25	55	19,6	21	48,9	39	0,3	2,3	26,1	1.899
Valle d'Aosta	85,1	93,1	49	20	14,9	6,9	51	28	--	--	--	--
Liguria	64,1	66,9	10,1	42	34,6	26,6	43	45	1,3	6,6	47	1.987
Lombardia	42,5	54,2	10,3	79	50,6	39,7	46,7	49	6,9	6,1	43	2.930
Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol	83,3	87,7	44,8	40	16	10,8	34,1	25	0,7	1,5	21,2	1.086
Bolzano/Bozen	86,2	91,9	48,9	38	12,9	7,4	30,9	30	0,9	0,7	20,2	2.061
Trento	81,3	82,7	40,7	43	18,1	14,8	37,2	22	0,6	2,5	22,1	763
Veneto	49	49	17,1	92	50,1	46,4	64	36	0,9	4,6	18,9	1.085
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	70,2	73,5	26,4	54	28,4	24,2	44,3	27	1,4	2,3	29,3	1.945
Emilia-Romagna	60,4	57,8	19,8	68	36,3	30,9	41,4	26	3,4	11,3	38,8	683
Toscana	61,2	67,4	19,6	46	36,3	26,3	51,9	31	2,4	6,3	28,5	725
Umbria	80,4	56,1	27,1	49	17,4	36,1	41,3	11	2,2	7,8	31,6	413
Marche	72,2	64,9	24,6	61	26,9	32,1	62,4	31	0,9	3	13	703
Lazio	72	52,6	10,3	65	27,2	38,1	37,9	33	0,8	9,3	51,8	1.842
Abruzzo	84,9	77,6	31,9	49	14,4	17,8	53,4	35	0,7	4,7	14,7	373



Molise	94, 1	89, 3	54	40	5,1	9,5	29,8	20 9	0, 7	1,3	16, 1	853
Campania	54, 9	66, 5	12,2	77	31, 1	25, 8	31,8	51 2	14	7,7	55, 9	3.0 14
Puglia	24, 5	14, 3	4,4	61	70, 4	68, 1	60,9	18 0	5, 1	17, 6	34, 7	397
Basilicata	87	74, 2	48,5	36	11, 5	20, 2	28,4	77	1, 5	5,6	23, 1	223
Calabria	78, 7	72	35,5	61	20, 5	25, 5	47,2	22 9	0, 7	2,6	17, 3	835
Sicilia	51, 5	36, 9	10	51	46, 2	56	57,1	19 1	2, 3	7,1	32, 9	868
Sardegna	84, 9	72, 2	33,2	30	14, 6	25, 2	49,7	13 1	0, 5	2,6	17, 1	433
North-West	60	67, 4	14,5	59	36, 3	28, 5	47	45 2	3, 7	4,2	38, 5	2.5 39
North-East	62	63, 8	21,7	63	36, 5	30, 2	50,5	31 0	1, 5	6	27, 8	856
Central Italy	69, 8	60, 9	16,3	54	28, 8	32, 2	45,6	28 7	1, 4	6,9	38, 1	1.1 22
South	66, 4	57, 9	17,4	55	28, 1	34	44,2	24 0	5, 5	8,1	38, 4	871
Islands	67, 9	53, 9	15,8	38	30, 6	41, 1	55,3	17 3	1, 4	4,9	29	757
ITALY	63, 8	60, 8	17,1	55	33	33	47,7	28 3	3, 2	6,2	35, 3	1.1 22

Source: EUROSTAT

Educational attainment

Educational attainment can be measured by looking at the highest level of education (based on the ISCED classification) that an individual has successfully completed. People with higher levels of education tend to have higher levels of income and are more satisfied with their life.

Table 2 provides information on the share of the country population aged 30-34 years who has successfully completed a tertiary education programme. This age group has



been used as most students complete their tertiary education in their twenties (even if they follow a masters or postgraduate course). This indicator forms part of a scoreboard used to monitor the European pillar of social rights and is an ET 2020 benchmark indicator. The policy goal is to increase tertiary educational attainment across the EU to at least by 40 percent by 2020.

In 2022, more than a quarter of the Italian population aged 30-34 years had a tertiary education. However, a detailed territorial analysis reveals considerable disparities between urban and rural areas. The share of city-dwellers aged 30-34 years with a tertiary education is 34,9 percent. By contrast, the share of people living in suburbs or rural areas with tertiary education is respectively 23.2 and 22.4 percent. The female population has a much higher level of education than the male population: particularly in towns/suburbs and rural areas the percentage of females with tertiary education is almost double.

Table 2 - Tertiary educational attainment of people aged 30-34 years by gender and degree of urbanisation (%) – year 2022.

	Total	Males	Females
Total	27,4	21	33,8
Cities	34,9	28,7	41
Towns +suburbs	23,2	16,9	29,6
Rural areas	22,4	15,8	29,4

Source: EUROSTAT

Between 2013 and 2022, the percentage of people with tertiary education has grown by about 5 percent in all types of territories, except for those living in the suburbs.

Table 3 - Tertiary educational attainment of people aged 30-34 years by degree of urbanisation (%)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total	22,5	23,9	25,3	26,2	26,9	27,8	27,6	27,8	26,8	27,4
Cities	29,4	30,4	31,7	31,5	33	35,1	36,5	35,8	34	34,9
Towns + suburbs	20,7	22,2	23	24,8	25,2	25,2	24,2	24,9	22,8	23,2



Rural areas	16,9	18,3	20,8	20,9	21,2	22,2	21,5	21,5	21,9	22,4
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Source: EUROSTAT

The skills, energy and fresh perspectives and ideas of young people are an essential resource for the development of a country. Therefore, the phenomenon of young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET), represents a significant waste of potential, besides being a condition often experienced with discomfort also.

In 2022, a fifth of Italians aged 30-34 are NEET (Table 4). The NEET rate is significantly higher among the female population especially in towns/suburbs and in rural areas, although it is by far the most educated (as seen in Table 2).

Table 4 - Young people neither in employment nor in education and training by sex, age and degree of urbanisation, (NEET rates), year 2022 (% share of population aged 15-34 years)

	Total	Males	Females
Total	20,8	17,1	24,7
Cities	22,1	19,0	25,3
Towns and suburbs	20,1	15,9	24,5
Rural areas	20,1	16,6	23,9

Source: EUROSTAT

Health status

Self-perceived health refers to people's own assessment of their health, using a five-point scale ranging from very good to very bad. It covers different dimensions of health: physical, social and emotional health as well as biomedical signs and symptoms.

In 2022, more than two thirds of all Italian adults perceived their own health as good or very good. This share was higher among city-dwellers (74,4%) than it was among people living in suburbs (72%) or rural areas (72,5%) (Table 5). The share of women who perceiving their own health as good or very good is lower than the share of men for all territorial typology.

Table 5 - People who perceive their own health as good or very good, 2022 - Italy



(%, share of population aged ≥ 16 years, by degree of urbanisation)

	Total	Males	Females
Total	72,9	75,3	70,7
Cities	74,4	76,5	72,4
Towns + suburbs	72,0	74,7	69,6
Rural areas	72,5	74,8	70,3

Source: EUROSTAT

In Italy, the overall share of the adult population with unmet needs for medical examination was less than 2 percent on average, slightly higher among city-dwellers and women. There are different reasons why an individual may report that they have an unmet need for a medical examination. The following are of interest with regard to illustrating equity in access to health care services:

- cost, whereby medical examinations are considered too expensive;
- distance, if patients consider it too far to travel to a clinic/hospital for an examination or there are no means of transportation available;
- time, when patients are dissuaded from having a particular type of examination because of a lengthy waiting list.

Table 6 - People with unmet needs for medical examination, 2022 - Italy

(%, share of population aged ≥ 16 years, by degree of urbanisation)

	Total	Males	Females
Total	1,8	1,4	2,1
Cities	2	1,8	2,1
Towns and suburbs	1,7	1,3	2,1
Rural areas	1,6	1,2	2,1

Source: EUROSTAT

Labour Market

Employment

The employment rate is the ratio of employed persons (of a given age) relative to the total population (of the same age). Within this section, data are presented for the working-age population, defined here as people aged 20-64 years. The choice of this age range reflects the growing proportion of young people who are still studying in their



teens (and beyond), potentially restricting their participation in the labour market, while at the other end of the age spectrum the vast majority of people in the EU have retired by the time they reach the age of 65.

Table 7 – Employment rate, 2022 - Italy

(%, share of people aged 20-64 years, by degree of urbanisation)

	Total	Males	Females
Total	64,8	74,7	55,0
Cities	64,9	73,5	56,6
Towns + suburbs	64,8	75,5	54,1
Rural areas	64,7	74,9	54,1

Source: EUROSTAT

The Italy employment rate was 64,8 percent in 2022 (Table 7). There are not significant disparities among the different territorial typologies. However, what is striking is the gender gap in relation to employment: female employment rate is about 20 points percent lower than male employment across all territorial typologies.

Unemployment

Unemployment can have a bearing not just on the macroeconomic performance of a country (lowering productive capacity) but also on the well-being of individuals. The personal and social costs of unemployment are varied and include a higher risk of poverty and social exclusion, debt or homelessness, while the stigma of being unemployed may have a potentially detrimental impact on (mental) health.

In 2022, the unemployment rate among people aged 15-74 was 8,1 percent. The unemployment rate is higher among people who live in cities and women across all types of territorial typologies, but mostly in towns/suburbs and rural areas (Table 8).

Table 8 - Unemployment rate, 2022 - Italy

(%, share of labour force aged 15-74 years, by degree of urbanisation)

	Total	Males	Females
Total	8,1	7,1	9,4
Cities	9,6	8,9	10,4



Towns + suburbs	7,4	6,3	8,9
Rural areas	6,9	5,9	8,4

Source: EUROSTAT

One of the most pressing concerns in the area of social policymaking is youth unemployment. The performance of youth labour markets is closely linked to education and training systems and reflects, at least to some degree, a mismatch between the skills obtained by young people and the skills that are required by employers (to fill job vacancies).

In 2022, the youth unemployment rate (people aged 15 to 24) in Italy was almost a quarter. (Table 9).

The unemployment rate was particularly higher among city-dwellers and women.

Table 9 - Youth unemployment, 2022 - Italy

(%, share of labour force aged 15-24 years, by degree of urbanisation)

	Total	Males	Females
Total	23,7	22,3	25,8
Cities	30,7	29,3	32,6
Towns + suburbs	20,8	19,4	22,9
Rural areas	19,1	18,3	20,4

Source: EUROSTAT

Living conditions and welfare

Income

Median equivalised income is a measure of (net) income that takes account of differences in household size and composition.

This is done by calculating the number of 'equivalent adults' in each household, based on the 'modified OECD scale' that assigns a weight to each household member. Total household income, derived as the sum of the income received by every member of the household and by the household as a whole is divided by the equivalised household size to determine the equivalised income attributed to each household member.



The use of the median (in contrast to the arithmetic mean) avoids potential distortions that may be caused by the existence of extreme values, such as a few extremely rich individuals/households.

In 2018, median equivalised net income among Italian city-dwellers was 19.218 EUR per inhabitant, lower for people living in suburbs (18.593 EUR) and rural areas (17.472 EUR). In the last decade, the median income has increased in all territorial typologies (Table 10).

Table 10 - Median equivalised net income - Italy

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cities	16.3 30	16.53 7	16.62 6	17.11 5	17.23 3	17.49 1	17.51 2	18.70 0	18.24 7	19.21 8
Towns and suburbs	15.9 05	15.85 0	15.73 9	16.28 9	16.61 2	16.94 3	17.38 2	18.21 3	17.50 5	18.59 3
Rural areas	13.8 68	13.59 6	15.04 8	15.42 4	15.64 8	15.94 4	16.15 0	16.49 5	16.68 1	17.47 2

Source: EUROSTAT

Housing

Housing costs comprise rental payments, mortgage interest payments, utility costs (such as water or energy charges), the cost of repairs and other local taxes/charges. Together these may account for a considerable proportion of a household's disposable income. Indeed, rising housing costs are often cited as a key factor impacting on the share of the population affected by monetary poverty. The housing cost overburden rate is defined as the percentage of the population living in a household where total housing costs represent more than 40% of disposable income (both measures are 'net' of housing allowances/benefits). City-dwellers tend to spend a greater share of their disposable income on housing than people living in suburbs or rural area (Table 11).

Some sections of the population are particularly at risk of poverty: unemployed people, migrants, single people, people in rented accommodation, and those living in particularly large (and relatively expensive) cities. It is interesting to notice that elderly homeowners who have paid off their mortgage might be considered to be in a fortunate situation. However, their income is often low and they are consequently unable to pay for the costs of any necessary repairs or for heating during the winter months. In a similar vein, although social housing and housing benefits constitute a buffer against the effects of poverty, they do not preclude people from living in poverty or in substandard buildings.

Table 11 - Housing cost overburden rate by degree of urbanization - Italy

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
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Cities	11,8	10,5	11,4	12,9	11,7	11,7	11,2	8,9	9,2	8,5
Towns and suburbs	6,7	6,7	7,7	8,3	6,8	7,2	7,5	6	5,9	6
Rural areas	6,4	7,8	6	7	5,6	5	6,9	6,8	6,4	4,7

Source: EUROSTAT

Material and social deprivation rate

The material and social deprivation rate shows the share of the population that cannot afford (rather than does not want or does not need) at least 5 out of the following 13 items: unexpected expenses; one week annual holiday away from home; to pay on time (mortgage/house loan, rent, utility bills and/or hire purchase instalments); a meal with meat, chicken or fish or vegetarian equivalent every second day; to keep their home adequately warm; a car/van for personal use; to replace worn-out furniture; to replace worn-out clothes with some new ones; to have two pairs of properly fitting shoes; to spend a small amount of money each week on themselves (pocket money); to have regular leisure activities; to get together with friends/family for a drink/meal at least once a month; to have an internet connection.

Many of these items are considered by most people to be desirable or even necessary in order to have an adequate quality of life.

In 2022, in Italy, less than one of the population was impacted by social and material deprivation. The deprivation rate is higher among people living in cities (10,1%) than in rural areas (7,9%). In the last decade, it has experienced a significant decrease, dropping from 23.2 percent in 2014 to 9 percent in 2022. The same trend has been observed across the different territorial typologies (Table 12).

Table 12 - Material and social deprivation rate by degree of urbanization, 2022 - Italy

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total	23,2	22	17,5	12,7	12,7	11,9	11	11,3	9
Cities	23,4	22,1	19,5	15,6	15,7	14	13,5	13,1	10,1
Towns and suburbs	23,4	23,5	16,4	11,4	11	10,6	9,7	10,5	8,6
Rural areas	21,8	18	16,4	10,9	11,2	11,2	9,8	9,8	7,9

Source: EUROSTAT

People at risk of poverty



The risk of poverty or social exclusion is a broader concept than just the risk of poverty. It does not depend exclusively on a household's level of income, as it may also reflect deprivation or joblessness. The number/share of people at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion combines three separate criteria covering people who are in at least one of the following situations:

- at-risk-of-poverty — people with a median equivalised disposable income (after social transfers) below the at-risk-of-poverty threshold;
- suffering from severe material deprivation — people unable to afford at least four out of nine material items that are considered by most to be desirable (or even necessary) for having an adequate quality of life;
- living in a household with very low work intensity — where working-age adults worked no more than 20 % of their total potential during the previous 12 months.

In 2022, about a quarter of the Italian population was at risk or social exclusion (Table 13). Over the last decade, the situation has improved but only marginally.

Table 13 - Persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion by degree of urbanization, 2022 - Italy

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Cities	28,1	28,1	27,3	27,2	26,9	26,8	25,5	24,8
Towns and suburbs	29,3	26,9	24,9	24,7	22,9	22,4	25,0	23,7
Rural areas	26,8	29,0	25,9	25,2	24,6	27,4	25,0	25,2

Source: EUROSTAT

Digital society

Internet users

An internet user is defined as a person (aged 16-74 years) making use of the internet in whatever way: whether at home, at work, or anywhere else; whether for private or professional purposes; regardless of the device (desktop computer, laptop, netbook or tablet, smartphone, games console or e-book reader) or type of connection being used. With a growing share of day-to-day tasks being carried out online, the ability to use modern technologies becomes increasingly important to ensure that everyone can participate in the digital society. Although the internet is an almost constant part of our lives, some people are excluded to a greater or lesser extent, resulting in the so-called digital divide. Particularly people belonging to older generations, may not have the necessary e-skills to take full advantage of various services that are provided via the internet. Moreover, people living in remote regions may be excluded as market forces and a lack of public infrastructure investment lead to access and/or performance issues when trying to use the internet. This may result in socially undesirable outcomes. In 2022, 83,7 percent of individuals living in cities reported having used internet daily (Table 14). The percentage is slightly higher in cities and in towns/suburbs than in rural areas.



Table 14 - Daily internet users, 2022

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Individuals living in cities	59,6	62,5	66,3	69,1	71,8	74,0	76,3	78,1	81,9	83,5
Individuals living in towns + suburbs	53,7	57,8	61,7	65,5	67,1	70,3	71,3	75,1	78,4	82,4
Individuals living in rural areas	48,9	53,2	57,4	60,8	63,2	70,1	69,3	71,6	74,7	77,4

Source: EUROSTAT

Broadband and connectivity

Information and communication technology (ICT) affect people's everyday lives in many ways, both at work and at home — for example, when communicating, keeping abreast of the news, being entertained, interacting with public authorities, paying bills or shopping online. To be able to benefit from technological innovations, businesses and individuals depend, at least to some extent, on having fast and reliable internet access (whether fixed or mobile). Therefore, the relatively high use of the internet away from home or work in capital regions may reflect, among other factors, high-quality infrastructure providing fast connectivity.

In 2021, approximately 90 percent of households in Italy have a broadband connection in the cities, while in rural areas the percentage is around 85 percent (Table 15). Over the last decade, households equipped with broadband connections have steadily increased in all areas.

Table 15 - Household internet connection type: broadband (%)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Households located in cities	71,1	72,5	76,7	79,1	82,9	85,2	86,6	88,3	90,4
Households located in towns and suburbs	67,3	72,0	73,9	77,5	78,7	81,6	82,5	86,7	88,5
Households located in rural areas	64,2	67,6	71,5	72,3	75,3	81,5	80,7	83,7	84,7

Source: EUROSTAT



Tourism

Tourism has the potential to play a significant role in the economic aspirations of many European Union (EU) regions and can be of particular importance in remote/peripheral regions, such as the EU's coastal, mountainous or outermost regions. Infrastructure created for tourism purposes contributes to local and regional development, while jobs that are created or maintained can help counteracting industrial or rural decline.

Tourism, in a statistical context, refers to the activity of visitors taking a trip to a destination outside their usual environment, for less than a year. It is important to note that this definition is wider than the common everyday definition, insofar as it encompasses not only private leisure trips but also visits to family and friends, as well as business trips.

In 2021, there were 289 million of nights spent in tourist accommodation across Italy. This figure refers to the total number of nights spent by all tourists and reflects both the length of stay and the number of tourists. It is considered a key indicator for analysing the tourism sector, even if it does not cover stays at non-rented accommodation nor same-day visits. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic at the beginning of 2020 has profoundly changed tourism throughout the world, including in Italy, above all because of travel restrictions. The number of nights spent in hotels between 2019 and 2020 halved from 436 to 208 million of nights. The number of nights spent in hotels has decreased significantly especially in cities (-66%).

In 2021, the total number of nights spent in Italian tourist accommodation was evenly distributed: the highest share was recorded in towns and suburbs (47,3%), while fewer nights were spent in rural areas (31,1%) and cities (21,6%). In 2019, before the pandemic, the share was a bit different: towns and suburbs (42,2%), cities (29,4%) and rural areas (28,3%).

Table 16 - Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments by degree of urbanisation

(million nights spent, by degree of urbanisation)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	376.78	377.77	392.87	402.96	420.62	428.84	436.73	208.44	289.17
	5.615	0.806	4.070	2.113	9.155	4.937	9.271	7.085	8.142
Cities	101.62	103.37	109.01	111.09	118.42	123.13	128.43	42.431	62.363
	6.964	6.417	0.826	1.121	7.378	3.312	1.741	.113	.629
Towns and suburbs	141.53	141.09	145.92	148.96	183.66	185.25	184.50	92.902	136.90
	9.722	6.962	0.550	1.102	1.424	4.405	5.775	.518	8.340
Rural areas	133.61	133.29	137.94	142.90	118.54	120.45	123.80	73.113	89.906
	8.929	7.427	2.694	9.890	0.353	7.220	1.755	.454	.173

Source: EUROSTAT



Table 17 - Nights spent at tourist accommodation establishments by degree of urbanisation (%)

(million nights spent, by degree of urbanisation)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Cities	26,97	27,36	27,75	27,57	28,15	28,71	29,41	20,36	21,57
Towns + suburbs	37,57	37,35	37,14	36,97	43,66	43,20	42,25	44,57	47,34
Rural areas	35,46	35,29	35,11	35,46	28,18	28,09	28,35	35,08	31,09

Source: Our elaboration on EUROSTAT data

The amount of tourist accommodation is higher in towns and suburbs than in rural areas and cities (Table18).

Table 18 – Tourism accommodation and bed place by degree of urbanisation

	Establishments		Bed places	
	Number	%	Number	%
Cities	62.871	28,0	1.024.891	19,7
Towns and suburbs	87.023	38,7	2.378.404	45,7
Rural areas	74.750	33,3	1.796.939	34,6
Total	224.644	100,0	5.200.234	100,0

Source: Eurostat

Typology of Rural: rural villages, remote rural areas and rural areas close to a city

In order to distinguish the characteristics of rural regions typified by rural villages, remote rural areas and rural areas close to a city, we referred to the two different lines of



classification of Italian rural areas that derive from two different public policies. One is related to the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the other to the National Strategy for Inner Areas (SNAI).

For what concerns the CAP, Italian municipalities are classified into the following four groups:

- A. Urban and peri-urban areas: provincial capitals that are urban in the strict sense and groups of municipalities with a rural population of less than 15% of the total population;
- B. Intensively farmed rural areas: rural municipalities located predominantly in the lowland areas of the country, where, although in some cases the average density is high, the agricultural and forestry area always appears to have a significant weight;
- C. Intermediate rural areas: rural hill and mountain municipalities with higher population density and intermediate development with stable relations with other sectors of the economy;
- D. Rural areas with development problems: include the southern hill and mountain rural municipalities with the lowest population density in all regions.

For what concerns the SNAI, municipalities with that provide access to services related to mobility, education and healthcare are classified as “Centres”. All other municipalities are classified differently depending on the minutes needed to reach the nearest Centre:

- peri-urban areas (less than 20 minutes to reach the Centre)
- intermediate areas between 20 and 40 minutes to reach the Centre)
- peripheral areas (between 40 and 75 minutes to reach the Centre)
- ultra-peripheral areas (more than 75 minutes to reach the Centre)

Considering these classifications and based on the literature analysis, to identify the typology of area of the different case studies we have considered “remote rural areas” those classified D by the CAP and the peripheral and ultra-peripheral areas of the SNAI. These are areas with low population density and with a limited presence of welfare services (education, health and mobility). They are often mountainous areas.

We have considered “rural areas close to the city” those classified as peri-urban areas by the SNAI. These are areas located close to urban centres providing easy access to education, mobility and health services. We considered rural villages all the remaining areas.

2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Despite the importance of women in the rural economy and in the agricultural business, information about the role of women in agriculture is available only from the end of the 1970s. This is because women have always been considered “subordinated” to men, meaning supporting male work within the farm economy, and they have long been employed in less qualified and more precarious agricultural work (seasonal work). There has long been a lack of presence of women in the most qualified roles of



entrepreneurship and qualified employee work, including in the agricultural sector and rural development (Barberis, 2013; Bertolini, 2015).

Starting from the 1970s, and increasingly in the 1980s, a process of feminisation of agriculture began due the fact that many male workers started working in other productive activities, in particular in the industrial and construction sectors – although little official data exists on this dynamic. The phenomenon is ongoing and more common in the south of the country but the new general trait that affects all areas is the affirmation of the female presence in the management of the economic activity: women start managing rural enterprises and farms, and holding important roles mostly in family farms and businesses (Bertolini, 2015).

Since the mid-90s, and especially 2000s, attention towards the presence of women has grown, also due to the solicitation of legislation on equal gender opportunities and initiatives aimed at enhancing the role of women also in agriculture.

Moreover, rural/agricultural businesses run by women often have different characteristics from those run by men (Biggeri and Sabbatini 2006); Adinolfi et al., 2020). They are less specialized and present diversified production, have lower yields per hectare and in general are associated to lower incomes and to a more intensive use of labor.

At the same time, it is interesting to note how rural/agricultural businesses run by women are more oriented towards agritourism and multidimensional business activities, including educational farms, and social agricultural projects. Furthermore, they are often oriented towards diverse forms of economy, such as short supply chains providing quality local and organic products and building relationships with small specialized distributors or consumer groups (GAS and GAC) (Bertolini, 2015; Adinolfi et al., 2020).

The number of agritourism, where female are engaged, is constantly increasing in all areas of the country and they contribute to diversifying agricultural activity (Bertolini, 2015).

All the three main national agricultural organizations have a women's association/movement/network operating at national, regional and local level.

Connected to the Italian Farmers Confederation (CIA) is the association called “**Donne in Campo**” (Women on the field). The association promotes the work of women farmers, supports their networks, assists and creates alliances among them, promotes initiatives aimed at improving their capacities and skills in rural areas. Moreover, the association is engaged in maintaining rural traditions in order to preserve the land, protect the environment and the biodiversity and to develop social services in rural areas. It organizes workshops, bazaars, local markets, training courses and other public initiatives. The association furthermore contributes to promote the multifunctional model of farming. As indicated in their web site: women are more present in high-value-added productive sectors, such as the wine growing sector, where the Italian female workforce constitutes up to 35%. They pass down farming and gastronomic traditions to future generations (through educational farms); they develop territorial differences and productive specialties (organic and niche products); expand the productive sphere to caring environments (social farms, farm kindergartens); establish a profitable relationship with the city (farmers' markets); promote the territory and a knowledge of



farm products through agritourism. Over 40% of farms that offer agritourism are run by women, producing a yearly turnover of around 500 million euro.” The association is also part of Copa Women’s Committee in Brussels and of the World Farmers Organisation (WFO).

Within Coldiretti (Italy's largest agricultural organisation), Coldiretti Donne Impresa was established as the women’s section of the organisation. It offers advice to women who want to become farmers; it organises training courses (e.g. on social farms, agri-nurseries and educational farms). It is a member of the Women's Entrepreneurship Committee, set up at the Equal Opportunities Department of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, of the Women's Entrepreneurship Committees set up at the Chambers of Commerce, of COPA and of the World Farmers' Organisation.

Confagricoltura Donna is the association that brings together women entrepreneurs of Confagricoltura with the aim of promoting the development of female entrepreneurship and equal opportunities in the agricultural sector and, more generally, in society and the economy. The association promotes business culture and enhances the ethical, economic and social role of women-led businesses. It was set up in 2012.

3. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL ECONOMY

In the agricultural sector, ISTAT data show a process of concentration of land ownership between 2010 and 2020. In fact, the total utilised agricultural area (UAA) recorded a limited decrease during this period, while there was a loss of more than 480,000 farms.

Table 19- Number of farms- UAA- Average size of farms

	2010	2020
Number of farms	1.615.590	1.133.023
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	12.856	12.535
Average size of Farms (UAA) (ha)	8,0	11,1

Source: Agriculture Census 2021

Table 20- Agricultural holdings by economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro)

	2010	2020
Less than 14,000 euros	1.195.520	731.620
From 15.000 to 49,000 euros	248.100	211.190
From 50,000 to 249.000 euros	148.100	151.320



From 250.000 to 499,000 euros	17.410	20.900
500,000 euros and over	11.770	15.500

Source: EUROSTAT

The Italian agricultural sector is characterised by an ageing farming population. The number of farmers aged 65 and over increased by about 5% between 2010 and 2020, representing more than 42% of the total number of farmers. Over the same period, the total number of farmers has decreased by almost 30%, but the proportion of female farm managers is increasing (31,5% of the total). Farms managed by women are mostly located in the south of the country. The highest percentage is found in the region of Molise (40%).

Table 21- Number of farm managers by age class 2010-2020

	2010		2020		2010(%)		2020(%)		2020-2010(%)	
	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total
Less than 45*	83.310	285.590	44.710	166.640	29,2	17,6	26,8	14,7	-2,3	-2,9
45-64	235.640	731.910	152.960	481.790	32,2	45,2	31,7	42,6	-0,4	-2,5
65 years or over	178.900	603.390	158.110	482.110	29,6	37,2	32,8	42,6	3,1	5,4
Total	497.850	1.620.890	355.780	1.130.540	30,7	100,0	31,5	100,0	0,8	-30,3

Source: Agriculture Census 2021

Italian agriculture is still characterised by family farms, where family members provide a significant labour input. However, the employment of non-family labour force (in number of persons) has increased significantly over the last 10 years. The female labour force decreased among both the family and non-family labour force.

Table 22- Farm labour force in person 2010-2020

<i>Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons</i>	
2010	2020



Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
1.148.503	39,2	2.932.651	469.026	32,1	1.459.588
<i>Non-family labour force, in persons</i>					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
274.486	29,3	938.103	354.008	27,3	1.295.753

Source: Agriculture Census 2021

Additional Information

Over the last 10 years, there was a decline of about 42% in farms of fewer than three hectares. In contrast, holdings of more than 100 hectares increased by almost 18%.

Although about 51% of Italian farms still have fewer than three hectares (in 2010 there were 61.4%), the reconfiguration of the agricultural system is clearly moving in the direction of an increase in farm size.

Table 22- Share of Italian farms by UAA class (%). Years 2010 and 2020

<i>Farm size category (in ha)</i>	<i>Composition %</i>	
	2010	2020
Up to 2.99	61.4	51.1
From 3 to 9.99	23.0	27.1
From 10 to 29.99	10.3	13.7
From 30 to 99.99	4.3	6.5
From 100 and above	1.0	1.6

Source: Sivini (2023)

Multifunctionality is a choice that characterizes farms managed by young people. Italian farms with other gainful activities are 5.7% of the total but this percentage rises to 27% in farms managed by young farmers. Multifunctionality is mainly articulated in the offer of agrotourism services (about one third of the multifunctional farms), contract work, product processing and solar energy production.



Table 23- Italian Farms with other gainful activities by main activities offered (%) - 2020

	Agritourism	Contractual work using production means of the holding for agricultural activities	Processing of animal products	Processing of vegetable products	Initial processing of agricultural products	Solar energy production
Managed by young farmers	34.7	15.8	12.7	12.3	10.0	10.6
Managed by over 40s	38.5	14.2	8.4	9.7	7.9	14.4

Source: Sivini (2023)

Italy is one of the top ten organic producers countries in the world. The percentage of organic UAA is increasing over the years and in 2020 was almost 17% of the total Italian UAA.

Table 24- Organic UAA on the total UAA 2000-2020 (%)



Source: Agriculture Census 2021

Rural Business



National data indicate that, in Italy, there are 233 thousand women employed in the agricultural, forestry and fishing sector, approximately 25.6% of people in the sector (ISTAT, 2021).

Over the last ten years, the number of women employed in this sector has decreased by 6.3%, while the number of men has increased significantly (+13.2%): a dynamic that goes against the trend compared to the overall economy which shows that the growth of female employment is more marked than male employment (ISTAT, 2021).

In 2020, women employed in the sector are older than women employed in other sectors: the average age is 48 years, compared to 45 years for other sectors. Approximately half of these are independent workers (46.7%): among these, 5 thousand (4.3% of non-employed female workers) define themselves as entrepreneurs and 71 thousand (64.7%) as self-employed workers (both shares are slightly lower than those for men, equal to 6.4% and 82.2% respectively). Among female employees/dependent workers (124 thousand), almost all are wage workers (88.7%, around 110 thousand), and as many as 72.7% are on a fixed-term contract (seasonal workers) – a higher share than men (61%). Finally, 75.9% of women employed in the agricultural sector work full time (compared to 90.3% of men) (ISTAT, 2021).

About half of the women employed in agriculture live in the South, double the share compared to the total number of employed people. On the other hand, the share of agricultural workers is low in the North-West (14.6% compared to 31.2% of the total employed) and in Central Italy (16% against 22.5%). These results are in line with those found on the male component.

There are approximately 31 thousand foreign women employed in agriculture, 13.3% of female workers in the sector; they represent 3.2% of employed foreigners, a share decidedly lower than that found among men (10.3% work in agriculture of foreign employed) and higher than Italians (2.3%).

Finally, women employed in agriculture are on average less educated than overall of employed women, although they are decidedly more educated than men (as happens for the total number of employed people) (ISTAT, 2021).

As mentioned in a report by the NGO ActionAid (2022), this data do not take into account people who work as agricultural workers without a formal contract. According to the report, there between 51 and 59 thousands women exploited in the agricultural sector. These women, who are often irregular migrants, face multiple discriminations – in terms of salary and labour rights - and marginalization – they do not have access to health and other public services – and are often victims of exploitation and violence (ActionAid, 2022).

4. SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

The main issues discussed nationally in newspapers, grey literature but also in scientific articles in relation to the 4 dimensions of sustainability in rural areas:

- *Cultural* - roots tourism, heritage tourism.
- *Social* - depopulation and aging population, provision of welfare public services (especially in relation to healthcare, mobility and education in remote rural areas),



voluntary commitment, community tourism; community cooperatives; educational farming; community agricultural processing infrastructure, “Restanza” (the remaining – people who decide to return or to remain in rural areas promoting innovative actions).

- *Environmental* - organic agriculture and agro-ecological approach, biodiversity/loss of biodiversity, (recovery) of typical local cultivar; renewable energy (mainly solar energy); energy communities.
- *Economic* - (digitalization), smart working, role of migrants (including exploitative dynamics), value added processing; rural tourism (agri-tourism, widespread hotel, eco-tourism); circular economy, short supply chains, consumer groups.

Specific focus on the role of women:

- gender-based violence and femicide (not only in rural areas) (see also the report by ActionAid, 2022);
- gender inequalities: women managing both domestic/care work and productive work in the farm or other rural business;
- agritourism run by women;
- educational and social farms run by women;
- female direct marketing in the agricultural context.

Innovations supported/promoted by women in rural/agricultural areas:

- *Cultural* - women engaged in agrobiodiversity conservation and in traditional farming methods
- *Social* - women running educational and social farms; women promoting community tourism; women being the promoter of community centres
- *Environmental* - female farmers promoting organic farming; women enhancing traditional local cultivar; female running business connected with recycling;
- *Economic* - female direct marketing in the agricultural context (short supply chain; building alternative relations with consumers); female running artisanal business;

5. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Specific funds linked to national policies providing grants for women are:

- **Fondo Impresa femminile** (Women's Enterprise Fund'): supports the creation, development and consolidation of enterprises led by women through non-repayable grants and subsidized loans. Technical and management assistance can also be requested. The subsidies are granted for projects in industry, crafts, processing of agricultural products, services, trade and tourism sector. However, the resources available for this fund are currently exhausted and therefore it is currently not possible to access these grants
- **On - oltre nuove imprese a tasso zero**: this is an incentive reserved for young people and women to set up new initiatives or to expand, diversify or transform existing activities in the manufacturing, services, trade and tourism sectors. The incentives provide a mix of zero-interest financing and a non-repayable grant for business projects with expenses up to EUR 3 million. The incentive can cover up to 90% of the total eligible expenses to be reimbursed over 10 years. The



available budget was exhausted, but a refinancing for 2024 of EUR 10 million gave the opportunity to submit applications again.

- **Più Impresa - Imprenditoria giovanile e femminile in agricoltura** is dedicated to young people and women who intend to take over the running of a farm or who have already been active in agriculture for at least two years and intend to expand their business, improving its competitiveness with an investment plan of up to EUR 1.5 million. The incentives include a non-repayable grant and interest-free financing. However, it is currently not possible to apply because all available financial resources have already been used up
- **Imprese femminili innovative montane – IFIM** (Innovative mountain women's enterprises – IFIM): finances investment projects with a high technological and innovative content supported by women's enterprises located in mountain municipalities. The business project must be: aimed at the development of products, services or solutions characterised by significant technological and innovative content, and/or aimed at the economic exploitation of the results of the research system. The overall budget of this Fund is EUR 3.9 million. The incentive is a non-repayable grant for an amount not exceeding 70% of eligible expenses and a maximum of €70,000.

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DESK TOP ANALYSIS - FINLAND

1. RURAL CONTEXT

Finnish rural areas face challenges, especially those linked to aging and unbalanced demographic developments. Young, educated women tend to leave rural communities, which causes demographic imbalance and challenges in the social structure and unsustainable local economies. Women's outmigration is often related to the lack of job opportunities and services, rather than to the rural region itself (Puhakka-Tarvainen et al., 2020).

Digitalisation has been often studied or planned as a potential and applicable tool for meeting the challenges of ageing, outmigration and sparsely populated rural areas. Digitalisation is hoped to help with improving wellbeing, education and other services and for creating new business opportunities and models (Luoto et al., 2014; Weckroth et al., 2022; Ruralpolicy.fi, 2023; Kattilakoski et al., 2022).

Farming and agriculture in rural Finland

Finnish farming mainly consists of small and mid-sized farms that are often family owned. Finland has a unique geographical profile with arctic climate conditions, vast forests and numerous lakes that characterize and define the farming models. Due to the environmental conditions and for historical reasons, Finnish family farming combines often many livelihoods – such as tourism, bioeconomy and forestry, and agriculture. Over 30 per cent of farms practice other gainful activities in addition to agriculture. (FAO, 2023).

Finnish agriculture is based on a large number of relatively small farms. The number of farms was at its highest level during the 1960s. Since Finland joined the EU in 1995, the number of small farms has decreased significantly. From 1995-2012, the number of farms decreased by over 38 per cent. Meanwhile farms that have received support payments have increased in size by almost 70 per cent: from 22.8 hectares of farmland to 38.6 hectares. (FAO, 2023).

Family farming has brought many opportunities and benefits to Finnish society (FAO, 2023). The average age of a Finnish farmer is now 50.7 years. The number of farmers under the age of 35 has decreased, but the financial support given to farms aims to keep young farmers involved in agriculture. Supporting the generational shift in a farm is crucial. Up to 40 per cent of applicants for financial support would not have continued their parents' work on the farm if there had not been support. This support has lowered the average age of farmers. A fifth of new generation farmers are women. (FAO, 2023).

A particular characteristic of agriculture in northern Finland is reindeer herding, which is traditional nature-based livelihood practiced both indigenous Saami people and ethnic Finn local communities. Reindeer herding is often combined with many other livelihoods, like nature-based tourism. Reindeer herding has been traditionally considered as male profession. However, extent of women reindeer herders has increased in recent years. Young women in particular have entered into the business (Grönholm, 2021). In 2020, a



significant share of new herders were women. This could be due to changes in the perception of gender roles in Finland. The profession of reindeer herding is often continued within a family, with children following on from previous generations and taking up the livelihood. Currently, women can be full time reindeer herders as well as men, and continue the way of life of the family (Paldanius, 2022).

Women entrepreneurship in rural Finland

Entrepreneurship is one solution for women living in the rural North to stay and make their living in their home regions, as modern ICT-solutions diminish the role of the geographical location in business (Puhakka-Tarvainen et al., 2020). However, a Nordic study from 2012 found that there is a gender gap in the level of entrepreneurship in Finland; women constitute between one-fourth and one-third of entrepreneurs in Nordic countries. Reasons for these gendered variations may be related to personal traits, like women's lack of self-confidence, but also that the gendered labour market and education segregation influences who becomes an entrepreneur. The concept of entrepreneur has also been found to be a male gendered concept, placing women in an inferior position from the outset (Pettersson et al., 2012).

The policy measures in rural areas are often based on a male norm. There is furthermore a need to understand the specific needs of women in rural areas, in order to formulate effective support. Suggestions on a more individual level for supporting women's entrepreneurship are: the need to challenge the unequal childcare burden women face within families in terms of the organisation and conduct of childcare; the construction of programmes to improve self-perceptions of aspiring women entrepreneurs; mentoring by experienced women entrepreneurs; networking; and the introduction of women entrepreneurs as role models (Pettersson et al., 2012).

Rannanpää et al. (2022) examined the possibilities for women in knowledge sector in Finnish rural areas. They found that networks at local, subnational, and national levels enhance possibilities for rural knowledge work. Rannanpää et al. (2022) found also that organizations need to be more flexible to enable new possibilities for work. In addition, Rannanpää et al. (2022) argue that that women-led entrepreneurship is supported by development projects and women-to-women networks. However, state, regions and municipalities need to support women-led entrepreneurship more strongly. Possibilities linked to women-led entrepreneurship need to be opened to local actors, for example, through LEADER groups. Recognizing gender impacts at municipal work is essential to move beyond gender blindness of current practices. In order to identify the impacts of various policies on gender, the existing gender blindness needs to be admitted and be replaced by assessing the impacts of policies to diverse groups and genders (Rannanpää et al., 2022).

Gender roles and expectations in rural Finland

Sireni (2015) found that rural women are expected to have an equal role in comparison to their husbands in earning their living: the family model which consists of two breadwinners is as culturally desirable in the countryside as it is in urban areas. Sireni (2015) also found that farm women and female rural entrepreneurs are devoted to both their careers and work. Rural women are often presented as actualizing their dreams and their small-scale businesses are said to be flourishing. However, not all female rural entrepreneurs are comfortable with the position which the discourse offers them as



successful entrepreneurs, and some women express that they would actually like to have less work and more time for their children (Sireni, 2015).

Ikonen (2008) found that rural women entrepreneurs are diverse group seeking to adopt to needs of the family and characteristics of rural areas, and take entrepreneurship seriously. Furthermore, contrary to the previous generations of farm women, whose opportunities to choose their roles and shape their identities are assumed to have been restricted, farm women interviewed in the 2000's constructed an image of themselves as knowledgeable agents of their lives, who are capable of shaping and defining their own ways of being farm women (Ikonen, 2008).

Challenges for rural women innovators

Several challenges have been found to inhibit the possibilities for rural women entrepreneurs and innovators. Grünfeld et al. (2020) found that there are several factors that are not driven by characteristics of the entrepreneurs themselves, which make it more difficult for female entrepreneurs to succeed, and especially to establish high growth companies. These challenges include:

- Women have less access to role models and smaller networks, which makes them less likely to innovate.
- Entrepreneurial cultures that are male dominated make it more difficult for women to succeed.
- Female entrepreneurs have less access to external funding than male entrepreneurs, which makes it difficult for them to expand. (Grünfeld et al. 2020).

Rannanpää et al. (2022) summarize the enabling and hindering factors for rural knowledge work for women. Hindering factors are 1) gender blindness in municipalities and regions, and related politics seeking to enhance vitality of rural areas, 2) issues linked to infrastructure (e.g. distance, lack of educational opportunities), and 3) personal factors including networks or lack of them, and attitudes.

Proposals to cope with the challenges rural women innovators face include:

- Establish more comprehensive female Nordic mentoring schemes and networks.
- Increase female entrepreneurs' access to capital.
- Remove competitive disadvantages in industries where women often operate as entrepreneurs.
- Establish a scheme for commercialization leave at universities and colleges. (Grünfeld et al., 2020).

Enabling factors are linked to 1) infrastructures, 2) work-related issues, such as organizational flexibility and norms in workplaces, and 3) personal factors including networks and communalism (Rannanpää et al., 2022).



2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

According to Kattilakoski et al. (2021) social capital is important in rural development and needs structures that support communality and grassroots activities. For example, the LEADER programme activates rural actors and development activities, channels resources and brings actors together for rural development. Village activities are important to develop community-led local rural development, and common spaces like village houses are needed to bring people together. In addition to village associations also hunting clubs, youth associations, 4H association, and cultural associations enhance rural social capital. Also religious communities play a part in rural social capital. In sum, enhancing communality and grassroots activities, funding for associations, flexible bureaucracy and new working models are needed (Kattilakoski et al. 2021).

The Women Entrepreneurs of Finland association (Suomen Yrittäjänaiset) was set up in 1947. The goal of the Association is to promote the economic, social and operating conditions of women entrepreneurs. At present the Women Entrepreneurs of Finland has more than 60 member associations and over 4000 individual members. Almost 60 percent of members are sole entrepreneurs, 40 percent have employees. We have members for all different fields of businesses.

Maa- ja kotitalousnaiset, Rural Women's Advisory Organization is a nationwide expert organization in food, nutrition, entrepreneurship, rural landscape, and environment, in addition to being an extensive women's network in the rural areas. Their aim is to promote lively, active, and equal communities and strengthen women's role in the communities. They approach actions from a rural perspective, without forgetting cities' views. Their mission is to provide people with concrete tools for the increased interest in local food and its cultivation, biodiversity, and sustainability. The leader of the organization considers women to be hugely relevant to rural development thus hopes that demography in rural Finland should be better balanced. She notes that associations and events that maintain rural villages viable and enhance communality in rural areas are often led and operated by women (Puruvesi, 2020).

The National Council of Women of Finland is a feminist umbrella organisation that promotes women's and girl's rights and gender equality together with member organisations. It was founded 1911 and is an umbrella organisation and co-operation forum for Finnish women's organisations that promote gender equality. Currently, the Council consists of 72 member organisations and roughly 400,000 women. The Council focuses on advancing and promoting women's and girl's rights and gender equality. It supports the work of its member organisations and coordinates a constantly growing network of women's organisation as well as takes initiatives, gives statements, and consults in legislation. The council's work is funded by the Ministry of Education and Culture, private foundations and funds, and member organizations. The vision of the council is that influential women foster and build a gender equal and sustainable society. The mission of the council is to advance women's rights, gender equality, and women and girls' human rights together with member organisations. The values and principles include;

- Gender equality
- Transparency and equity
- Politically and religiously independent



- Diversity of women
 - Strong advocate for women's rights
- (The National Council of Women of Finland, 2023).

The Council for Gender Equality (Tane), established in 1972, is one of Finland's gender equality authorities. It is a permanent council in which parliamentary parties are represented in proportion to the results of parliamentary elections. Due to its wide-ranging party political representation, Tane's statements play an important role in the creation of Finnish gender equality policy guidelines.

The Council for Gender Equality (Tane) works to promote gender equality in society. It is an equality policy actor that drafts proposals and makes statements to develop legislation and other measures that affect gender equality. The council also organises various events and seminars, and produces publications. Tane has an advisory role in state administration.

Tane is a solution-oriented pioneer in gender equality work and a societal influencer that brings together representatives from different actors and is involved in changes in society and what is current. Tane's task is to highlight structures that maintain gender inequality and to actively work to eliminate these as well as to initiate discussions and be a trendsetter in equality matters. Tane works to find political and social solutions for achieving an equal society, dismantling stereotypical gender norms, improving the status of women and promoting women's rights both on a national and international level.

The Council for Gender Equality duties include:

- monitoring and promoting the implementation of gender equality in society
- presenting initiatives and proposals as well as issuing statements, to develop legislation affecting gender equality and other gender equality measures
- promoting cooperation between authorities, organisations, and researchers
- promoting research on gender equality and the implementation of research findings
- monitoring the international development of the field.

The duties of the council are defined in Government decree 22.8.1986/638 (The Council for Gender Equality (Tane), 2023.).

QUIN association seeks to bring innovator women together and reward them for their work. QUIN is not specifically targeting rural areas, but all innovator girls and women.

Women- to women networks. A project by University of Applied Sciences in Seinäjoki found that the interviewed women entrepreneurs in the region think and try to find new ideas in multiple kinds of networks including those consisting of spouses, workers and other entrepreneurs in the same field. The active networks are selected based on trust and inspiration (Joensuu-Salo et al., 2023).



Naisyrittäjät Facebook (Finnish Female Entrepreneurs face book). This community is a closed Facebook community for female entrepreneurs in Finland and has 69 000 participants. The Facebook community only accepts individual participants, not enterprises.

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL ECONOMY

Source: LUKE

	2010	2020
Number of farms	59483	45 384
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	2 253 300	2 270 000
Average size of Farms	39 ha/farm	50 ha/farm

Agricultural holdings by economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro) **Source: Eurostat**

	2010	2020
Less than 15,000 euros	31 750	20 050
From 15.000 to 49,000 euros	15 130	12 210
From 50,000 to 249.000 euros	15 250	10 440
From 250.000 to 499,000 euros	1 270	1 990
500,000 euros and over	480	950

Number of farm managers by age class 2010-2020 **Source: Eurostat**

	2010		2020		2010(%)		2020(%)		2010-2020(%)	
	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total
Younger than 40	780	5 460	990	7 610	14,3		13			
41-65 years	5 720	52 820	3 280	30 080	10,8		10,9			
Older than 65	710	5 590	710	7 940	12,7		8,9		-3,8	
Total	7 200	63 870	4 970	45 630	11,3		10,9		-0,4	

Farm labour force in person 2010-2020 **Source: LUKE**



Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons					
2013			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
33 586	32,5	103 210	26 194	28,93	90 526
Non-family labour force, in persons					
2013			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
2 502	34,8	7 190	2 929	27,5	10 651

Additional Information

Regarding UAA: cultivated area and fallow total

As of 2013, only enterprises that exceed the economic threshold (SO 2,000 euros) are included.

Farm managers by sex and age

Age classes are different in 2020 than in 2010. Calculations are made as follows:

For 2010: less than 35 years old, 35-64, 65 years old or over

For 2020: less than 40 years old, 40-64 years old, 65 years old or over

Family labour force

Farmers and joint owners:

Farmers and shareholders of enterprises who have participated in agricultural and horticultural work on their farm/in their enterprise. Since 2020, this has included all holders (owners) who have worked in agriculture and horticulture on their farm. In 2013 and 2016, this category only included one farmer per family-owned farm, while other holders (owners) were listed under "Family members".

Family members:

Spouses and other close relatives of at least 15 years of age who have participated on agricultural and horticultural work on their farm. Since 2020, all holders (owners) who have worked in agriculture and horticulture on their farm have been included in the category "Farmers and joint owners".

Rural Business

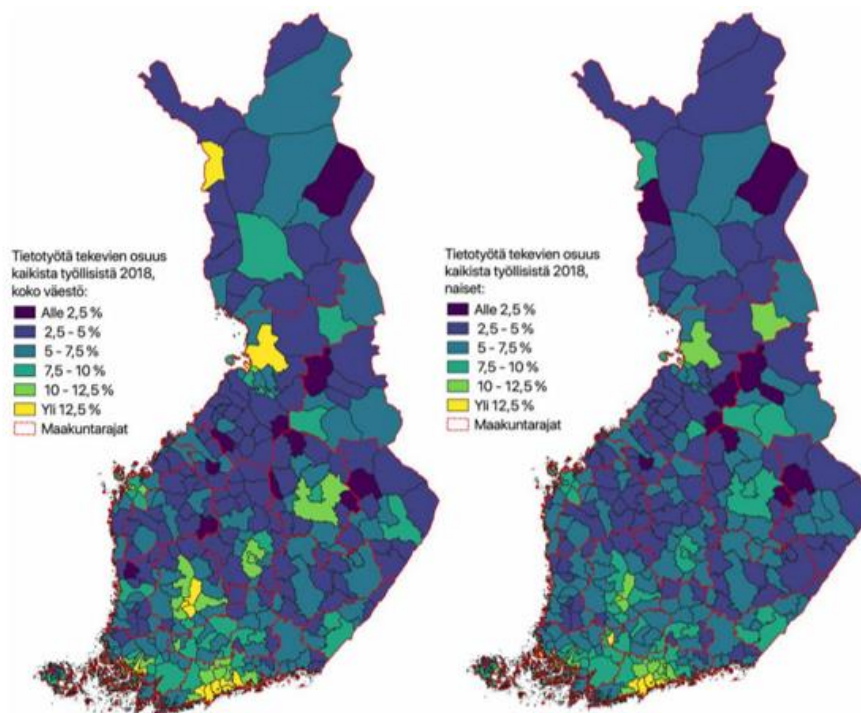


Figure 1. Share of women doing knowledge work in Finland in 2018 (on the right). Share of all workers doing knowledge work (on the left) (Copied from Aro et al. 2021). Darker colours for smaller portion, lighter colours for greater portion in the maps.

Aro et al. (2021) summarise their review of statistics and found that gendered work sectors are emphasised in rural areas, particularly in the hospitality sector, education and social services. In relation to knowledge work, gendered aspects are slightly stronger in urban areas than in rural areas. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry Finland sums up that 95 % of Finland's land area is rural. Over 1.6 million people live in rural areas, 40 % of all companies in Finland are situated in rural areas, and 2.1 million people are part-time residents in rural areas (Ruralpolicy.fi, 2023).

3. SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

Many cases of women innovation focus not only on environmental, social, cultural or economic dimension of sustainability, but are cross-cutting. For example, initiatives, like Älbyarnas Market Garden aims to increase interest towards farming in western parts of Finland (Vaasa) and to find out how collaboration between third sector, public sector and local enterprises can influence on rural sustainability. Rural areas are considered as an environment where entrepreneurs can establish strong communities and networks that benefit both the entrepreneurs and the rural communities. The rural environment also offers opportunities for environmental sustainability where entrepreneurs use local resources and develop sustainable business models from organic farming to forestry, sustainable tourism and renewable energy. Entrepreneurship can enhance



environmental sustainability and help to cope with pressing sustainability challenges, and women innovators contribution is here significant (Tuominen, 2023).

Social innovation

Two recent major reports on social innovation were identified. However, neither of these reports considered gender aspects or mentioned women or gender in the table of contents. Firstly, the report on 100 social innovations in rural Finland did not provide a gender-specific analysis (see Kattilakoski et al., 2022). Secondly, the governmental report on Social Innovation in Social Enterprises is extensive, but did not take the gender perspective into account, and does not have a rural focus (Lillberg et al. 2023).

Digital innovation

Digital innovation is also an aspect where women innovators have role to play. It has been found that female entrepreneurs seek freedom, time and location independence, flexibility, and lifestyle compatibility in digital entrepreneurship. The success of female digital entrepreneurs is built on a multifaceted entity consisting of personal motivational factors, internal factors such as skills and characteristics, and external factors related to self- and business development. (Hietala 2023)

There are also other initiatives which support rural women for rural businesses, such as middle Ostrobothnia's agricultural and domestic women association (Keski-Pohjanmaan Maa- ja kotitalousnaiset) (Varila, 2021) and initiatives which enhance inclusion and support of immigrant women in a role of entrepreneurs in Finland (Maisala-McDonnell, H.; Outi Pyrhönen, 2023).

4. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Rural policy landscape in Finland

The Finnish model of rural policy has been reasonably successful in achieving coherence among sectoral policies oriented to rural areas (the so-called *broad rural policy*) and in tailoring specific programmes to promote rural development (the so-called *narrow rural policy*). The Rural Policy Committee has played a crucial role in the governance of rural policy, bringing together diverse actors and advocating for rural communities. Key priorities for the future are delivering public services to an ageing and dispersed population more equitably and efficiently, enhancing the competitiveness of an increasing number of non-farm related rural firms, and improving the business environment in rural areas by fully utilising their abundant natural amenities. (OECD, 2008).

Rural areas across the EU have similar strengths and face similar challenges. Therefore, the EU has its own rural development policy. EU Member States prepare strategic rural development programmes, which are co-financed by the EU. National rural policy measures and regional decision-making are also needed.



Local activity and citizen involvement are two well-established elements of Finnish rural development activities, and the aim is to further strengthen this model. Each rural entrepreneur, expert, authority and active citizen is a rural operator and developer. Development efforts usually concern entrepreneurship, skills, employment, connections, environment, access to services, or special regional matters. Each of the 15 Centres for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment (ELY Centres) and 54 LEADER Local Action Groups have engaged in extensive collaboration and prepared regional strategies outlining development priorities for the programme period.

The LEADER approach promotes activities, advisory services and funding for the benefit of specific regions. LEADER activities involve local development efforts based on the needs and ideas of local residents. The aim is to strengthen and develop local communities and companies and increase the vitality of the area. The activities help to attract different communities and people of different backgrounds and ages to take part in local development efforts. Young people are a particular priority in LEADER activities. Funding for rural development projects is linked frequently to sustainability in local plans and also at EU level. LEADER, while not gender-specific in its activities, does also offer possibilities for women entrepreneurs (Tuominen, 2023). More recently, part-time entrepreneurship support and experimental agricultural support have been introduced as new possibilities. The experimental agricultural support can be applied through LEADER groups (Tuominen, 2023).

The Rural Policy Programme for the years 2021–2027 is the working programme for the National Rural Policy. It is implemented under the leadership of the Rural Policy Council and in broad cooperation with different stakeholders (Kattilakoski, 2021). However, none of the recommended 68 actions to renew Finnish countryside made in the report specifically mention women.

Gender in a Finnish welfare state

Finland has previously been classified as a representative of the Nordic welfare state, which has also been termed as a caring state or a social-democratic welfare state. Finland's gender regime has been characterized by the conscious political aim to equalize the roles and status of men and women (Sireni, 2015).

Social security reforms introduced farmers' pensions (1969) and social security, which meant that women have since become entitled to the same benefits as male farmers. In the early 1980s, farm women's rights to maternal leave were also improved and they basically became entitled to the same benefits as women working in other occupations. Currently all families, irrespective of their place of living and parental occupations, have the legal guarantee of public day care for all children under school age (seven years), and these services are relatively cheap, and provided free of charge for low-income families. In addition, parents (including farm families) can opt into child homecare allowances for children under three years old, instead of using public day care services, and during this time a mother or a father can take leave from work (Sireni 2015).

Women and men active in agriculture are members of the statutory Farmers' Social Insurance Institution to which they pay regular contributions dependent on their personal



incomes. In this context the social security of women is personal, and they pay taxes separately from their husbands (Sireni 2015).

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DESK TOP ANALYSIS - SLOVENIA

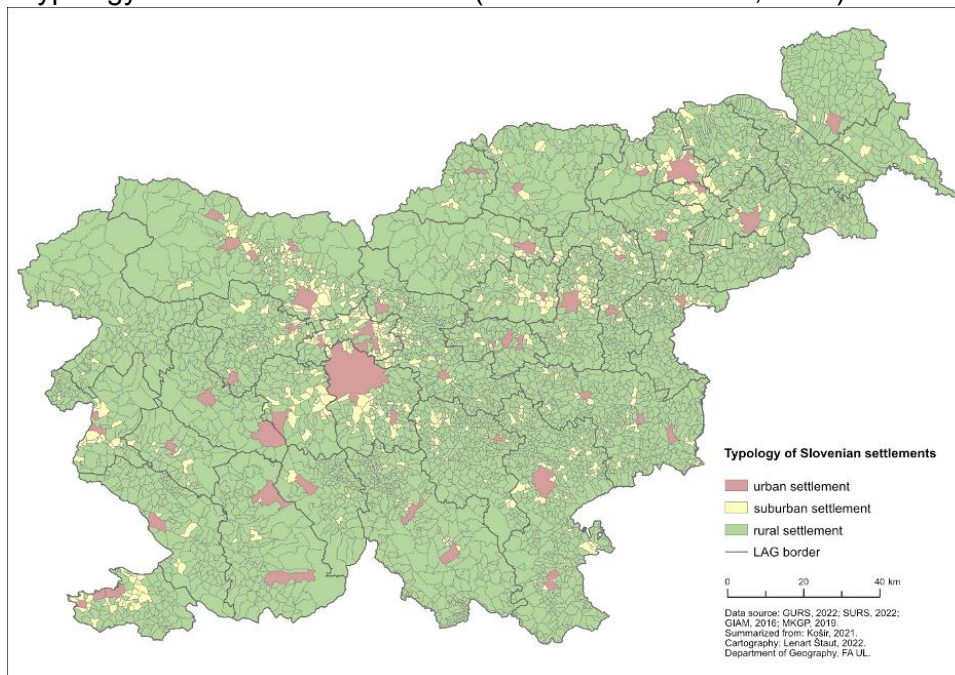
1. RURAL CONTEXT

In the **Slovenian Rural Development Programme 2023-2027**, the **entire Slovenian territory** (with the exception of 16 settlements with more than 10,000 inhabitants) is **defined as “rural”** and this is considered in the implementation of the LEADER/CLLD mechanism. At NUTS 3 level, nine out of twelve regions are defined as predominantly rural, while three regions are defined as intermediate regions.

A combination of the criteria (population density, population change index, share of agricultural population, settlements with a certain degree of centrality – based on four main functions: public administration, education, health, justice) (Nared et al., 2019) resulted in **three types of settlements** (Map 1).

- Rural settlements** (5,165 or 85.6% of all settlements in Slovenia) had either a population density of less than 100 inhabitants/km² (in 2020) or a population change index (2020/2012) of less than 110, a share of agricultural population in the municipality of more than 10% (2019) or were categorised as central settlements of local or surrounding importance.
- Suburbanised settlements** (can be defined as rural settlements close to the city; 816 or 13.5% of all settlements in Slovenia) had either a population density of more than 100 inhabitants/km² (2020), a population change index of more than 110 (2020/2012) or a share of agricultural population below 10% (2019).
- Only 55 settlements were defined as **urban settlements**.

Map 1: Typology of Slovenian settlements (Potočnik Slavič et al., 2022).



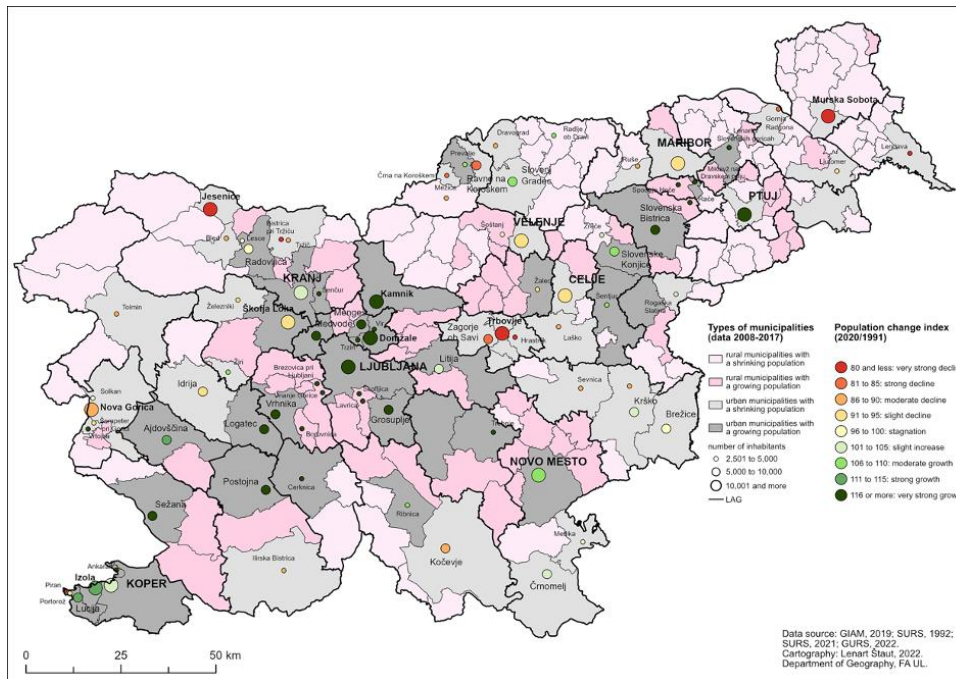


According to the more general typology based on the NUTS 5 level (municipality level – 212 municipalities in Slovenia), there are **two types of rural municipalities** (Map 2).

Rural municipalities with a shrinking population (82 municipalities): these are mostly border municipalities that are remote from transport and have been facing population decline and stagnation for a long time. This type of municipality is characterised by both the number of municipalities and the largest share of the area (29.2%; population density is 43.9 inhabitants/km²). Municipalities of this type are the least populated and the density has decreased due to the decline in the number of inhabitants (by almost 5% in the period 2008-2017; 12.6% of the population of Slovenia live in their area) at the expense of negative natural growth and emigration; the ageing index is high. From the point of view of development, the educational structure is also not very promising, as the number of people with primary education (or less) is almost twice as high as the number of people with university and higher education. More than a quarter of this type of housing is vacant. These municipalities have the highest voter turnout in local elections, which probably shows the sense of belonging to the place and also the need for change.

Rural municipalities with a growing population (61 municipalities): These are rural municipalities, mostly located in valleys and basins, with good transport links or with a long history of stable population growth. This type makes up the smaller part of the country (19.35%). The number of inhabitants has risen by almost 8% in the last ten years (2008-2017), making up 14% of Slovenia's total population. In this type of municipality, the number of inhabitants is growing the fastest, mainly due to immigration, although this type has a below-average population density (73 inhabitants/km²). The result of positive demographic processes is a significantly below-average ageing index (compared to the Slovenian average). Compared to the Slovenian average, fewer people with university and higher education live in these municipalities, and 21% have completed primary school (or less). Compared to the national average, there is a lower number of businesses and a higher proportion of agricultural population. The proportion of daily migrants is above average (77%, while the national average is 50%). The registered unemployment rate is the lowest. There are significantly more larger families (with four or more children) in the municipalities analysed.

Map 2: Typology of municipalities in Slovenia (NUTS 5 level) (Potočnik Slavič et al., 2022).



It is also interesting to note that in rural municipalities with growing populations over the last 30 years, the phenomenon of the growth of small towns can be observed (settlements with 2,501 inhabitants and more).

2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

The most important rural women's association in Slovenia is the **Association of Farming Women of Slovenia (Zveza kmečkih žena)**, which was founded in 1995 to raise awareness of women's rights and is currently active in **35 associations with 3,000 members**. Their activities include social events (e.g. the annual national games of rural women), highlighting good stories (competition for the title of "Young Female Farmer of the Year" organised by the agricultural newspaper *Kmečki glas* in cooperation with the local association of women farmers), educational workshops, seminars, excursions, and specialist conferences. They also endeavour to preserve rural communities and cultural heritage (e.g. with traditional food events) and raise awareness of issues such as violence, cancer, mental health, etc. through various project activities. Challenges include the non-professional (voluntary) structure of the organisation, the ageing of its members and the lack of interest among younger generations, as well as the shift away from farming (Rac et al., 2022). The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food co-finances the activities. In 2023, a budget of €144,000 is available for rural women's associations. This is about half of the annual budget of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food for the co-financing of non-profit organisations in rural areas, which is distributed annually through three public tenders (Sedmo periodično poročilo ..., 2021).

Representatives of the rural women association participate in the **Agriculture Council**, as well as in the **Rural Women's Council**, the advisory bodies of the Ministry of



Agriculture, Forestry and Food. However, they lack stronger cooperation between the state social system and non-governmental organisations, a greater understanding of agricultural activities within the social system and interdepartmental cooperation. There is a lack of strong inter-institutional co-operation, although some associations are building good links with local communities (municipalities). They also converse with the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia and the Farmers' Advisory Service and are well connected in informal networks such as the Agriculture Alliance. The aim of the organisation is to raise awareness of the problems of women in rural areas and other issues by organising various lectures, seminars, workshops, and excursions. In the past, they carried out surveys and ran their own advice centre. However, the lack of dedicated experts and a professional organisation poses a major challenge, especially the lack of a systematic source of funding (Rac et al., 2022).

In 2019, the **Rural Women's Council** was established within the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food as an advisory body to the Minister. The Council consists of three members of the Association of Farming Women, three members of the Association of Slovenian Rural Youth, two members of the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia, one researcher, one representative of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, two representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food and one representative of the Ministry of Finance (KGZS ..., 2019).

Another active association in rural Slovenia, which is aimed at young rural women (but also men), is the **Association of Slovenian Rural Youth (Zveza slovenske podeželske mladine)**. It is the umbrella organisation for **39 local associations with 3,000 members**. It was founded in 1988 with the aim of creating a professional agricultural organisation that unites farmers, young people, and experts. Their activities include social events such as quizzes, rural games, and youth exchanges, with an increasing focus on advocacy and empowerment of farmers. They also organise practical education, raising awareness campaigns and address emerging issues such as rural powerlessness and seek solutions to the psychosocial challenges faced by the rural population, especially young people. Over the last ten years, their work has become more systematic, structured, focused and strategic, with four main pillars: 1) young farmers and agricultural policy, 2) youth policy and rural development, 3) youth work and informal education and 4) international cooperation. The organisation has recently grown through project work. It actively contributes to the Alliance for Agriculture, the Youth Council of Slovenia, Rural Women's Council, and cooperates at international level with Rural Youth Europe (RYE), the European Council of Young Farmers (CEJA) and the International Farm Youth Exchange (IFYE) (Rac et al., 2022). As part of the project activities, workshops have recently been successfully held to raise awareness of the importance of mental health and to empower stakeholders to recognise and manage mental health problems (ZSPM, 2023).

Important networks between different interest groups and stakeholders in rural areas are also formed within the framework of **Local Action Groups (LAGs)** (37 LAGs in the 2023-2027 programming period). Rural women – as a target group with fewer employment opportunities in rural areas – are directly or indirectly represented in the committees of the LAGs and are addressed in various project activities (Potočnik Slavič et al., 2022). The more targeted inclusion of young people, women and other vulnerable groups in



rural areas was one of the thematic areas of LEADER/CLLD (Community-led Local Development) funding in the 2014-2020 programme period. The LAGs are coordinated by the **Slovenian Rural Development Network**, which was founded in 2002. The association is active in four areas: (1) information, training, and promotion; (2) national information centre for CLLD; (3) cooperation, advocacy and networking at national level; and (4) international cooperation. In these areas, the Slovenian Rural Development Network informs its members about the activities of the association and important events in the CLLD field. The Network also organises various events related to rural development (e.g. LAG meetings, webinars, workshops, co-organises the Slovenian Rural Parliaments and participates in the European Rural Parliaments) and is a member of international associations such as the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD), the European LEADER Network for Rural Development (ELARD) and PREPARE – Partnership for Rural Europe (DRSP, 2023). The association takes on professional challenges with a committed approach and an important player and dialogue partner in shaping development policy at national level. Through its representatives, it is active at international level in three areas: in the programming and management of the LEADER/CLLD concept, in the implementation of transnational projects and in learning and participating in international events.

All the associations and networks identified support women in rural Slovenia, but the area of innovation and the need for support is not clearly expressed and recognised

3. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL ECONOMY

	2010	2020
Number of farms	74,646	68,927
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	474,432	474,196
Average size of Farms	6.4	7.0

Agricultural holdings by economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro)

	2010	2020
Less than 14,000 euros	62,109	53,720
From 15,000 to 49,000 euros	9,459	10,052
From 50,000 to 249,000 euros	3,078	4,559
From 250,000 to 499,000 euros		
500,000 euros and over		

Number of farm managers by age class 2010-2020*

	2010		2020		2010 (%)		2020 (%)		2010-2020	
	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total
Younger	550	3,230	630	3,360	2.7	4.3	3.1	4.6	80	130



than 35										
35-65 years	11,79 0	48,71 0	9,960	41,48 0	58.0	65.3	49.6	57.2	- 1,830	- 7,230
Older than 65	8,000	22,70 0	9,510	27,64 0	39.3	30.4	47.3	38.1	1,510	4,940
Total	20,34 0	74,65 0	20,10 0	72,47 0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	-240	- 2,180

*adjusted age groups of managers due to the data available for Slovenia.

Farm labour force in person 2010-2020

Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
94,336	46.0	205,245	64,815	43.1	150,377
Non-family labour force, in persons*					
2013			2016		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
810	30.8	2,630	990	34.5	2,870

* data for Slovenia is available only for years 2013 and 2016.

Additional Information

Organic farms by gender of the owner/manager (Slovenia, 2020)

	Male	Female	no data	Total	Female (%)
Slovenia, 2020	2,732	826	117	3,675	22.5

Agricultural holdings with subsidiary activities by gender of the owner/manager (Slovenia, 2020)

	Male	Female	Female (%)	Total
Holders - SA tourism	718	238	24.9	957
Holders - SA others	3,235	731	18.4	3,973
Holders with SA - total	3,953	969	19.7	4,930

Young successors by gender (Slovenia, by programme periods)

	Male	Female	Female (%)	Total



2007-2013	2,205	447	16.9	2,652
2014-2020/22	1,454	335	18.7	1,789
Young successors total	3,659	782	17.6	4,441

Rural Business

In Slovenia, only 30.1% of female entrepreneurs are represented in the early stages of entrepreneurial activity, which puts Slovenia at the bottom of the European table (Slovenski podjetniški sklad, 2020). Registered social enterprises are an important exception. Of 265 registered companies, 118 are legally represented by women, 15 of which are joint ventures (female-to-male ratio). However, most social enterprises are registered in urban areas, while 93 are registered in rural areas (Košir, 2021) – mainly in agriculture, education, tourism and retail.

4. SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

In Slovenia, as in many other countries, the situation of women in rural and suburban areas is complex and multi-layered, reflecting a mix of traditional roles and modern challenges. The dynamics of gender roles and women's daily lives are strongly influenced by socio-economic changes, cultural norms and changing expectations within Slovenian society.

In Slovenia, inequalities manifest themselves primarily in the form of persistent segregation of the labour market by gender, the gender pay and pension gap, gender-based violence, greater poverty, especially among older women, unequal distribution of care and household responsibilities between the sexes, which negatively affects women's position in the labour market, unbalanced gender representation in many areas (e.g. in decision-making) and gender inequality in the labour market. This is also reflected in the evaluation of the implementation of the programme. This is also highlighted in the evaluation of the implementation of the Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men 2015-2020 (Kanjuo-Mrčela, Mikić, 2021).

Among the sub-themes of the sustainability dimensions, **rural tourism (and hospitality), community-based enterprises and social entrepreneurship** are discussed in the scientific geographical literature, without paying particular attention to the role of women (Cigale and Lampič, 2023; Lampič and Potočnik Slavič, 2017; Potočnik Slavič et al., 2016). Many women are characterised by agritourism, which is not only an activity that complements basic agricultural production and supports the performance of other subsidiary activities (Potočnik Slavič et al., 2016), but also expands the possibilities of selling agricultural crops and products and increases the resilience and adaptability of the farm in the face of unexpected changes (Lampič and Potočnik Slavič, 2017). Women excel especially in areas such as herbalism, where the majority are known as herbalists who are knowledgeable about natural remedies and are more visible in this field. The field of baking, particularly bread and biscuit baking, is also largely



female-dominated, reflecting a long-standing cultural association with women in the kitchen. In addition, women are leading the way in social work and caregiving, providing essential support for community wellbeing and are active social entrepreneurs (Loukopoulos et al., 2022). Furthermore, the importance of rural women's contribution not only to agriculture but also to the preservation of cultural heritage and community cohesion is increasingly recognised. Conversely, men tend to be associated with sectors such as forestry and services involving mechanical equipment, areas in which women's participation is comparatively rare.

This gendered distribution of roles not only highlights the different contributions of the two sexes, but also points to areas where gender stereotypes continue to influence career choices and societal expectations in rural Slovenia. To understand the situation of these women, various aspects need to be considered, including their economic participation, their social status, their role within the family, their access to services and their representation in decision-making processes (Rac et al., 2022).

In economic terms, women in rural areas of Slovenia are often faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, they play a central role in maintaining traditional agricultural activities and on the other, they struggle with economic dependence due to a lack of financial independence. It is estimated that a significant number of women in rural areas do not have their own bank account or personal income, making them dependent on their spouses or families (Rac et al., 2022). This economic vulnerability is exacerbated by their exclusion from the pension system, especially for those who perform unpaid labour on family farms, which is common in rural areas.

Women's work in rural areas of Slovenia is often characterised by unpaid work to support the family farm or business. Although they make an important contribution to agricultural production, their work is often invisible within official statistics and is economically undervalued. Despite the strong presence of women in agricultural education, which indicates a feminisation of this field, **leadership positions and ownership of farms are still rather male-dominated** (Robnik, 2016). There is a saying that 'a woman is not someone who works on a tractor', symbolising the persistent gender stereotypes that dictate what is considered appropriate work for women.

The labour market in rural areas can be challenging, especially in remote rural areas, with limited employment opportunities outside of agriculture, which has a significant impact on women trying to balance work and family (Černič Istenič and Knežević Hočevár, 2013). The social status of women in rural areas is strongly influenced by traditional values and stereotypes that define their roles and responsibilities. Women are **often expected to take on the role of carers, not only for children but also for ageing family members**. This caring role can limit their opportunities for personal and professional development.

The **difference in the risk of poverty between the sexes increases with age**. Compared to EU countries that are comparable to Slovenia in terms of the general risk of poverty, Slovenia has a significantly higher risk of poverty for women. The differences are particularly great for those over 75 years of age. Slovenia has not managed to address the problem of high poverty risk among older women, partly due to the lack of specific measures to reduce the poverty rate in the population and to reduce the



differences between men and women (Leskošek, 2017). Another highly vulnerable group is **single mothers**, especially in rural areas, where the limited availability of social services can leave single mothers with few options for support. Access to services such as childcare, healthcare, and professional development opportunities is generally more limited in rural areas than in urban centres. This lack of services can exacerbate the challenges women face, especially if they want to pursue a career or further their education. The closure of local schools, banks and post offices has been identified as an issue affecting the quality of life and social infrastructure in rural communities (Rac et al., 2022).

The participation of women in rural areas in community life and **social networks can be limited**. Due to their traditional roles, they often remain in the family sphere and have limited opportunities for social interaction and professional networking. This isolation can be exacerbated by the migration of younger generations to urban areas, further isolating older women and those with limited mobility. Representation in local and national decision-making bodies is crucial to fulfil the needs and rights of rural women. Slovenia has also introduced legal mechanisms to ensure a more balanced gender representation in politics. These include **gender quotas** to increase the number of women in politics. Gender equality is an issue that attracts the attention of various stakeholders. These stakeholders include not only civil society organisations, but also government ministries. During the Slovenian EU Council Presidency in 2021, an **international conference on women in rural areas** was organised by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (MKGP ..., 2021).

To summarise, the situation of women in rural and suburban Slovenia is characterised by traditional gender roles, economic challenges, and social change. They play an important role in agriculture and family life, but often without adequate recognition or economic independence. The efforts of local organisations and movements for gender equality are crucial to tackling these issues, even if progress is sometimes slow and uneven. A multifaceted approach is needed to empower rural women, combining education, economic opportunities, access to services and representation in administration to ensure a fairer future for women in all areas of Slovenian rural life.

5. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

As part of the **Law on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men** (Zakon o enakih ..., 2019), the Slovenian government and the relevant ministries are working together with the social partners and NGOs to develop solutions for gender equality. The **Equal Opportunities Sector**, which reports to the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, serves as the central national mechanism for the advancement of women.

The strategic document in Slovenia is the **Resolution on the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men**, which deals with gender equality in various areas of life. It defines goals, specifies measures, and identifies various actors responsible for the implementation of gender equality. The first resolution covered the



period 2005-2013, the next the period 2015-2020, and in September 2023 the third resolution was adopted for the period 2023-2030 (Kanjuro-Mrčela, Mikić, 2021). The resolution sets out goals and measures for a fundamental policy of equal opportunities for women and men in six key areas of social life:

- Labour relations, family relations.
- Social welfare – overcoming gender differences and ensuring equal economic independence for women and men.
- Education – reducing inequalities between women and men and overcoming stereotypical social roles.
- Health – improving women's health and reducing health inequalities between men and women.
- Violence against women – preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls.
- Decision-making positions – promoting a balanced representation of women and men; foreign affairs – promoting gender equality and the realisation of women's rights worldwide (Resolucija o ..., 2023).

In the 2023-2030 resolution, specific actions target vulnerable groups of women, mentioning **women in agriculture and other rural women, who are addressed under Objective 5**: Reduce the gender gap in the risk of poverty and social exclusion. Two key measures target rural women: Measure 1, a cross-ministerial initiative led by the Ministries of Labour, Agriculture and Culture, involves the implementation of programmes to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion for various vulnerable groups of women, including those in rural areas, with ongoing monitoring of effectiveness; and Measure 2, led by the Ministry of Agriculture, focuses on strengthening the role of women in agriculture and ensuring the enforcement of their rights through projects to promote professional events and events for the transfer of new knowledge and practises in agricultural production and processing (Resolucija o ..., 2023).

The innovation of rural women is not specifically promoted under the **Common Agricultural Policy**. Nevertheless, 447 female successors out of a total of 2,652 beneficiaries were supported in the period 2007-2013 and 335 female successors out of a total of 1,789 beneficiaries in the period 2014-2020/2022 under the **measure Support for the takeover of farms by young farmers/start of activities for young farmers** from the Rural Development Programme in Slovenia (Ministry of Agriculture ..., 2023).

In addition, as part of the Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027 (new programming period), Slovenia is implementing the measure the **Support for EIP projects (European Innovation Partnership)**, in which the contribution of projects to promote innovation in agricultural enterprises is one of the selection criteria (MKGP ..., 2023). **However, innovation by women is not explicitly promoted.**

In the **Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy in Slovenia 2023-2027**, greater importance is attached to women compared to the previous programming period. The importance of involving women in rural areas is addressed, among other themes, in the **LEADER/CLLD measure**, where women and young people in rural areas were



encouraged to participate in the preparation of new local development strategies. Once these strategies have been approved, rural women have the opportunity to receive funding for the implementation of projects within their local action groups.

Between 2016 and 2019, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, together with the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, implemented **a programme to promote women's entrepreneurship**. The initiative is primarily aimed at women who have been unemployed for at least three months, have a higher education, have a convincing business idea, and want to start their own business. The programme, which consisted of a two-month entrepreneurship training course and a grant of €5,000 for self-employment, assisted and supported 936 women to become self-employed at a cost of around €6.5 million. Although the geographical preferences were not explicitly stated, the overall aim was to inspire women from different backgrounds, possibly also in rural areas, to become entrepreneurs. In 2020, the Ministry of Economic Development expanded support for (potential) female entrepreneurs and offered training and incentives. Fifty-six female entrepreneurs received €3,000 each to support the launch of their entrepreneurial ventures (Sedmo periodično poročilo ..., 2021).

To summarise, **women in rural areas are rarely seen as innovators. Most policy measures in Slovenia are openly aimed at the social inclusion of women.** Indirectly, women in rural areas are supported through the promotion of employment and the preservation of jobs in rural areas, support for activities under the LEADER intervention, support for the establishment of agricultural businesses by young farmers, participation in EIP projects and support for investment in the establishment and development of non-agricultural activities.

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DESK TOP ANALYSIS - SPAIN

1. RURAL CONTEXT

The population density in rural areas in Spain varies considerably, with many villages experiencing depopulation due to migration to urban centres. Ageing populations are also common in rural villages. Younger populations have a tendency to migrate to urban areas for education and employment opportunities, leaving rural villages with a significant proportion of elderly residents. In recent years, there have been many efforts to diversify economic activities in order to address these challenges. Nevertheless, depopulation is still an important issue, as well as geographic isolation and the lack of access to healthcare and education, leading to unemployment. Limited connectivity also generates a negative impact on overall development. Economic activities in remote areas in Spain are heavily reliant on agriculture, forestry, and traditional crafts. Limited access to markets challenges economic diversification, nevertheless there are traditional agricultural practices still in place, and innovative forms of agriculture and of rural tourism are increasingly diffusing.

Population by gender/age:

- Access to quality education can be a concern in certain rural areas, especially in the most remote areas, as younger individuals have a tendency of migrating to urban areas for higher education and employment opportunities.
- Rural areas, in general, face challenges related to gender and age imbalances, with older populations and gender disparities in employment opportunities.
- Gender distribution in rural areas is a significant variable, as the femininity index is notably low in Spain.
- Employment opportunities vary, with limited job options in some rural areas, potentially leading to higher unemployment rates.

In 2015, half of all land in Spain is used for agricultural or livestock activities (33% as farmland and 16% as meadows or pasture land) and the agri-food sector is one of the most dynamic sectors of the Spanish economy. The following information summarises the contexts in Spain:

Rural villages: In Spain, rural villages typically have a population of less than 5,000 inhabitants and are often located in mountainous, coastal, or inland areas and includes:

- Small population: Rural villages typically have a population of less than 5,000 inhabitants.
- Agricultural economy: Agriculture is the main economic activity of many rural villages.
- Traditional culture: Rural villages often preserve their traditional culture, which may include gastronomic, folkloric, or religious traditions.
- Nature: Rural villages are often surrounded by nature, which offers opportunities for outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, or fishing.



Remote rural areas: These types of areas are often found in mountainous or inland areas in Spain and the common characteristics are:

- Low population density: Remote rural areas typically have a low population density, meaning that there are few inhabitants per square kilometre.
- Agricultural economy: Agriculture is the main economic activity in many remote rural areas.
- Traditional culture: Remote rural areas often preserve their traditional culture, which may include gastronomic, folkloric, or religious traditions.
- Nature: Remote rural areas are often surrounded by untouched nature, which offers opportunities for outdoor activities such as hiking, biking, or fishing.

Rural areas near the city: rural areas near the city are often found in coastal or inland areas. Its common characteristics are:

- Higher population density: Rural areas near the city typically have a higher population density than remote rural areas.
- Mixed economy: Rural areas near the city typically have a mixed economy that includes agriculture, industry, and services.
- Traditional culture: Rural areas near the city often preserve their traditional culture but are also influenced by urban culture.
- Nature: Rural areas near the city are often surrounded by nature but may also be influenced by urbanisation.

The following table includes socio-demographic indicators obtained from the Spanish National Institute of Statistics.

Socio-demographic indicator	Rural villages	Remote rural areas	Rural areas near the city
Population	Less than 5,000 inhabitants	Less than 1,000 inhabitants	More than 5,000 inhabitants
Gender distribution	52% female, 48% male	53% female, 47% male	51% female, 49% male
Age distribution	25% under 18 years old, 65% 18-64 years old, 10% over 65 years old	20% under 18 years old, 55% 18-64 years old, 25% over 65 years old	20% under 18 years old, 60% 18-64 years old, 20% over 65 years old
Education	50% with a high school diploma or equivalent, 30% with a college degree, 20% with less than a high school diploma	40% with a high school diploma or equivalent, 20% with a college degree, 40% with less than a high school diploma	60% with a high school diploma or equivalent, 40% with a college degree, 0% with less than a high school diploma



Employment	50% employed in agriculture, 30% employed in services, 20% employed in industry	60% employed in agriculture, 20% employed in services, 20% employed in industry	30% employed in agriculture, 40% employed in services, 30% employed in industry
Gender employment rate	55% female, 45% male	50% female, 50% male	50% female, 50% male
Unemployment rate	10%	15%	5%

2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

The main women's associations and networks operating at a national level in rural areas in Spain are the following:

AFAMMER – Rural Families and Women's Association

AFAMMER is a non-profit organisation dedicated to representing and safeguarding the interests of women engaged in farming and ranching in Spain. With over 100,000 members, the organisation operates across all autonomous regions in Spain. AFAMMER's initiatives encompass training programmes, advocacy, and support for women embarking on their own agricultural ventures.

AMFAR – Federation of Women and Families in Rural Area

AMFAR is a national federation of rural women founded in Ciudad Real in 1991 to tackle the lack of knowledge surrounding the reality of rural women in Spain and, consequently, the gap in professional association. Nowadays it has over 90,000 members across Spain and operates at both a national and European level.

ASEME – Spanish Association of Women Entrepreneurs

ASEME is a non-profit organisation that champions the interests of women entrepreneurs in Spain, boasting over 1,000 members. The organisation focuses on training programmes, advocacy, and networking opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

AMCAE – Association of Women in Agricultural Cooperatives of Spain

AMCAE is a non-profit organisation representing and advocating for the interests of women in agricultural cooperatives in Spain, boasting over 3,000 members. AMCAE-Andalucía is a Women's Association of Andalusian Agri-food Cooperatives, whose main mission is to work towards a greater presence and participation of women farmers and livestock women farmers in the decision-making processes and the management bodies



of the cooperatives, i.e. in their assemblies, governing councils and as managers or directors. Its activities include training programmes, advocacy, and networking opportunities for women in agricultural cooperatives.

CERES - Association of Rural Women

CERES is a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the social, economic, and environmental development of rural women in Spain. CERES' main objective is to promote and work for the achievement of real and effective equality of opportunities between men and women. Their activities combine different perspectives to introduce real changes aimed at the promotion of women's rights. Ceres has been operating for over 25 years at a national level. (Specialised trainings in agro-ecofeminism). With over 1,000 members across all 17 autonomous regions, CERES engages in training programmes, advocacy, and research.

FADEMUR – Federation of Rural Women's Associations

FADEMUR is a federation of regional associations representing over 200,000 rural women in Spain, working to promote their interests at national and European levels. FADEMUR's activities include advocacy, training, and research. Fademur's mission is to eliminate the triple discrimination that rural women experience, as they carry out an economic activity subject to great uncertainty, in a highly masculinised environment and in an environment with little social support to help them with their families. Through Fademur, rural women denounce situations of discrimination and inequality, contribute to improving education and training, and demand recognition of the role that women play in the stability and development of the rural world.

FEMUR – Federation of Rural Women

FEMUR is a non-profit organisation working towards the social, economic, and cultural development of rural women in Spain, with over 2,000 members across all 17 autonomous regions. FEMUR engages in training programmes, advocacy, and networking opportunities.

UNCEAR – Union of Rural Action Centres

UNCEAR is a non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting the development of rural areas in Spain, with over 1,000 members across all 50 provinces. UNCEAR's activities include training programmes, advocacy, and networking opportunities for rural communities.

WWB – World Women's Bank

WWB is a non-profit organisation working to promote the economic empowerment of women globally, with over 100 million members in over 100 countries. WWB's activities include training programmes, microfinance, and advocacy.

In terms of innovation, these organisations support a variety of initiatives, such as:

- The development of new products and services catering to the needs of rural women and their families. For example, AMFRE has implemented a programme



offering training and financial support to women starting businesses in rural areas.

- The utilisation of new technologies to enhance the productivity and efficiency of rural businesses. For instance, AFAMMER is advocating for the adoption of new technologies in agriculture, including precision farming and robotics.
- The creation of opportunities for women to participate in the workforce. For example, AMFAR collaborates with local governments to formulate policies supporting the establishment of childcare facilities in rural areas.

3. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL ECONOMY

	2010	2020
Number of farms	989,770 / 989,796	914,871
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	23,752,610 ha	23,913,682 ha
Average size of Farms (ha)	2,226,990	30,012,082 (ha) en 2016

Agricultural holdings by economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro)

	2010	2020
Less than 14,000 euros	1 376 813 910	576 620
From 15.000 to 49,000 euros	3 337 627 040	177 830
From 50,000 to 249.000 euros	6 539 291 200	129 100
From 250.000 to 499,000 euros	4 816 134 150	17 680
500,000 euros and over	10 094 272 640	13 650

Number of farm managers by age and class 2010-2020

	2010		2020		2010(%)		2020(%)		2010-2020(%)	
	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total
Younger than 44	40,140	205,240	30,730	127,280	19,5 %	20,7 %	24,1 %	13,9 %		
44-65 years	106,140	490,220	119,250	409,700	21,6 %	49,5 %	29,1 %	44,7 %		
Older than 65	68,100	294,350	111,590	377,900	23,1 %	29,7 %	29,5 %	41,3 %		
Total	214,380	989,810	261,570	914,880	21,6 %		28,5 %			



Farm labour force in person 2010-2020

Family labour force (sole holders) in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
283,291	30,4%	929,694	239,164	31%	771,183
Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
758,014	37,5%	2,019,596	345,052	30,2%	1,139,394
Non-family labour force, in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
47,852	17%	247,260	109,082	19,7%	554,100

Rural Business

Number of rural businesses

According to the 2021 Spanish Census of Economic Activities (CNAE), there are over 1.3 million rural businesses in Spain. This represents about 40% of all businesses in Spain.

Proportion of female owners

The proportion of women owners of rural businesses in Spain is about 30%. This is slightly lower than the national average of 33%.

Types of businesses

The most common type of rural business in Spain is the micro-enterprise, which has fewer than 10 employees. Micro-enterprises account for about 60% of all rural businesses.

Sector/industry

The most common sectors for rural businesses in Spain are agriculture, forestry, and fishing (30%), services (25%), and retail (15%).



Opportunities for tourism, services, and social enterprises

Rural areas in Spain offer several opportunities for tourism, services, and social enterprises. These include:

- **Tourism:** Rural areas in Spain are home to a wealth of natural and cultural attractions, which make them a popular destination for tourists. There is a growing demand for sustainable tourism experiences, which rural businesses can capitalise on by offering eco-friendly accommodation, activities, and products.
- **Services:** Rural areas in Spain need a variety of services, such as healthcare, education, and childcare. Social enterprises can play a key role in providing these services, particularly in areas where there is a lack of private sector provision.
- **Social enterprises:** Social enterprises can address a wide range of social and environmental challenges in rural areas. For example, social enterprises can provide employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups, promote sustainable agriculture, and support cultural heritage preservation.

Expectancy of growth

The expectation of growth for rural businesses in Spain is positive. The Spanish government is committed to supporting the development of rural areas, and there is a growing demand for sustainable products and services. Rural businesses that can adapt to the changing environment and embrace innovation are well-positioned for success. The table below lists key statistics about rural businesses in Spain:

Statistic	Value
Number of rural businesses	1.3 million
Proportion of women owners	30%
Type of businesses	Micro-enterprises (60%), services (25%), retail (15%)
Sector/industry	Agriculture, forestry, and fishing (30%)
Opportunities for tourism, services, and social enterprises	Growing demand for sustainable tourism, need for services, social enterprises can address social and environmental challenges
Expectancy of growth	Positive

SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

Environmental sustainability

- **Depopulation and land abandonment:** Rural areas in Spain are facing a significant challenge of depopulation, which is leading to land abandonment and



environmental degradation. This is due to a few factors, including the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas, the ageing of the rural population, and the migration of young people to urban areas.

- Climate change: Rural areas in Spain are also facing the challenges of climate change, such as more extreme weather events, droughts, and water scarcity. These challenges are making it more difficult for farmers to produce food and are also putting a strain on natural resources.

Economic sustainability

- Lack of employment opportunities: Rural areas in Spain have a high unemployment rate, which is making it difficult for young people to find jobs and start their own businesses. This is leading to a vicious cycle of depopulation and economic decline.
- Low agricultural incomes: Farmers in Spain are struggling to make a living, as agricultural incomes have been declining in real terms for many years. This is due to a number of factors, including the globalisation of agriculture, the increasing cost of inputs, and the low prices of agricultural products.

Social sustainability

- Access to basic services: Rural areas in Spain often have limited access to basic services, such as healthcare, education, and transportation. This is making it difficult for people to live healthy and fulfilling lives in rural areas.
- Social isolation: Rural areas can be socially isolating, as there are often fewer opportunities to meet new people and participate in social activities. This can lead to feelings of loneliness and depression.

Cultural sustainability

- Loss of traditional knowledge and practices: Rural areas in Spain are home to a rich cultural heritage, but this is being threatened by modernization and globalization. Traditional knowledge and practices are being lost as younger generations move away from rural areas and adopt more urban lifestyles.
- Homogenization of culture: Rural areas in Spain are becoming increasingly homogenised as they are losing their unique cultural identities. This is due to the influence of mass media and popular culture.

The role of women

Women play a vital role in rural communities in Spain. They are involved in all aspects of rural life, from farming and food production to childcare and eldercare. However, women in rural areas often face discrimination and marginalization. They are underrepresented in leadership positions, and they often have lower incomes than men.



Other themes in the discussion

In addition to the four dimensions of sustainability, there are several other themes that are being discussed in relation to rural areas in Spain. These include:

- The need for rural development policies: There is a growing recognition of the need for specific policies to support the development of rural areas. These policies should focus on creating employment opportunities, improving access to basic services, and preserving cultural heritage.
- The importance of innovation: Innovation is essential for the sustainable development of rural areas. New technologies and approaches can be used to address the challenges of depopulation, climate change, and economic decline.
- The role of local communities: Local communities have a key role to play in the development of rural areas. They can identify and prioritise the needs of their communities, and they can work together to implement solutions.

Innovations supported or promoted by women in rural or agricultural areas

Women in rural and agricultural areas are developing and promoting a wide range of innovations, including:

- New agricultural products and practices: Women are developing new crops and livestock breeds that are more resistant to pests and diseases. They are also using new irrigation and fertilisation techniques to improve the sustainability of agriculture.
- New forms of rural tourism: Women are creating new forms of rural tourism that provide visitors with authentic experiences of rural life. This is helping to generate income for rural communities and preserve cultural heritage.
- New social enterprises: Women are starting social enterprises that are addressing the challenges of rural communities. These enterprises are providing services such as childcare, eldercare, and transportation.

Gender and innovation in rural and agricultural areas

There is a growing body of research examining the relationship between gender and innovation in rural and agricultural areas. This research finds that women are often more innovative than men, but their innovations are less likely to be recognised and adopted. This is due to a number of factors, including gender discrimination, lack of access to resources, and lack of visibility.

The main issues being debated

- How to ensure that women's innovations are recognised and adopted: This includes promoting women's participation in decision-making processes, providing women with access to markets and funding, and raising awareness of the value of women's innovations.
- How to create a more supportive environment for women's entrepreneurship in rural areas: This includes providing women with access to training and



mentorship, creating networks of women entrepreneurs, and promoting gender-sensitive policies.

4. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

The National Strategy for Social Entrepreneurship (Estrategia Nacional para el Emprendimiento Social) aims to foster the development of social enterprises, particularly those led by women in rural areas. This strategy encompasses the provision of funding, training, and mentorship for social enterprises, and it has proven successful in elevating the number of women-led social enterprises in rural regions. Furthermore, it facilitates the development of innovative solutions to address social and environmental challenges.

The National Strategic Plan for Sustainable Rural Development (Plan Estratégico Nacional para el Desarrollo Sostenible del Ámbito Rural) outlines various objectives for the advancement of rural areas, placing emphasis on promoting innovation and entrepreneurship among women. This plan entails funding for research and development, training, and networking opportunities for women in rural areas. Additionally, it advocates for the integration of new technologies to enhance the sustainability of agriculture and other rural businesses.

The Strategy for Sustainable Rural Tourism in Spain (Estrategia para el Desarrollo Sostenible del Turismo Rural en España) seeks to encourage the growth of sustainable tourism in rural areas. This strategy involves financial support for the creation of eco-friendly tourism products and services as well as the promotion of rural tourism destinations. Moreover, it advocates for the adoption of new technologies, such as online booking systems and energy-efficient accommodations, to enhance the sustainability of rural tourism businesses.

The Support Programme for Women's Business Development in Rural Areas (Programa de Apoyo al Desarrollo Empresarial Femenino en el Ámbito Rural) provides funding and training to women initiating their own businesses in rural areas. This programme also facilitates networking opportunities and mentorship to assist women in overcoming the challenges of starting and managing businesses in rural locales.

The Rural Women Entrepreneurs Network (Red de Emprendedoras Rurales) comprises women entrepreneurs in rural Spain and offers training, mentorship, and networking opportunities to enhance the success of women entrepreneurs in rural areas. Additionally, the network advocates for policies supporting women's entrepreneurship in rural regions.



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DESK TOP ANALYSIS - GERMANY

1. RURAL CONTEXT

Eurostat: Rural Population Statistics

	Rural Areas	Town and Suburbs
Distribution of population by degree of urbanisation, dwelling type and income group - EU-SILC survey, Total	23.0	40.4
Unemployment rates by sex, age and degree of urbanisation (%), From 15 to 74 years, Total <i>Percentage</i>	2.7	3.4

Thünen Atlas

Rurality:

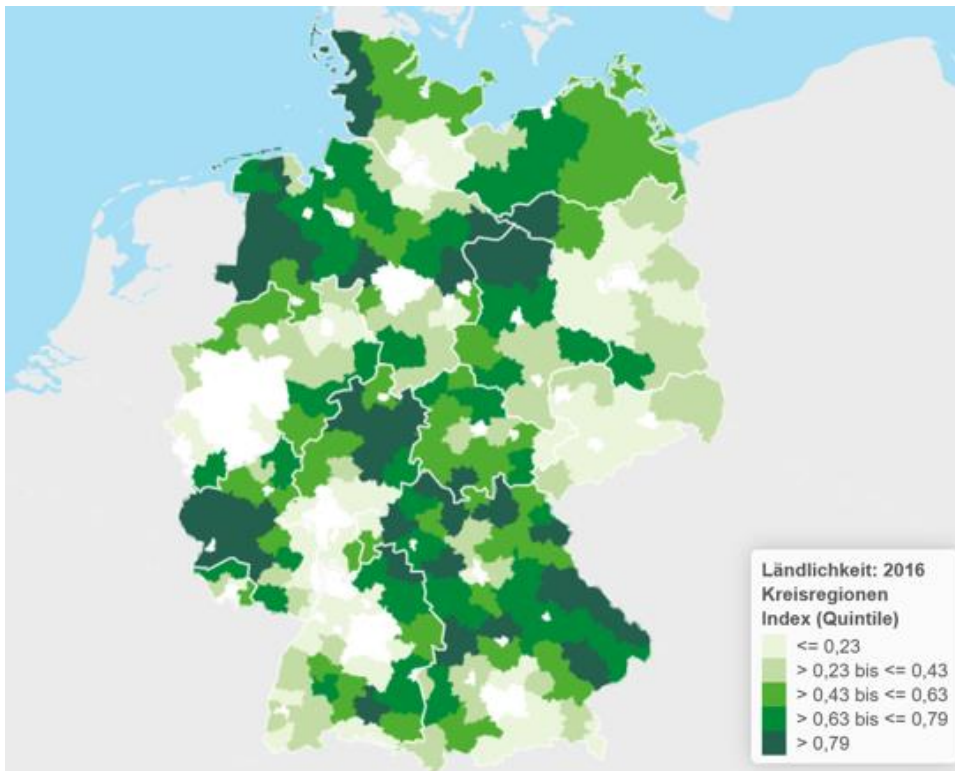
Rurality is understood to mean sparse residential development, low settlement density, a high proportion of agricultural and forestry land as well as peripheral locations to large centers, and a low number of inhabitants in the surrounding area. The spectrum ranges from very sparsely populated peripheral areas (extremely rural) to high-density metropolitan centers (hardly rural). Rural areas are differentiated from non-rural areas at the level of district regions. To illustrate the diversity within the rural district regions, the map shows the degree of rurality at municipal level.

Definition:

Five indicators are linked to form an index using a statistical procedure to determine rurality:

- settlement density 2013,
- share of agricultural and forestry land in the total area 2013,
- share of detached and semi-detached houses in all residential buildings 2013,
- regional population potential 2011 (sum of the population in a 50 km radius projected on the 1 km grid of Eurostat with weighting decreasing proportionally with the airline distance)
- accessibility of large centers (sum of the population of the next five regional centers in Germany or functional urban centers abroad weighted proportionally with the road distance according to the Federal Institute for Research on Building, Urban Affairs and Spatial Development [data as of 2014/2015]).

Rurality tends to be more pronounced the lower the settlement density, the higher the proportion of agricultural and forestry land, the higher the proportion of detached and semi-detached houses, the lower the population potential and the poorer the accessibility of large centres.

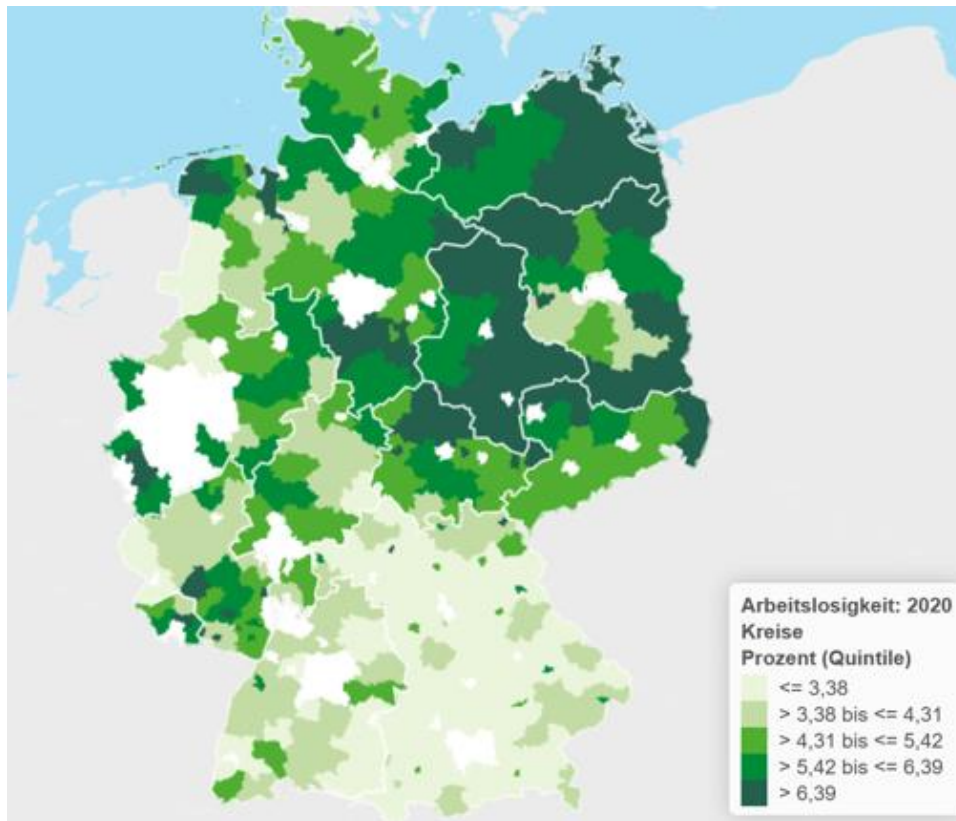


Unemployment rate:

The unemployment rate is shown here as the proportion of registered unemployed in the total civilian labor force (all civilian employed and unemployed persons added together).

Definition:

Persons are considered unemployed if they are not employed for 15 hours or more per week, are seeking employment subject to compulsory insurance for at least 15 hours per week, and have personally registered as unemployed with the employment agency or a job center. Pupils, students and participants in active labor market policy measures are not considered unemployed. The civilian labor force includes all dependent civilian employees, the self-employed and contributing family members as well as the registered unemployed. The non-civilian labor force includes, for example, soldiers. Calculation: $(\text{unemployed} / \text{all civilian labor force}) * 100$



Employees at the place of residence with an academic degree:

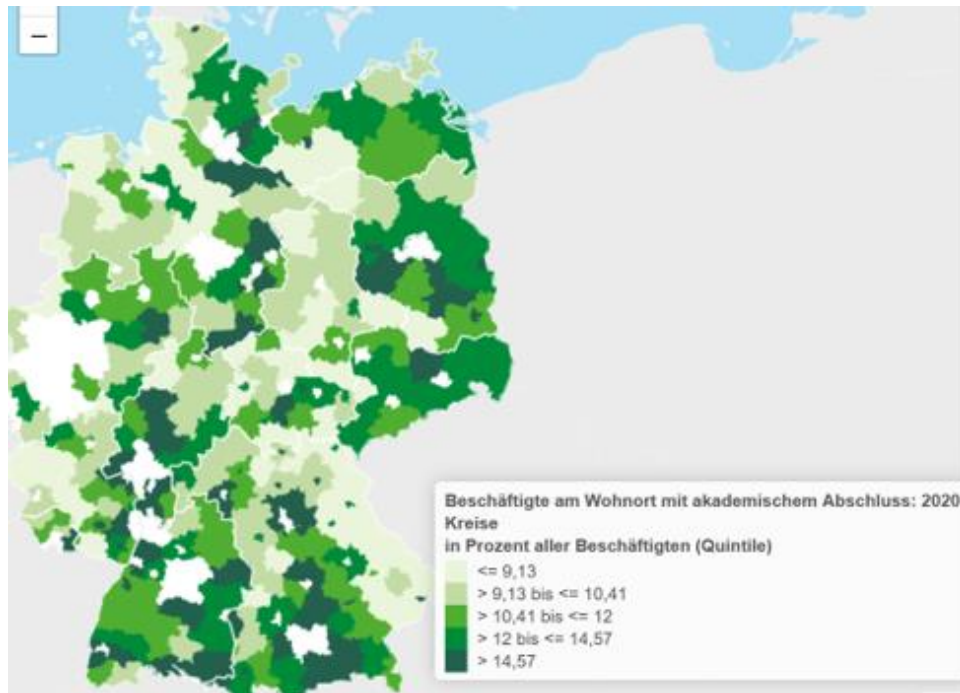
Employees at the place of residence with an academic degree are defined here as employees subject to social insurance contributions who have graduated from a university of applied sciences, college or university with an academic degree. The map shows at district level the proportion of employees subject to social insurance contributions at the place of residence with an academic degree in relation to all employees subject to social insurance contributions at the place of residence.

Definition:

Proportion of employees subject to social security contributions at the place of residence with an academic degree (including Bachelor's, Diplom, Magister, Master's, state examination, doctorate) according to the 2010 Classification of Occupations (KldB 2010). Employees subject to social security contributions are blue-collar workers, white-collar workers and persons in vocational training who are compulsorily insured under the statutory pension, health and/or unemployment insurance schemes. This does not include civil servants, the self-employed, family workers or marginally employed persons. In total, only around 75% of all employed persons are included. Despite this restriction, employees subject to social insurance contributions are used as a measure of the jobs available on the labor market. The employees are figures as at 30.06. Calculation: (employees subject to social insurance contributions at place of residence with an



academic degree / employees subject to social insurance contributions at place of residence) * 100



(Source: Thünen-Landatlas, Addition 01/12/2023. ed: Thünen-Institut
Forschungsbereich ländliche Räume, Braunschweig (www.landatlas.de))

2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Deutscher LandFrauenverband (German Rural Women's Association) ~ 450.000 members

The goal of the German Rural Women's Association (dlv) is more justice and equal opportunities for women who live in rural areas. This includes recognizing and acknowledging the achievements and equal participation of rural women in work and family, in society and politics, in education, business and culture. The German Rural Women's Association draws its strength from the diversity of its member associations. Its ranks reflect a broad spectrum of generations, professional and family interests and involvement in rural areas. The German Rural Women's Association brings together a wide variety of skills and concerns. As a lobby association for women in rural areas, it makes a significant contribution to developing common positions and concrete demands.

- Improving the social, economic and legal situation of women
- Compatibility of family and career
- Social recognition of work in the household and family
- Empowerment of women to participate in public life



- Empowerment to secure the income and quality of life of the family in rural areas
- Maintaining and improving the quality of life - this includes, for example, infrastructure, agriculture, the labour market, transport links, the environment and social life in the village

Activities:

The German Rural Women's Association is involved in various projects, both nationally and internationally. The aim of the project work is to empower women in rural areas and improve their living and working conditions.

- “The Municipal Action Program - Women in Politics!” aims to sustainably increase the proportion of women in municipal representations (municipal, city and district councils) as well as the proportion of full-time and honorary female mayors and district councillors. It therefore not only focuses on women, but also aims to help initiate structural changes that can have a positive impact on the participation of women and the acceptance and attractiveness of local politics as a whole. One focus is on rural regions. In two rounds, 10 selected regions will each receive advice and support over a period of one and a half years. The first round runs from 2022 to summer 2023; the second from June 2023 to the end of 2024.
- On behalf of the Deutscher LandFrauenverband e.V. (dlv), dlv-LandFrauen gGmbH has been successfully implementing projects in the field of international development cooperation since 2017. With its collective strength and decades of experience as an association, the dlv helps to promote equal participation of women in the agricultural and food sector worldwide.
- Podcast “zukunft_Land - Who moves rural areas!”. Germany is facing major challenges and changes. Climate policy in particular will change living, working and economic conditions. Rural areas are particularly affected by this transformation process. However, there is also scope for development and creativity - the open spaces in the countryside offer room and ideas to positively influence the future of the entire country.

How is innovation supported?

The German Rural Women's Association does a lot of lobby work in national and EU politics. Therefore, they support social and institutional innovations (e.g., more women in municipal politics or more female farmers, better living and working conditions for women on farms) by getting projects funded or setting topics on the political agenda. This organisation mainly supports social and institutional innovations.

Die Landfrauenvereinigung des Katholischen Deutschen Frauenbunds ~ 145.000 members

“We stand up for women!” - this conviction was and still is the foundation of the KDFB, which was founded by courageous Catholic women in Cologne in 1903. Today, around 145,000 members are active nationwide in 1,500 branch associations and 21 dioceses. They play an active role in shaping politics, society and the church. The diverse educational work of the Rural Women's Association empowers women in rural areas.



The content of the educational work includes rural development, environmental protection and nature conservation, pastoral care, renewable raw materials and renewable energies. Through their educational and lobbying work, they support women in taking on responsibility in church and political communities and in campaigning for environmental and climate protection.

Activities:

- Equal Pay day
- Conferences
- The organisations' #frauenbundblog has become a great place where women share their thoughts on everything from everyday life to existential matters.
- Women's peace pilgrimage
- Prevention of abuse
- Online events

How is innovation supported?

Lobby work in national politics, setting topics on the political agenda. This organisation mainly supports social and environmental innovations.

Unternehmerinnen-Ausschuss Deutscher Bauernverband

The German farmers association (Deutscher Bauernverband) has a chapter for female entrepreneurs. This is not an individual organization, but still women specific.

3. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL ECONOMY

	2010	2020
Number of farms	299 134	262 776
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	16 704 044	16 595 024
Average size of Farms	55,84	63,15

Agricultural holdings by economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro)

	2010	2020
Standard output	41 096 966 000	46 503 062 773
Less than 14,000 euros		
From 15.000 to 49,000 euros		
From 50,000 to 249.000 euros		
From 250.000 to 499,000 euros		



500,000 euros and over		
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Number of farm managers by age class 2010-2020

	2010		2020		2010(%)		2020(%)		2010-2020(%)	
	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total
Younger than 35	2712	21282	2599	20025	0,9	7,11	0,99	7,62	-0,009	-0,51
Younger than 45	9714	94699	8317	63613	3,25	31,66	3,17	24,21	0,08	7,45
45-64 years	13824	188530	17005	169059	4,62	63,02	6,5	64,34	-1,88	-1,32
Older than 65	1677	15903	3090	30104	0,56	5,32	1,18	11,55	-0,62	-6,23
Total	25215	299134	28412	262776	8,43	100	10,81	100	-2,38	0

Farm labour force in person 2010-2020

Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
194 605	34,98	556 343	144 100	33,17	434 400
Non-family labour force, in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
28 936	24,26	119 259	28 200 full time	22,22	126 900
35 536	47,93	74 142	44 600 part time	43,73	102 000
64 472	33,33	193 401	72 800	31,8	228 900

Additional Information

Small scale farming (0-10 ha)

	2010		2020	
	farms	ha	farms	ha
< 5 ha	27 400	54 000	21 600	36 500



5 – 10 ha	47 300	343 900	44 600	323 300
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Organic farming

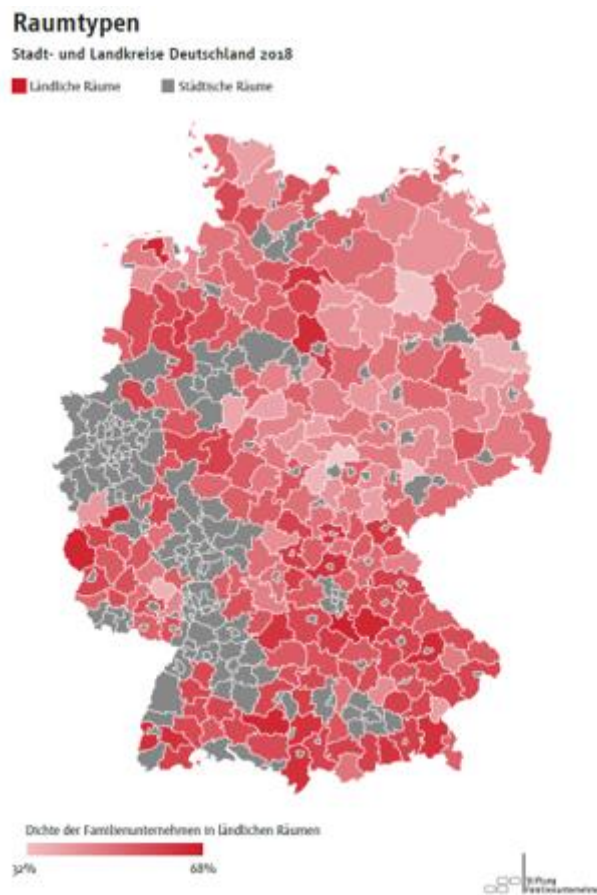
	farms		Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	
	organic	total	organic	total
2010	16 532	299 134	980 851	16 704 044
2020	26 133	262 776	1 592 735	16 595 024

Multifunctional agriculture

	Farms in total	Provision of health, social or educational services	Processing and direct marketing agricultural products	Tourism, accommodation, leisure activities	Pension and Sport horses	Renewable energies	Wood processing	Forestry	Total
2010	299 100	/	13 200	9 300	12 100	37 400	5 400	22 600	92 100
2020	262 776	4510	22 840	10 260	16 570	61 660	15 030	38 100	111 700

Rural Business

The below map illustrates the rurality combined with the density of family enterprises in Germany.



4. SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

The main issues discussed nationally in newspapers, grey literature and scientific articles in relation to economic, environmental, social and cultural innovation in relation to rural areas are:

- *Cultural* – tourism, networks and the concept of the rural idyll.
- *Social* – demographic change, populism, democratisation, provision of public services, equal living conditions, voluntary commitment, shortage of doctors and midwives, the gender pay and pension gap, loneliness, and agricultural protests.
- *Environmental* – sustainable agriculture, loss of biodiversity, rural area as a place of longing, and regenerative farming.
- *Economic* – out-migration, lack of manpower, infrastructure, digitalisation, and innovative rural start-ups.

The main issues in rural areas or in farming which directly impact women include:

- lack of employment opportunities for highly educated women



- lack of midwives in rural areas
- women being actively engaged in the voluntary sector
- women being innovative entrepreneurs
- maternity protection for female entrepreneurs
- female farmers and farm successors
- female rural start-ups
- female direct marketing in the agricultural context
- farm tourism run by women
- female agri-influencers
- female brain drain in the eastern rural areas, contributing to the rise of right-wing populism in east Germany

The main sustainability innovations supported or promoted by women in rural areas and agriculture include:

- *Cultural* - women establishing tourism enterprises in rural areas
- *Social* - social media agri-influencers
- *Environmental* - female farmers promoting sustainable farming practices
- *Economic* - female direct marketing in the agricultural context

The central discussions on gender and innovation in rural areas and farming focus on women as the driving forces for innovative farming and marketing practices. Gender equality in the farming sector, and life and work situation of women on farms are also key issues being debated.

5. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Innovative measures for women in rural areas (IMF) (in Baden-Wurtemberg)

What is supported?

- Qualification and investment measures as well as coaching measures to secure jobs and create alternative sources of income for women in rural areas
- Business start-ups by women in rural areas around income combinations and alternatives
- Establishment of new network organizations of women in rural areas

Objective:

Women in agriculture and women in rural areas are to be given an incentive to develop and implement new ideas and concepts for securing or opening up income and employment opportunities and for the integrated development of rural areas.

Who can apply:



Qualification measures:

- Providers of qualification and coaching measures for women

Business start-ups:

- Business start-ups for women,
- Cooperation between women in agriculture and rural areas
- Newly founded network organizations whose aim is to promote cooperation between a wide range of partners in order to create income and employment opportunities for women close to home.

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DESK TOP ANALYSIS - ROMANIA

1. RURAL CONTEXT

Romania has the second highest percentage of rural areas in the EU - **46.5%** (Lithuania with 54.9%), - compared to an EU (28) average of 27.3% according to Eurostat data from 2017 (Eurostat, n/a a). In 2021, the percentage had decreased to **46.1 %**. **This alludes to 9.1 million rural inhabitants occupying a territory of 207 842 km²**, comprising 87% of the land area of Romania (ESPON, 2022).

The perception of Romanian rural areas is largely shaped by the metrics population, density, socio-economic data, and official categorizations defining this specific spatial category. The Romanian National Institute of Statistics (NIS) provides data that describes local administrative units (LAUs), distinguishing urban areas (cities or municipalities) from their counterparts- communes (total 2861 in 2018). According to data published in 2019, the communes with populations ranging from 1,000 to 5,000 inhabitants accounted for 79.6% of the total number of communes, with 105 having less than 1,000 inhabitants (INS, 2019).

A commune consists, on average, of five villages (Dumitru et al., 2021). A challenge in analysing urbanisation and ruralisation lies in the contemporary urban and rural landscapes, where traditional city-village distinctions blur, giving rise to numerous entities—like semi-urbanized villages, distinct suburbs, semi-autonomous settlements, underdeveloped towns, and ambitious industrialised villages - both geographically and physically, cities and the countryside form the rurban continuum (Berescu, 2022).

Anything outside urban delineations automatically qualifies as rural space (ESPON, 2022). The legal definition of Romanian rural space, as per Law 351/2001, centres around the economic specialisation of the LAUs. It identifies rural areas by their strong emphasis on agriculture or, alternatively, by their limited territorial resources compared to cities. Within this law, a rural commune (LAU for rural spaces) is characterised by population density, economic and occupational structure (with a focus on agriculture), as well as socio-cultural factors such as shared traditions (Stănescu, 2022).

Analysing rural areas in Romania is challenging due to factors like administrative fragmentation, with 237 new LAUs since 2004, and limited data availability, especially pre-census and post-pandemic economic data (ESPON, 2022). The NIS also ceased providing key data on rural economic activities. Publicly, rural areas and populations are perceived as underdeveloped (socially, economically and culturally) compared to urban ones, lacking in infrastructure and inhabitants' lifestyle adaptations (e.g. capitalist economic practices, neoliberal modes of production and consumption, globalisation), leading to a focus on urbanisation in territorial governance (Berescu, 2022; Velicu, 2023).

During the early 2010s, a notable change in funding for rural areas approach emerged as government-supported regional and local development initiatives empowered local and regional authorities to propose and oversee project expenditures, signifying a shift in financial authority from the central government to local leadership (Stănescu, 2022). This transformation is evident in initiatives such as the "Modernisation of the Romanian



village" and the funding of inter-municipal associations through the "Infrastructure at county level" programme.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In January 2023, the resident population in Romania was 19 million, recording a slight increase of 9.100 inhabitants compared to 1 January 2022. This was due to the influx of refugees from Ukraine, asylum seekers from the Middle East, and deregulation of work-related-immigration regarding South-East Asia (OECD Library, 2021). The female population at national level is slightly higher than the male one (51.4%) (INS, 2023). The urban population has 52.1%, while the **rural population is 47.9% (9.1 million)**. The percentage of rural residents in Romania is much higher than the EU average of 30.6% (European Union, n/a). The significant proportion of Romania's total population residing in rural areas stems from delayed urbanisation, dependence on rural-to-urban commuting, and the advantage enjoyed by rural commuters who benefit from increased net incomes by saving on housing and food expenses, as well as healthier living environments (Cosma et al., 2020).

The overall main issue rural areas are faced with is depopulation (Dumitru, 2021), accompanied by an ageing population. The average age of the rural population is 42.2 years, 0.2 years higher than in urban areas (MDLPA, 2020). Negative natural growth rates, coupled with international migration deficits, lead to a significant decrease in the country's resident population.

In predominantly rural EU regions, fertility rates range from 0.70 in El Hierro (Canarias, Spain) to 3.01 in Vaslui (Eastern Romania). Vaslui stands out with the highest fertility rate among rural areas in EU Member States, surpassing national averages by 1.22 live births per woman (Eurostat, 2022b). According to the survey, five additional predominantly rural regions in Romania registered fertility rates exceeding 2.10, a benchmark considered the natural replacement rate in developed economies, indicating population replacement across generations in the absence of migration and with constant mortality rates. This is due to lack of access to reproductive/sexual education and reproductive health services primarily, as well as the social, cultural and economic factors being correlated with a very high degree of underage mothers. For example, in the North-Eastern region of Romania, between 2009 and 2020, out of 1,788 teenage girls who became mothers, 1,467 (82.04%) were from the rural areas (Doroftei et al., 2022).

QUALITY of LIFE in RURAL AREAS

Multiple factors, encompassing limited access to essential infrastructure (including transportation and public utilities) and services, educational and economic deficiencies, contribute to the diminished quality of life in rural Romania, perpetuated by systemic neglect, further exacerbating discrimination in favour of urban areas (Berbecar et al., 2020; Iftimoaie, 2021; Stănescu, 2022). This neglect results in a critical scarcity of essential social care and support services in remote rural regions, hindering accessibility and perpetuating disparities among vulnerable social groups, such as those with chronic illnesses, the elderly, or disabled individuals, thereby impacting social stratification and correlating with lower life expectancy, higher prevalence of chronic diseases, and



reduced overall development (EASPPD, 2018; Stănescu, 2022). Additionally, certain towns in Romania classified as "rural" encounter similar challenges to communes and villages, compounding the issues related to quality of life (Berbecar et al., 2020).

The risk of poverty and social exclusion in Romania for the whole population is 34.4%, the highest in the EU in 2023, compared to the EU average of 22% (Eurostat, 2023b). Women in rural areas, particularly single women, older women, women with dependent children, and disabled women are most at risk of poverty and social exclusion, particularly if they also belong to the Roma minority (Eurostat, 2022b; Iftimoaie, 2021; European Commission, 2019). All these factors together (economics, access to education and health services, accessibility, infrastructure, social services) lead to almost **half (48.5%) of the people living in rural areas in Romania being at risk of poverty or social exclusion, more than double the EU average of 23.9%**. The same Eurostat article points out that almost 35% of the women living in rural areas in Romania are affected by severe material and social deprivation, with the gender gap being the highest in the EU and on an increasing trend (compared to 2015). In urban areas in Romania, the percentage of persons at risk of poverty or social exclusion is 19.6%, while in towns and suburbs the percentage is 30.5%. **There is a clear correlation between the risk of poverty, social exclusion and the degree of urbanisation in Romania, with almost half of the rural population being exposed to it. This risk disproportionately affects Romanian women from rural areas, who are the category of population within the EU most exposed.**

Income inequality overall in Romania is pronounced: the top 20% earners receive 39.8% of disposable income, while the bottom 20% receive only 5.6% (Gazibar and Giuglea, n/a). Rural households are particularly affected by in-work poverty, those who have difficulty meeting current expenses include those where the head of the household is unemployed (69%), working in agriculture (48.3%), and those who have another other status (60,6%) (Iftimoaie, 2021). Research on marginalised rural areas in Romania - understood as LAUs exhibiting notably fewer residents, job opportunities, and substandard living conditions in contrast to the average for similar types of rural settlements - underscores a significant correlation between these areas and low levels of human development (Teşliuc et al. 2016).

In marginalised rural regions, individuals self-identifying as Roma constitute approximately 27% of the population. This overrepresentation in these areas is nearly 10 times greater than the overall national percentage of self-identified Roma in the entire population (Government of Romania, 2022). Rural Roma population experiences significant social and economic intersectional marginalisation on ethnic, degree of urbanisation and gender grounds. Approximately **60% of rural Roma communities face poverty**. Moreover, young Roma individuals and Roma women in rural areas encounter significantly reduced opportunities for employment in the formal economy (European Commission, 2019).

Despite the persistent challenges and contrast with other rural areas in the EU, living conditions in rural Romania have improved significantly in the decades since 1989: the heterogeneity of communities and villages and their development being both driven by suburbanization, as well as increased overall access to public utilities (Stănescu, 2022).



HEALTH and HEALTH SERVICES

Over the last two decades, the infrastructure of the health system has undergone significant changes in both the public and private sectors. The number of facilities providing health services has steadily increased, but certain categories of facilities have gone, especially in rural areas (e.g. rural polyclinics) (INS, 2021). Rural healthcare utilisation declines due to geographic barriers, resulting in fewer medical visits, limited specialist care, and a tendency for acute care over regular and chronic care visits (Berbecar et al., 2020). Disparities in access to healthcare, driven by limited medical facilities and decreased medical professionals, distance to specialised clinics, costs, and waiting lists, have a significant negative impact on overall population health, highlighting the crucial correlation between wellbeing and comprehensive healthcare coverage (INS, 2021). Between 2002 and 2012, 35 public hospitals in small towns were closed due to under-financing by the central government following the 2008 economic crisis (Berbecar et al., 2020), directly affecting the access to health services for rural citizens.

Inequalities in access to health services between rural and urban areas of residence and between different development regions have persisted since 2010. Only **10.3% of the public hospitals and 6.1% of the private ones were located in rural areas in 2018** (INS, 2019). In rural areas in 2019, one doctor was responsible for 1,571 residents. Primary healthcare, provided by family medical practices, counted 6,500 clinics in urban areas in 2018, compared to 4,400 in rural areas, resulting in 1.3 times more patients per clinic in rural areas than in urban ones (Mediafax, 2020). The network of specialised independent medical offices and independent dental offices within the outpatient healthcare system is also predominantly situated in urban areas. While 11,500 independent specialised medical clinics operated in urban regions, the number in rural areas was significantly lower, only 494 clinics, 23 times less than in urban areas (Mediafax, 2020).

Roma women and girls frequently face obstacles due to racial and gender biases when accessing health and public services. Additionally, specialised services tailored for women and girls with disabilities and other vulnerable groups are notably absent (Government of Romania, 2022). Thus, this further combines with the lack of medical services and medical professionals in rural areas, making them a triple/four times marginalised social group (gender, ethnicity, and area of residence, and disability in certain cases).

The difficulties faced by rural population in accessing health services in Romania also impacts the self-perception of health, especially for elderly persons in rural areas, with only 20.7% those over 65 years old assessing it as good or very good and 23.8% as bad or very bad, as compared to 25.5% and 20.4% respectively of those living in cities. The EU average for people over 65 years old living in rural areas assessing their health as very good is 36.4% and 21.2% assess it as bad or very bad. Access to health services and professionals is one of the main issues - 560 000 Romanians have renounced medical services in 2018 due to not being able to afford it, with 61.6% of them being women, and more than half of the total (52.8%) living in rural areas (FBS, n/a).

The vast majority of regions in Romania (including urban and rural areas) count with 66.5% or less of the population having a hospital within a short radius to their area with



some counties/NUTS regions having as little as 6.7% of the population in this situation (Eurostat, n/a b). In 2020, the average life expectancy of urban residents was 77.44 years, 3.03 years higher than the rural areas average, with the **lowest life expectancy being calculated for rural men (70.69 years)** (INS, 2021). The birth rate per 1,000 inhabitants is 10.2 in the rural areas, lower than in the urban ones (10.4), with this trend having started in 2013 (ESPON, 2022). Additionally, the mortality rate was also higher in 2021 in rural areas (15/1,000 inhabitants) than in urban ones (12/1,000 inhabitants) (INS, 2021).

Other relevant issues affecting the health of the rural population are related to preventable environmental factors. Mitigating air pollution's health effects in Romania, with an estimated 26,490 annual premature deaths attributed to high PM, NO₂, and O₃ concentrations, is limited due to lack of monitoring infrastructure and industry reporting, preventing comprehensive assessment and reduction efforts (UN, 2021). Similarly, discharges outside the sewerage network, agricultural pollution, inadequate rural water supply, and household pollution driven by unregulated urban expansion and illegal construction also affect the wellbeing of the rural population (UN, 2021).

EDUCATION

Rural areas in Romania are **the earliest leavers from education and training (27.2%)**. A percentage that is almost three times higher than the EU average of 10.9% early leavers in rural areas. The disaggregated numbers for young men and women are pointing to a very small gender gap, which tends to be closing - see below (Eurostat, 2022b). Nationally, the contrast is stark when considering the urban early leavers from education and training in Romanian cities which are only 4.5%, roughly half of the EU average of 9.6% in urban areas.

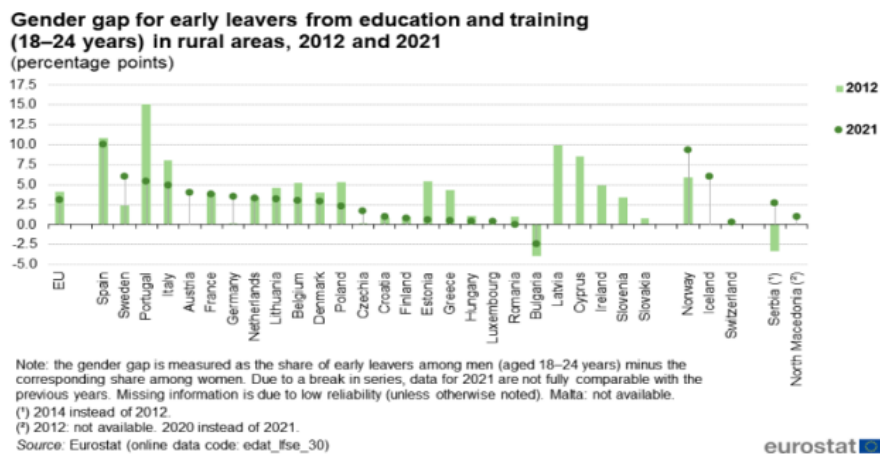


Figure 5: Gender gap for early leavers from education and training (18–24 years) in rural areas, 2012 and 2021 (percentage points)

Source: Eurostat ([edat_ifse_30](#))



7.2% of the rural population completed tertiary education. This indicates the limited access to education in rural areas compared to the EU average of 28.6% of people in rural areas. Within Romania, the contrast in terms of completing tertiary education is stark. 48.1% of those living in Romanian cities having obtained such a degree, compared to 20.6% of those living in towns and suburbs (Eurostat, 2022b).

The closure of arts and crafts schools in 2009 severely limited educational opportunities for rural students, contributing to a scarcity of skilled labour, particularly affecting the availability of trained agriculture workforce (NSP, 2022), in turn impacting the national economy (INS, 2021). Similarly, between 1991 and 2006, the number of state-funded kindergartens decreased by over half, with rural areas experiencing an even more acute scarcity of these essential education and care facilities for families (INS, 2021).

Up to 80% of adults in rural marginalised communities had completed less than eight years of schooling, with 35% having only a primary education. In contrast, non-marginalized communities show lower rates at 45% and 8%, respectively.

EMPLOYMENT and YOUTH

The Romanian Youth Strategy 2015-2020 primarily targets supporting disadvantaged youth, categorising rural youth as a vulnerable group (Șerban and Brazienè, 2021). Almost quarter (**23.4% of young people in rural areas** (18 to 24 years old)) are neither in employment nor in education and training, the EU average for rural areas being 15.6%, while in urban areas in Romania the percentage of youth unemployed or partaking in education or training is 9.1%. Rural youth (15 to 24 years old) are also particularly affected by unemployment (16.5%), when compared to the overall unemployment in rural areas of 5.4% in Romania (Eurostat, n/a a). However, the youth unemployment rate is in line with the EU average of 15% youth unemployment in rural areas, and lower than in cities (17.3%), towns and suburbs (23.3%). Young rural women are the most affected by this phenomenon, as it can be seen below:

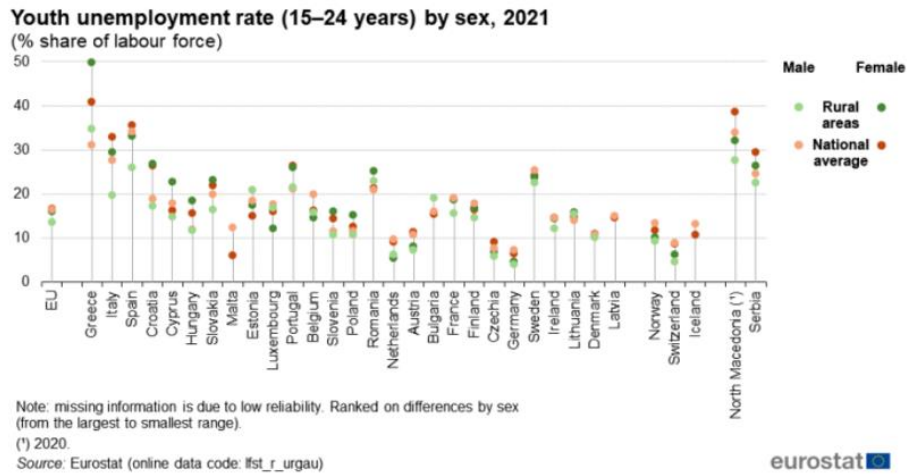


Figure 17: Youth unemployment rate (15–24 years) by sex, 2021

(% share of labour force)

Source: Eurostat (lfst_r_urgau)

Among youth aged 15 to 19 in marginalised rural areas, the percentage neither employed nor in education or training is double non-marginalized areas (51% vs. 23%). For individuals aged 20 to 64, the proportion neither employed nor in education is nearly 64% in non-marginalized rural areas but spikes to 88% in marginalised regions, **reaching 95% among Roma women** (Teşliuc et al., 2016). The situation concerning the Roma minority is very worrying: on average, 63% of Roma aged 16-24 were neither in employment nor in education or training at the time of the survey, compared to an EU average of 12% for the same age group. For this age group, the results also show a considerable gender gap, with 72% of young Roma young women not in employment, education or training, compared with 55% of young Roma men (Government of Romania, 2022). Young Roma in rural areas thus, as well as Roma women have a significantly lower chance of being employed in the formal economy.

In 2019, Romania's employment rate stood at 70.9%, slightly below the EU average of 73.9%. Rural areas showed a lower employment rate (69.4%) (Eurostat, n/a a). Regarding gender, men have an employment rate more than 20 percentage points higher than women, rendering women more vulnerable. Agriculture, forestry, and fishing constitute the primary labour activities in rural areas, engaging 43% of the rural workforce, trailed by the processing industry (17%) and commerce (10%) (European Commission, 2020).

MIGRATION

There is a positive correlation between the spatial distribution of international migration in Romania and the distribution of social exclusion risks, thus the remote and densely populated areas, predominantly rural areas lacking a large and dynamic urban centre are the most exposed (The World Bank, 2018). In turn, the process of migration is accompanied by a series of social, economic and cultural changes in the community of



belonging (Ciobanu, 2004), disruptive effects on family structure and higher dependency rate (children left by their parent/s in the care of others, and elders not having carers) and changes in the ethnic and religious composition of the community (The World Bank, 2018); change of consumption patterns and preference of entrepreneurial activities rather than agricultural production (Ciobanu, 2004); and change in architectural preferences and others (Jacob, 2015). However, migration positively affected income inequality among households by means of remittances which contributed to diminishing inequality within and between urban and rural areas (the average inflow was 3.5 billion euro between 2004 and 2016, representing 2.8 percent of GDP) (The World Bank, 2018; Zamfir et al., 2010).

Given the EU context of a growing demand for labour within its internal market (notably in sectors like agriculture, construction, and domestic service), facilitated by a regulatory framework permitting free movement of labour, and GDP disparity among member-states, the migration of working-age individuals from rural areas continues to increase in Romania, leading to growing national labour shortages in particular in the fields of agriculture, forestry and fisheries (Oprea et al, 2021). A significant factor is that EU's transnational agribusinesses rely on inexpensive, yet specialised/experienced, oftentimes seasonal workforce from low-wage Central and Eastern European countries (Romania included) which is both non-unionized and privately managed, thus leaving individuals and communities vulnerable (Cosma et al. 2020). From 1992 to 2019, Romania saw a reduction of over 1.9 million in its occupied population. More than 1.7 million people of those engaged in farming, forestry, and fishing affecting all 41 counties (Oprea et al, 2021). Since agriculture is one of the main branches of the national economy, the reduction in workforce directly impacts potential production and threatens Romania's food security (Oprea et al, 2021).

In terms of internal migration, the rural areas attracted a higher number of internal migrants than cities (190.000 persons almost 23.000 newcomers more than in the urban areas), in 2020 (ESPON, 2022). The trend generally being that youth leaves the rural areas to either enrol in studies or find jobs in the cities (Dumitru, 2021). As for those leaving the cities to move to rural areas, it is mostly the middle aged and older urban residents who choose to move to rural areas (either returning or as new entrants) for survival, a healthier natural environment, and be a part of a local community (Cosma et al., 2020). This phenomenon is linked to the substantial de-industrialization prompted by the market reforms after 1989 (Gabor, 2010), Romania observing instances of urban-to-rural migration among displaced industrial workers seeking survival options (Cosma et al., 2020).

ENVIRONMENT and SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Romania boasts rich biodiversity and nearly a third of its land covered by natural forests and vital biological corridors, holding the EU's largest untouched forests. The country lies predominantly within the Danube River basin, encompassing over 97% of its area and housing significant protected areas, including the vast Danube Delta. With more than 1,600 natural reserves, Romania safeguards 23.5% of its terrestrial territory and 21.5% of its marine waters. Despite alignment with EU environmental laws, challenges persist in implementing these regulations, resulting in the highest number of environmental infringements within the EU (European Union Civil Protection, 2023).



One of the main recommendations made in 2020 by the European Commission regarding the Romanian National Strategic Plan (NSP), which is part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was to bolster environmental care and climate action. The EU environmental objectives are particularly relevant but also challenging for Romanian agriculture as the country has a very low share of organic farming and it intends to develop the animal breeding sector. Additionally, there are still intensive agriculture areas where nitrate pollution is high.

Romania has established a comprehensive national framework to fulfil the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs, backed by policy, institutions, and political commitment of high level institutions: the National Strategy for the Sustainable Development of Romania 2030 was established, the Department for Sustainable Development was created within the Prime Minister's Office and, in 2019, the Government established the Interdepartmental Committee for Sustainable Development, while the National Institute of Statistics has been updating the existing Sustainable Development Indicators system (UN, 2021). However, the same report shows that there are significant issues with the current approach: the environmental legal framework undergoes frequent revisions to align with expanding EU environmental laws; a substantial portion of legislation arises from emergency procedures, disregarding citizens' involvement in environmental decision-making; and Strategic planning lacks alignment with budgetary cycles, and policy documents often lack measurable indicators and specific targets (UN, 2021). However, the Ministry of Development, Public Works, and Administration assesses that there's a justified need for a focused and coordinated response at both the EU and national levels due to the importance of rural areas in implementing the Green Deal, particularly in ensuring a fair transition through supporting the bioeconomy, circular economy initiatives, and sustainable food production systems (MDLPA-DPS, 2020).

The frequency of adverse climatic events (droughts, floods, storms) has increased in recent years (European Commission asserts, 2020). This has affected rural inhabitants, the agricultural productivity and income of Romanian farmers, as well as soil quality, with some areas experiencing increasing degradation and aridity. The quality of soil is below the EU average, mainly due to the intensification of agriculture, reduced crop diversification and low interest of agribusinesses in measures to improve soil. Strengthening the connection between disaster risk reduction and nature preservation is crucial, given Romania's rich biodiversity and vast virgin forests, showcasing the dual benefit of safeguarding ecosystems while mitigating disaster risks (European Union Civil Protection, 2023). However, there is little connection made at the institutional level between the potential that rural areas have in terms of nature preservation and the ongoing strategies and programmes.

The risk of floods is very high in Romania due to deforestation and poor management of natural areas. As such, sectoral strategies encompassing structural prevention measures like green infrastructures and Nature-Based Solutions are needed, as outlined in unimplemented plans like the National Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change (managed by the Ministry of the Environment), urging their implementation and value recognition by local authorities for cost-effective and sustainable flood risk management



2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

EcoRuralis was founded in 2009 by two young women and is a member of La Via Campesina (European Secretariat) since 2011. It represents 17,000 peasants, small farmers, and rural workers across Romania, advocating for their rights and interests. EcoRuralis is driven by the belief that collective representation empowers the network to uphold their rights and promote peasant agroecology as the ideal sustainability agriculture and food production model in Romania (Ecoruralis, About). The themes EcoRuralis is active in are right to seeds, right to land, right to markets, peasant rights, public policies, rural migration, agroecology and young peasants, and rural feminism. For EcoRuralis, the focus is on empowering rural women, acknowledging their pivotal role in family, community, and rural economy while addressing historical disparities. Ecoruralis strives for a future where rural women have equal rights, recognition, and participation in all aspects of rural life, aiming to end their marginalisation and enable their full engagement in economic, social, political, and cultural development. Ecoruralis runs a Rural Feminism Working Group and celebrates the International Rural Women's Day on October 15th, highlighting rural women's vital role in development, farming, food security, and poverty eradication (EcoRuralis, Rural Feminism).

The **National Rural Development Network (NRDN)** structure under the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and financed by the European Regional Development Fund, groups together organisations and administrations involved in rural development, being part of the European Network for Rural Development (ENRD). NRDN serves as a crucial bridge between national administrations and entities engaged in executing Rural Development Programme (RDP) initiatives, such as Local Action Groups (LAGs) developing the LEADER approach, which includes a gender equality approach. With a focus on fostering networking and information exchange regarding RDP endeavours at regional, national, and EU levels, NRDN undertakes activities such as organising events, communication material development, and the dissemination of best practices. NRDN's core objectives involve augmenting stakeholder engagement, enhancing the quality of RDP implementation, informing the public and potential beneficiaries about rural development policies and funding opportunities, and nurturing innovation in agriculture, food production, forestry, and rural domains. NRDN regularly disseminates informative materials about rural women entrepreneurs, their access to funding and successful innovative projects in farming and in rural areas. It also discusses women's representation in farming at EU network's meetings; engages in the activities of the EU network working group for responding to demographic change and promoting social inclusion (focusing on migrants, refugees, the Roma community, young people, women); and informs about changing gender dynamics in different agricultural activities.

The projects and services of the **Center for Mediation and Community Safety (CMCS)** are built on the development and promotion of public policies and models of community development, cooperation and development of best practices, as well as campaigns or legislative initiatives that contribute to a safer life for communities, families and society. The four strands of action are rural community development including projects, services and legislative initiatives in the field of preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence; local, European and international cooperation for safe communities; and technical assistance, research, innovation and legislative initiatives in



the social field. CMSC has been established by and is being led by a woman and has coordinated more than 30 regional projects since 2000 and continues its ongoing work focused on introducing new and improved standards in community development and domestic violence victim support. Introducing European and international community safety models, adapted to the needs and realities of the undeveloped region where it develops its programmes (both in rural and urban areas, in 9 counties and almost 20 communities - in the NE part of Romania) has been a priority since its establishment. CMCS is licensed in services for victims of domestic violence, assisting about 150 adults and children annually facing abusive situations by providing legal counselling and representation in court, individual/group therapy programmes to overcome the trauma caused by violence, educational programmes for child witnesses/victims of domestic violence, assistance and material support in crisis situations, as well as the reimbursement of costs such as those necessary for the issue of medico-legal certificates. Since most of those assisted reside in rural areas, CMCS is also located in a commune.

Women's Neighbourhood of Saschiz Association (WNS) was founded in 2015 by twenty-three women living in Saschiz, Mureş County. They implemented, together with the local LAG - Dealurile Târnavelor, the culturally and economically innovative and sustainable project "Bucate din vecinătate" (Food from the neighbourhood), financed by EU funds and delivering baskets of traditional food to homes in the area, having decided to set up a cooperative to continue marketing their products after the grant ended. The two complementary innovative sustainability measures implemented (short supply chains and associativity) were a support for the food producers in the area. Since 2013, they have also been organising the festival Rabarbăr celebration in Saschiz, aiming to bring to the local and regional public, as well as national and international tourists, the Saxon culinary tradition and highlight the multiculturalism of the area, and the tangible and intangible heritage and gastronomy.

A series of innovative regional initiatives and networks related particularly to traditional peasant seed saving and community supported agriculture (CSA) in which rural women hold preeminent roles, as either founders and/or leaders. Among the seed saving networks in Romania are: *Semințe cu suflet*, *Semințe vii*, *Semințe libere*. The seeds guardian networks organise seed exchange markets throughout the country, in line with the environmental sustainability dimension, enacting a circular and sharing economy through direct seed exchanges. Moreover, these networks and initiatives display significant social and cultural sustainability innovation by not only preserving traditional agricultural practices through the seed banks the members establish and conserving thus agrobiodiversity, but also by contributing to skills development regarding traditional ecological seed reproduction practices and perpetuating traditional ecological knowledge. The seeds are produced using sustainable agriculture practices, particularly peasant agroecology, and contribute to the genetic thesaurus and overall biodiversity conservation. Among CSA networks initiated or currently led by women are Peasant Box in Cluj County and ASAT - Association for the Support of Peasant Agriculture. The CSA networks showcases innovative economic and social sustainability, by being community-based enterprises which foster education and skills development in terms of sustainable food production and consumption. They also contribute to value chain development through the direct market linkages between local producers and consumers. At the same



time, they have a cultural sustainability innovative dimension in that they produce locally, culturally adequate food which allows for traditional gastronomy to be preserved, while also contributing to food sovereignty.

The **European Youth Village** acknowledges that significant cases of gender-based violence and discrimination against sexual minorities persist in rural areas in Romania. Such as combating sexism and gender discrimination must become a priority for civil society and public authorities in rural settings, empowering young girls and sexual minorities to defend their rights. Additionally, integrating a gender-sensitive approach across all aspects of life is necessary. European Youth Village, initiated in 2018 and coordinated nationally by the Active Development Association and Go Free Association, strategically fosters rural youth development, enhances community organisation, and aims to establish best practices in youth development at local, national, and European levels.

The **Rural Women National Association** established in 1997, is a diverse non-profit organisation operating across 15 branches nationwide, formerly part of the National Rural Development Network (RNDR), dedicated to fostering equal opportunities, social protection, and economic independence for its diverse membership, spanning various backgrounds and ages in rural areas. The RWNA promotes local heritage, entrepreneurship, women's professional integration, and the preservation of traditions while encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives among rural women.

The **Association of Rural Women and Families** established in 2008, advocates for women's rights in rural and urban settings. Emphasising equal opportunities, access to education, and ongoing professional development for adults in rural areas, aiming to enhance social inclusion, employment, and reduce economic dependence, envisioning decent lives and prosperity for rural women and families in Romania, with a mission to empower these women for personal and community development, although currently inactive.

The social enterprise **Doamnele Bucovinene** is a regional women's association and the **Association of Rural Women "Olga Sturdza"** appear to have been active around 2007 (when they became members of the **Romanian Women's Lobby** - an umbrella association representing the national co-ordination for the European Women's Lobby - EWL). They no longer have active websites or mentioned online by news outlets. Neither of the last three are mentioned in research articles indexed by Google Scholar - the same stands true for the **Rural Women National Association** and the **Association of Rural Women and Families**.

The **Association of Romanian Communes** was established in 1997 as an assembly of local authorities, focuses on active participation, legislative improvement, collaboration with municipalities, progress in rural development strategies, education for local officials, fostering partnerships, and unified representation of commune interests at national and international levels. ACOR also hosts the **League of Women, Mayors of Communes** (LWMC) in Romania. In Romania, there are 166 communes with female mayors. Recent activities of LWMC include the extraordinary session meeting of the LWMC and the Republic of Moldova in August 2023, which addressed crucial topics such as equal opportunities, gender equality, the role of women in local public administration, and the



women mayors' primary objective of sustainable development in the represented localities. During this session, the Declaration Appeal was signed between the Association of Communes in Romania, the Women's League, Mayors of Communes in Romania, the Congress of Local Authorities in the Republic of Moldova, and the Network of Women Mayors in the Republic of Moldova, constituting an appeal to the governments of both countries (Noapteș, 2023). The appeal declaration advocates for decentralised governance with increased administrative capacity, emphasising gender equality in public roles, urging political parties to include women in positions for elections, aligning administrations with EU legislation to eliminate gender-based obstacles, supporting Moldova's reforms and funding sources, and proposing joint initiatives, despite being disregarded by central Romanian authorities.

3. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL ECONOMY

	2010	2020
Number of farms	3857	2887
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	13 343 000 ha	12 800 000 ha
Average size of Farms	3.45 ha	4.42 ha

Agricultural holdings by economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro)

	2010	2016
Less than 14,000 euros	3 812 650 - 98.8%	3 350 220 - 97.8%
From 15.000 to 49,999 euros	33 840 - 0.9%	55 120 - 1.6%
From 50,000 to 249.000 euros	10 140 - 0.5%	12 910 - 0.4%
From 250.000 to 499,000 euros	1 430 - 0%	2 180 - 0.1%
500,000 euros and over	950 - 0%	1610 - 0%

Number of farm managers by age class 2010-2020

	2010	2016	2010(%)	2016%	2010-2016(%)



	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total
Younger than 35 years		280440		105590		7.3%		3.1%		
35-65 years		2114890		1798080		54.8%		52.6%		
Older than 65		1463720		1515570		37.9%		44.3%		
Total		3859050		3422040		100%		100%		

Farm labour force in person 2010-2020

Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons					
2016			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
2 880 460	48.3%	5 980 250	1 147 824	33.8%	3 395 930
Non-family labour force, in persons					
2016			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
15 301	18.9%	80 960			

Additional Information

ECONOMY and AGRICULTURE

The main economic activity characterising the Romanian rural areas is agriculture. Agriculture, forestry and fishing together produced a **gross value added of 4.2%** within the national economy in 2020, compared to an EU average of 1.9%, with the total agricultural output value being 15280 million euros in 2020 (European Union, 2021a).



Romania registered a sharp 25% rise in the value of agricultural output in 2021 compared with 2020 (Eurostat, 2022a). Romania finds itself in seventh place in the EU (after France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Netherlands and Poland) in terms of value of agricultural output in 2021 (Eurostat 2023c). 70.8% of the output is obtained from crops, with cereals (including seeds) contributing 21.0%, vegetables and horticultural products 17.5%, and forage plants 8.6%. The animal products account for 27.2% of the agricultural output (Eurostat 2023c).

In 2013, Romania was the leader in the EU regarding the number of farms (3.63 million), a 33.61% of all EU holdings. In the same year, 60.2% of all EU farms were in Romania and consumed 50% of their agricultural production for family needs, which did not allow integration in the industrial agriculture production chain (Popescu et al., 2016). There is significant unequal concentration of farms in Romania, meaning that in 2016 the top 10% of farms kept a huge agricultural land, compared to the farms belonging to other size classes (Popescu et al., 2016). The variability of the land policy applied in the EU has a deep impact on the farm structure in the EU and Romania, where most farms are mainly family subsistence and semi-subsistence small farms (associated with traditional peasant households), with limited material and financial resources, low productivity and self-consumption. This characteristic has led to a slower process of land concentration during the transition (Popescu et al., 2016), which is now increasing its pace as the statistics regarding the size of the farms show.

The 2020 national agricultural census shows that the number of agricultural holdings without legal personality was 2862 thousand, 25.3% lower than in 2010. This type of agricultural holding (size, legal status, production, consumption) is equivalent to family and peasant farming, with land being predominantly inherited over generations. Farms with legal personality accounted for 6.6% of all farms in 2020 (INS, 2022). Between 2010 and 2020, 488,000 farms of less than 1 hectare have disappeared. In total, between 2005 and 2020, Romania suffered the biggest loss of farms in the EU - around 1.5 million (Eurostat, 2022c). The area of arable land is increasing compared to 2010 (INS, 2022). At the same time, however, the area of grassland and meadows traditionally used jointly as commons by farming communities for livestock is decreasing from 4 506 000 hectares in 2010 to 3 724 000 hectares in 2020 (a decrease of 18%). The reduction of livestock in peasant households is closely linked to this phenomenon (Ecoruralis, 2022).

The number of holdings covering more than 10 hectares almost doubled between 2010 and 2020, increasing from 2.2% to 4.2%. Thus, in the case of agricultural enterprises and businesses, the average utilised agricultural area per farm was 194.78 ha in 2020, compared to 190.78 ha in 2010. The increase is less based so much on real investment in agriculture or on developing the competitiveness and economic sustainability of the agricultural sector, and more on the concentration of land and its repurposing toward industrial agriculture (Ecoruralis, 2022) with relevant negative effects on cultural (loss of peasant way of life), social (rural depopulation) and environmental sustainability - particularly biodiversity and soil health (Velicu and OGREZeanu, 2022; Berescu, 2022).

Until 2002, the majority of the occupied population was from rural areas (INS, 2019). According the 2023 data the agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors are the significant sources of employment in Romania. In Romania twenty four out of forty-two regions had over 16.5% of their workforce engaged in these sectors. A Eurostat (2023) survey shows



that the largest numbers of people employed in agriculture, forestry, and fishing at the EU level were found primarily in Romania.

Following 1989, Romania rapidly transitioned from being a net food and agriculture products exporter to a net food and agriculture products importer - the agricultural trade deficit being of -676 million euros in 2021 (International Trade Administration, 2022). Due to the removal of restrictions on land re-privatization in 2005, a significant portion of the land was acquired at discounted rates by private agribusinesses and investment funds known for their expertise in land acquisition (Popovici et al., 2016).

The total Common Agricultural Policy expenditure in 2020 was 3118 million euros, meaning 5.7% of Romania's budget (compared to 6 908 - 12.6% in Spain, and 949 - 1.7% in Sweden). Out of this, the large majority of funding was spent on direct payments (61.3% - compared to an EU average of 69.9%). 36.6% of the total expenditure was directed to rural development (more than 10% higher than the EU average of 25.5%). Market measures however only received 2.1% of the funds, half of the EU average of 4.6% which can be correlated with a total decrease of agricultural income of -13.8% compared to 2019 (compared to an EU average of -1.2%) (European Union, 2021a). The result is a reduced potential for rural populations to move beyond subsistence farming and low incomes, especially for peasant and family farming. Although permanent farmers' markets in urban Romania have shown resilience, local rural farmers have been displaced by semi-formal food vendors acting on behalf of local agribusinesses or importers (Cosma et al., 2020). Also, Romania has the lowest count of acknowledged agriculture producer organisations or groups within the EU due to the organisation of producers in cooperatives, consequently leading to reduced market access and bargaining capability for its farmers (European Commission, 2020).

Studies focusing on economic modernization in Romania show a territorial resistance in the adoption and spread of economic innovations, particularly in terms of company establishment in rural areas. The active presence of companies within rural areas is notably scant. Urban areas exhibit such high concentration that the ratio of company accumulation between urban and rural spaces is nearly 2:1 (specifically 1.93). This stands in stark contrast to the demographic ratio, which is only 1.06:1 after excluding Bucharest from both calculations (ESPON, 2022). The reasons are related to a low usage of rural advantages, such as safeguarding available land for productive sectors, encouraging the education of and retention of the labour force, and preserving the existing specific expertise in activities like agriculture. Particularly, an increased penetration of economic innovation correlates with enhanced spatial accessibility, primarily through major (European) road segments like E60, E85, E87, and others. Conversely, rural areas characterised by lower connectivity, primarily due to less significant road segments (DJ - county roads), exhibit lower values of the indicator (ESPON, 2022).

Remote rural communities, characterised by lower development and penetration of economic innovation, smaller sizes, and independence from urban influence, tend to experience minimal impact from economic crises (2008-2011, for example) (Pavel et al., 2020). This could be attributed to their existing economic status, mainly agrarian and self-reliant, alongside limited integration into the global economy, shows the same



research. This goes against the capitalist logic of economic growth and prompts the reconsideration of economic factors when analysing diverse rural settings.

RURAL WOMEN, EMPLOYMENT and ECONOMY

The agricultural sector's increased productivity and migration resulted in a decline in the agricultural workforce, dropping from 30.4% in 2010 to 22.2% in 2017. In 2016, **women comprised 44.9% of this labour force, with 34% of all farm managers being women which surpasses the EU average of 28%** (European Commission, 2020).

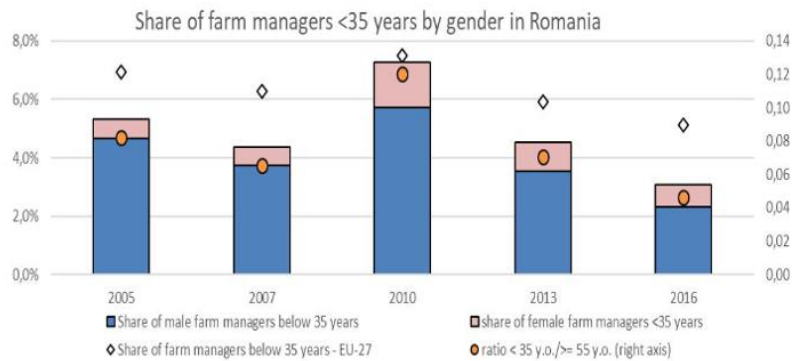
Share of female farm managers < 35 years

Ratio < 35 y.o / >= 55 y.o. (right axis)

Share of male farm managers below 35 years

Share of farm managers below 35 years – EU-27

Share of farm managers < 35 years by **gender** in Romania



Source: EUROSTAT LXXXIII

In 2021, across the EU, rural men had higher employment rates than the overall male population, while rural women had slightly lower rates compared to women overall. This pattern extended to 19 out of 27 EU Member States, including Romania. In Romania, rural women faced the most significant disparity, with their employment rates trailing the national average by 12.4 percentage points, indicating a pronounced gap compared to Bulgaria and other Eastern and Baltic countries (Eurostat, 2021b). This does not mean that rural women in Romania are inactive, rather it is due to their involvement in activities related to either domestic work, unpaid family work in agriculture. Women **make up 60% of all unpaid family workers**, or their employment in informal economy (NSP, 2022). Unemployment affects not only a country's economic output but also the welfare of individuals and their families. It brings diverse personal and social costs, leading to increased risks of poverty, social exclusion, debt, and homelessness. Moreover, the stigma attached to unemployment can potentially harm mental health and, as a contributor to economic precarity and social stress, also correlates with increased domestic violence, which affects rural areas in Romania more than urban ones (Bonea et al., 2023).

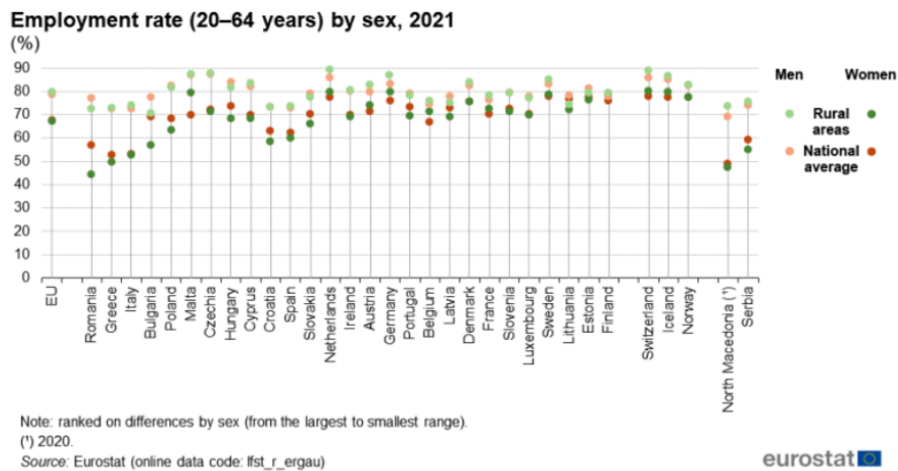


Figure 10: Employment rate (20–64 years) by sex, 2021

(%)

Source: Eurostat ([lfst_r_ergau](#))

The recommendation of the European Commission during the development of the National CAP Plan for 2023-2027 was that there needs to “**be careful consideration of the specific needs of women in agriculture and rural areas in order to deliver on gender equality and close the gender gaps in employment, pay, pensions, care and decision-making**” (2020).

4. SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

Agriculture specialised press framed the situation of women in agriculture in Romania in the context of CAP, with the Romanian version of Euractiv also reviewing the challenges faced by women in agriculture and presenting data regarding the number of women who accessed subsidies and direct funding through the previous CAP.

There are a number of national policies focusing on supporting rural women, agribusinesses and the agricultural industry are one of the main promoters of innovation lead by women in rural areas through funding and trainings, be it in the area of sustainable agriculture, or rural entrepreneurship, as a way to both promote their business and demonstrate corporate responsibility/ improve their image (Corteva, EWA - Empowering women in agrifood). Similar to EWA, co-financed by the EU through EIT Food, other projects such as Women’s Empowerment through GREen Social ENTrepreneurship aim to use models of digitalization and social economy and increase rural women's capacities.

In terms of central and local administration, events such as the International Conference “Innovation and Quality in the Public Sector” / “Competition of best practices in public administration in Romania” which was organised in 2018 by County Directorate For Agriculture Iași , refer the Agenda 2030 of the UN FAO as their main driver for supporting



sustainable innovation by women in rural areas. The National Rural Development Network (NRDN), affiliated to MADR, constantly gives visibility to sustainable innovation led by women in farming/family farming/agroecology, short food supply chains and agritourism through the section of “Successful projects” on its website, 10 out of 27 success stories being about women or family- innovations.

NGOs in Romania (either financed by or in partnership with different corporate actors, such as banks, industrial seeds, chemical pesticides or bio packaging producers) focus on empowering rural girls and women by providing Education and Skills Development in trainings and camps on topics such as health education, discrimination, active citizenship, financial independence, fake news and fact checking, global warming, human trafficking (Progress Foundation) and digital competencies promoting Digital Inclusion (Hosman Durabil). Other such projects include Women's library (by Girl Power Network) and European Youth Village, which also aims at empowering rural girls through learning and civic engagement in their communities through its activities.

NGOs, civil society organisation (CSOs) and rural blogger's websites also host success stories about women innovating in rural areas, in terms of sustainable rural enterprises grounded on circular and sharing economy, short supply chains and peasant agroecology (Hoinari Coolinari) or peasant inspired crafts – cultural sustainability (feminismforreal.com), innovating teachers in rural areas focusing on social inclusion and improving the education offers and infrastructures (De la Sat; Objects library - Noua), as well as social sustainability aimed at transforming gender-related values (Active Citizens Fund). More rarely and in particular circumstances (of either very high visibility, connection with the world of the Romanian press, or very good PR and communication skills), women-led innovation with a cultural sustainability dimension – Community Cultural Centres and Museums, Cultural Festivals and Events, Cultural Exchange and Collaboration - makes its way on to national news, with the innovations being promoted in regional media local media, and touristic websites, as well as included on culture-oriented portals. The situation is similar for women innovating in social sustainability by promoting multiculturalism and safeguarding diverse gastronomic practices and traditions. Independent progressive magazines do occasionally publish success stories of women innovating in rural areas, most commonly in agriculture entrepreneurship, be it cooperative production or goods distribution (DOR).

However, in some cases, although the initiators of NGOs/CSOs (civil society organisations) focusing on different kinds of sustainable innovation in rural areas are women, this is not necessarily highlighted in the articles available online covering their initiatives and projects as, very likely, it is perceived as not being related/relevant for the sustainable innovations implemented (Micile bucurii).

National press dedicated to rural areas and agriculture fails to mention sustainable innovation led by women, as is the case of Radio Villages' Antena. Regional online newspapers not only fail to report on women-led innovation in rural areas, but more generally on sustainability and rural innovation in general (as it is the case with the Satu Mare Press, Constanța Day, The Monitor Botoșani, Transylvania Reporter).

A topic which seems to gain the interest of both civil society websites, as well as national and regional press, both oriented towards rural areas or on other main topics, is that of



women seed guardians and peasant seed exchange markets, thus innovating in Traditional Agricultural Practices through establishing Seed Banks and Agrobiodiversity Conservation.

This topic of seed reproduction in Romania (acknowledging it is done mostly by women), as connected to the scholarship of food sovereignty and socio-environmental justice, and overall, the global peasant movement, has also received considerable attention in scientific literature in the recent years (Velicu and OGREZEANU, 2022; Velicu, 2023). Due particularly to the privileged relation between the researchers and NGOs/CSOs promoting the topic, and the researchers' preference for research-activism. The same holds for the Community Supported Agriculture endeavours, with a somewhat reduced focus on gender (Delibas, 2021; Moellers, J., & Bîrhală, 2014). Overall, the tendency in research regarding rural areas in Romania is to stop searching either for explanations of its "backwardness" or solutions to urbanise it, but rather perceive it in all its complexity as having its own characteristic and being a source of critique toward state and EU policies, as well a significant repository of solutions to current global challenges, such as climate change and environmental degradation.

5. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

The approved 2018-2021 National Strategy for the Promotion of Equal Opportunity and Treatment between Women and Men focuses on three primary goals: ensuring access to sexual and reproductive health, harmonising professional and private life, and enhancing women's involvement in decision-making processes. Spanning across education, health, labour markets, decision-making participation, and gender mainstreaming, the strategy introduces activities like formulating a unified gender mainstreaming methodology, establishing a network of equal opportunity experts, and building NGO capacities for gender-inclusive budgeting. Despite the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men unveiling a new strategic policy and action plan in March 2021—aiming at promoting equal opportunities and preventing domestic violence for 2021-2027—adoption had not occurred by December 2021, despite undergoing public consultation (EIGE, 2022).

The approved National Strategic Plan (NSP) for 2023 – 2027 which is part of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) identifies the need to support gender equality by promoting involving the female population in entrepreneurship (N24) as a moderate need which is only partly addressed. This need is reflected as the strategic objectives "Promoting employment, economic growth, equal opportunities and including women's participation in agriculture, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry" (SO8). Besides highlighting the need against the socio-economic background of rural areas in Romania, the justification for this need also includes the significantly lower activity rate of women than the activity rate of the working age at national level and low employment rate of rural women, which includes also unpaid family workers out of which 60% are women (NSP). The Plan highlights that the data on the gender equality context within the workforce, particularly in agriculture and forestry sectors, indicates a significant imbalance favouring men in managerial positions by over four times compared to women. Addressing



patriarchal mindsets in Romania is named as a crucial approach. It also acknowledges that ensuring tailored facilities for women can boost their involvement in business management, notably in rural and agricultural sectors, potentially addressing existing gender disparities. Previous successful initiatives which NSP builds on are young farmer support and rural tourism, which underscore the need to further engage with the available female workforce. Additionally, to increase women's representation, the Plan aims for sustained financial backing for agricultural and forestry sectors which is expected to revitalise farming, diversify activities, and create new pathways for women in the job market.

At the same time though, SO8 (as well as all other Specific Objectives) do not have implementation measures or interventions catering directly to women or rural women. The Plan justifies addressing only partially the need to support gender equality by promoting women's involvement in entrepreneurship. It is partially addressed by stating that “although **there are no specific interventions targeted at women**, they can benefit from sector-specific interventions. Promoting yet again a static gendered view of the rural areas and farming, NSP considers that the measures aimed at the vegetable or flower sectors are sufficient, since the activities are more often practised by the female population. With agri-tourism, a sector supported by the NSP, is being mainly practised by women (NSP, N24).

However, according to the NSP which is part of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), there is a significant percentage of young female heads of holdings (21.68%), and of those who have accessed the measure supporting young farmers in setting up 38% in the case of young women farmers, according to monitoring data from the 2014-2020 Rural Development Plan. According to the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), this indicates increased **natural interest of women** in entrepreneurship in the agri-food sector, **without the need for prioritisation**. It can be noticed that the policies developed by this Ministry take an essentialist approach to gender and resist including gender equality measures/mainstreaming in the National Strategic Plan. The justification for this was added to the document only after receiving the recommendation of the European Commission regarding the first version of NSP submitted. The Commission clearly recommended that “there must also be careful consideration of the specific needs of women in agriculture and rural areas in order to deliver on gender equality and close the gender gaps in employment, pay, pensions, care and decision-making. At the same time, ensuring the protection of agricultural workers, especially the precarious, seasonal and undeclared ones, will play a major role in delivering on the respect of rights enshrined in legislation which is an essential element of the fair EU food system” (European Commission, 2020).

Interventions related to LEADER transpose the EU legislation on the principles and qualities of the partnership, stating that partnership including women will be prioritised (NSP, 2022, p. 965). The LEADER Programme implementation in Romania covers 92% of the eligible area and 86% of the population (the territory covered by Local Action Groups spans 209,391.54 km² and 2,735 communes and 142 towns under 20,000 inhabitants), offering extensive benefits through locally designed strategies that address key aspects impacting rural areas, although not directly focused on depopulation (MDLPA-DPS, 2020).



According to the latest guidelines for strategy development, LEADER encourages gender equality through the following measures:

1. The quality of the local development strategy is determined by specific criteria, which also allows for additional funding for Local Action Groups if the strategy includes interventions that finance economic projects with direct beneficiaries being women and/or young people aged between 18 and 30 years.
2. The partnership within the Local Action Group (LAG) must include at least one associative form that represents the interests of youth, women, or children.
3. The partnership is encouraged through selection criteria to include multiple associative forms that represent the interests of youth, women, or children.
4. Additionally, it is a selection criterion that at least 30% of the representatives of entities within the partnership should be young people or women.

The Ministry of Family, Youth and Equal Opportunities (MFYEO) carries out the policies correlated with the European and International policies in the areas of family and demography; youth; protection of children's rights and adoption; and domestic violence and equal opportunities of women and men on the national territory. One of the subordinated institutions is the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men - NAEO. MFYEO has a pronatalist approach, implementing policies which imply funded opportunities aimed at overcoming women's fertility issues, rather than improving the overall social and medical services which prevent families from having children. Less impactful for now are policies such as flexible work schedules for parents with small children; protection for the mothers returning to work; and low interest rates for bank loans for families with many children.

Established in 2002, the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (NAEO) is a government entity mandated with promoting gender equality, operating independently under the Ministry it aligns with. Formerly under the Ministry of Labour, it shifted to the MFYEO in November 2021. The NAEO's functions encompass formulating and executing governmental strategies and policies for gender equality, aligning national legislation with EU directives, and developing legal frameworks in line with international conventions. It represents Romania on gender equality matters, integrates gender perspectives into national policies, and oversees compliance. In 2021, the NAEO's activities included implementing action plans, establishing a domestic violence emergency helpline, and preparing for international visits related to gender equality (EIGA, 2022). However, as far as the information available online, neither the MFYEO **nor NAEO are implementing initiatives with measures directly targeting rural women.**

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRDP) funded by the EU with over €30 billion until 2026, lacks integration of gender mainstreaming and explicit measures for gender equality, particularly in rural areas, despite mentioning balanced representation of women in reform processes related to public administration and governance. Pillar XX on education, the NRDP acknowledges educational challenges including low funding, high rates of early school leaving, inadequate facilities leading to below-average preschool participation, impacting women's labour market participation and perpetuating



disparities between rural and urban areas, particularly affecting vulnerable groups like the Roma due to unaddressed equity challenges. (NRDP, p. 3). This pillar focuses on fostering gender equality, equalising urban-rural disparities, and addressing structural gender disparities, specifically targeting women's pay, pensions, and early education inequalities, while striving to enhance education quality, reduce early school leaving, desegregate Roma communities, and combat stereotypes affecting disadvantaged groups in rural areas. (NRDP, p. 11). The Education pillar's emphasis on work-life balance prioritises formal childcare services, expected to empower women by facilitating their return to work or access to training, aiming to shift traditional gender roles and promote partnership culture, ultimately reducing violence and amplifying women's contributions to family income (NRDP, p. 13).

Intervention I7 - Transforming agricultural high schools into vocational training centres has an allocated sum of €43,6 million. This addresses the underfunding, curriculum inadequacy, and limited internship opportunities in agricultural secondary education which require investment in infrastructure, attracting 8th grade graduates to the field, and ensuring robust vocational training aligned with technological advancements and CAP standards for sustainable agriculture, aiming to bridge the skills gap and align with European policies for resilience and development in line with other EU Member States, especially in adopting work-based learning models (NRRP, p. 65). This intervention is complementary with 6.1 (support for setting up young farmers) and of measure 11 (Organic farming of the NRDP).

The "Female Entrepreneur Program," run by the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism in collaboration with the Agencies for Small and Medium Enterprises, focuses on supporting private economic structures led by female entrepreneurs. This initiative aims to promote the growth of women-led businesses, balancing professional and family obligations, and addressing local prejudices. The estimated budget for the "Female Entrepreneur Program" for the period from 2022 to 2027 is €200.000.000 (MIEP, n/a)

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DESK TOP ANALYSIS – CZECH REPUBLIC

1. RURAL CONTEXT

Currently, 27% of the Czech population resides in rural areas, specifically in villages with up to 2,000 inhabitants. When combined with small towns (ranging from 2,000 to 20,000 inhabitants), these areas collectively make up 55% of the population. This proportion is gradually growing, particularly at the expense of medium-sized cities (with populations up to 100,000 inhabitants). The Czech countryside is the most industrialized within the European Union. However, primary industries such as agriculture, forestry and fishing employ only 5.5% of the economically active population in municipalities with less than 2,000 inhabitants.

Commuting to work has been a common practice in the Czech Republic since the mid-20th century, facilitated by an extensive public transport system compared to other countries. A typical commuting time of up to 30 minutes is experienced by the majority of residents in the Czech countryside.

The key challenges facing the Czech countryside include a poor educational structure that aligns more with the manufacturing sector, hindering a swift transition to a service-based economy. Moreover, there's a trend of disappearing local services due to increased population mobility—people are accessing services in urban areas—which also threatens the social fabric of rural communities.

Rural areas in close proximity to big cities are experiencing the influence of residential and industrial urbanization, which developed around Prague in the 1990s, and around other cities since the beginning of the 21st century. A semi-urbanized space (rural-urban continuum) is emerging here. Economic, social, educational, and demographic characteristics are closer to cities, although a relatively strong element of the original population remains (which sometimes leads to tension between old and new residents). Suburbanized communities are not always just hostels for residents employed in cities, but also have their own industrial and logistic activities. Most large cities are located in fertile areas, so agriculture is also developed in their surroundings.

Rural villages are located in the fertile areas of the Moravian and Bohemian lowlands. These were traditionally rich regions with large villages and developed agriculture that is easily accessible from large cities. However, in the post-industrial period, agriculture is no longer a source of wealth, and rich agricultural regions face the need for economic restructuring, similar to industrial regions.

These regions show higher depopulation and unemployment. In the fertile South Moravian districts of Hodonín and Znojmo, unemployment is close to 5% during the summer season. Nevertheless, the structure of large villages allows for maintaining rural services and thus keeping the population.

The outlying countryside can be divided into inner and border periphery. These are often mountainous areas with worse conditions for agriculture and are harder to reach than big cities. The system of small and very small settlements does not allow for effective maintenance of the network of services. Transport is also complicated not by the distance, but by the complex conditions of the relief and, in winter, the climate. On the



other hand, these regions have retained a relatively high-quality natural environment and are attractive for various types of tourism and, more recently, for first and second homes. In many very small settlements, we encounter significant migration increases in population. Agriculture has favourable conditions for organic forms and therefore can be significantly subsidized.

The borderland countryside experienced a significant shock as a result of ethnically conditioned population exchange, which the communist regime used to liquidate the middle class. In these territories, the tradition of the relationship with the land was broken. In addition, the 40-year-long iron curtain was manifested. Such processes did not take place in the border area with Slovakia, but a change in the geopolitical position was manifested when this area moved from a position in the centre of the country to a position on the border.

2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Women's rights have had strong support since the establishment of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk supported women's emancipation even before his political career and helped several women's organisations by establishment. It is his famous quote that gives the best picture about the attitude that he wanted to promote "There is no women's question as well as there is no men's question, it is only a question of society." The importance of women in the newly established republic has been formalized in the Washington document written by Masaryk, Beneš and Štefánik in the USA and handed over to the government headed by President Wilson, which recognised the independence of the Czechoslovak nation, there was also a clause that women and men should be equal politically, socially and culturally. Czechoslovakia was among the first countries where women were not only voters but actively involved in politics and representing political parties. However, even though there are no formal barriers for women in terms of career path and their involvement in political life, there are still prevailing gender stereotypes seeing the role of women as household and caretakers and men as the main earners in the family. It may complicate the career development of a woman and above all has a negative influence on her income.

According to the non-profit organization Business & Professional Women of the Czech Republic, the difference in pay between men and women in 2016 amounted to 21.8 per cent. Differences in the remuneration of men and women may lie hand in the inequality of remuneration for the same job positions, or in the inequality between remuneration in enterprises with a preponderance of male and female workforce. Inequality in pay for the same positions is reduced in state institutions with unambiguously set salary regulations and in large companies with strong unions. However, there are differences here also. For example, at the Faculty of AgriSciences of Mendel University, these differences amount to roughly 8% and, according to the analyses, are caused by the fact that more competitive men get more research projects, which is tied to additional salary funds and also part of the variable salary component. In rural areas, there are fewer companies with a clear wage policy and strong trade unions. The significantly higher share of manual labour also leads to the fact that the division into enterprises, or the divisions of enterprises with male and female workforce, is more pronounced than in cities.



There are several definitions of rural women in the literature. These include women who live in the countryside and work anywhere, women living and working in the countryside, women active in the primary sector or women working or helping on family farms. The differences are by no means educational. In 2021, 53.8% of Czech women and 46.2% of Czech men had at least a high school diploma. Czech women are therefore significantly more educated. In rural areas (municipalities with up to 2,000 inhabitants), the differences are even more striking. In these municipalities, 47.6% of women and 38.0% of men over the age of 15 had at least a high school diploma.

Horská and Spěšná (2000) draw differences between rural women and women in agriculture. Rural women spend more time than farm women taking care of children and taking care of themselves. In their free time, rural women devote themselves more than farm women to visits of friends, reading, visits to cinemas and theaters, and trips. In contrast, female farmers engage more than other rural women in housework, relaxing in front of the TV, manual work, and sleep. In terms of income, agricultural women are more likely to be in the average categories, while rural women are also in both extremes (with the highest but also the lowest incomes). The amount of income depends to some extent on whether women work in jobs for which they are qualified or not. There are quite significant differences between the two categories of women. Due to the low representation of persons employed in the primary sector in the Czech Republic (which has also significantly decreased since 2000), there are higher numbers of rural women in comparison to farm women.

The position of rural women versus men illustrates the distribution of income within the family. In almost 40% of cases, the incomes of both partners are combined and each of the partners provides for their own needs. In more than 10% of cases, women control the household finances. In the remaining cases, each of the partners manages their own money, or the male partner is in charge of finances. About a quarter of women do not have a partner. The situation of female farmers is similar, with the difference that about 10% of them are women without a partner.

Both rural and farm women agree that equality of opportunity between women and men in rural areas is not ensured. However, only a small percentage of women would like to change this situation. Women seem to be content with having their own earnings, which ensures independence from men and a sense of being valid members of the family and rural society. They prefer that both partners contribute to the family budget according to their means. Female farmers are more inclined to the traditional division of roles, where the man is the economic provider of the family. The position of rural men in general is closer to the traditional stereotype.

Women's organizations originally held an important role in supporting education for young girls. However, the scope of these organisations has widened to include the topics such as human rights in connection to women's rights, the right to natural birth, equal opportunities, gender issues and many others. Several women's organizations in the Czech Republic are clustered by the Czech Women's Lobby, with probably the most influential organization the Czech Women's Union. The union works throughout the territory of the Czech Republic, however, one of its five main focuses concerns rural women. The aim is to increase the role of women at the local/regional level, representation in the management of municipalities, promotion of service availability,



transport accessibility, access to employment and involvement in cultural and social life. We did not encounter its activities in the field.

The Agricultural Association of the Czech Republic founded the Club of Agricultural Women Managers. The club is focused on sharing experiences, visiting companies and self-education, greater communication with agricultural schools, representation at Czech and foreign conferences and in the media, as well as cooperation with similar platforms at the European level. It also aims to address topics related to social agriculture and gender issues.

Between 2014 and 2020, the Ministry of Industry and Trade handled the Ensuring Equal Opportunities project, co-financed from the Operational Program Employment. It seems that the project was more educational in nature and focused on gender equality in general (not from the rural viewpoint).

Some political parties and national interest organizations also have women's sections. However, it is not known that any of them focus on the issue of rural women. In rural areas the role of women not only concerning own families but they are usually actively involved in keeping the traditions of the municipality alive and contributing substantially to the quality of life in the area for example via organizing local festivities. Some of them also held the function of mayoress gained by local elections.

3. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL ECONOMY

	2000	2020
Number of farms	39,082	28,909
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	3,623,929	3,493,6
Average size of Farms	93	121

Agricultural holdings by the economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro)

	2010	2016
Less than 14,000 euros	11,414	12,668
From 15.000 to 49,000 euros	5,196	6,242
From 50,000 to 249.000 euros	3,701	4,625
From 250.000 to 499,000 euros	757	978
500,000 euros and over	1,671	1,920

Number of farm managers by age class 2010-2020

	2010	2020	2010(%)	2020(%)	2010-2020(%)



	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total
Younger than 25			64	296			21.6			
25-44 years			1,571	7,299			21.5			
45-64 years			1,953	11,670			16.7			
Older than 65			934	5,383			17.4			
Total			4,532	24,648			18.3			

The farm labour force in person 2010-2020

Family labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons					
2010			2020		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
		24,135			28,553
Non-family labour force, in persons					
2010			2016		
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total
		161,965			70,247

This analysis is based on the results of the statistical survey Agrocenzus, which was carried out by the Czech Statistical Office in 2010 and 2020 (the last one under the name Integrated Survey in Agriculture), on reports about the state of agriculture elaborated by the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic for individual years (so-called Green Reports), on the population census 2021 and the unemployment statistics from the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic issued every month.

Additional Information

Czech agriculture has undergone a significant transformation, transitioning to a market economy from nearly 100% nationalization of farms and the establishment of large public cooperatives through collectivisation. Subsequently, it integrated into the EU Common Agricultural Policy. At the same time, the structure of large agricultural enterprises was preserved as they transformed into cooperatives, joint-stock companies and limited liability companies. This structure was supplemented by individual family farms, but to a



lesser extent than expected. The result is by far the largest average area of agricultural land per farm in the EU. The average family farm manages an area of 39 ha. Another consequence is the extremely high proportion (73%) of farming not on own land, but on leased land. Agriculture contributes 1.79% to the gross domestic product of the Czech Republic, and its share of jobs is 1.99%.

The historical development following the Second World War and the existing land management structure have resulted in a substantial portion of individuals in agriculture being employed in an employment relationship linked to agricultural production. Additionally, the current state of agricultural land is unsatisfactory, with past large-scale meliorations disturbing the water regime. Ploughing boundaries and forming large fields have further increased vulnerability to water and wind erosion, contributing to the loss of biodiversity. In 2016, a typical agricultural holding in Czechia utilised 132 ha of agricultural land. Out of this area, it owned 35 ha and the remaining 97 ha were rented. On average 7 persons worked in one agricultural holding, with 5 of these being fully employed.

Czech agriculture occupies a unique position within the EU. It ranks first in the average area of agricultural land per 1 holding, the share of entities over 500 ha (6.6%) and in the number of employees per entity (4.9 people). It ranks second in the share of ecologically managed entities. In contrast, it ranks 28th in the share of family workers (37.2%), 24th in the share of own agricultural land (26.9%) and 24th in the number of workers per 100 ha of agricultural land (3.8 persons).

Organic agriculture is developing, which in 2020 was implemented by 11.2% of enterprises managing 15.3% of agricultural land (mostly grasslands). The reason is the mountainous nature of the greater part of the state, where there are no favourable conditions for conventional agriculture, but pasture. Given the organizational structure of Czech agriculture (large companies and large fields), there are suitable conditions for implementing the principles of precision agriculture. However, we see the share of women more in the implementation of the developing social agriculture.

Today, the Czech countryside is very little dependent on agriculture both in terms of job opportunities and the rural economy. Agriculture is particularly important for the creation and maintenance of the landscape, among other things, to support its attractiveness for tourism and housing. That is why it is also more important to seek the role of women in non-agricultural activities, especially in local administration, association activities and services.

In terms of the workforce, there has been a significant decline since 2000. However, the situation is completely different for family farms and legal entities. While the number of agricultural workers on family farms has hardly changed, on legal entities it has fallen by a quarter since 2000. In 2016, 36.9% of owners, 39.3% of their family members and 10.9% of employees worked on family farms (the rest were agency workers, contract workers, etc.). For legal entities, 60.9% were employees, 35.2% were irregular (mostly seasonal) workers and only 2.3% were owners and their family members.

In the age structure of people engaged in agriculture, 15,215 are younger than 30 years, 70,938 are middle-aged (30-60) and the rest are older than 60: 12,646 persons. The share of older workers has been decreasing recently but remains higher than in other sectors of the national economy. In terms of education, 9.7% of workers in agriculture



have a basic or incomplete education, 52.2% have an apprenticeship, 25.6% have a high school diploma and 10.7% have a university education. Unemployment in agriculture is increasing and has reached 2.2%. This results in a high proportion of foreigners (22,600 people). Wages reach 80.3% of wages in the national economy. Therefore, it the solution is not to focus on the creation of job opportunities in agriculture when it is not possible to fill the existing ones either. Moreover, unemployment in the countryside is lower than in the cities.

The share of women in the total number of labour force regularly employed did not change much since 2000; it decreased from 34.4% to 32.5%. Their share rose distinctly in the age group above 55 years (+22.7 p.p.), while a decrement was recorded for the group up to 34 years (-2.5 p.p.). The share of women in holdings of natural persons was slightly lower (31.5%) than in holdings of legal persons (33.1%). Since 2000 the trends in both legal forms were different: the share of women in holdings of natural persons rose by 1.2 p.p., probably in connection with an increased share of holder's family members working on the farm; on the contrary, their share in holdings of legal persons declined by 3.0 p.p.

According to projections (Šimpach and Pechrová, 2015), the share of women in agriculture will increase from today's 30% to 35% by 2046, and the share of women in managerial positions from 16 to 19%. However, the authors are based mostly on demographic data and do not yet take into account increased immigration.

4. SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

Today, there is no doubt about the equal rights of women in the public space. Rather, the debate is focused on the question of why there are relatively significant differences in the application of rights and whether it should be about equality of opportunity or the fulfilment of formal criteria. It seems that the first problem already lies in upbringing when boys are valued for qualities needed for leadership positions, such as competitiveness, while in girls such qualities are rather suppressed. This is also reflected in persistent paternalistic views on the division of labour when a woman should take care of children and the household.

Some research shows that the biggest differences between men and women occur in reproductive age and are associated with childbirth and child care (penalising motherhood). Maternity leave in the Czech Republic is 28 weeks. This is followed by parental leave, which can be taken by either the mother or the father. During this, the respective parent is entitled to a reward of CZK 300,000 (about EUR 12,000), which is evenly distributed over the period chosen by the respective parent and can be up to 48 months (at the same time, the employer is obliged to keep the parent's job position for 36 months). Although today young men are already trying to help in the home, few are willing to take full care of the children and go on parental leave. However, this is how women mostly understand the situation. Unfortunately, company personnel also consider women of reproductive age to be less reliable, because they assume that these women have or may have children and, in case of an illness, take time off to care for a family member (the employer must release the employee from work for up to 90 days). Interestingly, a similar argument was made by female entrepreneurs, who for this reason



also prefer men as employees. Engaged women in our research often pay for their success by losing their family as the pressure on the relationship is very high, even if their partner agrees with their activity. They are often divorced and without a permanent partner.

Another reason could be that the statistics are misleading. A common model is when a man is registered as the owner or serves as chairman of an association or party (and thus bears responsibility), but women predominate in middle management positions (economists, agronomists, marketing workers, etc.). The women in this research emphasized the advantage of cooperation between men and women, which results from their different approaches. In agricultural enterprises, women tend to be more often involved with animals and take care of animal production, while men have a relationship with technology and deal more with plant production and machinery. In politics, women are more able to open up about controversial topics because they are less concerned about re-election. It has also been seen that women can reach an agreement across political parties when solving specific problems and then push their party leaders to this solution. It is therefore a question whether men who hold leadership positions or women who make specific policies have more power.

The beginning of the 21st century heralded both positive and negative social changes. Older generations of low-skilled women gradually retired and the younger generations more or less adapted to the rules of the market economy. In family life, the trends of reproductive behaviour, known from Northern and Western Europe, manifested themselves: increasing the age of marriage, alternative forms of cohabitation, and an increase in the number of individual households of young people with no interest in starting a family. In the wake of current global crises such as Covid-19 or the acceptance of refugees from the Ukrainian war, the gender issue is on the back burner because it is perceived as being overcome or redundant.

The role of rural women in the sustainability of agriculture is not substantial. However, women have a far greater field of competence in matters of rural development. It is about their action in local administration, in non-governmental organizations, in educational and cultural activities and services. The rural political system is no longer based on political parties but on local personalities and local associations. Here, women have a much greater opportunity to run for office because they do not have to go through the system of party bureaucracy that caters to men. The share of women in the positions of mayors of the municipality is close to one quarter, while it increases with the shrinking size of the municipality.

One of the biggest problems in the Czech countryside is disappearing services due to a lack of customers. This is a natural process, related to the increasing motorization of the population (who satisfy their demands for services in better-equipped cities) and digitization (e.g. the transition of a large part of postal and financial services to a digital environment). However, it is likely that women, especially older women and mothers with small children, are among the disadvantaged population who cannot take advantage of these new trends. Despite the relatively excellent and frequent public transport system in Czechia (compared to other countries), this aspect can also be considered a certain source of the unequal status of women.



Interesting conclusions were reached by Petrovič and Maturkanič (2022), who examined the differences in the quality of life between cities and rural areas from the perspective of men and women. They found that, from the point of view of subjective (psychological) perception, the quality of life in cities is clearly higher for men, while women do not have such a clear opinion. For women, indicators of happiness in cities are better, but indicators of quality of place and environment are worse. This could indicate that women will be more willing to devote themselves to the improvement of their rural settlements and at the same time their discrimination in the rural labor market will not be an insurmountable obstacle.

The role of women in the educational, cultural and social life of rural communities belongs to the traditional paternalistic idea. These activities are often underestimated by men, and women have a relatively free field here. Due to their more developed aesthetic sense, women also take care of the improvement of villages. A role here is played by their ability to informally convince men to provide technical support for individual events. The increasing representation of women in local administration and non-governmental organizations can gradually influence actions within the EU LEADER program and the philosophy of Community Led Local Development.

5. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Equality between men and women is the responsibility of the Office of the Government of the Czech Republic, which mentions, among other things, income inequalities (nearly 22% difference), higher threats to women from poverty (which concerns mostly single mothers and lonely seniors), low representation of women in decision-making processes and sexual and domestic violence. Lower incomes at an economically active age also mean a lower amount of pensions and therefore security in old age, also taking into account the fact that women live to a significantly older age and are therefore more often lonely. The problem of gender inequality from the point of view of this document is evaluated annually. There is no specific law in this direction, but every newly submitted law should contain a Gender Impact Assessment. However, this obligation is fulfilled only formally. Individual ministries have coordinators of gender issues (gender focus points), which, however, usually do not represent a single full workplace. The Public Defender of Human Rights (ombudsman) also plays a certain role. At the level of regions and municipalities, gender issues are not formally anchored in any way. The Government of the Czech Republic has a program for the Support of Publicly Beneficial Activities in the Field of Gender Equality, but the allocated resources are minimal. Some aspects of gender equality are also included in the Employment program of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs. Gender issues can be supported by EU and EEA/Norwegian funds. However, the interest in submitting projects is significantly lower than the allocated amounts.

In 2016, with the support of Norwegian funds, a joint research project of Olomouc universities, the Central Moravian Agency for Rural Development and four local action groups were implemented, focusing on discrimination against rural women in the labour market. The project noted the obvious fact that this discrimination occurs compared to urban women. He drew attention to the fact that women would welcome work opportunities with reduced or flexible working hours, which the countryside offers only to a limited extent. According to our opinion, this is not discrimination, but simple differences



in the structure of job opportunities in the city and the countryside. The countryside, unlike the cities, offers job opportunities in production or in services with direct contact with customers, where there is not much room for flexible working hours. Certain possibilities are seen in the development of social agriculture (taking into account that mothers with small children belong to disadvantaged groups), which, however, is still in its early stages.

Rural women are not given attention in this regard. Some non-governmental organizations may be active in this direction mainly through the support of families. For example, the Association of Private Agriculture of the Czech Republic has support for rural families among its goals (in fact, it is an organization of family farms). The 50% FORUM is a non-governmental organization that focuses significantly on gender equality, which also draws attention to the fact that although women make up 60% of university graduates, their representation in leadership positions amounts to approximately 20%.

A specific problem of inequality is domestic violence and sexual violence, usually applied against women, less often against men. According to Vodafone Foundation research from 2020, 59 to 63% of residents perceive domestic violence as a significant phenomenon in individual size categories of municipalities, while in rural areas it is 62%. This phenomenon apparently does not have an urban/rural dimension.

Overall, it can be concluded that gender issues in the Czech Republic are oriented more passively (preventing or reducing inequality) than actively (supporting women's activities). Support for gender equality is insufficient and unsystematic. One of the reasons may be the fact that women's equality was enshrined already at the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, and society was convinced for a long time that this was enough and there was no need to deal with the issue of factual equality. In rural areas, collectivization played an important role, which destroyed the stereotype of family farms, where the man (householder) was the head of the family (business) and the woman, who had no income of her own, was subordinate to him. This led to the economic independence of rural women and had negative consequences, for example, in the form of a high divorce rate. Society failed to recognize that economic independence is not the same as economic equality. Additionally, the mentioned contributions of women for traditions preservation, education and rural development are rarely valued officially, it is mostly taken for granted.

The question is how to perceive gender equality. Feminist organizations emphasize increasing women's education and their penetration into "male" professions. By doing so, they actually push women into men's lives and can actually deepen paternalism. After all, in 2021, 55.6% of women studied at Czech universities, without the possibility of considering women's gender equality as resolved. Equal opportunities and women's freedom to choose and implement their preferences are apparently important. There is a relatively small percentage of career-oriented women (scientists, artists, doctors, etc.) who manage raising children and the household only with the help of their family. Most women work primarily for economic reasons. These women divide their time between work and home and are therefore at a disadvantage compared to men. They consider their work important but do not equate success with gaining a leadership position. The last group (perhaps a quarter of women) consists of people who are strongly family and household-oriented. One of the problems is the evaluation of the maternal role of women,



which should be put on an equal footing with the economic role of men. Efforts should be focused on supporting the second group of women, primarily through the development of economically and locally accessible services such as preschool facilities, services to the population or public transport.

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DESK TOP ANALYSIS – SWEDEN

1. RURAL CONTEXT

The size of Sweden is 528 447 km² and it has 10.4 million inhabitants, living in 290 municipalities. The Swedish authorities define the municipalities geographically as follows. This definition was updated in 2021 to harmonize with EU definitions (Tillväxtverket, 2021).

26 Metropolitan municipalities

Municipalities with less than 20 per cent of the population in rural areas, and a population of at least 500 000 inhabitants when combining with neighbouring municipalities.

87 Dense mixed municipalities (former “dense municipalities close to a larger town”)

Other municipalities with less than 50 per cent of the population in rural areas and at least 50 per cent of the population with less than 45 minutes of travel to a major city

29 Sparsely populated mixed municipalities (former “remote dense municipalities”)

Other municipalities with less than 50 per cent of the population in rural areas and less than 50 per cent of the population with less than 45 minutes of travel to major cities

80 Rural municipalities close to urban areas (former “close to larger towns”)

Municipalities with at least 50 per cent of the population in rural areas and at least 50 per cent of the population with less than 45 minutes of travel to major cities

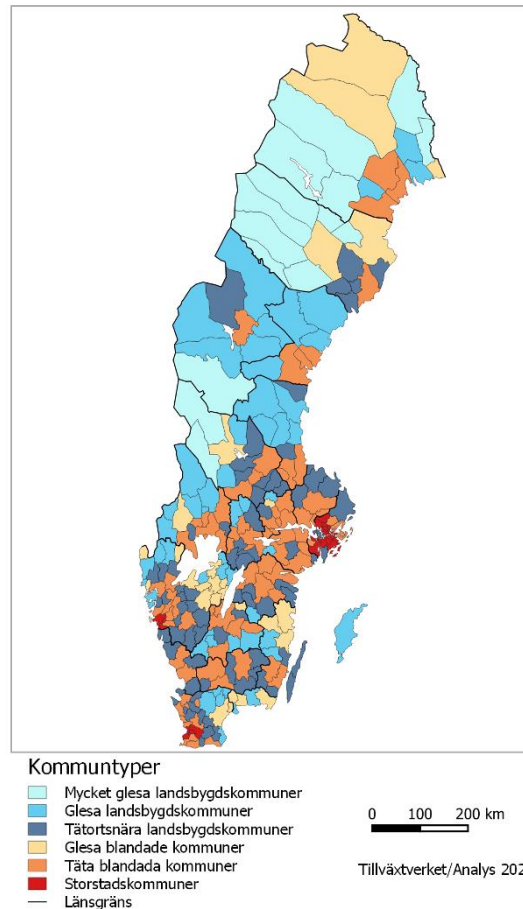
53 Sparsely populated rural municipalities (former “remote rural municipalities”)

Municipalities with at least 50 per cent of the population in rural areas and less than 50 per cent of the population with less than 45 minutes of travel to major cities

15 Very sparsely populated rural municipalities (former “very remote”)

Municipalities with the entire population in rural areas and with an average distance of at least 90 minutes to an agglomeration of at least 50000 inhabitants

The three rural categories are marked blue on the map below (the lighter blue, the more rural)



One might use the three rural types of municipalities as proxies for the three rural categories used in FLIARA, but they are not equivalent. A rural municipality covers a certain geographic area which may also contain villages and towns. We suggest drawing our participants from any rural municipality as defined above, and *within* the selected municipalities, select the three different categories of participants as defined in FLIARA.

The following table shows the population development, and estimated population development by 2070 in the six types of municipalities (here rounded to closest 1000) (Tillväxtverket, 2021). We added a % column which shows that the rural population in 2020 was 21%, and this is expected to further decrease to 19% by 2070, despite an expected population growth of 2,2 million (21,6%).

	1968	%	2020	%	2070	%
Metropolitan municipalities	2 198 000	28%	3 358 000	32%	4 453 000	35%
Dense mixed municipalities	3 009 000	38%	4 130 000	40%	5 009 000	40%
Sparsely populated	724 000	9%	764 000	7%	815 000	6%



mixed municipalities						
Rural municipalities close to urban areas	996 000	13%	1 248 000	12%	1 467 000	12%
Sparsely populated rural municipalities	883 000	11%	801 000	8%	812 000	6%
Very sparsely populated rural municipalities	121 000	2%	78 000	1%	72 000	1%
Total population	7 931 000		10 379 000		12 628 000	

Sweden is a highly urbanized country. It is estimated that urbanization was completed in the 1970's. Agriculture is highly rationalized and industrialized – any new employment opportunities in Swedish rural areas are unlikely to emanate from agriculture (Hedlund & Lundholm, 2015; Westholm & Waldenström, 2008) – new industries, or offshoots from agriculture will be needed.

Eurostat statistics

Eurostat has different labels. 20% of the population live in rural areas and coincides with the blue municipalities above. The graph below illustrates a summary of the 2017 (latest available) EU statistics for Sweden (grey colored line is rural).

2. WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

Until 2015, Sweden had a specific programme for women's entrepreneurship. However, post-2015, the shift was towards gender mainstreaming across all policies, aiming for equal availability of support systems for both men and women. Despite a number voluntary, local-level networks, there are limited provisions exclusively for women. Below outlines significant entities that potentially support rural life and development. While these organisations may have projects dedicated to gender equality, it is important to note that gender equality is not their primary mission.

Government Organisations

The Swedish government organisation is three-layered. All three layers have elected parliaments and tax professionals.

- **The state government** manages national legislation and the state budget. It has a large number of independent authorities (340 in 2023) that execute state policy.



- **21 regions** are responsible for health care, regional transportations systems, culture (including e.g. museums) and regional growth. The regions may be actors in rural development initiatives.
- **290 municipalities** are responsible for anything local. Most importantly schools, social services, and care. Many have a trade and industry office (or officer) tasked to develop the municipality. Their task is traditionally one of trying to attract industries and people to the municipality in order to increase the tax base – particularly urgent for rural municipalities.

Government Authorities of Relevance for FLIARA are:

1. **The Swedish board of agriculture** - It implements and oversees any laws or regulations related to agriculture, fishery, and rural areas. It also organises the district veterinarians^[ii]. Importantly, it administers the EU CAP support to farmers.
2. **The Swedish Forest Agency** implements policies and laws regarding forestry and also involved in international forest policy processes and reporting^[iii]. The Agency has 75 local offices. It cooperates with the forest industries and environmental sector towards the goals of economically and ecologically sustainable forestry.
3. **Vinnova, Sweden's innovation agency**^[iv] has a mission to strengthen Sweden's innovative capacity and contribute to sustainable growth. Vinnova regularly issues calls for funding for innovative projects. STEM and digital solutions dominate. It currently (Nov 2023) has calls for international collaboration with specific countries, such as one on plant-based protein, a call on circular transport systems, and a call aimed at incubators who have the global sustainability goals in Agenda 2030 and a gender perspective as a driving force. Historically, Vinnova has funded several projects related to gender equality and the inclusion of women in innovation systems, and projects are evaluated against gender equality considerations. No current call is specifically directed to rural areas, the goals are economic, environmental, and social.
4. **The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth** is tasked to promote sustainable growth and competitive companies throughout Sweden^[v]. It offers knowledge, networks, and financing for companies and for the regions. The vision is to have more companies in Sweden that want to grow and have the capabilities and courage to do so. It administers the EU Regional Development Programme, and a primary task is helping to ensure that EU funds are invested in projects that promote regional growth and employment. It has nine offices throughout the country. Programmes are to be gender mainstreamed and the agency has issued several publications on how to achieve it, as well as projects and publications on the green transition, and examples of good businesses practices in rural areas. It also administered the programme on women's entrepreneurship that ended in 2015. There are currently no programmes only for women.

Member Based Industry Organisations



1. **The Swedish Forest Owners Associations.** There are three associations, covering the north, middle and south of Sweden^[vi]. They have 96000 members, who own 5,2 million hectares of forest land. The associations are owned by the members which employ hundreds of people and provide essential services to their members. The association (a cooperative) buys the raw material from the members and transforms it to product for the market. They also provide legal and financial counselling. The forest industry estimates that forestry and forest products account for 2,5% of GNP.^[vi] It is one of **Sweden's** main exports. The organisation primarily supports economic development.
2. **The Federation of Swedish Farmers – LRF** – is an interest and business organisation with approximately 128 000 individual members, representing 70 000 enterprises^[vii]. Almost all cooperatives within Swedish agriculture and forestry are also members. LRF is divided in 17 regional units, and it owns a number of business organisations including media, mostly print. The members account for 4% of Sweden's GNP. LRF is financed by member fees and returns on asset investments and business operations. It supports the members with services and with counselling. It is a very strong lobby organisation for farmers, lobbying politicians at the national level as well as at the EU-level. The organisation primarily supports economic development. However, they have a "Gender Equality Academy" which is a think tank that commissions studies in the area. It aims at creating knowledge on women and men's opportunities to start businesses within the green sector.
3. **The chamber(s) of commerce**^[viii]. These are 11 regional, and independent industry organisations, owned by some 10 000 company members. They represent the regional trade and industry and lobby against politicians and other organisations for improved business conditions, including the supply of competent labour, transportation/infrastructure, and local and regional attractiveness. The goal is primarily economic development.
4. **The Entrepreneurs** represents 60,000 small business owners in 250 local associations. It is essentially a lobby organisation but also provides networks, knowledge, and practical support for its members. It has some prizes and some studies designed to highlight women's entrepreneurship.^[ix]
5. **The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise** is the lobby organisation for the large companies, with some 60000 company members. It also represents the employer side in the annual salary negotiations with the trade unions. It is quite vocal on women's entrepreneurship and the importance of more of them (for economic growth), but largely use the question to lobby for deregulation^[x]
6. **Other trade associations.** Sweden has hundreds of specialised trade associations, large and small. There is one for violin makers, for example.^[xi] Some associations for businesses using rural resources are The Swedish Horse Industry Foundation (HNS), The Swedish Food Federation, The Nature Tourism Enterprises, Swedish Wine, The Swedish Wind Energy Association, "Odlarlaget" which gathers fruit and vegetable growers, or "Plant Based Sweden" for



companies making plant-based food products. But women innovators in rural areas may be active in any trade so any trade organisation may be applicable.

Organisations Supporting Entrepreneurship Or Development Projects

1. **Almi** is a corporation, co-owned by the state (51%) and by the regions (49%)^[xiii]. It offers loans, business development counselling, business training and venture capital and is an important resource for start-ups and small and medium sized businesses. Almi has had a focus on increasing the share of female board members in Swedish companies and run trainings, networks, and manages a list of board qualified women member candidates. Some of their 16 regional offices run “Women Lead” which are local networks of women CEOs and owners.
2. **Jobs and Society** is present in over 200 Swedish municipalities and provides free start-up counselling^[xiii]. Ten percent of new firms have received support from them. It is also co-financed by 30 businesses, unions, and state authorities.
3. **The Swedish tax authority** also provides start-up help. They have a helpful web page, a qualified customer service organisation, and they organise seminars for those interested in starting a formal organisation in order to help them properly navigate the bureaucracy^[xiv].
4. **LEADER** Sweden provides EU-financing for rural development. Sweden has 40 Leader areas. Unlike the other organisations, LEADER builds on voluntary engagement from the public, private and civil society sectors and business is not the primary aim, the public good is^[xv].
5. **Coompanion** assists those who want to start a cooperative business^[xvi]. Coompanion is financed by The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth. They initiate local and regional development projects with a focus on cooperation and entrepreneurship and seek third party financing for such projects. They have 25 offices, and services are free. They focus on projects that aim to help integrate refugees. They also concentrate on social responsibility as the goals are economic and social.
6. **Landsbygdsnätverket** (Sweden’s AKIS branch) is the National CAP Network^[xvii]. It consists of organisations engaged in rural development. It has over a hundred members – about half of the organisations listed above are members, and many more. Only one member is dedicated to speaking for women, namely Winnet.
7. **Winnet** consists of 12 local associations unevenly spread throughout Sweden. They aim for furthering women’s position in society and for contributing to sustainable economic development. Winnet has, among other things, taken part in the development of the Regional Development Plans and is keen to be a player in local and regional politics^[xviii]



3. AGRICULTURE AND RURAL ECONOMY

	2010	2020
Number of farms	71 090	58 790
Utilised agricultural area (UAA) (ha)	3 132 030	3 005 810
Average size of Farms	51.13 (ha)	44.06 (ha)

Agricultural holdings by economic size of the farms (Standard output in euro)

	2010	2020
Less than 14.999 euros	123 339 570	100 559 370
From 15.000 to 24,999 euros	150 278 590	111 003 950
From 25.000 to 49.999 euros	247 803 850	223 457 890
From 50.000 to 100.000 euros	382 555 420	376 055 410
From 100,000 to 249.000 euros	955 785 260	769 381 040
From 250.000 to 499,000 euros	783 819 440	937 854 930
500,000 euros and over	967 272 760	3 031 007 330

Number of farm (female) managers in Sweden by age class 2010-2020

	2010		2020		2010	2020	2010-2020(%)
	Female	Total (%)	Female	Total (%)	Female (%)	Female (%)	Total (%)
Younger than 44	398	5,62	364	10,74	5,62 %	10,74 %	> 5,12 %
44-65 years	6764	66,73	5991	61,61	66,73%	61,61 %	< 5,12
Older than 65	2414	23,81	2757	28,35	23,81%	28,35 %	> 4,54 %
Total	10 136		9,724				

Every third agricultural entrepreneur who is engaged in farming is older than 65 age. There is an increase of 5,12 % of female entrepreneurs younger than age 44 in farming in 2020 compared to 2010, while there is a decrease in farming of females aged 44-65 during the same period. In addition, there is an increase of 4,54% of females over the age 65 who engage in farming in 2020 compared to 2010.

Farm labour force in person 2010-2020.

Gender (instead of Family) labour force (sole holders + family members) in persons	
2010	2020



Female	Male	Total	Female %	Female	Male	Total	Female %
10 136	43 768	53904	18,08	9 724	43 768	53492	18,17
Non-family labour force, in persons							
2010				2020			
Female	Female %	Total	Female	Female %	Total		

Figure above shows the age distribution of self-employed persons in individual enterprises, by gender^[1], 2020.

Additional data, regarding small-medium and large scale farming (0-100 ha), are presented in the below table showing Sweden's farmland used during the year 2020 in hectares (extracted from European Union – statistics dataset variables- Time-frequency: Annual, Crops: Utilised agricultural area; Farm type: Total: Standard output in Euros; Total: Unit of measure: Hectare; Time: 2020 (Dataset: Sweden's main farm land use by NUTS 2 regions [EF_LUS_MAIN__custom_8457727])

AGRAREA (Labels)	Total	Less than 2 ha	From 2 to 4.9 ha	From 5 to 9.9 ha	From 10 to 19.9 ha	From 20 to 29.9 ha	From 30 to 49.9 ha	From 50 to 99.9 ha	100 ha or over
GEO (Labels)									
Sweden	3 005 810	420	20 800	105 450	168 050	132 870	223 500	467 090	1 887 630
Stockholm	89 030	30	500	3 020	6 450	5 020	7 690	13 360	52 970
Östra Mellansverige	777 460	70	2 780	15 920	29 930	26 740	45 980	111 310	544 730
Småland med öarna	498 820	40	2 300	15 500	26 830	21 940	39 080	85 570	307 560
Sydsverige	529 790	130	2 750	14 510	23 070	19 030	35 680	77 360	357 270
Västsverige	647 190	90	4 980	27 230	43 960	33 410	51 810	101 130	384 590
Norra Mellansverige	252 750	30	3 320	13 690	19 810	14 610	24 910	42 670	133 710
Mellersta Norrland	100 870	20	2 120	7 390	7 840	5 620	7 820	17 010	53 070
Övre Norrland	109 900	20	2 050	8 190	10 160	6 490	10 540	18 700	53 740



Rural Business

Statistics Sweden does not provide the requested detailed statistics. However, it is possible to generate such data by integrating company registers with individual registers. In Sweden, only one study of this nature has been published (Sköld, Tillmar, Ahl, Berglund, & Pettersson, 2018; Tillmar, Sköld, Ahl, Berglund, & Pettersson, 2022). While the figures are not entirely current, they are the most recent available. The following presents key information extracted from the study, with tables sourced from the 2022 publication.

1. The ten most common industries for women-owned businesses in rural municipalities in Sweden

Industry	Sweden rural areas	
	No. of business owners	Share of women business owners %
Forestry	3,056	10.2
Hairdressing	2,506	8.4
Mixed farming	1,196	4.0
Restaurants	959	3.2
Accounting/book-keeping	796	2.7
Physical wellbeing activities	751	2.5
Business management consulting	581	1.9
Physiotherapists	491	1.6
Literary and artistic creation	481	1.6
Other personal services	394	1.3
	37.4% of 29,972	

2. The ten most common industries for men-owned businesses in rural municipalities in Sweden

Industry	Sweden rural areas	
	No. of business owners	Share of men business owners %
Forestry	6,936	9.4
Mixed farming	4,152	5.6
Construction of buildings	3,030	4.1
Freight transport by road	2,893	3.9
Joinery installation	2,406	3.3
Milk production	2,377	3.2
Site preparation	2,375	3.2



Raising of other cattle and buffalo	1,843	2.5
Restaurants	1,626	2.2
Growing of cereals	1,512	2.1
		39.6% of 73,698

As can be seen from Tables 1 and 2, men are highly concentrated in male gendered industries, while women's businesses are more diverse. Rural women were represented in 572 different industries. Women make up about 30% of the population of business owners, in rural as well as in urban areas, but entrepreneurship or self-employment is more prevalent in rural areas. It should be noted that forestry is the most common industry, for both men and women.

3. Numbers and shares of women business owners distributed over net sales categories.

Women business owners in Sweden			
Net turnover SEK	No. of business owners	Share of the business owners in %	
0-49,000	3,711	12.4	
50,000-99,000	1,577	5.3	
100,000-299,000	4,235	14.1	
300,000-599,000	3,547	11.8	
600,000-999,000	2,084	7.0	
1,000,000-1,499,000	1,426	4.8	
1,500,000-9,999,000	4,011	13.4	
10,000,000-99,999,000	968	3.2	
> 100,000,000	66	0.2	
In total	21,625	72.2	
No. of reports/missing values	8,347	27.8	
In total	29,972	100	

4. Women's and men's mean disposable income for the year 2012 in the rural and urban areas of Sweden

Disposable income SEK				
Employed		Mean	Median	Std.D.
Rural	Women	218,772	213,000	2.301
Rural	Men	271,309	256,800	5.490
Urban	Women	251,093	232,400	1.395
Urban	Men	314,921	279,100	4.089



Business owners

Rural	Women	199,335	158,300	24.168
Rural	Men	279,450	228,000	28.831
Urban	Women	261,442	196,100	40.543
Urban	Men	355,199	275,500	16.455

Table 3 shows that most women-owned businesses are small, and Table 4 shows that women business owners in rural areas have the lowest disposable income of all the categories.

5. Women and men business owners within the five most common industries for women in rural Sweden

	Women	Men		Women	Men
Individual			Business		
Gender	39%	61%	Sole proprietorship	92%	93%
Individual disposable income SEK	186,299	230,345	Employed in own limited company	8%	7%
Age	56 years	59 years	<i>reference</i>		
Age 16-24	3%	1%	Solo entrepreneur	85.6%	85%
Age 25-39	13%	9%	2-9 employed	13.6%	14%
Age 55-65	25%	26%	>10 employed		
Age 66-74	36%	45%	<i>reference</i>	0.8%	1%
Age 40-54	23%	19%	Net turnover <99,000 SEK	34%	37%
<i>reference</i>			Net turnover. <599,000 SEK	41%	28%
Married	57%	58%	Net turnover <1,499,000 SEK	13%	15%
Children at home	23%	17%	Net turnover >1,500,000 SEK	10%	20%
Born outside Sweden	8%		Profit for the year <0	26%	33%
Primary education level	23%	38%	Profit for the year <99,000 SEK	29%	25%
			Profit for the year	29%	21%



			<299,000 SEK		
			Profit for the year	15%	
Secondary education level	59%	46%	>300,000 SEK		20%
Tertiary education level					
<i>reference</i>	18%	16%			
Additional employment	15%	14%			
Industry			Municipality location		
			Rural - very remotely located	7%	7%
Mixed farming	13%	31%			
			Rural - remotely located	39%	40%
Forestry	36%	52%			
			Rural - close to a larger town	54%	53%
Restaurants	11%	12%			
Hairdressing	30%	2%			
Accounting/book- keeping					
<i>reference</i>	10%	3%			
No. of business owners	8,280	12,870		8,280	12,870

Table 5 gives detailed information for the businesses and their owners in the five most common industries for women in rural Sweden. The authors conducted regression analyses on the data and discovered that:

- Business and industry variables (i.e. not gender or other demographic variables) explain the economic performance of women as well as men entrepreneurs in the most common industries for rural women entrepreneurs.
- Both men and women entrepreneurs operating larger businesses have higher disposable incomes than men and women operating smaller businesses.
- Both men and women entrepreneurs running limited companies have higher disposable incomes than men and women operating sole proprietorships.
- In Sweden—a welfare state with high levels of gender equality – having children living at home will be positively related to economic performance both for men and women entrepreneurs.
- Marriage is an advantage for men in terms of their disposable income but a drawback for women.



The final point corroborates the “marriage penalty” which is also found Internationally. Women start small businesses to combine family and work, however, in Sweden there was no “child penalty” which is most likely a result of the provision of shared, paid parental leave and good quality and affordable daycare for all children aged 1 (Markowska, Ahl, & Naldi, 2023). Swedish women do not *have* to start a business to combine work and family, but when women in rural areas do, they still seem to devote more time to childcare and household work than their partners. Or they simply start businesses in gendered niches that are not profitable on average.

4. SUSTAINABILITY AND WOMEN-LED INNOVATIONS IN RURAL AREAS/AGRICULTURE

Sweden has a vibrant public discussion regarding environmental sustainability related to climate change, particularly in light of the energy crisis that emerged when the war in Ukraine began. However, almost all public discourse revolves around significant matters or prominent issues such as the Northvolt’s new battery plant in northern Sweden, the Hybrit steel factory making carbon-free steel, also in northern Sweden (which is having a boom now), new wind power plants (which the locals oppose – “not in my backyard”), and new nuclear power plants. There is significant optimism that advanced technology can address the challenges posed by the climate crisis.

In developing countries, there is a rhetoric that women are to solve social problems for example poverty (through micro-businesses) or overpopulation (through birth control, education, or jobs) but the thinking in Sweden is rather that the government should solve any problems. The government has been quite good at designing one of the best welfare systems in the world. Swedes have become used to outsourcing much responsibility to the government and gladly pay for it in their taxes (Berggren & Trägårdh, 2010).

The discourse on women’s entrepreneurship is the same in Sweden as in the International research literature: women are seen as an unused resource for economic growth (Ahl, 2006; Ahl & Marlow, 2021; Thulin, Broström, & Stutzinsky, 2023). If and when gender equality is considered, it is assumed that if only more women started businesses, gender equality would result.

Media representation of women entrepreneurs is scarce. When covered, articles tend to focus on extraordinary success stories, typically those of young digital entrepreneurs or small lifestyle businesses in traditionally feminine industries. Examining the four most recent editions of the prominent weekly tabloid magazine catering to a rural audience, including farmers and forest owners (Tidningen Land with Lantbruk and Skogsland), it becomes evident that women feature prominently. In all rural-focused issues, and in one specifically dedicated to farming, women take center stage as the headline story.

Entrepreneurship is central in the magazine, both as mobilising voluntary work for rural development and running a business in the rural. How to be economically viable in the rural is central for the articles. Food-processing and service business/innovations stand out as the main initiatives. Closeness to nature and reviving the “old rural” are keywords for the articles. There are also some small-scale farming/forestry that women entrepreneurs are involved in. One article focusses on integration of immigrants as part of female rural development.



Initiatives that are labelled as innovations are part of some of the articles but none of them are linked to women entrepreneurs. The magazine is currently running a tech innovation competition for farming and forestry that people can apply for. The four issues presented some of the competition contributions and no woman was portrayed.

5. NATIONAL (REGIONAL AND LOCAL) POLICIES SUPPORTING WOMEN IN RURAL AREAS

As mentioned earlier, since 2015 all policies are to be gender mainstreamed and consider the equal inclusion of men and women. Affirmative action is normally prohibited. A study of a regional development plan showed that most of the money went to rationalization of agriculture and broadband development. Gender mainstreaming was treated as an information issue - if only women are informed that they can apply for RDP-money, the policy was considered gender mainstreamed (Pettersson et al, forthcoming).

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[1] In the figure on age distribution gender the women are presented in blue and men in orange colour.

[i] <https://jordbruksverket.se/languages/english/swedish-board-of-agriculture>

[ii] <https://www.skogsstyrelsen.se/en/>

[iii] <https://www.vinnova.se/en/>

[iv] <https://tillvaxtverket.se/tillvaxtverket/inenglish.2908.html>

[v] <https://skogsagarna.se/>

[vi] <https://www.skogsindustrierna.se/siteassets/dokument/rapporter/skogsningens-betydelse-for-valfarden-2021.pdf>

[vii] <https://www.lrf.se/om-lrf/sa-arbetar-lrf/about-lrf/>

[viii] <https://www.sverigeshandelskamrar.se/>

[ix] <https://www.foretagarna.se/nyheter/>

[x] https://www.svensktnaringsliv.se/sakomraden/arbetsmarknadspolitik/darfor-ar-sa-fa-kvinnor-foretagare-har-ar-atgarderna_1204033.html

[xi]

<https://tillvaxtverket.se/tillvaxtverket/guiderochverktyg/branschorganisationer.2744.html>

[xii] <https://www.almi.se/en/in-english/>

[xiii] <https://www.nyforetagarcentrum.com/>

[xiv]

<https://www.skatteverket.se/funktioner/sok/sok.4.64a656d113f4c7597011b3.html?query=starta+f%C3%B6retag>

[xv] <https://leadersverige.se/>

[xvi] <https://coompanion.se/coompanion/coompanion-in-english/>

[xvii] <https://www.landsbygdsnätverket.se/>

[xviii] <http://winnet.se/web/page.aspx?refid=2>



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