



Infrastructures for Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

A Policy Booklet

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1 INTRODUCTION

Women have long been overlooked and under-represented in the agriculture and rural sectors. Many women-led innovations and practices go unnoticed, which not only limits their potential impact, but also perpetuates the idea that women have a smaller role to play in these fields. The challenge, therefore, is to increase visibility and recognition of women's contributions and support them in becoming key players in shaping the future of sustainable agriculture and rural areas.

This booklet is based on the FLIARA project¹. FLIARA (Female-led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas) works to improve understanding, awareness, and recognition of women's role in a more sustainable agriculture and rural future. The project combines future foresight analysis and case studies to understand women's current and potential future contribution to rural innovation and sustainability. The evidence generated also sheds light on the pathways successful women innovators take, as well as the current policies and future policy needed to further enhance women's role in rural sustainability and innovation. Through the case studies, FLIARA has engaged directly with 200 female innovators, and these activities span across ten European countries.

This booklet focusses on the development of policies that can support women-led innovative practices in farming and rural areas to initiate progress towards gender equality and sustainability.

In section 10 'About FLIARA' we provide information on how the activities in FLIARA are the source for these insights. This booklet is based on policy briefs developed by FLIARA project partners (see Annex 3 Overview of FLIARA Policy Briefs), which provide material and proposals relevant for various policy contexts.

1.1 SUPPORTING FOUR DIMENSIONS OF SUSTAINABILITY

During the FLIARA project, about 200 women innovators in agriculture and rural areas have been interviewed. Although these innovators have been selected based on contributions to only one dimension of sustainability, either social, environmental, economic or cultural sustainability, the analysis of the interviews showed that they all contributed to additional sustainability dimensions. This result highlights the importance of the selected female innovators for sustainable rural development. Supporting female innovators has, consequently, a wider (and positive) impact, on sustainable development of farming and rural areas (Table 1).

¹ Funded by the European Union through the Horizon Europe programme, Grant Agreement nº. 101084234. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors 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.

Table 1 Positive impact of female innovators to different dimensions of sustainability.

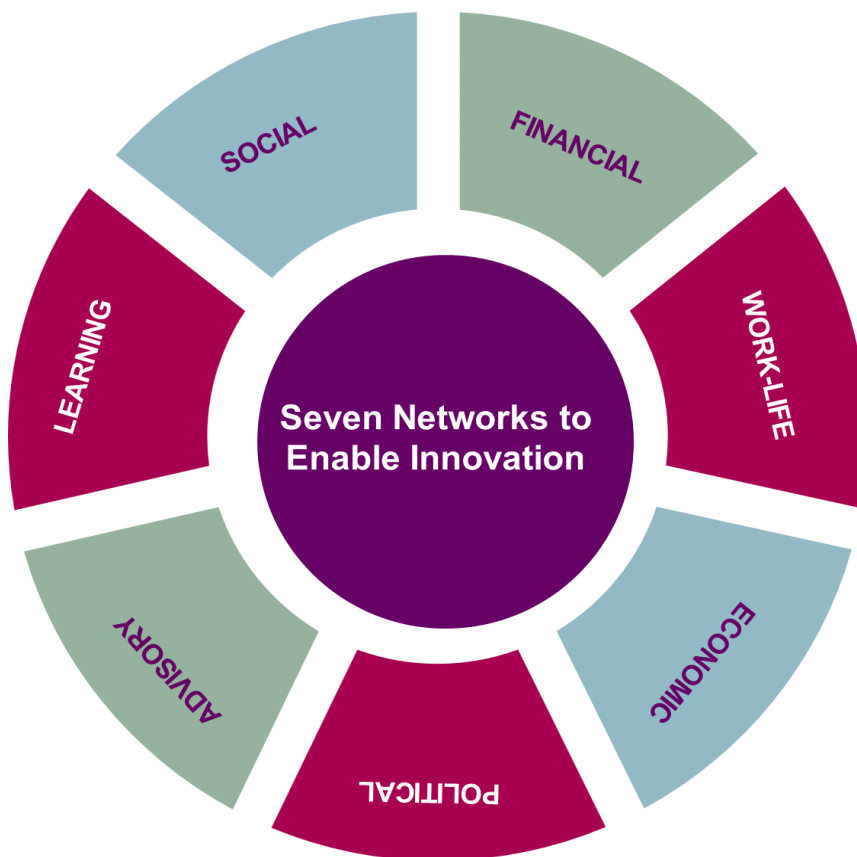
Total 10 Countries			Interviews		195
97.44%	Social Sustainability	24.10%	47	Outstanding Impact	
Positive Impact		36.92%	72	Significant Impact	
		24.62%	48	Moderate Impact	
		9.23%	18	Some Impact	
		2.56%	5	Minimal Impact	
190 Interviews		97.44%	190		
		2.56%	5	Zero Impact	
95.90%	Economic Sustainability	18.97%	37	Outstanding Impact	
Positive Impact		35.90%	70	Significant Impact	
		29.23%	57	Moderate Impact	
		5.64%	11	Some Impact	
		6.15%	12	Minimal Impact	
187 Interviews		95.90%	187		
		4.10%	8	Zero Impact	
96.92%	Environmental Sustainability	24.10%	47	Outstanding Impact	
Positive Impact		35.90%	70	Significant Impact	
		21.54%	42	Moderate Impact	
		11.28%	22	Some Impact	
		4.10%	8	Minimal Impact	
189 Interviews		96.92%	189		
		3.08%	6	Zero Impact	
93.33%	Cultural Sustailability	10.26%	20	Outstanding Impact	
Positive Impact		29.23%	57	Significant Impact	
		27.18%	53	Moderate Impact	
		22.05%	43	Some Impact	
		4.62%	9	Minimal Impact	
182 Interviews		93.33%	182		
		6.67%	13.00057034	Zero Impact	

Source: FLIARA, Roos et al, 2025, D3.4

1.2 SEVEN NETWORKS AS INFRASTRUCTURE FOR INNOVATION

Networking is often seen as a strength of (female) innovators. Based on their networks, women often have good basic knowledge of the local places and communities they operate in. Research in FLIARA (See Annex 1 Visions for future) revealed that rural stakeholders considered the position of women in networks as both a strength and a weakness. Extensive networks have been considered the major possibility and lack of networks as a major constraint to women's contribution to sustainability innovation.² This relates to the fact that women operate in a web of interdependencies that affect an innovation. Successful innovators have not secured a good position in a single network, but must manage multiple interdependencies, which can be expressed as taken place in **7 networks** (Figure 1; Table 2). Policies can support female innovation by having an eye on measures to support these networks as **infrastructures for female innovation**. As such, and for the purpose of this report, we will examine policy supports through each network, namely, social, financial, work-life, economic, political, advisory, and learning (Figure 1; Table 2).

Figure 1 The seven networks for innovation



² Kuhmonen, Tuomas & Belyta Tembo. (2024). D2.4: Women's Potential Contributions to Sustainability Innovations. FLIARA. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14045295>

Table 2 The seven networks for innovation

Network	What is it about	Policy measures to improve infrastructures
Social Network	Parents, family, children's care, flexibility	Measures improving childcare, care for elderly, school systems
Network for Financial Security and Independence	The safety net in case of health issues, divorce, etc. Access to financial means.	Social security system, family law, have financial security in mind in developing grants and financial instruments
Working/Life Network	To achieve a healthy work-life balance	Infrastructures that enable self-employed people and farmers to relax, i.e., prevent the accumulation of stress.
Economic Network	Networks to trade products	Supporting networking for commercialization of products
Advisory Network	Access to tailor-made advice	A rural advisory network that meets the needs of innovative women
Learning Network	Networks with (women) in the same situation to exchange experiences Peer-to-peer contacts with other innovators	Providing platforms, spotlighting innovation experiences, providing spaces to convene, provide opportunities to recognize and meet peers
Political Network	Access to political decision making	Organise public participation, meet with (potential) innovators

Source: FLIARA

This policy booklet gives some practical tips and insights on how to improve the infrastructure of the networks that women use to bring innovations to farming and rural areas.

Next to working on separate infrastructures, there is also a need to work on integrated policy programmes, such as a programme to support return migration of women to rural areas. As being presented below such a programme often includes working on the separate 7 infrastructures at once to make it a success.

2 INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE SOCIAL NETWORK

Combining work and family is in practice one of the most salient obstacles for women innovators as the distribution of work in the social network is inadequate. The social network includes the organisation and distribution of care, such as for children, parents and others. A good social network caters to the organisation of care in such a way that it provides room for innovations in other domains. There are large differences between national systems, and consequently between rural areas, in the ways this is organised. Inspirational examples can be found (see Annex 2 Selection of FLIARA Outcomes for further reading). This includes the following infrastructures:

- **Provision of adequate parental leave** advances equality and ensures that rural economies fully benefit from the innovative contributions of women farmers and entrepreneurs. Inadequate parental leave systems and stereotypical gender norms, particularly the notion that women have the main responsibility for childcare and household work, hold women back. Policy should include adequate parental leave systems that are paid, flexible, and that encourage men and women to share childcare and household work on equal terms.
- **Provision of adequate childcare pre-school and after-school activities** could do the same. Policy should therefore include adequate and affordable childcare provision as well as after school activities.
- **Improving care for single seniors supports senior women.** Women live on average almost six years longer than men and are, in average, about 3 years younger than a male partner, resulting in a growing proportion of elderly women living alone, which has significant social implications, especially in rural areas. For innovative women, this situation represents the need for assurance that they will be cared for after leaving active business. This issue also affects women who in practice take a large part in caregiving for elderly parents and good, alternative, solutions are in practice beneficial to them. Additionally, care for the elderly represents a significant public and private business sector that requires innovative approaches from service providers (many of whom are women). The focus is not only on basic care, such as retirement homes, but also on comprehensive rehabilitation, as well as cultural, educational, and recreational activities and generally on enabling active ageing.

2.1 THE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED BY THESE INFRASTRUCTURES

The lack of adequate paid **parental leave** benefits restricts women's opportunities to combine work and family. Women typically assume, and are expected to assume, the primary responsibility for childcare and domestic work. The uneven distribution of childcare and domestic work between men and women creates further barriers for women to engage in entrepreneurship and productive work. As a result, rural economies do not fully benefit from women's innovative contributions. Consequently, both material provisions and gender norms must change.

A further issue is the lack of **available childcare** in rural areas, or the lack of available afterschool activities/care. Since women typically assume the primary responsibility for childcare, this inhibits women's opportunities to allocate time to their innovative projects. Consequently, childcare provision is crucially important for gender equality and rural viability. Childcare policies vary across EU member states, thus providing unequal conditions for parents across Europe. There is a need for almost all countries to step up their policies.

Example of a challenge: No statutory maternity pay and leave for the self-employed in Germany

- While employees are guaranteed a certain percentage of their regular income and time off, financial compensation is often inadequate for the self-employed.
- This may force those affected to return to work prematurely, with corresponding health risks.
- A particular challenge exists for agricultural entrepreneurs, as their businesses require continuous management.
- Beyond agriculture, women affected by this issue work as craftspeople, small shop-owners, midwives and child minders, providing services very much needed in rural areas.
- The status quo stunts women in their entrepreneurship and hampers sustainable development of rural areas.

Source: Policy Brief DE04 Maternity Leave Reform

Example of a challenge: Inadequate pre-school capacities in rural Czechia

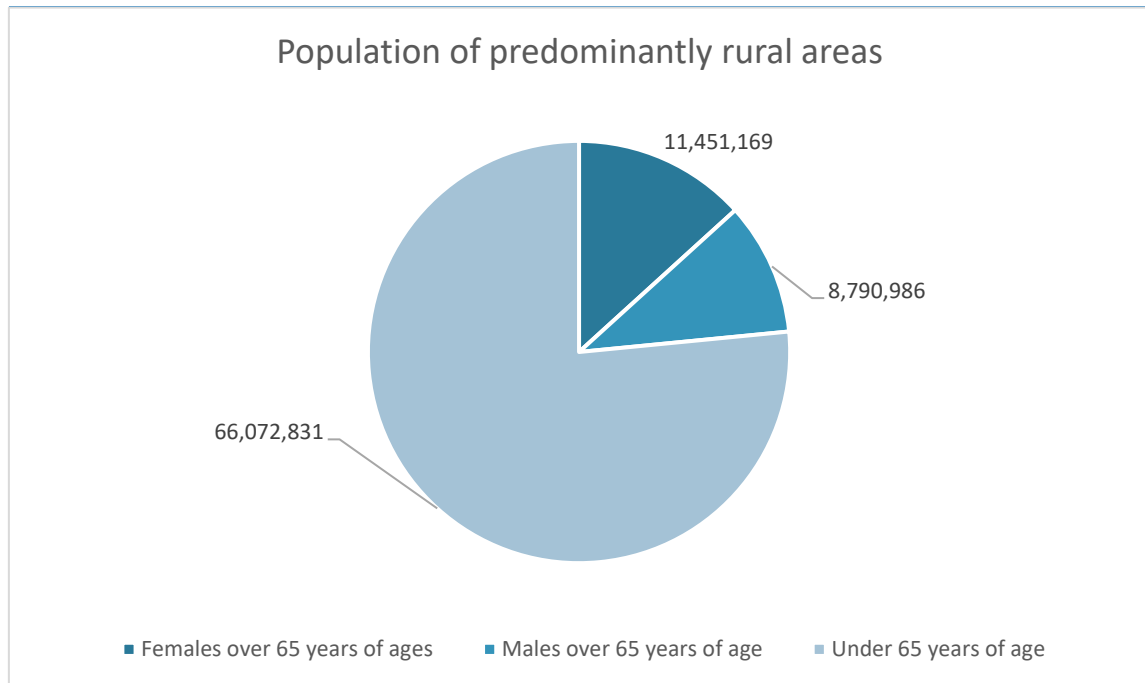
- As a result of underestimating demographic trends and parents' interest in returning to work earlier, and the needs of incoming Ukrainian mothers with young children, an acute shortage of places in preschools has arisen. Insufficient capacity does not allow parents to return to work.
- Other forms of childcare are underdeveloped.
- In addition to ensuring uninterrupted careers for women and men, an earlier return of parents to work would address the challenge of rural economic development and bring an economic effect in the form of benefits and collected taxes.
- The ill-considered administrative reform after 1989 has resulted in 22% of municipalities having fewer than 200 inhabitants and therefore a minimal budget and minimal number of qualified people. Therefore, it is not realistic to comply with government regulations as these rural municipalities are missing the capacity to organise pre-schools adequately.

Source: Policy Brief CZ05 Strengthening Care for Pre-school Children

The ageing in rural areas is, to a large extent, the **ageing** of rural women (Figure 2). Previous policies have focused mainly on pensions, which are usually low for women as pay gaps throughout a lifetime are reflected in a pension gap. In addition to material security, these women primarily need opportunities for participation in rural communities.

In addition, care for seniors could be an important economic sector in rural areas that could offer innovative opportunities to other women.

Figure 2 Elderly population in the European Union's rural areas



Source: EUROSTAT, Population in 2024

2.2 PRACTICAL TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

Best practice: Parental leave in Sweden

Social policy is not regulated at EU level, but EU member states regulate social policy themselves. Parental leave policies vary widely, thus providing unequal conditions for parents across Europe. The only country in the FLIARA project where women innovators did not identify work/family conflict as a major problem was **Sweden**. Swedish policy is therefore the inspiration for the policy solutions. It must be kept in mind, however, that the Swedish system has not been created overnight. It has been developed by many relatively small steps over many decades. In 1995, the introduction of the current system was not yet feasible and many small steps, followed by societal changes, have been necessary to come to its current state. This means in effect that building an infrastructure for social networks takes time. Benefits already come from early steps, but full benefits wait for the realisation of the full infrastructure, which can be defined as follows:

- A universal, paid parental leave system financed through the state and equally available to everyone, irrespective of employment status.
- Reimbursement should make up for lost income, with a minimum level for those without a prior income.
- Legislation should guarantee job security for the parent on leave.

- Parental leave should be offered for 18 months or more per child and be seamlessly integrated into childcare availability.
- Encourage parents to share parental leave. Each parent should formally be awarded half of the parental leave days – if not splitting 50/50 days must be transferred from one parent to the other. This sets a standard of parenting being a shared responsibility.
- Consider earmarking a portion of the parental leave months for each parent to encourage fathers to take parental leave.
- Make parental leave flexible. Allow flexibility in the use of parental leave, with parents being able to use it as a part-time option, and over an extended period, which is particularly important for the possibility of combining parenthood and business ownership.

Box 1 Insight from Policy Brief SE01 Providing Adequate Parental Leave

The Swedish system includes 480 days of universal, state administered paid parental leave, financed by statutory social security fees. Reimbursement is 80% of prior income for 390 days (up to a cap) and 90 days are paid a minimum level. 90 days are reserved for each parent. Days can be transferred to other persons if a spouse is absent, and days can also be transferred to, for example, a grandparent. There is flexibility on how much and when days are taken – it can be taken part time (25, 50 or 75%) and it can be spread out over time as one wishes until the child is four years old. 96 days can be saved until the child is twelve years old. Additionally, until the child turns twelve, Swedish parents are entitled to a maximum of 60 paid days off per child and year to care for a sick child. The remuneration is the same as for parental leave days, and the days can be shared among the parents as they wish. Fathers take 40% of these days on average.

Sweden legislated shared parental leave in 1974. Men's uptake was at first negligible. In 1995, 30 days were earmarked for each parent, which in 2002 was increased to 60 days, and in 2016 to 90 days. If men did not use them, the family lost it. This gradual increase, a nudging approach if you will, has increased Swedish men's uptake of parental leave days. It is now about 30% (more than the mandated days). It has also changed gender norms. It is now completely taken for granted that men take parental leave - parents of today have never experienced any other system.

Employers no longer have a reason to discriminate women on the grounds that they may have babies and stay away from work for a long time, since the male work force is no more reliable. The system applies to the self-employed in equal measures. Legislation has, over time, changed gender norms dramatically. *Social change can thus be instigated by new laws* – they may meet resistance at first, but over time change will occur. Men and women's participation in the workforce is high in Sweden, both around 80-85%. The dual breadwinner family is the norm – less than 1% of Swedish adult women are homemakers and financially dependent on a partner.

The Swedish experience shows that social network infrastructure can be created step-by-step in which earmarked parental leave for each of the partners provided an important incentive to incorporate male partners as key actors in the social network.

Best practice: Providing adequate childcare and after school activities in Sweden

A good system of childcare and after school activities is characterised as follows:

- Provide good quality childcare facilities/preschools in all areas where people live, including rural areas
- Make childcare affordable. Make fees low and income tested so that everyone can afford them. Subsidize the cost through the tax system.
- Provide full-time daycare/preschool for children aged one or older, until school starts.
- Staff daycare/preschool with qualified personnel with adequate education. Include programmes for the education of preschool teachers and leisure time pedagogues at universities or vocational schools.
- Serve the children lunch.
- Provide meaningful after-school activities for school age children at, or nearby, the school so parents can work full-time day.

2.3 CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Finding a balance between work and family is a major obstacle for women's contributions to rural development.

Parental leave:

- EU member states should provide adequate, paid parental leave systems.
- The system should be flexible.
- The system should encourage parents to share parental leave days.
- It should also be accessible for self-employed people (such as farmers) and not only for employees.

Around school:

- Policy must offer affordable solutions that make the combination of work and family possible.
- EU member states should provide high quality daycare/preschool facilities and after school activities for school age children in rural areas.
- Services should be subsidized and affordable for everyone.
- The staff should be well educated.

Ageing:

- Due to the trend of ageing, the number of seniors will increase rapidly. This development needs to be addressed both for social reasons and because it is a promising economic sector for the future.
- This is a task of all stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental.
- The approach addressing the social status of senior women includes lifelong learning, services and facilities, strategic frameworks and the allocation of tasks to the relevant stakeholders.

2.4 POLICY BRIEFS FOR FURTHER READING

- CZ05 Strengthening Care for Pre-school Children
- CZ06 Improving care for lonely seniors
- DE04 Maternity Leave Reform
- IT04 Improving Family and Work Balance in Rural Areas
- SE01 Providing Adequate Parental Leave
- SE02 Providing Adequate Childcare and After School Activities
- SE03 Maintaining Schools in Rural Areas
- SE04 Culture and Sports in Rural Areas

3 INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE NETWORK FOR FINANCIAL SECURITY AND INDEPENDENCE

This is about the network that not only helps to overcome the financial challenges in case of health issues, divorce, etc. but also helps to get access to finance needed for innovations in farming and rural areas. Issues of relevance are:

- **Legal position.** Traditional farming systems in Europe are patriarchal. Land was owned by males and in succession the farm went to sons and not to daughters. Although laws have changed to allow for equal rights, practices have not always followed these changes. Many women still contribute with unpaid (and not registered) labour to a farm they legally do not own, and have a weak position if the relationship is broken up by a divorce or the demise of their partner. Policies and legal frameworks to ensure that women have easy access to the rights of all their contributions, should be set up as part of the equal rights agenda. The details of family law vary by member state and so the right remedies differ by member state. It is, however, essential to promote practices that form a sound base for the acknowledgement of female contributions in all circumstances. Good infrastructures assure that women can fully exercise their rights and benefit fairly from the labour and initiatives they invest in a joint enterprise, without their contributions being undervalued. This may also hold for practices of registration of joint companies and the ways in which female contributions are being acknowledged in statistical representations of reality, which often still focus on representing the head of the family in family farming.
- **Start-up finance, training and mentoring vouchers for rural women.** Women in rural areas face significant barriers when starting a business, including limited access to finance, tailored training, and mentoring. To address these challenges, we propose an integrated voucher-based support scheme offering start-up funding and which may also provide access to other infrastructures such as the advisory network (access to tailored advisory services) and learning network (access to entrepreneurship training and personalised mentoring). These vouchers would help women cover essential start-up costs, build skills, and gain confidence through individual guidance. Although such programmes exist in several EU countries, they are often project-based. There is a strong need to embed these tools into national policies to ensure long-term, stable support for women entrepreneurs in rural areas. The financial innovation support should be able to cater to various stages, sizes and types of businesses.
- **Improve access to finance for women-led rural and farm innovation.** Access to finance at the right level and at the right time in the development of women-led rural and farm innovation is part of the key to success. Access to finance to start and develop an innovation remains a significant barrier limiting the potential for women-led innovation in rural and farming contexts. This is relevant as many female entrepreneurs in farming and rural areas run micro-businesses that are relatively small-scale and do not align with the typical business operations targeted by funding sources. Examples include food cooperatives, knowledge

initiatives, and voluntary associations. These unique small-scale rural and farming activities often fall between different funding schemes, which are designed for larger businesses. Dealing with this barrier is also complex. There are many sides to the access to finance issue. This calls for policy action at a variety of levels, from more direct support to better monitoring of the issue. We need funding agencies that can adapt financial funds for small businesses, those that do not have financial profit and growth as goals, or that are not technology based, but sustainability based. Adjusting the size criteria is especially relevant for agricultural support, which aims for large-scale economically effective farms and thus disregards landowners of small farms. Also funding for small-scale environmental initiatives are missing. This is relevant for the design of the new CAP and National level CAP Strategic Plans. Communication about created opportunities is also relevant to ensure that female entrepreneurs feel that these opportunities are also meant for them.

- **Simplifying Innovation Support Systems.** With simplified rules, lower fees, and better support systems, small businesses can navigate bureaucracy and grow sustainably. Small businesses struggle with the same regulations as large companies, leading to high compliance costs and administrative burdens. They lack resources to navigate bureaucracy, hindering growth. Simplified rules, lower fees, and better support systems are needed. A user-friendly, centralized online resource could help startups access necessary information and support more easily. In the FLIARA interviews and Community of Practice events (CoP), female entrepreneurs from farming and rural sector emphasized that women are often engaged in SME operations that are relatively small scale and/or does not represent average rural operations, that are better recognized in regulations or CAP subsidy options
- **Close the gender pay gap.** This gap manifests in multiple forms, including the persistent undervaluing of professions socially coded as feminine — often associated with care and relational work — compared to those regarded as masculine, which tend to be better paid and more institutionally recognised. Other forms need to be addressed as well.

3.1 THE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED BY THESE INFRASTRUCTURES

Traditionally “women’s role on the farm can be informal and unpaid”³. This traditional role, which has been enshrined in legal and policy frameworks, stands in the way of the acknowledgement of female contributions to rural areas and, although in theory, frameworks allow for equal rights, the practical outcomes and choices within the systems do not materialize these equal rights. Women remain underrepresented in entrepreneurship. Access to funding remains the main challenge for new women

³ Aisling Murtagh, Maura Farrell, & Louise Weir. (2024). D1.3: Assessment of Rural and Farming Policy and Legal Frameworks in relation to Women-led Innovation. FLIARA. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14045163>, p. 47.

entrepreneurs and many women must rely on personal savings and informal sources of funding to launch their business ideas and start innovation journeys.

Example of a challenge: Definition of farm managers based on patriarchal traditions of family farming

In family law, the idea of a single (usually male) ‘head of the household’ has been abolished, in European statistics of family farming this has not yet been the case.

The Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2018/1874 on integrated farm statistics defines: “Manager of the agricultural holding is the natural person responsible for the normal daily financial and production activities of the agricultural holding.”

(http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg_impl/2018/1874/oj). This is interpreted by EUROSTAT (in its 2024 Metadata on Farm structure) in a way that “only the main holder (one person) is accounted”, which is often a rather senior male. This definition (based on the Commission Implementing Regulation) is at odds with EUROSTAT’s broader definition of farm management as “all persons responsible for the day-to-day management of the holding”. It does not help the acknowledgement of female contributions to farming as the statistical definition of family farming is based on single (in practice, patriarchal) leadership. EUROSTAT data shows that the contribution in annual working units (excluding housework) by other family members is substantial and is in some Member States and EU regions even larger than the number of annual working units of the “sole” farm manager (EUROSTAT ef_if_main).

Current **innovation funding support systems** are not often well-adapted both to small businesses, which, although contributing to a fair standard of living in rural areas, have been started without financial profit and growth goals, and to enterprises which are not focused on technological innovation. Women entrepreneurs often avoid external funding due to financial risks and value preservation. Current support systems are inadequate, particularly for rural areas. Specialized funds exist but are fragmented, and many businesses struggle to qualify for national support. The financial innovation support should cater to various stages, sizes and types of businesses. This has led to unequal impacts, particularly affecting women-owned businesses in rural areas. Consequently, many do not seek or receive adequate financial support. Some entrepreneurs avoid external financing altogether since they are afraid that criteria privileging economic growth before other goals will lead to dependence on financiers’ intentions and compromise their vision of a sustainable society.

While numerous specialized support systems exist, they often cater to specific stages of business development and the systems may not communicate with each other, creating a fragmented support landscape.

Finding financial support for initiatives that aim to sustain existing communities or projects becomes even more difficult. Funds are more readily available for technological development than for production development, administration, or marketing. This may, for example, lead some businesses to engage in construction projects just to qualify for rural development support. As such, ingenuity is needed to navigate the complexities of the existing business support system. Women-led rural and farm innovation comes in

many forms, from livelihood focused businesses to innovations focused on a social mission. This calls for policy innovation and specific tailored finance support to capitalise on the distinctive nature of women-led farm and rural entrepreneurship.

In conclusion, public funding provides an important source of finance however there are still barriers impacting women leading rural and farm innovations engaging in the funding system such as finding match funding, the bureaucratic nature of the application process and the time it takes to apply and receive funding.

Box 2 Insight from Policy Brief FI03 Special targeted support for atypical rural SMEs

In interviews and Community of Practice (CoP) events, female entrepreneurs from the farming and rural sectors emphasized that women often run small businesses that do not align with typical business operations and thus feel unrecognized in regulations. Examples include small-scale (sometimes organic) farms, alternative organizational forms, and tourism enterprises. These small-scale rural and farming businesses often fall between different regulations, which are designed for larger traditional operations.

Small businesses face significant challenges due to policies that apply the same regulations to both large and small companies. Consequently, complying with regulations and reporting requirements takes too much time and resources for small businesses. A large company can hire legal advice and economic experts to help them navigate government requirements, but a start-up or a small company has neither the necessary skills nor the resources to do so. These circumstances in turn can hamper business growth prospects.

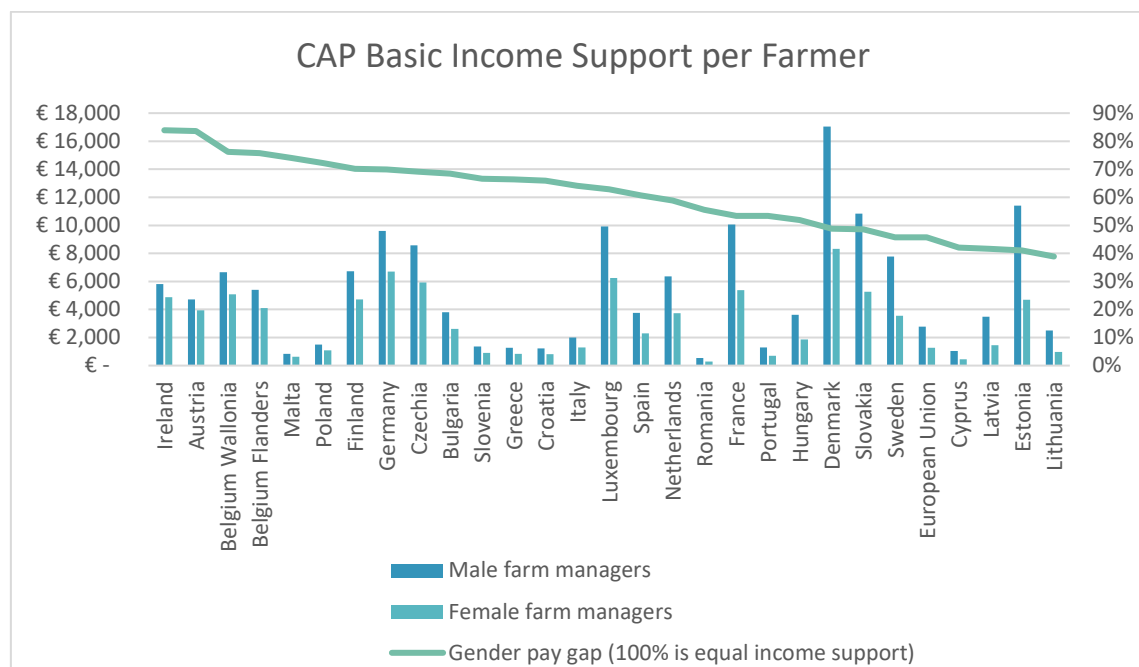
Some businesses are too small to qualify for national support funds, posing significant obstacles in bureaucracy. This is especially clear when it comes to agricultural support which aims for large-scale economically effective farms and thus disregards small landowners. Additionally, small-scale landowners, often seasonal and dependent on harvest periods and varying weather conditions, find it challenging to anticipate their need for extra or seasonal workers. Flexible and simplified hiring procedures for fixed-term seasonal and short-term temporary workforces would greatly benefit these rural operations.

Reduce pay gaps between hard and soft professions The gender pay gap persists within the EU. One of the causes is that male-dominated (technical) professions are paid better than female-dominated (social and humanistic) professions. A potential solution could be to reevaluate the salary scales in the public sector.

The financially largest contribution of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS), is based on the number of hectares of a farm. The outcome of this is that farms with male farm managers get more BISS than farms with a female farm manager (Figure 3). Many female farm managers add extra value to products produced on the farm, rather than receive extra income (including extra CAP) by enlargement of the farm. The issue of getting **access to land** (traditional values within family farming result in larger farms being more likely to be allocated to male family members) may be part of the explanation of these differences in farming styles. In practice, the CAP produces a gender pay gap by the way it is allocating its support.

FLIARA evidence suggests that female initiatives create extra value for the farm that contributes to all dimensions of sustainability in rural development.

Figure 3 Gender Gap in CAP Basic Income Support for Sustainability based on planned allocation 2023-2027 and farm structure 2020



Source FLIARA based on EUROSTAT and EC

3.2 PRACTICAL TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

Practical tip: Business plan support enabling access to finance

National/regional governments could provide rural women entrepreneurs with a well-developed business plan with micro-credit programmes, small grants and facilitated bank loans. Women entrepreneurs would ideally be assisted in developing a business plan and in applying for microcredits/small grants – to increase chances of success. These financial instruments should be easily accessible (very low level of bureaucracy). This action would help women, and particularly those who did not inherit a farm or an asset, to develop their ideas and projects.

Source: Policy Brief IT02 Funding and Advisory Services for Women Innovators in Rural Areas

Women leading farm innovations may not aspire to develop a large business with high turnover but develop a business that complements the existing family farm, its scale and their own work-life balance choices. Due to the small size of many innovative enterprises that were part of the FLIARA case studies, impact was not necessarily strong on economic metrics such as turnover or job creation. However, these impacts can also emerge but may take time. Starting an innovation may follow a more organic pathway. Development in different steps may take a longer path and establishing financial sustainability is built over time. It is important that the public and private finance system appreciates this and is designed to support this type of innovation, which plays a key role in adding to the quality of life in rural areas.

More broadly, the case studies highlight the need for improved access to finance. Many women were using their own resources (home office space, savings) and did not use external sources of finance such as loans and grants. A gender gap in access to finance to support innovation and entrepreneurship is perceived based on general access to finance figures. Regular access to financial incentives and personalised support would significantly strengthen women's entrepreneurial ecosystems, particularly in rural and structurally weaker regions. This leads to the following **practical tips**:

- Policymakers should widen the scope of subsidized rural economies to atypical farm related economies compared to traditional farming operations.
- Policymakers should recognize better the need for flexibility in hiring a seasonal, temporary and part-time workforce.
- Policymakers should recognise the needs of small, often sole operator or family run rural businesses, which often miss out on subsidy schemes because their operations are considered too small.
- By revising the rural policy strategies to cover better exceptional and innovative women-led rural solutions, we can amplify women's contributions for the future and support meaningful and sustainable change in rural communities.

Box 3 Insight from Policy Brief RO03 Supporting Women's Return to Rural Areas and Promoting Female Entrepreneurship

Start-up Nation Program for Romania

The Start-up Nation Romania program offers grants for newly established companies, including start-ups, small businesses, and SMEs, with a focus on entrepreneurship. The program includes two pillars: one for local applicants (Pillar I) and one for those returning from the diaspora (Pillar II). It provides non-reimbursable funding of up to 100,000 lei for creating one job, or up to 200,000 lei for creating two jobs, covering up to 95% of eligible project expenses. In 2022, the program allocated a total budget of 520 million lei for local entrepreneurs and 20 million lei for the diaspora. Managed by the Ministry of Entrepreneurship and Tourism, it promotes smart, sustainable growth through digitalization, innovation, and job creation. This program can be an essential policy tool to support women entrepreneurs returning to rural areas, fostering economic development and job creation in these communities.

The financial innovation support should be able to cater to various stages, sizes and types of businesses. While specialised funds exist, they are fragmented, and many businesses struggle to qualify for national support. Consequently, norm-breaking, sustainable companies face funding challenges, especially non-tech and small businesses.

- Address barriers impacting women accessing existing public and private finance sources, such as administrative burdens attached to grant support and pre-conceptions about bank loans.
- Improve understanding and monitor how women-led innovation gains access to finance, including better gender data on public funding and private finance for supporting enterprise in rural and farming contexts.

To meet the needs of small-scale businesses and farms, especially targeting women in rural areas, we propose that small and large companies play in different leagues. This can be done through :

- fewer and less-complicated rules for small businesses.
- lower fees and user-friendly access to information.

Employers can also take action to keep women as part of their workforce. Data shows that a significant proportion of women would like to return to work sooner if employers created suitable conditions for them. This would certainly benefit employers, who would thus retain qualified workers. According to the findings of the FLIARA project, a number of innovative women left their original qualified professions for this very reason and started their own businesses in the countryside, where they can organise their working hours according to their own needs and those of their families.

3.3 CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

The basic position of women in family farming and family business models needs to be safeguarded. Although formal laws explicitly putting women under the supervision of males have been abolished decades ago, practices based on the once formal patriarchal system are resilient within families, established ways of working and financial relationships, and there is a need to actively protect and promote the position of women in the financial security network.

There is a strong need for stable and predictable support structures. This includes the integration of voucher schemes into national policies and the establishment of sustainable funding mechanisms that go beyond short-term project cycles.

The current gender pay gap is partly due to the perception that technical fields should be paid more than more socially oriented work, even though the qualification requirements in what are considered to be softer fields are sometimes higher. This division is increasingly unjustifiable, as physically demanding work in technical fields is declining due to mechanization. These disparities should be gradually addressed, starting in the public sector through wage scales, and eventually extending to the private sector. Subsequently, stakeholders in the private sector will also consider their rules for evaluating employees. The Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS) should be based not on the dimension of the farm (in terms of hectares) but other parameters should also be considered as it is currently a practice of indirect discrimination of women that have extra barriers to get access to land.

3.4 POLICY BRIEFS FOR FURTHER READING

- CZ04 Reduce to pay gaps between hard and soft professions
- DE02 Empowering Rural Women through Tailored Measures
- ES01 Financial gaps and opportunities for rural women-led innovation projects
- FI03 Special targeted support for atypical rural SMEs
- IE01 Improve access to finance to better support women-led rural and farm innovation
- IT02 Funding and Advisory Services for Women Innovators in Rural Areas
- IT03 Local Support to Women Innovators
- NL01 Promoting a Diversity of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural Practices
- RO01 Unlocking the potential of rural women through inclusive CAP measures

- RO05 Promoting gender equality in Romania's rural communities by supporting innovative women driving sustainable development
- SE07 Addressing Inequities in Financial Support to Enhance the Sustainable Transition
- SI01 Start-up Finance, Training and Mentoring Vouchers for Rural Women

4 INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE NETWORK THAT ENABLES A HEALTHY WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Being successful in a rural initiative can result in becoming irreplaceable, which is a trap making it impossible to find a healthy balance between work and relaxation, resulting in the accumulation of stress. Ensuring opportunities for a healthy work life balance is essential for rural attractiveness and for rural women to sustain their initiatives. Next to a range of soft measures and measures improving the division of care work (see 2 Infrastructure for the social network), policies can address this issue by establishing a farmer relief service.

- Implementing a **farmer relief service** is crucial for farmer well-being, animal welfare, local employment, and ensuring gender equality and safety for farmers and small children. Without substitutes, farmers struggle to take the mandated five-week vacation, leading to overwork and stress. This impacts farmer well-being and animal welfare. Implementing a farmer relief service could boost local employment and it is crucial for pregnant farmers and those with small children, thus ensuring farm safety and gender equality. A new regulation about substitutes is proposed to cover the costs of leave from the farm, childcare and unplanned situations.

4.1 THE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED BY THESE INFRASTRUCTURES

Most farmers cannot afford to pay for substitutes on the private market, and not everyone can rely on friends, family, and neighbours. Those who can't rely on this support experience stress and put their animals, themselves and their children at risk.

Women farmers interviewed in the FLIARA project relied on family for extra childcare and family logistics. This includes partners, parents, and stepparents. If agriculture is to be able to meet contemporary requirements for preparedness in times of war and crises, a new generation must enter the industry. For young families to invest in agriculture and animal husbandry, economic and social conditions must be greatly improved in the long term.

A farmer relief service is especially important for pregnant farmers and for those with small children. The solution for many farming parents is to bring their children along while working on the farm. However, having children in agricultural work involves a major safety risk that many farmers are concerned about.

Farmers, without a substitute, cannot take a well-deserved holiday of several weeks, since the animals need daily attention. The combination of long working hours, working alone, high performance requirements, increased vulnerability, conflicting signals from the government, and the deterioration of economic conditions has meant that many farmers are overworked and suffer, contrasting starkly with the comprehensive legislative protection for workers in the European social model of society.

If farmers are not able to rest, it can lead to burnout and decreased attention to detail, which can negatively impact animal care. Regular rest periods allow farmers to recharge,

thus reducing their stress and improving their ability to manage their farms effectively. This, in turn, ensures that animals receive consistent, high-quality care, as a well-rested farmer is more attentive and capable of identifying and addressing health issues promptly. Additionally, taking breaks can prevent decision fatigue, leading to better management practices and overall healthier livestock.

4.2 PRACTICAL TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

Farmer substitutes enable farmers to get time off or get extra help when sick. Substitutes can be a solution for recurring leave off the farm, child-care, or when something unplanned happens, in case of illness for example.

Box 4 Insight from Policy Brief SE05 Implementing a Farmer Relief Service

Best Practice from Finland

Finland's farmer relief system, regulated under the statute 20.12.1996/1231, is designed to support agricultural entrepreneurs by providing substitute services during vacations, illness, or other periods of incapacity. This system ensures that farmers can maintain their operations without interruption, promoting their social security and work motivation. The relief service includes assigning substitute workers or compensating farmers for the costs of self-arranged substitutes. This approach not only enhances farmer well-being but also contributes to local employment and farm safety.

Additionally, implementing a relief service for rural areas could significantly boost local employment by creating job opportunities for residents, while supporting the local economy by keeping jobs within the community and reducing the need for external workers. Certain practical tips should be considered:

- Many female innovators have a diversified enterprise: they, for example, do not only grow food, but also process it and distribute it to customers. A relief system organised in a silo, stepping only in in part of these activities, does not provide the necessary relief. It should be integrated to cover all activities.
- It is necessary to organize the system in such a way that there is the possibility of finding reliable substitutes easily.
- Many women are still overburdened with domestic work and care and are consequently working in a double shift. Facilities that address these activities provide also a positive contribution to a healthy work-life balance.

A farmer relief system can also work as an entry point to farming for young potential successors who have finished education, but whose parents are still too young to transfer their farm to a new generation.

4.3 CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

A new regulation about farmer relief services is proposed to cover the costs of leave from the farm, childcare and unplanned situations.

4.4 POLICY BRIEFS FOR FURTHER READING

- ES02 Family & Work Conciliation Policies for Women in Rural Areas
- IE09 Balancing Women-led Innovation, Rural and Farm Family-life: The Need for Improved Policy Support
- IT04 Improving Family and Work Balance in Rural Areas
- SE05 Implementing a Farmer Relief Service

5 INFRASTRUCTURE FOR COMMERCIALIZATION OF PRODUCTS

Economic networks to commercialize products can make a difference. New initiatives are often in need of novel markets. As an innovator in the FLIARA showed, school canteens may be a relevant new market for local farm products. Organising a local market can also be a way to help commercialisation. There are also examples of female initiatives organising marketisation by various producers through a website and a weekly delivery structure. For building such commercialisation networks are essential.

- **Strengthening the Commercialisation of Women-Led Rural Products and Services through Support Networks.** In rural areas, women are generating high-quality, locally rooted products and services across agriculture, tourism, crafts, education, and culture. These initiatives not only support environmental sustainability and social cohesion but also represent powerful engines of economic resilience. Yet many remain invisible or commercially fragile due to weak market access, limited support structures, and a lack of coordinated promotion.
- **Supporting Direct-to-Consumer and Short Supply Chain Farming.** Direct-to-consumer (DTC) and short supply chain (SSC) models offer critical pathways toward more sustainable, equitable food systems. Women farmers and rural entrepreneurs are key drivers of these models, enhancing food sovereignty, reducing carbon footprints, and revitalizing local economies. Yet, these initiatives remain under-supported in existing CAP and national policy frameworks. A targeted effort is needed to foster DTC and SSC farming, integrating them fully into the mainstream rural and agricultural strategies.

5.1 THE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED BY THESE INFRASTRUCTURES

Challenges include:

- **Fragmented and informal market presence:** Many women entrepreneurs sell their products locally or online in small volumes, without stable channels or scale-up opportunities.
- **Limited access to support tailored to rural, gendered needs:** General business programmes often do not consider the realities of micro-scale, care-constrained, or seasonal female entrepreneurship.
- **Lack of structured branding and promotion tools:** Few opportunities exist for women to co-brand, certify, or jointly promote their products under a shared rural women identity.
- **Underrepresentation in cooperatives and value chains:** Women remain marginal in many agricultural and craft cooperatives and often lack support for joining or founding such networks.

Farming is often judged by whether farms are a successful player in producing food for the world market. This is being supported by current agricultural subsidy frameworks and

food market structures that favour large-scale production and long, centralized supply chains. To stay competitive under this framework, farmers need to enlarge their scale (more hectares per farm), resulting in less and less farms, contributing to an alienation between farming and society and less farm enterprises in rural areas.

- Next to this there is space for farmers with more direct relationship with local and regional customers using DTC and SSC models—such as CSA (community-supported agriculture), farm shops, online farm-to-table services, and farmers' cooperatives—. Often operate at smaller scales and face challenges accessing investment, scaling logistics, and navigating complex food safety regulations. Technology plays also a role in (online) marketing.
- Female-led initiatives play a larger role in these more local market-oriented practices.

5.2 PRACTICAL TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

Based on Spanish experiences with existing initiatives (best practices) a list of practical tips can be provided.

Box 5 Insight from Policy Brief ES03 Strengthening the Commercialisation of Women-Led Rural Products and Services through Support Networks

Existing Initiatives: Several initiatives offer a foundation for a stronger network:

Desafío Mujer Rural (MAPA): National program with training, business support, and a digital promotion platform.

PAEM (Chambers of Commerce): Business support program with widespread access points.

Ganaderas en Red: Grassroots network for female livestock farmers offering mutual support and advocacy.

Red de Mujeres del Mundo Rural de Álava: Local intergenerational network promoting women's economic empowerment.

Lánzate Rural: Project focused on building rural women's entrepreneurial skills through training and mentoring.

Practical Tips to open-up local and regional markets so rural women can commercialize their products and services.

- **Coordinate existing programmes** (e.g. in Spain: *Desafío Mujer Rural*, PAEM, AMFAR) into regional ecosystems with common objectives, communication tools, and shared logistics.
- **Support access to** branding, packaging, distribution, and consultancy services for rural women-led initiatives.
- Encourage the development of **joint platforms** (physical or digital) to showcase and sell products under collective identities, e.g., in Spain: *Hecho por Mujeres Rurales* (Made by Rural Women).
- Promote **collaborative business models** and cooperative innovation, which includes the funding and mentoring of novel inclusive cooperatives, especially in

sectors where women are underrepresented, e.g., agritourism, food processing, artisan crafts.

- Provide legal and administrative assistance to facilitate cooperative formation in rural contexts.
- Leverage public procurement and territorial branding; create local quotas and simplified procedures to include women-led businesses in public procurement, such as, school meals, hospital food, regional fairs.
- Encourage inclusion of women-led products and services in tourism routes, quality labels, and regional development branding efforts—especially under shared identifiers such as *Hecho por Mujeres Rurales* (Made by Rural Women).
- Include women-led enterprises in Smart Villages strategies and Local Action Group (LAG) activities.
- Boost digital and commercial skills through targeted capacity building; fund training programmes in digital commerce, storytelling, marketing, and pricing strategies.
- Promote women's participation in national and international fairs and virtual marketplaces.

Tips for specific local food commercialisation measures include the following:

- Create dedicated CAP (including LEADER) funding windows for DTC and SSC models.
- Simplify food safety and logistics regulations for small-scale, direct-selling farmers.
- Support digital infrastructure investments (e.g., online ordering, logistics platforms) for rural farms.
- Promote consumer awareness campaigns highlighting the benefits of short supply chains and women-led initiatives.
- Establish mentoring and training programs for farmers shifting to direct sales models, with special outreach to female entrepreneurs.
- Pilot public procurement schemes prioritizing SSC suppliers for schools, hospitals, and municipal services.

Access to Digital Platforms for Market Linkages and Networking

- Networks, supply chains and cooperatives can all assist in creating market linkages for women entrepreneurs in farming, food production and rural businesses. These can become powerful tools for women to connect to markets, share knowledge, market information and business skills. These range from WhatsApp and Facebook groups to Agri-extension apps and online marketplaces. Finance and training could be key to opening up this digital market for women.

Evidence from the FLIARA project's Spanish case study confirms that rural women often operate alone, selling through informal or digital channels, with limited access to commercial infrastructure, branding, or business development tools. While national programmes like *Desafío Mujer Rural* and PAEM offer relevant resources, these are

often underutilised or not integrated into a coherent, gender-responsive commercial ecosystem.

The development of a support network specifically aimed at commercialising women-led rural products and services can support the economic network. This would connect existing resources, offer tailored support, and promote visibility, collaboration, and access to strategic markets—contributing directly to the EU Rural Vision 2040 objectives of stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas.

Box 6 Insight from Policy Brief NL03 Supporting Direct-to-Consumer and Short Supply Chain Farming

-  Many of the female innovators interviewed by FLIARA show a strong combination of local networking and innovation.
-  **Regional food hubs** in Germany and Belgium demonstrate that strategic logistical support can scale SSC models effectively.
-  **French public procurement laws** now encourage sourcing from local, small-scale producers—a model adaptable to other contexts.

5.3 CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Supporting the commercialisation of women-led products and services is not only about economic empowerment—it is about recognising the full value of women’s contributions to rural sustainability, culture, and community resilience. A dedicated support network for rural women’s access to markets can strengthen regional economies, reinforce social cohesion, and advance commitment to gender equality and rural development in line with the EU Rural Vision 2040. National and regional policymakers should create integrated support systems that connect existing programmes and fill gaps in visibility, training, and branding. Local authorities and development agencies must facilitate women’s access to markets, infrastructure, and public procurement opportunities. Civil society and rural networks should lead co-creation efforts, ensure inclusive governance, and amplify women’s voices in commercial strategy. EU and national funding instruments should prioritise collaborative, women-led models as key drivers of innovation and sustainable rural development.

The following actions can not only support a higher share of local food production and establish closer links between consumers and food production, but, for a large part, may also contribute to other women in rural areas producing new local products and services:

- Prioritize support for direct-to-consumer and short supply chain models.
- Recognize and nurture the leadership of rural women in innovating local food systems.
- Adjust legal, funding, and regulatory frameworks to match the needs of diverse, community-centred farming and production models.
- To call for organizations (local authorities, schools, offices) to buy food at local farms; adopting local producers as key suppliers.
- Short supply chains are not a nostalgic return to the past—they are a vital part of sustainable rural futures.

5.4 POLICY BRIEFS FOR FURTHER READING

- ES03 Strengthening the Commercialisation of Women-Led Rural Products and Services through Support Networks
- NL03 Supporting Direct-to-Consumer and Short Supply Chain Farming

6 AN ADVISORY NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE

Advisory services have been a cornerstone for farm innovation policies for decades. However, many female innovators feel that they are not taken seriously by advisory services. Female innovators, and the specific innovations they are developing, are not always recognised by advisory services and these services, consequently, do not contribute to their full potential to increase women's engagement in rural sustainable development and contribute to gender equality. This issue can be addressed by the following key infrastructures.

- **Empowering rural women through targeted advisory services.** Women in rural areas are key drivers of innovation and sustainability, yet their needs remain underserved in existing advisory systems. This situation calls for a dedicated regional advisory network, with specialised advisors trained to support women. It also recommends broadening the scope of services to include support for diverse business models, not only those within traditional supplementary on-farm activities, but also emerging, socially oriented, sustainable and community-based ventures where women are often at the forefront. Advisory programs should adopt flexible and inclusive formats, that reflect women's needs and realities. Promote confidence building and mentorship (rural women-to-women mentorship scheme). Advice is provided by professionals. By strengthening women's representation in professional networks, the advisory network can be improved as well.
- Providing **access to information about funding and capacity building programmes** and giving rural women proper **support to apply** for such programmes. Hence, it would be important to have a national platform where all the information about funding can be easily accessible; furthermore, advisory service could also guide women innovators starting from scratch in finding access to funding (like microcredit, small grants and accessible bank credit). In addition, public desks in rural areas offering women-centred services are a valuable tool to help women develop business plans for innovative and sustainable agricultural and rural projects.

6.1 THE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED BY THESE INFRASTRUCTURES

There is a lack of a gender-responsive advisory services who understand and address the needs and potentials of women in rural areas.

Women are frequently underrepresented in decision-making structures and professional networks, e.g. chamber of agriculture and forestry, farmers union, cooperatives, other advisory boards, etc., limiting their influence and access to key information and support.

Women in rural areas often face challenges accessing information on funding and capacity building programmes, and often do not receive adequate support to apply for such programmes. In many cases, they feel that they are not the target group for the programmes.

6.2 PRACTICAL TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

Practical tips:

- Establish **regional advisory services network for women**. Ensure at least one specialised advisor in each region, trained and equipped to support women, well familiar with specific challenges and opportunities faced by women in agriculture and entrepreneurship in rural areas. Such advisory support can be provided primarily within the public agricultural advisory service (such as provided by the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia), while regional business incubators may also play a complementary role by offering specialised support for women-led rural enterprises and start-ups. This also requires that advisory support for women on farms and in rural entrepreneurship is recognised and included as a standalone thematic area within the broader framework of public agricultural and rural entrepreneurship advisory services, ensuring that gender-specific needs are addressed systematically and consistently across regions.
- Recognise and support **diverse business models**. Advisory services must formally recognise and support women in developing diverse forms of entrepreneurship such as social entrepreneurship, different sustainable models, and community-based forms of entrepreneurship. These are areas where women can truly excel, bring innovative, inclusive and locally rooted solutions to rural challenges. The advisory services must recognise these models as equally valuable and impactful as more traditional, profit-driven forms of entrepreneurship.
- Support **flexible and inclusive training formats**, promote confidence-building and mentorship. Offer advisory services and capacity-building programs that account for women's time constraints resulting from traditional gender roles – such as caregiving and household responsibilities –, by providing flexible options like evening sessions, online modules or on-site childcare. Keep in mind that traditional top-down approaches (lecture–listening) often fail to produce the same level of engagement or empowerment. Participatory, reflective, and relationship-based methods, such as storytelling, experience-sharing, and group learning, are more effective. Women often exhibit lower levels of confidence in technical or entrepreneurial skills, despite having the necessary capabilities. This highlights the importance of mentorship, empowerment, and trust-building in advisory practices. Support and formalize rural women-to-women mentorship schemes in agriculture and entrepreneurship.
- Strengthen **women's representation** in governance and networks. Introduce gender quotas or targeted inclusion measures to ensure women's representation in key rural and agricultural decision-making bodies such as chambers of agriculture and forestry, farmers' unions, cooperatives, LAGs, different advisory boards, enabling more balanced participation and access to information and support.
- Promote **the provision of women-centred services** at local open desks. The staff of these association should be well trained on the different funding and capacity building programmes available at the European, national, regional, and local levels for women-led innovation in rural areas. Involving local municipalities or the LAGs to

support these open desks, also in terms of logistics, can be useful. Advertise the set-up of such open desks through the local LAGs, at farmers markets and through existing local and regional women farmers' and rural entrepreneurs' networks.

- **Train advisors and regional and LAGs operators** on the importance of women-led contributions in rural development and sustainability.

Box 7 Insight from Policy Brief SI02 Empowering Rural Women Through Targeted Advisory Services

Farm advisory services in Slovenia are primarily provided by the public institution Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia which operates as broad and well-structured advisory network at three levels: 1) national, with headquarters in Ljubljana), 2) regional, comprising 8 regional advisory centres employing around 70 advisors specialised in various agricultural fields, and an additional 40 other advisors who work with young farmers, and other thematic groups and 3) local level with 59 local units and approx. 170 advisors who generally do not have specialised roles. The Chamber is the most recognizable institution, accessible all over country and well trusted by (especially traditional) farmers. Advisory service is organised in **five topics**: 1) advisory support for successors and retiring farmers, 2) farm economic efficiency consulting, 3) legal assistance, 4) psychosocial support and 5) social security for farmers and family members.

Each regional advisory centre employs one to two specialised advisors for young farmers. Legal and social security support are centrally coordinated, with regional advisors offering basic guidance, while complex cases are handled by central experts. Psychosocial support is a newer advisory area and still developing. The largest advisory area is farm economic efficiency consulting, which includes business planning, CAP measures for farmers, and supplementary on-farm activities—a particularly relevant field for women. Many rural women realise their entrepreneurial ideas through these activities, as they are more accessible than starting an independent business, especially in terms of legal, tax, and administrative requirements.

FLIARA innovator Damjana Ostanek Herič successfully took her first entrepreneurial steps by registering a supplementary activity on farm, through which she developed a recognisable vegetable processing business.

6.3 CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Women in rural areas are key drivers of innovation, sustainability, and community resilience, yet they are still not recognised as a distinct target group in need of dedicated advisory support, unlike young farmers who already benefit from tailored services. To unlock their full potential, a more inclusive, gender-responsive advisory framework is needed. Establishing dedicated advisory support for women in every region, adapting training formats for women's needs, and ensuring women's presence in decision-making bodies are essential for building more resilient rural futures. Regional business incubators may also play a complementary role by offering specialised support for women-led rural enterprises and start-ups.

Women must have accurate information and support to apply for funding and access capacity building programmes at European, national and regional levels.

Policymakers should fund localized advisory services/open desks supporting female-led innovation.

6.4 POLICY BRIEFS FOR FURTHER READING

- IT02 Funding and Advisory Services for Women Innovators in Rural Areas
- SE08 Reforming the Knowledge Support System to Foster Innovation in Rural Areas
- SI02 Empowering Rural Women Through Targeted Advisory Services

7 INFRASTRUCTURE FOR LEARNING NETWORKS

Rural women can learn a lot from each other and can also be motivated by good examples of other women they can see and with whom they can exchange experiences. Peer-to-peer learning is an important way for innovators to learn. It is therefore essential that infrastructures are in place to accommodate these exchanges. Throughout the FLIARA project, the importance of networking places, easy access to training and visibility of female rural innovations have been stressed as of vital importance.

- **Improve networking support and social spaces for rural women both physical and digitally. Create platforms for sharing experiences.** Networks supporting women, peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, and local communities are crucial for the success of women-led innovations. These initiatives aim to empower rural women, foster sustainable development, and improve political participation, ensuring inclusive, effective governance and strengthening local cohesion in rural areas. Innovative women benefit greatly from mutual support and experience-sharing. It is beneficial to create a common framework that enhances motivation, support, and the exchange of experiences and information—while still preserving valuable face-to-face interactions. Co-creation platforms offer support and facilitate exchange of information on alternatives, examples and good practices. Strong networks have the potential to positively impact the self-esteem and morale of rural women. This stems from the difficult landscape for small businesses as expenses rise and many areas experience a decline in residents. A national co-creation platform could consist of smaller local platforms working towards building successful collaborations and growing the bandwidth of small businesses. Proposed policy measures include creating collaborative social spaces, offering logistical and financial support to women's networks, expanding digital connectivity, and promoting peer-to-peer learning.
- **Training for women innovating in farming and rural areas.** Next to the creation of platforms for interaction, dedicated training is called for. The platforms mentioned above can be used as places where information on free and public training courses can be easily found.
- **Promote digital knowledge and skills.** Leveraging digitalisation to empower farm and rural women can be achieved on a number of levels and has the potential to advance farming and enhance rural regions. Digitalisation, including infrastructural development, access to digital tools, support platforms and training in digital literacy can enable rural and farm women to harness technology for personal, professional and economic empowerment. Digitalisation can effectively bridge gender gaps by allowing access to key resources, including agricultural advisory services, digital technologies in farming, business training, and markets and finance. In doing so, it can significantly enhance rural women's livelihoods and in turn rural communities.
- **Promoting positive images of rural farming women and rural women entrepreneurs across all education curricula.** Persistent stereotypes about farming and rural entrepreneurship undermine the aspirations of young women.

Mainstream education at all levels often ignores or caricatures rural life and agriculture, particularly female roles in these sectors. Reforming curricula and promoting positive, diverse images of rural women entrepreneurs is crucial for building an inclusive, future-proof rural economy.

7.1 THE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED BY THESE INFRASTRUCTURES

Small businesses have limited resources. Women-led enterprises may have difficulties in accessing specific networks e.g. in policy and economic-technological domains. Virtual networks or physical hubs for networking are rare in many rural areas despite that they are needed. There is need for improvement and adequacy of actions supporting higher rural connectivity and social inclusion, as well as rural businesses and innovation. Gender equality challenges related to building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions, particularly in improving women's participation in rural politics need to be addressed.

Challenges include the following:

- Limited participation of rural women in organisational decision-making, which, besides systemic barriers, is influenced by women's empowerment and their motivations to engage in the decision-making process.
- Insufficient support for women's networks and civil society organizations hindering the creation of collaborative social spaces and the expansion of rural development initiatives.
- Lack of financial and logistical mechanisms to support women's networks, knowledge exchange, and community engagement in rural areas.
- Limited access to digital connectivity and necessary technological infrastructure, hindering the formation of online networks and access to funding opportunities.
- Barriers to peer-to-peer learning and mentoring for women, especially in rural areas, due to a lack of structured support programs and platforms.
- Economic sustainability challenges for women-led rural businesses, stemming from limited access to resources, knowledge, and best practices.

In many cases, women lack sufficient self-confidence, information, and role models to start a business in rural areas. At times, they even underestimate their own abilities, which is sometimes referred to as an imposter syndrome.

European as well as national public agricultural **training programmes** mostly target large conventional agriculture rather than alternative forms of sustainable agriculture. Furthermore, the set-up of the courses teaching basic entrepreneurial skills may be such that women do not consider these as fit for them.

Women tend to lead small-scale farms, multifunctional farms, or environmentally sustainable farms (organic, agroecological, etc.). They therefore need to acquire specific knowledge and skills related to these models of agriculture.

Training courses about sustainable farming techniques (e.g., organic, regenerative, permaculture, etc.) are often unavailable through public institutions/public educational

system. Training on specific competences such as those needed to run a farm kindergarten, or a social farm, are also limited.

Digital and entrepreneurship skills are required to manage a rural entrepreneurship as well as a farm. Currently, these skills are acquired mainly through paid courses run by associations, NGOs, or private individuals. Women interviewed indicated that it was difficult to access information on available training courses in their regions.

Addressing skills gaps appears as one important part of the key to unlocking increased levels of women starting rural and farm innovations.

- To empower women as innovators and leaders in rural and farm-based innovative enterprises, training programmes must reflect their realities. They must be flexible, inclusive, practically applicable and future focused.
- Possessing essential skills and expertise can support taking first steps where women decide and prepare to develop an innovation.
- Many educational materials present rural life as outdated or secondary, reinforcing urban-rural divides and gender biases.
- Teenage girls from rural areas rarely encounter inspiring role models who combine farming, entrepreneurship, sustainability, and leadership.
- In many family farms, traditional gender models are internalised and it is difficult to change these.
- This gap leads to brain drain from rural areas and the underrepresentation of women in rural innovation.

Traditional gender roles in farming and rural business may influence women's participation in acquiring technological knowledge and, consequently, in **technology adoption**. Innovations carried out by women on farms and in rural businesses can require technology to enhance efficiency (e.g. machinery, software packages), but investment to support these technical needs is lacking and can be a considerable challenge for many women. A **lack of training** in key areas of technology and AI use is a challenge.

The CAP Strategic Plans across the EU aim to establish Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) Coordination Groups to enhance the flow of knowledge related to new technologies and innovations. However, women's participation in these groups remains significantly limited, which marginalises them from accessing this crucial source of knowledge and innovation.

7.2 PRACTICAL TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

Practical tips for network support:

Launch platforms for exchanges (Box 8) and policy programmes for improving network support (Box 9). Platforms increase the availability of mentoring and peer to peer learning opportunities. They contribute to build confidence and leadership skills. A peer-based mentoring approach appears a promising way forward.

Box 8 Platforms of exchanges (based on various Policy briefs)

Practical tips: Platforms for exchanges

- Identify and document best practices for providing platforms that enable to build networks and which may also create community spaces in rural areas.
- Explore existing infrastructure, opportunities and involved actors by engaging with the Local Action Groups and local initiative groups.
- Create adaptable pilot model to test and improve.
- Invest in new community or multifunctional centres or repurpose existing buildings, spaces and physical infrastructure to provide safe, accessible spaces for women to meet, collaborate, and organize.
- Ensure these spaces are open to other community groups, fostering inclusivity and strengthening local ties.
- Ensure all support is easy to access and transparent to foster trust and participation. Mentorships and peer to peer programme should also be offered.
- Use real case studies to show what the supports and good practices look like in practice.
- Expand successful initiatives and platforms to all regions of the country, ensuring that rural women across different areas can benefit from shared resources and knowledge.
- Provide the necessary infrastructure and funding to scale these efforts and ensure their sustainability over time.

Box 9 Insight from Policy Brief RO04 Improving networking support and social spaces for rural women

-  *The Women's Vicinity of Saschiz (Romania):* Inspired by the Saxon tradition of community organizing, is an informal network founded in 2015 to develop social and cultural projects, fostering strong bonds among women based on shared community belonging.
-  *See Her Elected Program (Ireland):* Offers training, mentorship, and networking to support rural women's participation in local democracy.
-  *ACORNS Program (Ireland):* Provides peer-to-peer learning and mentorship to bridge the skills gap among rural women entrepreneurs.
-  *German Rural Social Projects:* Create new meeting spaces to improve social life in rural communities.
-  *Women's Rural Entrepreneurial Network (Ireland):* Supports independent women entrepreneurs in Cork and Limerick through local action groups (LAGs).
-  *Slovenian Agricultural Women's Association:* Empowers rural women in agriculture through collaborative initiatives.

Best practice: The Czech Women's Union's initiative to create a platform and invite other interested professional and regional institutions to cooperate. This is a body of interested institutions and organizations, which determines the organizational structure, rules (including financial) and implementation team. The programme includes the following:

- Establish community engagement programmes.
- Connect schools with local action groups.
- Create connections between urban and rural areas.
- Create cooperation hubs.
- Strong involvement from municipalities.
- Use women's strengths to facilitate platforms for cooperation.
- Appreciation of soft and social values.
- Extensive educational background.
- Organisation skills.

Source: Policy Brief CZ02 Create a platform for sharing experiences and examples of good practices

Promote female role models in education:

- Review and revise education curricula at all levels to include contemporary rural themes and role models, with a gender-sensitive lens.
- Integrate case studies of successful rural women innovators into civic education, entrepreneurship, and sustainability classes.
- Support teacher training programs that challenge stereotypes about farming, entrepreneurship, and gender.
- Develop national campaigns featuring rural women leaders across media and education platforms
- Encourage rural schools and universities to organize field trips, guest lectures, and mentorship programs led by rural women innovators

Source: Policy Brief NL02 Promoting Positive Images of Rural Farming Women and Rural Women Entrepreneurs Across All Education Curricula

Practical tips to improve access to training:

- Strengthen local training infrastructure and support partnerships between women's organisations, farming bodies, and education providers to create accessible, community-based training hubs in rural areas.
- Develop micro-credential and recognition of prior learning systems that validate on-farm, intergenerational, or self-taught knowledge often held by rural women, allowing them to access further education or funding opportunities.
- Create and expand training initiatives that focus on key gaps and novel areas, such as, digital literacy, e-commerce, finance skills, precision agriculture technologies, data management, entrepreneurship and social media marketing, all tailored to the needs of rural and farm women. Prioritize hands-on, locally delivered trainings that fits rural contexts and women's time constraints.
- Increase the availability of more flexible funding so that women can access support towards the cost of training specific to their needs and business innovation: Innovation skills vouchers for women could help to support the costs of training. This could be flexible to allow covering costs of short courses to longer

more in-depth training. This should also include covering the costs of remote and online learning to ensure a wide range of options are opened up in a rural (more remote) context.

- To gather information on specific interests and needs (both in terms of content and logistics), it can be helpful to conduct a regional survey among women farm managers and rural entrepreneurs, involving local women farmers' and rural women's associations.
- Advertise the courses through regional and local farmers organizations, LAGs and other rural networks, making sure to reach women.
- Organise a course branded "for rural women" to ascertain that the target group knows they are welcome. Even if the course materials are not different from the course not branded for rural women, this can help to attract women who otherwise would not come and provide a place for networking between women

Box 10 Insight from Policy Brief SI01 Start-up Finance, Training and Mentoring Vouchers for Rural Women

In Slovenia, between 2015 and 2018, a national programme to promote women's entrepreneurship was introduced. The programme, led by public agency in the collaboration with Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, primarily aimed to unemployed women with higher education and a viable business idea. The initiative included a two-month entrepreneurship training and a grant of EUR 3.000-5.000. Participants were required to complete training and received individual mentoring to develop their business model. Although not exclusively focused on rural areas, the programme aimed to reach women from diverse backgrounds. As a result, **over 1.000 women successfully started their own business.**

Building on this foundation, efforts to promote women's entrepreneurship have continued through public calls for awarding the best business models by beginner women entrepreneurs. Nowadays, a particular emphasis is placed on the mentoring scheme, which has been recognized as one of the most valued forms of support among aspiring women entrepreneurs.

This aspect was especially appreciated by the **Slovenian FLIARA Ambassador, Saša Kržič**, who herself participated in one such programme and highlighted mentoring as a crucial element in her entrepreneurial journey.

A specific area of interest is **digitalisation**. There are gender stereotypes around digitalisation that can be addressed as follows:

- Fund or support campaigns of visibility around women's use of digitalisation in rural business or leading on-farm innovations. Use media, case studies, awards and speaking opportunities to highlight women engaged in digitalisation and their success in doing so.
- Mobilise local champions and influencers who can advocate for women utilising digital options in their business and on their farm. Such role models can create an awareness around the issue, changing attitudes and empowering young girls and other potential innovators.

In remote areas next to training also **access to digital infrastructure and devices** is of importance:

- Starting with access to highspeed broadband and good mobile phone connections could make considerable difference for rural women innovators.
- Dedicated subsidies, grants or partnerships with tech companies could help women starting or scaling up a small to medium on farm or off-farm rural business make smartphones, computers and other digital devices more affordable and accessible. This also goes for on-farm machinery, new equipment, equipment or software which is too expensive but could potentially launch a business or farm diversification.
- Use programmes such as LEADER and the CAP Strategic Plan to provide funding calls specifically for women to access digital devices or improved infrastructure.

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to create impact for rural women in farming and business. The power of AI could have potential ranging from on-farm issues to smart tools and weather predictions. It could assist in business administration, accessing foreign languages and international markets. Training and access for rural and farm women is essential and can come in the form of training grants or microloans for women using AI to community-based training programmes, or specific programmes. Tax breaks or funding to companies that build in AI tools and training or partner with rural women's cooperatives.

7.3 CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Women in rural areas face significant barriers to active political participation and lack sufficient support networks, hindering their capacity for innovation and social impact. To address these challenges, it is crucial to invest in creating collaborative social spaces, providing logistical and financial support to women's networks, and expanding access to digital tools and peer-to-peer learning platforms. Strengthening these initiatives will empower women to actively engage in decision-making processes and foster sustainable rural development.

Training rural women strengthens agricultural sustainability and fosters inclusive development of rural areas.

- The training must be designed to meet women's demands and needs.
- Women farmers' and rural women's associations should be involved in designing appropriate training courses.
- Policymakers should fund localized training programmes tailored to women's needs.
- A regional coordination among stakeholders and public institutions offering different types of training courses would be useful and important.
- Stakeholders should facilitate mentorship, trainings, and visibility opportunities.
- By investing in these strategies, women's innovations in farming and in rural areas can be enhanced by favouring sustainable change in rural communities.

Improving access to adult and further education opportunities related to entrepreneurship and innovation for women in rural and farming contexts appears part of the key to unlocking increased opportunities. This includes women interested in

starting up an innovation as well as enabling women already on their innovation journey to further develop a sustainable business. There is also a need to understand this issue better and the gender balance of current uptake of adult and further education opportunities related to entrepreneurship and innovation.

Without visible role models, the next generation of rural women entrepreneurs will hesitate to lead.

- Reform educational materials to reflect modern rural life and women's leadership.
- Promote positive rural identities alongside urban ones.
- Inspire young women to see farming and rural innovation as desirable, viable futures.
- Address all people involved in family farming with this message

Digitalisation holds transformative potential for rural women in business and in farming, empowering them with access to wider markets, financial services, and vital information that was once beyond their reach. Therefore, investing in digital literacy and infrastructure for rural women is not just a technological advancement, it's a crucial step toward gender equality and economic and social resilience.

7.4 POLICY BRIEFS FOR FURTHER READING

- CZ01 Include more gender education in School Curricula
- CZ02 Create a platform for sharing experiences and examples of good practices
- DE01 Connecting Women: A Driver for Agricultural Innovation
- DE03 Learning how to Engage with Stakeholders
- EU01 Spotlighting Rural Women in Sustainable Innovation
- FI04 Co-creation platforms for rural women
- FI05 Visibility platforms supporting rural entrepreneurship and renewing rural image
- IE02 Improve skills training opportunities targeting women-led rural and farm innovation
- IE03 Women's Empowerment as a Driver of Rural and Agricultural Innovation
- IE04 Innovating from the Ground Up: Digital Policy Pathways to Support Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas
- IE05 Building a Gender Inclusive AKIS in Ireland
- IT01 Training for Women Innovating in Farming and Rural Areas
- IT05 Reframing and Expanding AKIS in Italy to Reach Women Innovators
- IT06 Spotlighting Women in Sustainable Rural Innovation
- NL02 Promoting Positive Images of Rural Farming Women and Rural Women Entrepreneurs Across All Education Curricula
- RO04 Improving networking support and social spaces for rural women
- SE09 Education on Sustainable Food Production in Swedish Schools
- SE10 Diversifying AKIS in Sweden

8 AN INTEGRATED POLICY NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE

Policies in rural areas are multi-level. Local policies, regional policies, national policies and the EU Common agricultural policy interplay. Local policy makers can play a role to support innovators to provide access to other relevant policy makers: this helps to have a supportive policy network. For all government levels this adds to the agenda to allow for a strong multilevel policy network.

- **Apply gender mainstreaming in all policies.** Gender mainstreaming involves that gender will be on the agenda of all stages in all policies to be made. Applying gender mainstreaming is a principle included in the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union states: “In all its activities, the Union shall aim to eliminate inequalities, and to promote equality, between men and women” (Article 8), which means that it is an active obligation to promote equality between women and men. Gender mainstreaming is an important tool in the integration of that principle into the CAP and other rural policies. Currently, the uptake of gender mainstreaming in the domain of farming and rural areas stays behind; using this method is instrumental to achieve more equality between women and men. Introducing this method to all policy initiatives is an important step forward. Ignoring inequalities in policy making is at odds with EU principles.
- **Supporting women’s return to rural areas and promoting female entrepreneurship.** In many rural areas there is an outflux of young women to work and study elsewhere. Having focused policies to accommodate a rural return for women can boost rural regeneration. Women returning to rural areas—often with international work and/or study experience—drive sustainable innovation in local communities. Targeted support through grants, reintegration programs, and peer networks can enhance rural entrepreneurship and development while fostering knowledge exchange between returnees and local women—a key condition for sustainable innovation.
- **Local support to women innovators.** Local authorities can support women-led innovation projects in different ways, thus contributing to improving the quality of life in rural communities. Public spaces and public land could be rented/made available to facilitate the creation of innovative projects led by women. In addition, local services may be used to support initiatives. Policy makers can also contribute by making their own political networks available for women innovators to address issues at the right places: with visible support of local policy makers doors may open that otherwise stay closed. The experience is that this has not always been the case with the innovations studied in FLIARA and in some cases, a supporting political environment has been very helpful in getting an innovation forward.
- **Women’s empowerment and breaking barriers to women-led rural and farm innovation.** Greater policy focus on issues of women’s empowerment and breaking down barriers impacting equality between men and women is a key part of the policy mix to better support women-led rural and farm innovation. Women

that successfully navigate a path towards rural and farm innovation still must break down barriers. Empowering these women to overcome barriers that hold them back, such as 'imposter syndrome', lack of supportive networks, local attitudes and expectations is a key part of the policy challenge to better supporting women-led rural and farm innovation. For women in more vulnerable and marginalised circumstances, limitations on their empowerment are even greater calling for integrated supports that address the range of unique barriers to innovation faced by them.

8.1 THE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED BY THESE INFRASTRUCTURES

Innovation involves doing new activities beyond usual expectations, which, consequently, are often not foreseen by policies and regulations. The interviews with female rural innovators reveal that bureaucratic hurdles, such as delays and time-consuming regulations need to be navigated. Political support and political interest are sometimes lagging, which hinders the development of the innovation.

Gender can play a role in appreciating innovations. Only a minority of farms, farmland and farming output is managed by females. Farmers organisations that talk with authorities reflect this situation as being an 'old-boys network'. Many schemes are formally gender blind, but implicitly they post a picture of a farmer as a man on a tractor and this is what is supported (there is an implicit gender bias) by the allocation of funding based on hectares and investments in machinery. For more alternative styles of farming (whether they are executed by males or females) there is often less or no support. Information on support programmes does not always reach the proposed recipients of a programme in the sense that they consider these programmes as relevant to apply for.

Box 11 Gender in EU Regulation on CAP Strategic Plans

Gender in specific objective 8 of CAP: 'to promote (...) gender equality, including the participation of women in farming' [EU Regulation on CAP Strategic Plans, Art. 6-1h]

"Equality between women and men is a core principle of the Union and gender mainstreaming is an important tool in the integration of that principle into to the CAP. There should therefore be a particular focus on promoting the participation of women in the socio-economic development of rural areas, with special attention to farming, supporting women's key role. Member States should be required to assess the situation of women in farming and address challenges in their CAP Strategic Plans. Gender equality should be an integral part of the preparation, implementation and evaluation of CAP interventions. Member States should also strengthen their capacity in gender mainstreaming and in the collection of data disaggregated by gender." (EU Regulation on CAP Strategic Plans, preamble 33)

Gender mainstreaming, although a principle in many policy documents, is often not applied adequately. There is an implementation gap between objectives and policy instrumentation and policy monitoring. For example, in the Common Agricultural Policy

gender is part of specific objective 8 but not of the result indicators and is so no part of every step in the policy cycle (Box 11)

Many successful innovative women in rural areas had previously lived, studied, or worked abroad (or in urban areas) before returning to rural communities. This trend includes both women returning to their home villages and urban-born women choosing to resettle for a rural life. Their diverse experiences position them as crucial agents of sustainable rural transformation. Supporting these returnees with targeted measures can enhance rural development and foster innovation by promoting the exchange of knowledge and skills with local communities—an essential condition for context-sensitive, sustainable solutions. Such a policy can address **all infrastructures** defined in this policy booklet. Specific for this group is the challenge of weak reintegration mechanisms: absence of structured peer-to-peer knowledge exchange between returnees and local women and lack of formal reintegration programs connecting returnees to local communities. So, there is a lack of tailored policies to support women returning to rural areas and insufficient support for women aiming to implement ecologically, socially, and culturally sustainable projects

For women who do not migrate to other (urban) areas, there is (in many rural areas) limited access to education and skill development: few scholarship or training opportunities aligned with sustainable rural development and women's professional interests. Political support is needed to promote infrastructures as laid out in this booklet. This includes policies to listen to the needs of local women themselves and take steps to navigate the system in a way that supports their needs.

Women-led innovation is a source of economic empowerment for women in rural areas and farming. However, wider social and cultural issues impact women's empowerment:

- Gender based discrimination, traditional social norms and gender stereotypes can impact women becoming involved in innovation and developing their innovation.
- Women in rural areas and farming are key drivers of innovation, sustainability and community resilience. Yet they remain underrepresented in and need greater visibility within farm and rural innovation ecosystems.
- Addressing this imbalance is not only a matter of gender equality but of rural economic and social development.

8.2 PRACTICAL TIPS AND BEST PRACTICES

Practical tips on gender mainstreaming

The website of the European Institute for Gender Equality offers extensive resources and practical guidance on how to implement gender mainstreaming effectively. Tips include the following:

- Gender mainstreaming is a cyclical process. In every step of the policy cycle gender should be taken into account. It is not sufficient to take gender into account in the definition of policies, but also in planning, implementation and policy evaluation gender aspects must be on the agenda.

- Stereotyping: Go beyond traditional gender roles in presenting and illustrating policies.
- Representation: Ascertain that interest and matters are discussed with representatives of all genders.
- Beneficiaries of policies. Consider explicitly who will be addressed by the policies and include a gender inclusive approach regarding the proposed beneficiaries.
- In many farms, formal farm managers are male and have a formal say about important decisions. Look for ways to enhance a better gender representation in the farming sector to formal decision-making powers.
- Family farming is an important backbone of European farming. Many farming families still have traditional gender roles and a step towards modern European family relationships is needed from a gender mainstreaming perspective.
- Farming and rural communities often maintain more traditional gender roles than urban settings, a reality frequently overlooked in gender equality and emancipation policies. It is therefore essential to start with the fundamental steps of gender mainstreaming, as these may not yet have been implemented.

Practical tips to support women's return to rural areas and promote female entrepreneurship

To support women's return to rural areas and promote female entrepreneurship, policies must address three key areas. First, national-level interventions are essential to facilitate return migration through targeted scholarships, reintegration programs, and accessible, low-bureaucracy grants that encourage women to start innovative rural initiatives. Second, local and regional efforts should focus on strengthening female entrepreneurship by expanding support networks, enabling access to resources, and fostering collaboration through women-led associations and trans local networks. Finally, improving the attractiveness of rural life for women - particularly those returning or migrating from urban areas - requires investment in public infrastructure, such as transport and education services, and the inclusion of women in local governance. Ensuring women are part of decision-making processes at the community level is vital to shaping inclusive, responsive rural development.

Reinsertion and integration programs support the reintegration of women in rural communities and the effective use of their skills. Including peer-to-peer knowledge exchange programs that link returnees with women in the community/region for mentoring and facilitate exchange of best practices.

Start-up grants and funding for rural innovation provide financial support to women returnees to launch start-ups or innovative rural projects, with a focus on small and medium grants that are non-reimbursable, easy to access and have low administrative/reporting requirements.

Attract women with relevant skills and experience to work with local government and institutions both formally and informally. The active participation of rural women in local institutional bodies (e.g. municipal council) emerged as essential to support and enhance the impact of women-led innovations in a specific rural area. The participation

of women in informal networks, as well as in farmer and entrepreneur associations, organisations and cooperatives also turned out to be extremely important to amplify women's voices in policy discussions, highlighting their specific needs.

Rural infrastructure improvement, with a focus on expanding and adapting local and school public transportation to meet the needs of local communities. Lack of access to adequate transportation and quality educational services is a major barrier to women's relocation and active involvement in rural life.

Box 12 Insight from Policy Brief IT03 Local Support to Women Innovators

The FLIARA Project found more than one project making use (usually for a fee) of public spaces or public land and demonstrating the relevance of this type of policy in encouraging female innovation and ensuring new services at local level. Municipalities should facilitate access to these assets under favourable conditions for women proposing entrepreneurial or social projects. These public areas or spaces are little used or not used at all by public administrations, who have to bear the cost of maintaining them. Making them available for activities promoted by women is therefore doubly beneficial, both in terms of reducing public costs and in terms of supporting the local economy and/or creating new services for citizens.

In Italy, for example, the project of Salento Km0 expanded in 2015 when a Laboratory was opened in a public space provided by a local Municipality, and where events, workshops and dinners dedicated to the enhancement of local products are organized, as well as a weekly farmers' market. A young woman developed her innovative idea of extracting birch sap by obtaining a concession for a birch forest owned by the municipality. She guarantees the cleaning and maintenance of the forest at the same time.

Another woman manages an alpine hut owned by the local municipality. It is open all year round, thus guaranteeing a meeting point for the local community; providing a restaurant and a bar, as well as a place where children and adults of all ages can meet, play games, share stories, and read books.

An interesting experience is that of the Cooperativa Agricola Germinale, which also runs a small restaurant in a public space. A "Bottega dei servizi" (funded by the Piedmont Region and FinPiemonte Spa) has been opened in the same space. It is a multifunctional shop where it is possible to buy basic necessities and access various services (e.g. home deliveries, co-working space, sports equipment rental, etc.).

The RYSSBY Library project in Sweden is a prime example of a Civil Society-Public Partnership that successfully ensured the maintenance of services at the local level. The municipality made an agreement with 14 local associations and handed over the management. The library has become a "local living room" used by the village associations to host cultural events.

8.3 CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

Start applying the method of gender mainstreaming by testing for every policy initiative whether the gender dimension has been addressed appropriately. Use the method of gender mainstreaming to do so. By applying this method to the domain of agriculture and rural areas, further knowledge in gender inclusive policies will develop.

For example, the return of women with international experience to rural Romania is a powerful driver of sustainable innovation. These women bring valuable skills, global perspectives, and a strong commitment to local development. Yet, without the right conditions, their potential remains underutilized.

To harness this transformative force, the **following actions are needed**:

- Implement national reintegration programs tailored to women returning to rural areas or who are rural newcomers, including mentorship, peer exchanges, and skill recognition.
- Expand access to non-repayable start-up grants for sustainable rural initiatives led by women, with minimal bureaucracy.
- Invest in local infrastructure and governance inclusion, ensuring returnee women help shape community development.
- Build and support women-led networks that connect returnees with local women to exchange knowledge and co-create resilient solutions.

Local authorities should support women-led innovative projects.

- Local authorities should make available public spaces and/or public land for innovative projects developed by women.
- Local authorities should promote public/civil society partnerships to enhance local services, also involving women farmers' and rural women's associations.
- Policymakers should fund multiservice shops to guarantee more local services also in rural remote areas.
- By investing in these strategies, the contribution of women's innovations in agriculture and rural areas can improve the quality of life of rural communities.

The range of policy actions outlined here aim to target barriers impacting women's economic empowerment that can be achieved through **rural and farm innovation**.

- Fund and develop integrated women-specific rural and farm entrepreneurship programmes that address business and innovation issues as well as wider barriers facing women. More widely embedding a rural and gender equality lens into innovation and entrepreneurship strategies is also important to a wider and more fundamental policy shift.
- Making gender-responsive funding available to support community-led initiatives is important so that women-led and centred initiatives can be developed in response to local, place-based needs and opportunities.
- Actions are needed that improve the visibility of rural and farm women-led innovation, as well as directly tackle the perpetuating of traditional gender roles and stereotypes in rural communities and wider society.
- Ensure strong and targeted supports are available to women in more vulnerable and marginalised situations to assist breaking down barriers that impact their economic empowerment through rural and farm innovation.

8.4 POLICY BRIEFS FOR FURTHER READING

- EU02 Apply Gender Mainstreaming in Farming and Rural Areas
- EU03 How women-led innovations can contribute to EU Rural Vision 2040
- FI01 How women-led innovations can contribute to EU Rural Vision 2040?
- IE06 Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan and Gender Equality
- IE07 The Gender Gap in Generational Renewal
- IE08 Strengthening the Voice of Rural and Farm Women in Decision-Making Spaces

- IE09 Balancing Women-led Innovation, Rural and Farm Family-life: The Need for Improved Policy Support
- IT03 Local Support to Women Innovators
- NL01 Promoting a Diversity of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural Practices
- NL04 Incorporating Gender Policy KPI in CAP, CSP & LEADER
- NL05 Addressing Underrepresentation of Rural Women and Rural Entrepreneurship in the Emancipation National Policy
- RO01 Unlocking the potential of rural women through inclusive CAP measures
- RO02 Building gender-sensitive capacity for rural development governance
- RO03 Supporting Women's Return to Rural Areas and Promoting Female Entrepreneurship
- RO05 Promoting gender equality in Romania's rural communities by supporting innovative women driving sustainable development

9 SOME TAKEAWAYS FOR ACTION

Policy needs and issues⁴.

1. **Address social and cultural conditions** impacting women-led rural and farm innovation through:
 - Innovative policy measures need to work to address gender stereotypes, traditional gender norms and patriarchal attitudes.
 - Measures need to tackle improving the visibility and recognition of existing women-led innovation.
 - Policies need to effectively address the challenge of balancing all of life's demands, such as parental leave, enabling innovators to take holiday leave and benefit from remote business and work opportunities.
2. **Address barriers in the policy support system itself** that hinder women leading rural and farm innovation benefiting as best possible from existing supports through:
 - Greater attention is given to the policy life cycle, looking at issues in policy design that impact effective delivery and uptake of support measures.
 - Policy governance also receives greater attention, and spaces are strengthened that enable women's improved participation in the decisions that impact women-led rural and farm innovation.
3. **Strengthen the conditions for women-led rural and farm innovation** and entrepreneurship through improved supports:
 - Women-led rural and farm innovation needs to be supported to flourish through a diverse range of supports that address women's needs such as improved access to finance, networks, knowledge and skills development opportunities
 - Within the support system, specific needs also need to be addressed, such as targeted supports to different stages of the innovation journey and the needs of particular groups of women.
4. **Strengthen rural and farm economy renewal and sustainability** with women-led innovation as a lever:
 - Women-led rural and farm innovation appears to embed an untapped opportunity for wider benefits to enhance the rural and farm economy. This calls for certain areas to receive improved supports, such as social, cultural, environmental and digital rural and farm innovation.
 - Alongside this, there is a need for more policies that are integrated, place-based and locally led.

⁴ Derived from Aisling Murtagh, Anastasia Oprea, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir (2024) D 4.3 Benchmarking Initial Report, FLIARA, draft to be published at <https://zenodo.org/communities/fliara/> and <https://doi.org/10.3030/101084234>

10 ABOUT FLIARA

FLIARA is a Horizon Europe Research and Innovation actions with 15 partners from 10 EU member states⁵. It is built around several work packages in which specific tasks have been performed.

The project started with developing key concepts, reviewing existing literature, developing an assessment framework and the assessment of current policy and legal frameworks to support policy benchmarking. This formed a solid base for the rest of the project.

The project partners with local stakeholders in 9 rural regions have executed foresight and trend analysis to envision the role of women in innovations demanded for sustainable farm and rural futures. Based on an inventory of sustainability problems, project partners with local stakeholders developed visions to go beyond these problems. In a next step the FLIARA team with the stakeholders identified innovations that are needed to reach these visions and consequently the contribution of women to these innovations. Based on surveys and workshops possibilities and obstacles to these innovations have become clear. The outcome showed that many solutions are needed to promote these innovations and that most of these measures are more social measures (See: Annex 1 Visions for future) and that only a minority can be seen as hard measures as more funding or different regulations.

The project partners also learned from successful women innovators. Based on the assessment framework the FLIARA team selected 200 women innovators who contributed to a range of sustainability issues. The team interviewed these women and has written 20 case study reports based on the interviews. Based on the reports many insights and lessons have been drawn which are also the basis for this booklet. All innovators were portrayed in a fact sheet showcasing their innovations to a wider audience.

Out of the 200 innovators, the FLIARA team selected 20 FLIARA ambassadors (2 per country involved), who have been participating in a Community of Practice network and for which four workshops have been organised in different macro regions within Europe. During these meetings ambassadors have presented their innovation journeys and a series of workshops have been organised to address different issues of promoting female led innovation in rural areas and agriculture. The participants in these workshops included also many regional stakeholders, innovators and policymakers.

This booklet is part of a policy design and assessment work package that next to policy briefs and policy booklet, included participatory scenario development, benchmarking

⁵ Funded by the European Union through the Horizon Europe programme, Grant Agreement n°. 101084234. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the authors 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.

and a final policy workshop discussing key policy insights developed throughout the project.

A lot of emphasis in the project has been on communicating the results of the project to a wider audience through the website (www.fiara.eu) and social media as well as by webinars and onsite meetings. All delivered reports will be uploaded to Zenodo⁶ and will also become available at CORDIS⁷, the oldest permanent website of the European Commission.

⁶ At <https://zenodo.org/communities/fiara/>

⁷ At <https://doi.org/10.3030/101084234>

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 VISIONS FOR FUTURE

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Summary

Rural areas across Europe suffer from many kinds of sustainability problems in demographic, economic, environmental and socio-cultural domains. FLIARA foresight activities were harnessed to address these problems through increased contributions by women to rural sustainability innovations. We found out that even if the portfolio of problems varied across different types of rural areas (rural areas close to city, rural villages, remote rural areas), the innovations that were needed to address the problems did not deviate a lot between the different types of areas. The same applied to measures to increase women's contributions to these innovations. We found out that women have extensive possibilities in contributing to environmental and social innovations, but extensive obstacles in contributing to economic–technological and, especially, political innovations. Top-5 measures included co-creation and cooperation platforms, provision of information, provision of education, adoption of equality and promotion of vision-based policies and actions. For this matter, no 'silver bullet' seemed to exist but a specific measures for specific needs or a mix of measures to be applied. While many recent EU visions and strategies on agriculture, food and rural areas provide strong support for the evidence-based proposals of FLIARA foresight activities, our results may assist in focusing the actions to most promising topics that observe the gender as well as the specific sustainability issues and rural contexts.

Key words: foresight, gender, innovation, rural, sustainability, vision

1. INTRODUCTION

All the choices made in the present materialise in the future. Therefore, it is important to try to assess to which kinds of future states current developments might lead us and image specific futures states to be reached for from the present. Design and assessment of alternative futures to serve choices in the present is the reason for the existence of futures science and foresight.

Apart from this, many rural areas across Europe suffer from many kinds of sustainability problems: environmental degradation, selective loss of population, urban sprawl, regional inequalities and many more. Many of these problems have turned out to be very persistent and difficult if not impossible to resolve. FLIARA foresight activities (FLIARA 2025) took the diversity of these sustainability problems as a starting point, since rural policies ultimately try to address rural problems. After the inventory of sustainability problems, visions were crafted to remove these problems. As soon as the visions were at the table, innovations could be designed to realise the visions. Logically, these innovations should contribute to resolving rural sustainability problems. Finally, we asked

what could done to increase women's contributions to these innovations as they could provide some novel edges and approaches that have not been noticed before (Figure 4). This process was implemented in a similar way in nine EU countries covering northern, western, eastern and southern parts of Europe as well as rural areas close to city, rural villages and remote rural areas. This approach made it possible to observe the diversity of contexts and add relevance of the findings. Altogether, 577 stakeholders with different backgrounds contributed to the findings through interviews, workshops and small surveys.

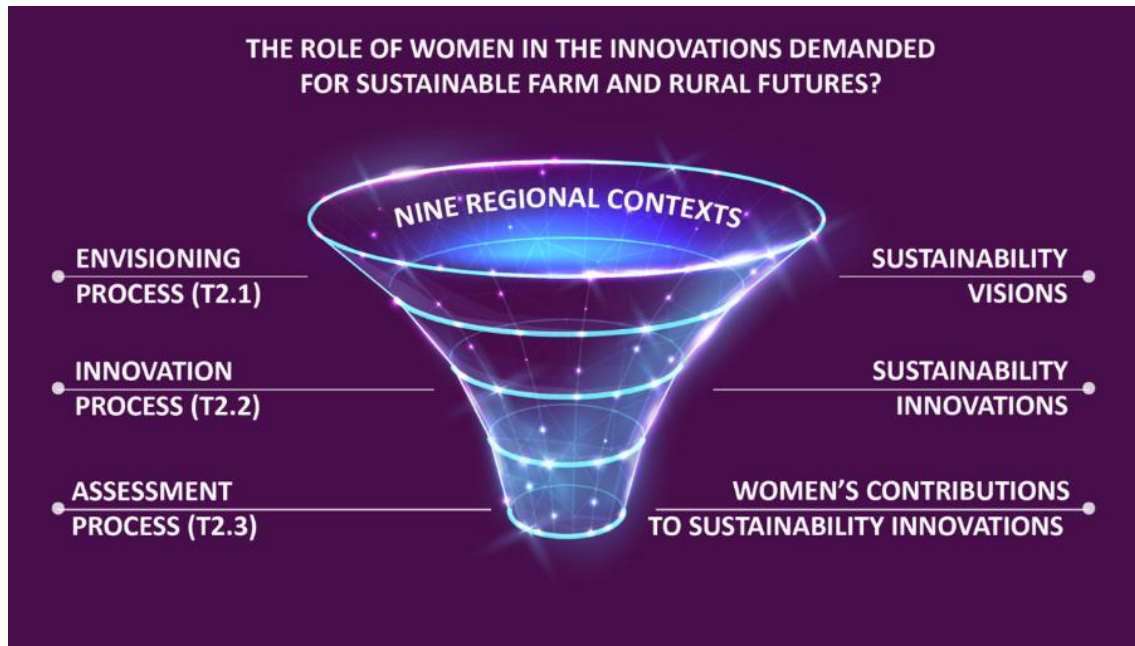


Figure 4 FLIARA foresight process: tasks and outputs

2. CHALLENGES AND IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

Starting with the challenges, the top-5 sustainability problems prevailing in the rural regions were related to the lack of infrastructure and services, lack of sustainability wisdom, lack of economic diversification, lack of social capital and selective population decline (Figure 5). None of the problems was dominant as the percentage shares of the top-5 problems varied between 8–12% of 322 problems that were identified in the process.

The most burning problems were different in different types of rural areas. For example, alienation of people from food production was the most common problem in rural areas close to city (15%), lack of sustainability wisdom in rural villages (20%) and lack of economic diversification in remote rural areas (20%). Many of the rural sustainability problems were networked wicked problems that manifested vicious circle of development.

Altogether 109 visions were created that would remove the sustainability problems if realised through innovations. The visions included a large variety of topics and did not converge around few key issues as, for example, top-5 topics covered only 22% of all

topics and the remaining 55 topics covered 78%. At a higher level of abstraction, about 46% of vision topics featured ways out of the negative structural spiral in rural areas, 36% features ways to defeat social problems, 11% addressed specifically environmental problems and 8% envisioned alternatives to inappropriate, inadequate or biased interventions by the society. Visions were needed to bridge the current problems and futures-oriented solutions: sustainability innovations.

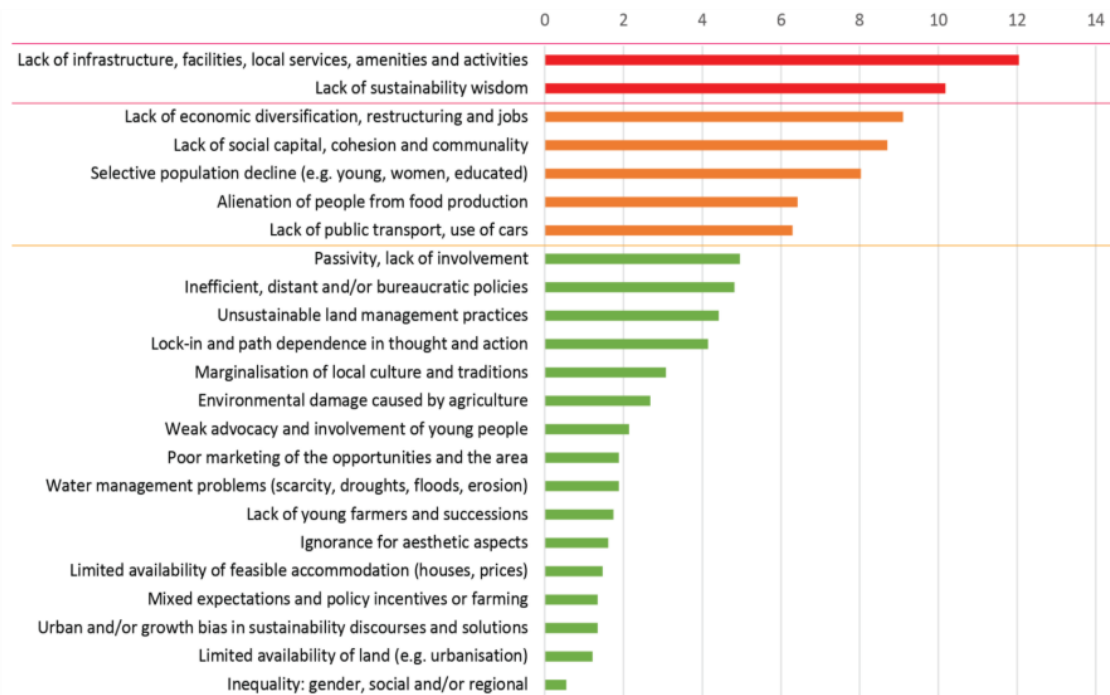


Figure 5 Sustainability problems prevailing in the rural areas, %.

As many as 747 innovations were proposed to realise the visions and ultimately address the rural sustainability problems. Top-5 topics of these innovations covered new ways to organise local development, adoption of sustainable practices and lifestyles, novel organisation of communality, sustainable farming models and new ways to involve people (Figure 6). The innovations and the problems had logical connections, e.g. adoption of sustainable practices and lifestyles to address the lack of sustainability wisdom and novel organisation of communality to address the lack of social capital. Again, a diversity of innovations rather than a silver bullet was needed as the shares of top-5 innovations were only 7–11% of all innovations. Looking at the different types of rural areas, the profiles of sustainability innovations were more similar than the profiles of sustainability problems. So, support for the suggested types of innovations may help all types of rural areas in resolving sustainability problems.



Figure 6 Innovations to address the rural sustainability problems, %.

3. FLIARA EVIDENCE-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS

As evident, many kinds of innovations are needed to overcome the sustainability challenges. What special could women offer for this enterprise and how their efforts could be supported? Looking at our co-created evidence, we found that women have possibilities for contribution especially in environmental and social innovations. Based on the stakeholder assessment, this derives from their strengths: women have extensive networks, they have good educational background, they appreciate soft and social values, they have good ground level knowledge, and they have a positive attitude for change. Nevertheless, we also found out that women have extensive obstacles in contributing to economic–technological and, especially, political innovations. The reasons for this setting are numerous: lack of demand for genuinely novel practices, lack of equity, lack of capital and lack of access to specific networks needed in these domains. Possibilities and obstacles did not differ significantly between different types of rural areas. All these aspects should be observed upon the design and delivery of strategies, policies and projects to overcome rural sustainability problems with a gender sensitive approach.

Finally, we can present a set of measures to promote women's contributions to the rural sustainability innovations. The stakeholders came up with 333 proposals and these were categorised into 18 measures (Figure 7). Top-5 measures included co-creation and cooperation platforms, provision of information, provision of education, adoption of equality and promotion of vision-based policies and actions. Again, the shares of these measures varied between 6% and 16% of all proposed measures. For this matter also, no 'silver bullet' exists but a specific measures for specific needs or a mix of measures to be applied. What was remarkable was the high rank of equality-related measures (genders and social groups), since inequality was neither among the most common problems nor among the most common target of innovations.

Taking a still higher level of abstraction, about 80% of the proposed measures are social in character (e.g. cooperation, education, empowerment, involvement, support networks) and only 20% economic or administrative in character (e.g. infrastructure, finance, simplification of bureaucracy). Application of social measures most often asks for bottom-up rather than top-down approach, and for this reason local policies and actions are at the core in promoting women's contributions to rural sustainability innovations targeted to remove rural sustainability problems.

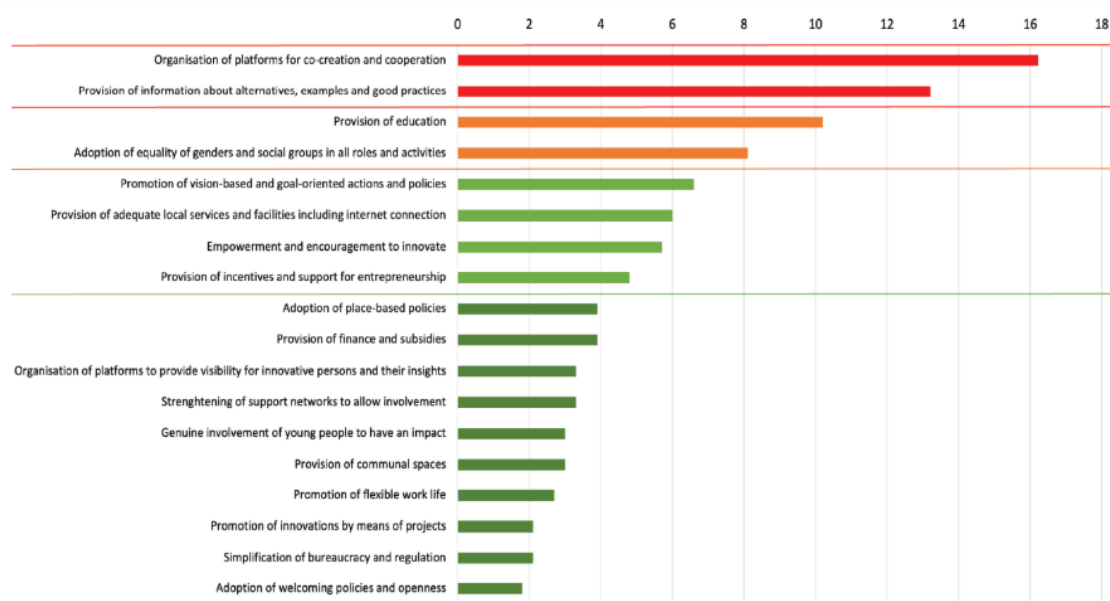


Figure 7 Measures to increase women's contributions to rural sustainability innovations, %.

Ranking of the measures did not differ significantly between different types of rural areas. Keeping the rather high level of abstraction with four categories of measures, networks were the most important category of proposed measures in all types of rural areas – and most promising in rural villages (Figure 8). Remote rural areas were more in need of incentives and knowledge focused measures than the other types of rural areas. As the differences were not striking, the most promising measures can be applied in all kinds of rural areas when striving for increased contribution by women to rural sustainability innovations.

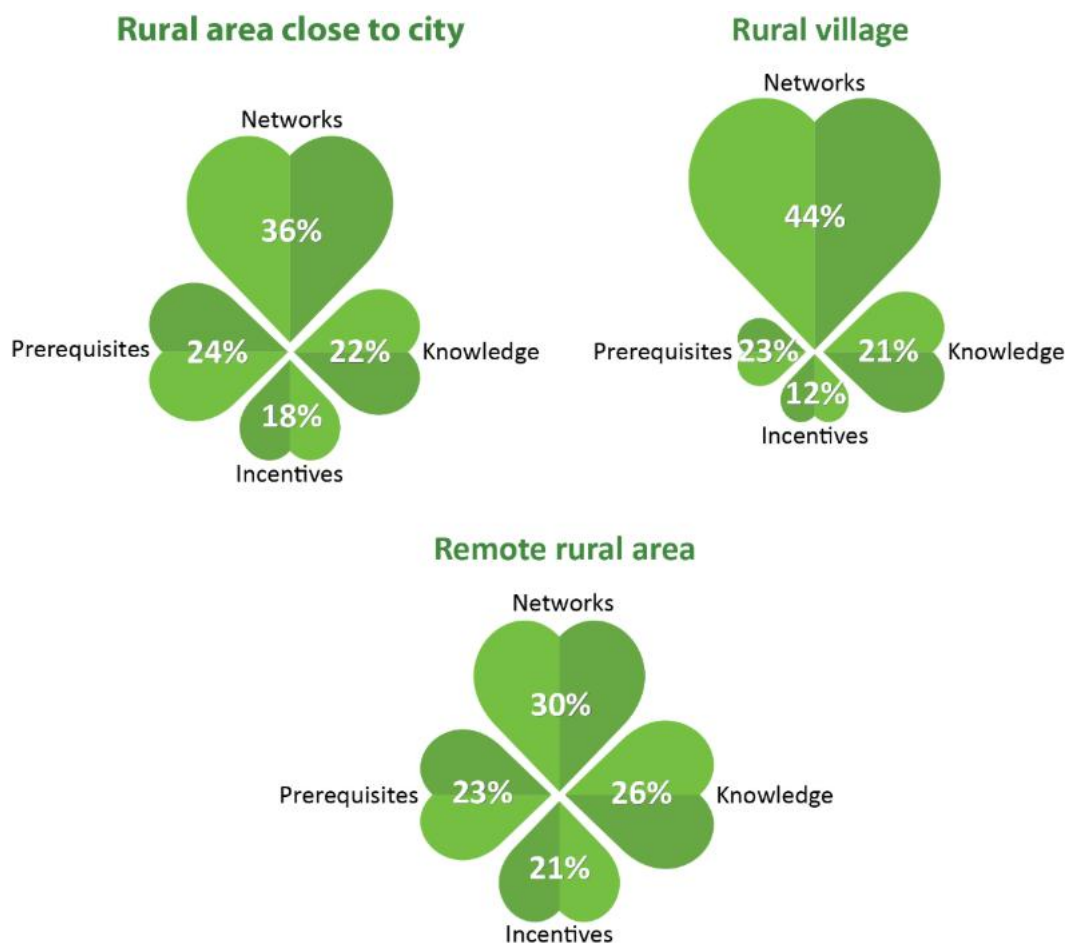


Figure 8 Measures to increase women's contributions to rural sustainability innovations by type of the rural area, %.

4. CONNECTION TO EU POLICIES

Several if not all EU, national and regional policies observe the rural sustainability challenges. However, not many of them observe gender specific aspects. Further on, many measures that are provided by the top-down policies are economic or administrative in character. We found out that this approach is not the most effective approach in trying to involve and encourage women to innovate.

For example, the long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas (EC 2021) recognises the diversity of Europe's rural areas (p. 2) as well as the numerous sustainability problems (p. 4–6) including gender gaps but remains rather general and unfocused when it comes to contents of the vision. However, many topics that were found important in the FLIARA foresight process are found also in the Rural Vision as, for example, 'place-based and integrated policy solutions' (p. 10), encouragement of 'strongly social innovations' (p. 11) and support for 'entrepreneurial mind-sets' (p. 13). FLIARA findings may assist in turning the Rural Vision into local action targeted to address specific sustainability challenges and observing the impact of local context. Equality aspects that came up in FLIARA measures are observed in the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 (EC 2020a).

Farm to Fork Strategy (EC 2020b), Strategic Dialogue (EC 2024) and Vision for Agriculture and Food (EC 2025) all discussed the futures of farming and food. All of the discussed sustainability issues emphasised the role of innovations in the quest for sustainability transitions. While they provide strong support for the evidence-based proposals of FLIARA foresight activities, our results may assist in focusing the actions to most promising topics that observe the gender as well as the specific sustainability issues and rural contexts.

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ANNEX 2 SELECTION OF FLIARA OUTCOMES FOR FURTHER READING

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New outcomes will be published at <https://zenodo.org/communities/fliara> and <https://doi.org/10.3030/101084234>

See also: <https://fliara.eu/toolkit/>

ANNEX 3 OVERVIEW OF FLIARA POLICY BRIEFS

- CZ01 Include more gender education in School Curricula (author: Antonín Vaishar, contributors: Milada Šťastná, Jan Zloch)
- CZ02 Create a platform for sharing experiences and examples of good practices (author: Antonín Vaishar, contributors: Milada Šťastná, Jan Zloch)
- CZ03 Support of Flexible Work (author: Antonín Vaishar, contributors: Milada Šťastná, Jan Zloch)
- CZ04 Reduce to pay gaps between hard and soft professions (author: Antonín Vaishar, contributors: Milada Šťastná, Jan Zloch)
- CZ05 Strengthening Care for Pre-school Children (author: Antonín Vaishar, contributors: Milada Šťastná, Jan Zloch)
- CZ06 Improving care for lonely seniors (author: Antonín Vaishar, contributors: Milada Šťastná, Jan Zloch)
- DE01 Connecting Women: A Driver for Agricultural Innovation (authors: Felicia van Tulder, Susanne von Münchhausen, contributor: Anna Häring)
- DE02 Empowering Rural Women through Tailored Measures (authors: Felicia van Tulder, Susanne von Münchhausen, contributor: Anna Häring)
- DE03 Learning how to Engage with Stakeholders (authors: Felicia van Tulder, Susanne von Münchhausen, contributor: Anna Häring)
- DE04 Maternity Leave Reform (authors: Felicia van Tulder, Susanne von Münchhausen, contributor: Anna Häring)
- ES01 Financial gaps and opportunities for rural women-led innovation projects (authors: Michelle Perello, Martina Mangia, Víctor Martínez)
- ES02 Family & Work Conciliation Policies for Women in Rural Areas (authors: Michelle Perello, Martina Mangia, Víctor Martínez)
- ES03 Strengthening the Commercialisation of Women-Led Rural Products and Services through Support Networks (authors: Michelle Perello, Martina Mangia, Víctor Martínez)
- EU01 Spotlighting Rural Women in Sustainable Innovation (authors: Willem Korthals Altes, Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip, contributor: Vitnarae Kang)
- EU02 Apply Gender Mainstreaming in Farming and Rural Areas (authors: Willem Korthals Altes, Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip, contributor: Vitnarae Kang)
- EU03 How women-led innovations can contribute to EU Rural Vision 2040 Areas (authors: Michelle Perello, Martina Mangia, Víctor Martínez)
- FI01 How women-led innovations can contribute to EU Rural Vision 2040? (authors: Simo Sarkki, Hannu I. Heikkinen)
- FI02 Toxic resilience and ways to overcome it (authors: Simo Sarkki, Hannu I. Heikkinen)
- FI03 Special targeted support for atypical rural SMEs (authors: Simo Sarkki, Hannu I. Heikkinen)
- FI04 Co-creation platforms for rural women (authors: Belyta Tembo, Tuomas Kuhmonen)
- FI05 Visibility platforms supporting rural entrepreneurship and renewing rural image (authors: Belyta Tembo, Tuomas Kuhmonen)
- IE01 Improve access to finance to better support women-led rural and farm innovation (authors: Aisling Murtagh, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir)
- IE02 Improve skills training opportunities targeting women-led rural and farm innovation (authors: Aisling Murtagh, Tara Farrell, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir)
- IE03 Women's Empowerment as a Driver of Rural and Agricultural Innovation (authors: Aisling Murtagh, Tara Farrell, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir)
- IE04 Innovating from the Ground Up: Digital Policy Pathways to Support Women in Agriculture and Rural Areas (authors: Maura Farrell, Tara Farrell, Aisling Murtagh, Louise Weir)
- IE05 Building a Gender Inclusive AKIS in Ireland (authors: Maura Farrell, Anne Kinsella, Aisling Murtagh, Louise Weir)
- IE06 Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan and Gender Equality (authors: Aisling Murtagh, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir)
- IE07 The Gender Gap in Generational Renewal (authors: Aisling Murtagh, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir, Anne Kinsella)
- IE08 Strengthening the Voice of Rural and Farm Women in Decision-Making Spaces (authors: Aisling Murtagh, Tara Farrell, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir)
- IE09 Balancing Women-led Innovation, Rural and Farm Family-life: The Need for Improved Policy Support (authors: Aisling Murtagh, Tara Farrell, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir)
- IT01 Training for Women Innovating in Farming and Rural Areas (authors: Silvia Sivini, Irene Leonardelli, contributor: Annamaria Vitale)

- IT02 Funding and Advisory Services for Women Innovators in Rural Areas (authors: Silvia Sivini, Irene Leonardelli, contributor: Annamaria Vitale)
- IT03 Local Support to Women Innovators (authors: Silvia Sivini, Irene Leonardelli, contributor: Annamaria Vitale)
- IT04 Improving Family and Work Balance in Rural Areas (authors: Silvia Sivini, Irene Leonardelli, contributor: Annamaria Vitale)
- IT05 Reframing and Expanding AKIS in Italy to Reach Women Innovators (authors: Silvia Sivini, Irene Leonardelli, contributor: Annamaria Vitale)
- IT06 Spotlighting Women in Sustainable Rural Innovation (authors: Silvia Sivini, Irene Leonardelli, contributor: Annamaria Vitale)
- NL01 Promoting a Diversity of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural Practices (authors: Vitnae Kang, Willem Korthals Altes, Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip)
- NL02 Promoting Positive Images of Rural Farming Women and Rural Women Entrepreneurs Across All Education Curricula (authors: Vitnae Kang, Willem Korthals Altes, Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip)
- NL03 Supporting Direct-to-Consumer and Short Supply Chain Farming (authors: Vitnae Kang, Willem Korthals Altes, Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip)
- NL04 Incorporating Gender Policy KPI in CAP, CSP & LEADER (authors: Vitnae Kang, Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip, contributor: Willem Korthals Altes)
- NL05 Addressing Underrepresentation of Rural Women and Rural Entrepreneurship in the Emancipation National Policy (authors: Vitnae Kang, Willem Korthals Altes, Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip)
- RO01 Unlocking the potential of rural women through inclusive CAP measures (authors: Anastasia Oprea, Laura Incze)
- RO02 Building gender-sensitive capacity for rural development governance (authors: Anastasia Oprea, Laura Incze)
- RO03 Supporting Women's Return to Rural Areas and Promoting Female Entrepreneurship (authors: Anastasia Oprea, Laura Incze)
- RO04 Improving networking support and social spaces for rural women (authors: Anastasia Oprea, Laura Incze)
- RO05 Promoting gender equality in Romania's rural communities by supporting innovative women driving sustainable development (authors: Anastasia Oprea, Laura Incze)
- SE01 Providing Adequate Parental Leave (author: Helene Ahl, contributors: Anna Alexandersson, Annie Roos)
- SE02 Providing Adequate Childcare and After School Activities (author: Helene Ahl, contributors: Anna Alexandersson, Annie Roos)
- SE03 Maintaining Schools in Rural Areas (author: Helene Ahl, contributors: Anna Alexandersson, Annie Roos)
- SE04 Culture and Sports in Rural Areas (author: Helene Ahl, contributors: Anna Alexandersson, Annie Roos)
- SE05 Implementing a Farmer Relief Service (author: Annie Roos, contributors: Anna Alexandersson, Helene Ahl)
- SE06 Simplifying the Swedish Innovation Support System (author: Annie Roos, contributors: Anna Alexandersson, Helene Ahl)
- SE07 Addressing Inequities in Financial Support to Enhance the Sustainable Transition (author: Annie Roos, contributors: Anna Alexandersson, Helene Ahl)
- SE08 Reforming the Knowledge Support System to Foster Innovation in Rural Areas (author: Annie Roos, contributors: Anna Alexandersson, Helene Ahl)
- SE09 Education on Sustainable Food Production in Swedish Schools (author: Anna Alexandersson, contributors: Annie Roos, Helene Ahl)
- SE10 Diversifying AKIS in Sweden (author: Anna Alexandersson, contributors: Annie Roos, Helene Ahl)
- SI01 Start-up Finance, Training and Mentoring Vouchers for Rural Women (authors: Sara Mikolič, Irma Potočnik Slavič, Barbara Lampič)
- SI02 Empowering Rural Women Through Targeted Advisory Services (authors: Sara Mikolič, Irma Potočnik Slavič, Barbara Lampič)



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