



**DIRECTORATE GENERAL FOR INTERNAL  
POLICIES**

**POLICY DEPARTMENT**  
**CITIZENS' RIGHTS AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS**



## ***GENDER EQUALITY***

**The situation of women  
living in rural areas of the  
European Union**

# Presentation by

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# Background

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- Women play a **major role in civil society and in economic growth in rural areas,**
- Rural women account for the production of **half of the world's food,**
- **Seven out of ten (7/10) of the world's hungry are women,**
- Women **own less than 15% of land** worldwide, and **less than 2% of property in the developing world,**
- Their roles, and contributions to the society differ, as well as their needs and interests,
- **A constant feature is nevertheless discrimination,**
- Global policy put gender **equity as a strategic objective.**

# Aim

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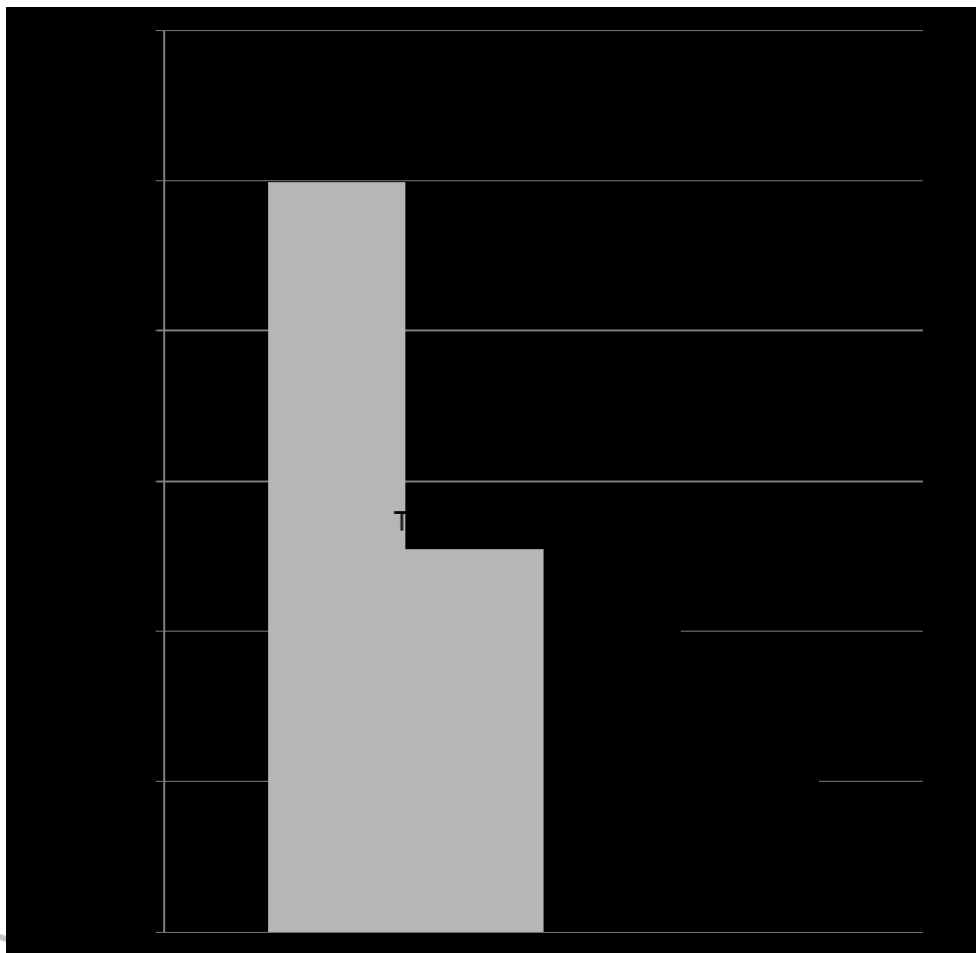
- Overview of the situation of rural women in Europe:
  - their position in the labour market,
  - their role in food production,
  - their position on the food market,
  - their role in sustainable rural development,
  - their role in maintaining tradition and cultural heritage, and
  - main characteristics of the leadership and participation in decision-making and policy shaping.

# Introduction

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- Women's work is crucial for survival and provides means for households to escape poverty or to improve living conditions,
- Women do two-thirds of the world's work, receive 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the means of production,
- **Gender inequality** is not just a problem of women, but it is a problem of agricultural productivity, of food security and rural development,
- **Gender roles** are learned and perceptions of gender are deeply rooted,
- **Gender mainstreaming** is usually understood to be addressing women's inequality.

# Europe: Total and active population in the EU-28, 2014



The **employment rate is generally higher for men than for women.**

Women are more likely to be concentrated in **lower paid employment**, and **less senior roles.**

The lowest employment rates among women in predominantly rural areas were found in Italy, Greece, Spain and Hungary.

**In 2013, 16.6% of the EU-28 population was assessed to be at-risk-of-poverty after social transfers;** women are still under greater risk of poverty in most of the European countries.

Increasing the rate of employment can help to **reduce poverty and thereby improve economic, social and territorial cohesion.**

# The role of women:

## Ensuring food production

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- **Women in rural areas produce more than half of the total amount of food;** in developing regions even up to 80%.
- In many parts of the world their home gardens represent some of the most **complex ecosystems**.
- **Spain:**
  - Family feeding has always been in the hands of women; a concept linked to feeding, not to business.
- **Romania:**
  - Women's income is lower than that of men; women who are unpaid domestic workers or agricultural workers on their own land are very vulnerable to social risks.





# The role of women: participation in the food market and in rural development

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- Women are responsible for about **81% purchase of consumer goods and about 82% of all foods.**
- Women's contribution to local and community development is significant, but rural women everywhere are in a **minority in decision-making and planning.**
- **Croatia:**
  - For rural women, “sustainable development” has a social and spatial dimension: keep the family together, stay in the village, have a successor, keep the environment for health of the family.
- **Portugal:**
  - Project contributed to the village revitalisation through residential tourism; the leverage for population settling; the creation of new tourism businesses; and the preservation of the architectural and cultural heritage of the village.



# The role of women: maintaining tradition and cultural heritage

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- Women are **more extensively involved in care giving** than men in both the home and the labour market.
- Women display more tolerant attitudes due to a **lower preference for inequality** among different social groups than men.
- **Greece:**
  - Creation of small women's enterprises for the production of local agro-foods responds to the **demand for special quality foods** by an increasing number of selective consumers, and results in **additional income** for rural households.
- **Croatia:**
  - Women organised in associations, NGOs, or informal groups, organize and participate in exhibitions, cultural and tourist events, with various activities: exhibitions of handicrafts; revitalisation of old crafts, skills and manifestations.



# The role of women:

## Participation in policy shaping

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- In a majority of countries agriculture is characterised by feminization processes; however, it is still unusual for women to participate in discussions and decisions about the agricultural business.
- Bringing women into rural development also means **ensuring participation** in planning and decision-making, concerning development objectives, strategies and projects.
- **Poland:**
  - Not only **question the image of passive women**, but demonstrate that home, private sphere and everyday concerns are a source of civic activities, forge solidarity and constitute a base for collective actions.
- **Slovakia:**
  - The **main barriers to entry into the world of politics are family and children**; most women that actively participate in local politics consider their work as a service to others.

# Policy measures to close the gap: EU legislation

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- Elements of **successful community based, participatory development** in official rural development policies since 1990s.
- Policy measures suggested to close the gap between genders in rural areas:
  - Specific legal measures and policies focusing on improving the situation of rural women,
  - Involvement of rural women in agricultural policy development at national, regional and local levels,
  - Promote greater participation by rural women in decision making and their presence in local political life,
  - Monitor the proper implementation of the law in the fields of justice, anti-discrimination, labour law and criminal law,
  - Support visibility and awareness-raising campaigns for women's rights,
  - Improve statistics aimed at providing a clear overview and information about women and their life in rural areas.

# Policy measures to close the gap:

## Rural women in Rural Development Plans

- Rural development programs aimed at identifying the constraints on women's full participation in local public and economic life and at developing specific initiatives in favour of women.
- **Little has been done to address the systemic features of gender inequality and to realise inclusive developments** that address the needs of all social groups.
- **Italy:**
  - **Rural women entrepreneurs** have been benefiting from the subsidies allocated by the official legislation, especially for business start-up and innovation projects.
- **Slovenia:**
  - Measures within the Rural Development Plan resulted in better development capacities in terms of economic and demographic conditions.; However, **the farms did not show significant development in terms of gender equality** (division of work and decision-making on family farms).

# Conclusions

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- Women are still not equal in matters of employment, earnings and wages, and in recognition of their engagement in general.
- The challenge for rural development programs is to **identify the constraints on women's full participation in economic and public life at local level**, and to **develop specific initiatives** in their favour.
- Solutions for achieving women's better productivity, access to markets and economic efficiency are seen in better access to **information, education and credit** and **encouraging business association**.
- Positive trends were recorded during the past 20 years; **criteria and indicators of gender equality are clearer and serve as guidelines** for (gender-based) rural policy creation and implementation.
- The **main goal still remains** the same: better recognition and evaluation of women's role in the society, especially the rural society.



# Recommendations

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- The **European Parliament** should continue and **intensify international discussions** on the role of rural women in different socio-economic and cultural circumstances, looking for the elements of **recognition, validation and respect for women** in their traditional roles in the rural economy and rural society.
- The **European Commission** should **improve statistical database** about women's 'invisible' work and engagement in family and social life, at the registration, but also at the **evaluation** level. Rural development plans and programs should intensify and **concretize support to female entrepreneurial ideas**.
- The priority of national governments and local authorities should be put on concrete **local development projects run by women and/or aimed at improving the socio-economic position of women** in rural areas.
- Policy in general should look for equal **opportunities and equal evaluation of women's and men's different qualities** within the same level of engagement; only such will ultimately result in sustainable rural, but also general, socio-economic development.

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**Thank you for your attention**