



# Empowering Rural Women Through Targeted Advisory Services

## Policy Brief Slovenia

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*"I have the ideas and the drive – but what's missing is a supportive system that listens and understands how women build differently."*

## Executive Summary

Women in rural areas are key drivers of innovation and sustainability, yet their needs remain underserved in existing advisory system. This policy brief 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. Finally, women's representation in professional networks must be strengthened.

## The Challenge

- 🏠 The lack of a gender-responsive advisory services who understand and address the needs and potentials of women in rural areas.
- 🏠 The focus of agricultural advisory services for women remains centred on support for registration of supplementary activities on farm and matters related to social security issues. While these are important, they

do not fully reflect the range of needs and potential of women in rural areas.

- 🏠 Women possess different entrepreneurial motivations. They are more likely to pursue socially oriented, sustainable, or community-based ventures, which are often overlooked or undervalued by mainstream advisory systems and traditional frameworks.

- 🏠 Despite strong capabilities, many women underestimate their skills, especially in technical or economic field, and lack role models, leading to underrepresentation in leaderships and innovation.
- 🏠 Traditional gender roles place a heavy burden of household, caregiving and farm work on women, reducing their availability for traditional training and business development.
- 🏠 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.


## Policy Solutions

- 👤 Establish regional advisory services network for women.
- 👤 Support flexible and inclusive training formats, promote confidence building and mentorship (rural women-to-women mentorship scheme).
- 👤 Recognise and support diverse business models.
- 👤 Strengthen women's representation in governance and farmers networks.

## 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 (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 in Slovenia, 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. When working with women, participatory, reflective, and relationship-based methods, such as storytelling, experience-sharing, and group learning, are more effective. Women also 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.

## Supporting Evidence & Best Practices

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.

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## Conclusion & 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, Slovenia must take decisive steps to create a more inclusive, gender-responsive advisory framework.

The Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia needs to take a leading role in recognising rural women as a distinct target group and in integrating up-to-date, gender-responsive support into the public advisory system. Establishing dedicated agricultural advisory support for women in every region, adapting training formats for women needs, and ensuring women's presence in decision-making bodies are essential for building more resilient rural future. Regional business incubators may also play a complementary role by offering specialised support for women-led rural enterprises and start-ups.



## Further Reading

<https://fliara.eu/>

<https://fliara.eu/innovators/>

<https://fliara.eu/ambassadors/>

## About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

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# Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

[www.fliara.eu](http://www.fliara.eu)



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