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RURAL WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT THROUGH GREEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE CASE OF SLOVENIA

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Youth: engine of innovation, entrepreneurship, local development and well-being in rural areas

Special attention in strategic documents for the next programming period is given to assure long-term food security, green transition, and sustainable development of agriculture, forestry, food industry and rural development. In Slovenia, forestry is important as more than half of the country's landscape is covered by forests. On the other hand, the fishery is limited to a small seaside coastal area and fresh waters of rivers and lakes, including artificial ones devoted to fisheries. Slovenia can be included among the European Union countries with the lowest gender pay gap (MAFF, 2022a). Generational renewal is important for agriculture and the rural economy. Young farmers and women on farms are important for the sustainability and resilience of farm households with on-farm and off-farming activities and incomes. Business and social entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship in farming and non-farming activities can be important for the competitiveness and survival of the rural economy. Special Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) support can be important for setting up farms by young farmers and succession of existing farms from older to young farmers. Some other initiatives and financial supports for young farmers and residents in rural areas can be important such as a tool for promoting joint local development (LEADER) approach based on the "bottom-up" principle.

In the transition of youth from education to employment, different players and stakeholders are engaged from education institutions, local offices for employment, enterprises and other organizations. This transition process is also important to transfer knowledge and skills to final users. A generational renewal brings not only a younger-vis-vis-the-older generation, but there is also the potential for improvements and catch-up in knowledge and innovation due to a more educated and more likely more flexible youth-vis-vis-older population that can possess skills and experiences to be combined in this process.

Other organizations can be important social enterprises and social entrepreneurship for vulnerable and socially excluded groups in their integration into the labour market, social integration and local rural development. Exchange of ideas and networking between education institutions, public and private sector organizations and civil societies can be important in mitigating possible gaps in different interests contributing to social cohesion and well-being among different structures of the rural population, particularly in the integration of youth in employment. In addition to public support, it is important to encourage young entrepreneurs to become engines of innovation, job creation and income generation in the local development of rural areas.

Women and gender equality in rural areas: policy interventions

Supporting gender equality can be important for the functioning of civil society in multifunctional agricultural and rural development (MAFF, 2020). Strengthening the role of women, gender equality and non-discrimination are the foundation of democratic society and well-functioning transition from education and education market into employment and labour market (Čerňič Istenič, 2015). Rural women can play important role in strengthening agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty as well as contributing to the preservation of the agricultural and rural cultural heritage and ensure their families' daily survival (MAFF, 2021).

Family farms play a crucial role in the structure of the Slovenian agricultural holdings. In the 2014-2022 programming period, women's equality is dealt within the framework of the LEADER measure, where social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development of rural areas are promoted with an emphasis on the acceleration of local development in rural areas. Women are especially supported within the thematic area of action "Greater involvement of young people, women and other vulnerable groups". Jobs in the countryside can also be addressed through the promotion of employment and the preservation of jobs in the countryside with support for the establishment of agricultural holdings of young farmers, support for investments in the establishment and development of non-agricultural activities. Additional support for women is also provided for some interventions in the form of criteria for selection of roles. In the framework the CAP, supplementary activities on farms can be also supported. Jobs and entrepreneurship and social inclusion (including rural women) can be also supported by other EU funds - the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund.

Rural women organizations and empowerment

The Council for Rural Women was established in March 2019 (MAFF, 2022b) as a consultative body of the minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Food (MAFF) to monitor the situation of women in rural areas and makes proposals for improving their socio-economic situation, gives expert opinions on agricultural and other policy measures that affect the situation of women in rural areas contributes to raising awareness of the special situation of women in rural areas and informing about this issue more widely public and encourages organized action and intergenerational cooperation of women in rural areas (MAFF, 2022b).

Among institutions dealing with the socioeconomic position of women in rural areas and empowerment can be included the Slovenian Women Farmers' Association with local associations and committees, the Association of Slovenian Rural Youth, the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry of Slovenia, and the Union of Farmers of Slovenia.

Rural and social entrepreneurship and women empowerment

Association Social Economy Slovenia (ASES, 2021) provides initiatives to develop social entrepreneurship initiatives in the country. However, in rural areas, interventions and measures can be from the national and European funds (OECD, 2022) to promote social entrepreneurship and the development of social enterprises.



As part of the LEADER intervention, women in rural areas can be encouraged to get involved in preparing new local development strategies. Jobs in the countryside can be addressed through the promotion of employment and the preservation of jobs in the countryside, with support for the establishment of agricultural holdings of young farmers and support for investments in the establishment and development of non-agricultural activities. Additional support for women is also provided for some interventions in the form of role selection criteria.

Entrepreneurial activities rural women are often in tourism, crafts and in the field of local culture or heritage. On farms, there are often initiatives to expand the offer, such as processing, direct sales on the farm or farm tourism. In entrepreneurship, women can face problems typical of rural areas, such as poorer access to public transport and basic social services (health and preschool care).

Their special needs in start-up enterprises or enterprise growth can be supported by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. The organization of dedicated training and the establishment of networks can also be supported. Other European funds can help build infrastructure and basic public services to promote the inclusion and employment of women in rural areas.

Social enterprises and rural women empowerment

Few best practices related to green social entrepreneurship for women in rural areas have been identified (Domajnko and Bojnec, 2022; Bojnec, 2022). For example, the Dobrina cooperative (<https://www.zadruga-dobrina.si/>) can be an example of good practice that includes women in the countryside, especially in preparing farm catering and delicacies that only these women know and prepare. In this way, they are integrated into society - they introduce themselves at catering events, serve food, come to regular meetings of the cooperative, participate in events, and similar.

It is also about women who work on farms all year round and rarely leave the house. In this way, they can expand their social network, the possibility of sales/marketing, socialise and strengthen their self-confidence. Most of them are unaware of the importance and excellence of the cuisine they know how to prepare. From the point of view of marketing in the local environment and using local raw materials, the story is sustainable, green and socially responsible. Farm Korenika (<https://www.korenika.si/>) is also developing a similar story, while Vitica Institute in reuse textile (<https://www.bizi.si/ZAVOD-VITICA-GORNJA-RADGONA-SO-P/maticno-podjetje/>).

Social enterprise Brinjevka (<https://brinjevka.si/>), run by a woman (women). It is an organic farm (vegetables) registered as a social enterprise. Vulnerable groups, including women, are involved in the work.

The problem identified with enterprises, even though they operated according to social principles, can be additional bureaucracy that they did not want to register as social.



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