



RURACTIVE



RURACTIVE Insights on Women-Led Innovation in Rural Areas



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01

Introduction



Introduction

This booklet showcases different women-led innovations from the RURACTIVE Dynamos and the personal stories behind them. This is to provide inspiration for new women innovators in rural areas. To provide some context, this section is dedicated to tell you a little bit about the wider RURACTIVE project, how it came to fruition and how it ultimately led to the creation of this very booklet.

To set the scene, RURACTIVE is a four-year innovation project (2023-2027) focused on empowering rural communities to act for change. It is funded by the Horizon Europe Programme, the Swiss Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI, and UK Research and Innovation. RURACTIVE explores how to support the development of innovation solutions in six Rural Development Drivers domains relevant to rural areas: Sustainable agri-food systems and ecosystem management, Nature-based and cultural tourism, Culture and cultural innovation, Sustainable multimodal mobility, Energy transition and climate neutrality, and Local services, health and wellbeing.

By establishing and supporting local Multi-Actor Rural Innovation Ecosystems RURACTIVE aims to support the just and sustainable transition of European rural areas, making rural communities stronger, healthier, connected, resilient and prosperous.

RURACTIVE is led by University of Bologna and involves 29 partners from 10 countries, including Universities, research centres, local authorities, environmental consultancies, NGOs and a variety of rural innovators. RURACTIVE works in 12 pilot areas across Europe called 'Dynamos'. These Dynamos serve as hubs of rural innovation, where local communities, in partnership with RURACTIVE, drive the implementation of innovative solutions tailored to their unique contexts. The Dynamos are central to the project, acting as focal points for piloting new practices, fostering local engagement and addressing specific rural challenges.

To ensure their sustainability, the project places emphasis on addressing and strengthening multilevel governance, training and capacity development, place-based progress and inclusive participatory processes. Also, in a transversal way, the project also aims to unlock women-led innovation, tapping into the unique perspectives and capabilities women bring to rural development. This resulted in the creation of this booklet, which aims to showcase women who are leading innovations and capture their insight and experiences.

Booklet Guide

You will first be introduced to an **overview of the Insights from the Solutions Catalogue**, which is a core part of the wider RURACTIVE project. Following this, there are **spotlights of seven women innovators**. These spotlights are based on information collected from the catalogue and a focus group with the women innovators, where each of their respective solutions and experiences are shared. Further drawing upon the focus group data, **10 key learnings** from the women's time spent in the innovation space is set out in section 5 of this booklet. This is to provide insights into what the women innovators perceive to be their most important lessons and agents for change. The penultimate section showcases the full **collection of women led solutions**. Finally, we point to further **resources from other EU funded projects** which focus on empowering women towards entrepreneurship and leadership in rural areas.



02

The Importance of Women-Led Innovation

The Importance of Women-Led Innovation

The empowerment of women is a key objective and priority for the European Union, evident in their 2025 Roadmap for Gender Equality, which highlights the need for gender mainstreaming and gender sensitive research and data collection¹. The need to bolstering gender equality in the innovation space is evident in that only one third of businesses are initiated by women in the EU, despite making up approximately half the labour force². To combat this, the EU has introduced several programmes to help elevate women in innovation and business such as EIC Women Leadership, WE-RISE and HER Fund. This is in line with research that highlights the importance of networking and visibility to improve confidence thus success of women-led innovations³.

The lack of women who lead innovations in Europe is reflected in the wider RURACTIVE project, where out of 437 solutions, only 40 were explicitly identified as led by women. Research has highlighted several barriers to women leading innovations in rural areas. These include access to training, finance and caring expectations⁴. Previous work within RURACTIVE has highlighted the need to help women build their competences, capacity and networks to lead and initiate innovations in rural areas⁵.

Beyond the challenges, there are also possibilities for enabling women-led rural innovations. A key factor is shifting the voices that are heard. By creating and distributing this women-led innovation booklet, it will highlight existing innovators and allow for a greater insight into what has helped them become a success.

¹ European Institute for Gender Equality (2025) A Roadmap for Women's Right, Available at [0c3fe55d-9e4f-4377-9d14-93d03398b434_en](https://ec.europa.eu/equality/en/roadmap-womens-right)

² Eurochambers. (2025). Eurochambers Women Entrepreneurs Survey 2025 Available at <https://www.eurochambres.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Eurochambres-Women-Entrepreneurs-survey-2025-Unveiling-insights-from-the-women-entrepreneurs.pdf>

³ Sarkki, S., Dalla Torre, C., Fransala, J., Živojinović, I., Ludvig, A., Górriz-Mifsud, E., Melnykovich, M., Sfeir, P. R., Arbia, L., Bengoumi, M., Chorti, H., Gramm, V., López Marco, L., Ravazzoli, E., & Nijnik, M. (2021). Reconstructive Social Innovation Cycles in Women-Led Initiatives in Rural Areas. *Sustainability*, 13(3), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13031231>

⁴ Brush, C., Ali, A., Kelley, D., & Greene, P. (2017). The influence of human capital factors and context on women's entrepreneurship: Which matters more? *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, 8, 105–113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbvi.2017.08.001>

⁵ Melnykovich, M., Böttinger, E., Waeber, P., Bertuca, A., De Luca, C., Domínguez, X., Fuentesmilla, S., Hernández, S., Heikkinen, H., Kottawa Hewamanage, L., Nijnik, M., Pilla, F., Sarkki, S., Selva, C., Wilson, R., Valero, D., and Miller, D. (2024). Learning needs and gaps of rural communities. Report D. 3.1. Horizon Europe project RURACTIVE - Empowering rural communities to act for change (2023-2027). GA no. 101084377. pp. 122



Photo Credits: FORZA from the Fem4Forests solution

03

Insights from the RURACTIVE Solutions Catalogue



Insights from the RURACTIVE Solutions Catalogue

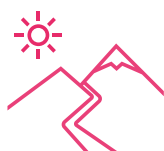
As part of the RURACTIVE project, partners were asked to submit solutions from their communities which addressed some of the key challenges in rural areas. RURACTIVE conceives solutions as place based established practices, products, processes, actions, models of governance, decision making practices, initiatives, policies and plans made up by one or a combination of various forms of innovations that drive rural communities towards a sustainability transformation. This resulted in the RURACTIVE Solutions Catalogue, which therefore provides a variety of insights and identifies key patterns across the different solutions in relation to their background information, and the challenges they target.

Background

Respondents to the Catalogue questionnaire were asked about the gender composition of the team leading the solutions. The results of this help us to characterise women-led innovation. Among the more than 400 solutions in the Catalogue, only 40 were identified as led by women. This comparatively low number might be due to incomplete records in a high number of entries, discrepancies on how solutions were reported. Thus, the insights in these pages are to be understood within the context of women-led innovation rather than rural innovation more generally.



9.2% are
women led



51.3% in
mountainous
areas



42.5% are
implemented at
municipal or
supralocal/county
scale



25% are
led by local
associations
/ NGOs



52.5%
target
women

What are the solutions about?

In the catalogue people were asked to consider the area of rural development their solution was tackling. Typically, solutions in rural areas are associated with agriculture, whereas RURACTIVE considers solutions across a wide range of rural development drivers (RDDs). The themes respondents could select were: sustainable multimodal mobility; energy transition and climate neutrality; sustainable agri-food systems and ecosystem management; nature based and cultural tourism; culture and cultural innovation. Rural women are active across all of the RDDs, with some being more common than others:

- The most common focus for women-led solutions is **local services, health and wellbeing**, with 62.5% solutions tackling this. Within the solutions that tackle this challenge, over half (64%) involve some form of **employment or employability initiative**, and just under half (44%) include **education** in some form.
- There were other themes common for women-led solutions. Just under half (40%) were identified as **driving nature based and cultural tourism**, and just under a third (27.5%) drive **sustainable agrifood systems and ecosystem management**.



Social and Environmental goals

In improving rural life, solutions can also begin to tackle wider societal and environmental goals. Respondents were asked to consider whether their solution addressed any of these, what are termed ‘cross cutting priorities’: climate change adaptation; climate change mitigation; protecting biodiversity; social justice and inclusion.



92.5% addressed **social justice and inclusion**. Within these solutions, **78.4%** encourage **education and training**



27.5% protect **biodiversity**



10% involve **adapting to climate change**



10% involve **mitigating against climate change**

Types of Innovation

In tackling the challenges identified in local rural areas, solutions can provide new approaches to address challenges. Respondents were asked to consider whether their solution involved any of the following innovations: digital/technological; social, organizational or governance; or financial and business models.



85% involve **social, organisational and governance innovation**. Within these solutions, nearly three quarters (**73.5%**) respond to **neglected or new social needs**. **Half** generate **closer or new social relations**.



55% involve **financial and business models innovation**



42.5% drive **digital and technological innovation**



25% involve **technical innovation**

Enablers and Barriers

The success of a solution can be influenced by a range of factors. Respondents were asked to consider whether their solution was enabled or faced barriers as a result of a series of listed factors.



52.5% highlighted the importance of **availability of funding and resources** as an enabler



37.5% felt a **lack of funding** to either start their solution or maintain/upgrade their solution was a barrier



Photo Credits: GrowBiz

Spotlights on Women-Led Innovation



About the Spotlights

In Spring 2025, seven inspiring women leading initiatives in the RURACTIVE Dynamos in Sweden, Greece, Scotland, Ukraine and Spain, shared their experiences and insights of leading innovations in their respective countries. This was through an online questionnaire and a focus group, which five of the women attended. Their answers included their motivations and what they would like for future generations of women innovators.

Therefore, this section provides a spotlight for the women innovators who are behind solutions that are driving change in their communities. These spotlights represent an interesting range of types of sectors, organisations, and ultimately solutions from which women innovators contribute to the rural economy, going beyond the traditional agricultural related industries.

Despite their heterogeneous environments and foci, all their stories contain threads of hope and strength and give us a glimpse of what it is like to be a women in this space.

To highlight their numerous talents, we now welcome you to read about these inspirational women.

Therese Wilhelmsson

Energy Bag: Supporting households to improve their energy efficiency in Sweden



Gotland, Sweden



Organisation:

Local public body
'Energicentrum'



Beneficiaries:

General public,
including all
groups at risk of
exclusion

- In response to rising energy bills, as well as concerns around the climate crisis, EnergyBag was created by Gotland's energy consultancy, EnergiCentrum to enable Gotlanders to introduce energy efficient measures in their homes.
- Often the tools used to help monitor inefficiencies in the home are expensive, and so the EnergyBag was devised to give Gotlanders access to these tools to help understand how to make their homes more energy efficient, saving them money on heating, and reducing waste emissions in the process.
- The Bag that has been produced is free to borrow from all of the island's libraries. Because of its' success, the reservation list is now over 15 weeks long.

Therese, who is part of EnergiCentrum is the lead on the 'Energy Bag' solution. Having drawn inspiration from another similar initiative in Sweden, Therese and the team developed the EnergyBag to suit their context, producing a solution that was sought after by the local community. The process of doing this was smooth, and the initiative has been well received by both partners and users. The solution has had a positive impact on women in Gotland as they are able to reduce energy bills by working to detect inefficiencies in the home. In providing them the tools to do this, women are given the opportunity to learn new skills, the importance of which is highlighted below:

"We have a high level of gender equality in Sweden, but I do believe this solution helps make it easier for women to feel confident in trying out technical tools that are typically used by men. Expressing that women dare to try technical tools helps normalize women's involvement in technology, which can inspire more to take the first step."

Reflecting on the influence of women-led innovations in the process, Therese highlighted how women-led initiatives generally are a source of inspiration in both her personal and professional life, shaping how she views leadership and innovation.



Is there anything you would do differently if you were to start over?

"I probably should have tried to think even more "outside the box" from the very beginning, in order to enable synergies with other solutions. In addition, I would have looked for more opportunities to create value for the user. That's the direction we're working on now."

Ana Sanchez

Monitoring of the elderly with sensors in their homes in rural areas in Spain



Zamora province,
Spain



Organisation: Local
public body
'Diputacion de
Zamora'



Beneficiaries: Older
people, women.

- This solution provides additional support to help older people age successfully in their homes by using sensors throughout the home to help detect when assistance is needed, as well as the use of a 'Silver Caregiver' who monitors the sensors, as well as providing company, and assistance with daily tasks.
- Using an Internet of Things system, older people's quality of life is ensured, whilst allowing for independence and privacy.
- The success of the project also creates new jobs for carers, the majority of whom are women, who are often empowered locals who receive training in the project.

Ana Sanchez is the leader of this solution, and with over a decade of experience designing and implementing initiatives focused on the Silver Economy, she saw an opportunity to make a difference in a place where over half of Zamora's inhabitants are over 50.

Her solutions' success has resulted in the solution being cited in specialized publications and has drawn the attention of European innovation networks on ageing, such as **AGE Platform Europe**, **Rural Digital Europe**, and the **European Green Deal's demographic branch**.

As well as supporting older people, Ana's work has helped provide employment opportunities for young women in rural areas by using a decentralised model for services that allows women to become entrepreneurs in areas like catering, laundry, or home assistance.



"I've actively collaborated with numerous women-led initiatives in rural entrepreneurship and social innovation. Many of these have been linked to Zamora's Silver Economy ecosystem, where female leadership has been essential — particularly in professionalizing care services, managing local support structures, and co-creating participatory innovations in community health."

When asked what she would do if she were to start again, Ana identified the need for political buy-in from the beginning to ensure long-term scalability and sustainability. More structured political involvement from the beginning could help ensure they had all the necessary budgetary and regulatory frameworks to scale up.

Ana's initiative has had a number of direct impacts on several key aspects of gender equality:

- **Changing gender roles:** professionalising care work, something that has historically been informally and female, makes it into a recognised career path.
- **Improved access to employment and training:** the solution involves the development of training programmes in 'Silver Care', promoting stable employment within rural areas.
- **Active participation in decision-making:** caregivers, technicians and community leaders are actively involved in improving services, rebalancing roles in local power structures
- **Empowerment in rural settings:** model encourages women to become entrepreneurs in home support services, generating income and enhancing their professional status.

Jackie Brierton

GrowBiz: Driving Entrepreneurship in Rural Scotland



Scotland



Organisation:

Community-based enterprise, established as charity



Beneficiaries: Women, young people, long-term unemployed

- GrowBiz Scotland provides free support services for those considering becoming self-employed, starting or growing an existing small business or social enterprise in rural Scotland
- With more than 14 years of expertise, GrowBiz has developed a unique approach to community-based support for sustainable rural entrepreneurship in Scotland. GrowBiz has identified 4 key areas : support under-represented groups, eradicate digital exclusion, build self-sustaining peer networks and challenge age-old perceptions of rural.



Jackie, who has just retired, led GrowBiz for 14 years. Throughout her career she has promoted women's business ownership and development, including women-led initiatives.

GrowBiz provides support for women to gain financial independence, assistance in accessing land, resources, entrepreneurial support, as well as training and education to help with upskilling/reskilling. The success of GrowBiz's clients results in more women taking on leadership or decision-making roles in Scotland's rural communities, increasing their influence.

Throughout her time at GrowBiz's helm, Jackie has faced several challenges, such as accessing funding and achieving recognition for their work. Her position at the forefront of driving rural business development in Scotland has given her insight into the experiences of and the challenges for women in the space, both structural and attitudinal. Reflecting on how the context for women-led innovation has shifted over her own career, she identified many of the same structural barriers that existed 20 years ago.



"it's rare for some kind of positive impact not to come from networking".

Using networking and lobbying, Jackie has worked to address the following:

- Expanding the definition of what constitutes 'innovation'. Scotland's innovation-led economic strategy is often focussed on high tech innovations rather than more traditional female industries. If women do foster solutions, there is a tendency for them to be dismissed as "little projects" rather than diversification efforts that are essential for the local economy
- Rates for women starting businesses are low (less than 20%) due to barriers of acceptance, access to finance, childcare and social services, as well as societal attitudes to women running businesses
- Business support organisations often have a higher uptake amongst men. GrowBiz does not have explicit branding as a woman's organisation, but the 75% female team have attracted a client base where over 60% are women-led. This support can be both generic and tailored to the gendered challenges these businesses can face.

Lesya Loyko and Natalia Voloshyna

FORZA: Elevating women in the forestry sector in Ukraine



Ukraine



Organisation:
NGO



Beneficiaries:
Women

- FORZA are an NGO aimed at promoting sustainable development of the Carpathian region in Ukraine.
- The organisation is involved in a series of projects that help women in the forestry sector, which has traditionally been seen as a male sector. This work helps to increase the visibility of women, valuing their role in society, and training and empowering them to play more of an active role in the forestry sector.
- Their work now also involves working as part of the Ukrainian Dynamo in RURACTIVE to continue their work empowering rural women.



Lesya and Natalia's work involves being managers, supporters and organisers of activities relating to women empowerment.



Drawing on their deep knowledge of the area, Lesya, Natalia and their partners in FORZA and other organisations are able to begin to tackle some of the biggest challenges facing women in the region. These challenges, and potential ways to combat them include:

- Rural areas often have more traditional attitudes to women's roles: women often handle the majority of the housework, childcare and care for the elderly, leaving little time to develop innovations. When women do enter the workforce in traditional industries like forestry, they are often given the tasks men do not want.
- Raising awareness about women that are able to have both a career and children is needed to disrupt dominant perceptions – realistic role models can be pivotal in this.
- To effect real change, men need to be brought on board about the current loss to rural areas that having women as an untapped resource is causing.

Utilising both formal and informal networks, a process which is integral to driving change, work is being done to address these challenges. Partnerships include: the partnership in the coalition 1325 on a regional level; participation in the Women Fund in Ukraine; partnership with other women-led innovations during implementation of activities or the promotion of women-led innovations via communication channels.

All of this work culminates in tangible improvements in Carpathian women's lives. For example:

- New income or job opportunities
- Women gaining financial independence
- Women accessing land, resources or entrepreneurial support
- Opportunities for women to learn new skills or digital tools
- Women taking on leadership or decision-making roles
- Training, reskilling or upskilling for women
- Increased voice or influence or women in community decisions
- Reduction of gender stereotypes or discrimination

Dimitra Papaioannidou

She Moves Mountains: Empowering mountain women in Greece



Zagori, Greece



Organisation:

Social Cooperative
Enterprise
'Ecomuseum
Zagori'



Beneficiaries:

Women

- She Moves Mountains is a project aimed at empowering marginalised women in the mountainous region of Zagori through fostering a supportive environment, highlighting the vital role they play in maintaining the region's traditions and practices.
- The project involved providing the women with skills and tools for personal and career growth, as well as establishing a Women's circle to exchange experiences.
- Work to increase the visibility of women in the region involved a Live Story Sharing Event where they shared their stories with a wider audience, including local businesses, helping to foster connections and lead to new opportunities.



Dimitra has a deep connection to the Zagori region and has witnessed firsthand the challenges faced by women living in the mountainous area, noting how often their contributions were overlooked or undervalued. Having participated in the British Council's *Stronger Together: Leadership for Gender Equality*, Dimitra used these tools, and her experience through the EcoMuseum Zagori when working with the community to create 'She Moves Mountains'.

Dimitra is involved in networks with women both in Zagori and further afield. She finds them useful because they "create spaces for exchange, empowerment and collaboration".

Whilst there have been some difficulties during the process, She Moves Mountains has evolved organically, growing from challenges faced to drive the impact it now has.

The process of developing this innovation has been both challenging and rewarding. Reflecting on the factors needed for success, Dimitra highlighted the need for build trust within the community first. To overcome this barrier, designing a locally led, participatory process is key.

Whilst bottom-up approaches are essential to responding to local challenges, Dimitra highlighted the need for better support at a policy level to help drive this change by creating an enabling environment.

Dimitra and her team's work has had an impact on women in the community in a number of ways:

1. Helps women in Zagori connect with new networks and opportunities, especially in tourism, crafts and agriculture, boosting visibility and economic potential
2. Through the Women's Circle participants gain communication, storytelling and self-presentation skills that support personal and professional growth
3. Gives value and public recognition to women's roles in cultural preservation, caregiving and agricultural heritage in traditionally unpaid and invisible work
4. Sharing their stories publicly helps women gain confidence and visibility, encouraging active participation in local decision making and leadership
5. The initiative challenges traditional gender roles in a male-dominated region and creates inclusive spaces for women across generations and backgrounds to be heard and empowered

Caron Ironside

Perthshire Artisans: Cultivating a community of local artists in Scotland



Perth and
Kinross,
Scotland



Organisation:
Community-
based enterprise
'GrowBiz'



Beneficiaries: All
Groups

- Founded in 2020 as a way to help support small, creative businesses in the Perth and Kinross area, Perthshire Artisans is a community of artisans that meet both in person and online, and who are part of a curated platform for selling their products.
- For a small fee, members are able to build a strong brand and share information, knowledge and peer support to others. The platform also promote the artisans, their creative processes and products to the wider public, as well as providing a curated, e-commerce platform for the artisans to sell their products.
- Online and in person events boost artisans' confidence, helping them feel valued, supported, heard and connected.

Caron, having worked in a creative support role for five years within Perth and Kinross, running Perthshire Creates- an online platform supporting cultural activities throughout Peth and Kinross- had worked with GrowBiz on a couple of occasions. In early 2020 became an Enterprise Facilitator for GrowBiz to support clients in the creative sector and lead the Perthshire Artisans Platform which had launched in 2020.

Growing organically and responding to members ideas in a collaborative sense, the platform, the team behind which are all women, offers real value. As benefits have grown as the solution has grown, the strong foundation of support has remained.

Because of the nature of the creative industry, being predominantly women, the solution has a significant impact on the female participants' lives, as careers in the creative sectors are made more feasible through increased business:



"80% of the members of Perthshire Artisans are female, so inevitably there's a gender bias, this is due to a lower number of men working full time in the creative sector. So, whilst working as a creative is a precarious choice in terms of regular income, the platform is supporting, encouraging and enabling some members to make the choice to combine their creative practice as a business, often alongside other part time work."

In her own professional journey, Caron has been involved in organisations led by women, noting management style and how she was made to feel valued for her contributions and commitment were key in her progression. Discussing the barriers to women leading innovations, she highlighted lack of self-belief. However, the shift towards younger women becoming increasingly confidence and rural areas need for diversification provide an opportunity to break down this barrier

The solution has:

- Created new income streams or job opportunities for women
- Facilitated women gaining financial freedom
- Trained, reskilled or upskilled women
- Provided opportunities for women to learn new skills or digital tools



Photo Credits: Alisa Smyrna from the Dobra Nuc Bead and Bike solution

05

10 Key Learnings



10 Key Learnings

The experiences of each of these different women provide valuable insight into women-led innovation and the factors needed to help other women lead innovations of their own. Here are 10 of the key takeaways from their experiences and our discussions with them:

1. Expand the definition of innovation

Conventional understanding of what counts as ‘innovation’ lean towards traditionally masculine industries. An expansion of the definition would allow women and society to see that their innovations and their scale of implementation is legitimate.

2. Acknowledge gendered caring responsibilities

Women are often expected to take on the majority of the unpaid labour in the home, including cleaning and childcare. This often ‘invisible’ burden leads women to have less time to spend on driving innovation – steps need to be taken to acknowledge and address this.

3. Develop strong, supportive communities

Communities made up of women who provide support to help one another grow and progress, this is important for building and strengthening institutional preconditions for scaling out and up of these experiences.

4. Appreciation for women's contribution to the rural economy

Shifting away the perspective of women run small scale innovations are not legitimate businesses and instead recognise their vital economic contributions that allows residents to remain and work in their local community.

5. The need for self-confidence

One of the biggest barriers to women getting involved in innovations is a lack of self-confidence. Even once they have started innovations, it can feed into, for example, asking for less money to fund their solutions. Work needs to be done to challenge a lack of self-confidence.

6. Shift from women being seen as the anomaly in innovation

Unless specifically focusing on female innovators, policymakers and society more generally default to assuming innovation is masculine. This oversight results in policy that is not fit for purpose. Perceptions of who an innovator is need to widen.

7. Networking opportunities

Networking opportunities will allow women to learn and grow from others who have similar experiences and circumstances. Networking also provides those starting out with realistic role models to draw inspiration from.

8. Access to funding

Financial capital is essential for both starting and growing innovations; awareness and the confidence to apply for the appropriate funding will allow for women to be successful in their field.

9. Combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches

Whilst women rooted in their communities have deep insight into the challenges, and the potential solutions, an innovation's success also relies on an enabling policy environment. Governments need to work to address the systematic barriers which women face within the innovation space.

10. Tailored Ambassador Programmes

Ambassador programmes are important to both elevate existing innovators and to inspire those who may consider a similar path in the future. The key to such programmes' success is to ensure that ambassadors have access to resources and training to enable them to fully participate in support programmes and reach their target groups.



06

Collection of Women-Led Solutions



Collection of Women-Led Solutions

As part of the RURACTIVE project, we have developed a Solutions Catalogue showcasing solutions to rural challenges across Europe. Within this collection of 437 solutions, 40 were identified as being women-led. What follows is a collation of these women-led solutions to highlight the important work of women innovators across Europe, solving varied challenges. Additional information on the solutions in the catalogue can be accessed using the QR code on the right.



Guide to navigating the solutions:

Name of the solution

💡 If consulting this booklet online, click on underscored names will take you to the initiative's website

Where the solution is located

Leading organisation

Groups targeted and beneficiaries


Aims and activities and what the solution is about


Check the QR code to get more details in the RURACTIVE Factsheet about specific solution


Rural development theme

💡 Find the correspondence of logos and solutions organised by themes in the next page.



EchoLoci
Source: via RURACTIVE partner

 Zagori, Greece

 Led by: InnoPolis

 Beneficiaries: Other

- Using Citizen Science, this solution involves locals and visitors recording biodiversity, using sound and images through an app. The aim is to conserve biodiversity using these novel participatory means, fostering learning and a sense of responsibility of the natural and cultural environment by the public.
- This responsibility and connection is cultivated with raised awareness of the local biodiversity on offer, linking biodiversity to a cultural identity. As part of this process the project raises awareness of traditional practice of mobile pastoralism
- Because of the Citizen Science aspect, there is the potential to ensure anyone that wants to contribute can do so through the app.



Solutions by theme



Nature based and cultural tourism

• Bed and Bike Tours , Ukraine	28
• EchoLocj , Greece	29
• Listen-Touch-Feel , Greece	33
• Livo School- Village House , Finland	33
• Noszvaj Folktale Route Hungary	34
• Pannonian Nature Experience Days , Austria and Hungary	35
• Perthshire Artisans , United Kingdom	35
• Poru-Panuma Reindeer Farm , Finland	36
• Programme for subsidisation of Social and Solidarity Economic Entities , Greece	36
• Sardinia Spop Tourism – valuing rural tourism-related companies in Sardinian depopulated areas , Italy	38
• Viu Els Ports – Experiences based on local products , Spain	40
• Women Branch of the Vakıflı Village Cooperative , Turkiye	40



Sustainable agrifood systems and ecosystem management

• 24/7 REGIOmat , Austria	27
• Agricultural service cooperative in Snidavka , Ukraine	27
• Artel 13 – Reviving a depopulated village , Bulgaria	28
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24/7 REGIOmat

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Waiern, Carinthia,
Austria



Led by: Diakonie GmbH



Beneficiaries: People
with Disabilities

- 24/7 REGIOmat is a solution that involves the installation of 24/7 vending machines in Styria, which are filled with local produce.
- Building on other similar innovations in other parts of Austria, the vending machines offer local farmers the opportunity to market and sell their products, whilst also fulfilling local consumers' desire to shop locally.
- The successful sale of 17,000 products over 18 months has led to the roll out of further products, with new jobs created to support the upkeep of the vending machines, addressing the current personnel shortage.



A guide for running a ride-sharing service

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



West Gotland Region,
Sweden



Led by: Fyrbodal
Association of Local
Authorities- local
public body



Beneficiaries: all
groups

- Developed as part of a wider project named 'Tur&Retur' (Round trip) which explored finding new sustainable mobility solutions, this innovation involves a guide for how to run a ride-sharing service.
- Within the guide, there is information for how a person/group can initiate and run a ride-sharing service, as well as the option for an app (Freelway) which can be used to help facilitate this. The guide also contains practical steps to initiate and run the service, including tips on doing a pre-study defining project owner and scale, how to find financial backing in the short and long term, as well as considerations for planning the implementation and activating the service.



Agricultural service cooperative in Snidavka

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Snidavka, Ukraine



Led by: ASC Snidavka



Beneficiaries:
Women, Young
people, Older people,
Long-term
unemployed and
General public

- The cooperation was created in 2019 in the remote village Snidavka.
- Utilising local traditions, culture and natural heritage, ASC Snidavka developed a tourist route, creating a cooperative to provide services along the route.
- The aim of this is to provide income generation opportunities to support local economic development, preventing depopulation through the provision of economic opportunity.



Artel 13- Reviving a depopulated village

Source: *DESIRA GNOME*



Kiselchovo, Bulgaria



Led by: Artel 13 Association



Beneficiaries: General public

- Kiselchovo is a small, isolated village in the Rhodope Mountains and had 12 residents. As a result, the villagers suffered from a lack of social services, no local shops and social isolation.
- Artel 13, a Bulgarian not for profit has worked to develop the village into a tourist destination with the help of volunteers, opening an arts and crafts centre in the heart of mountains. They have also renovated several old houses, converting them into guest houses. Other tourist activities have sprung up including hiking trails, horse tours and accommodation. Artel 13 have also launched an arts programme which includes themed workshops including local crafts, history, traditional meals and music.
- The result of Artel 13's work allows locals to profit from rural tourism activities and increases people moving there.



Baba Residence

Source: *via RURACTIVE partner*



Bulgaria



Led by: Ideas Factory- NGO



Beneficiaries: Young people, Older people

- Baba Residence connects older people from depopulating villages with unemployed youths. The project involves 20 unemployed young people going to live for 4-6 weeks in older people's homes. Learning crafts and working with locals to create new innovative ideas for a product, service or event to attract interest to the village, the connections allow for knowledge exchange. They also write a diary to inspire themselves and others for how to help revive villages.
- All participants receive training for human centred design, social entrepreneurship, systematic and design thinking and skills in ethnological field studies. With these skills, they are able to develop their original idea or develop a new one to provide solutions for the area.
- Those with the best innovations become part of the Laboratory for Baba-Innovations, where assisted by mentors, develop and accomplish their idea.



Bed and Bike Tours

Source: *via RURACTIVE partner*



Zakarpattia, Ukraine



Led by: Private entrepreneur



Beneficiaries: Young People, General Public, Other specific groups

- Bed and Bike Tours involves the creation of a tourist guide in Zakarpattia, as well as guides for elsewhere.
- Bed and Bike Tours are done with ethnographic tours.
- In boosting tourism through increased interest by the guide, it generates local income.



EchoLoci

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Zagori, Greece



Led by: InnoPolis



Beneficiaries: Other

- Using Citizen Science, this solution involves locals and visitors recording biodiversity, using sound and images through an app. The aim is to conserve biodiversity using these novel participatory means, fostering learning and a sense of responsibility of the natural and cultural environment by the public.
- This responsibility and connection is cultivated with raised awareness of the local biodiversity on offer, linking biodiversity to a cultural identity. As part of this process the project raises awareness of traditional practice of mobile pastoralism
- Because of the Citizen Science aspect, there is the potential to ensure anyone that wants to contribute can do so through the app.



Energy Bag

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Gotland, Sweden



Led by: EnergiCentrum
(see page 14)



Beneficiaries: Other

- In response to rising energy bills, as well as concerns around the climate crisis, EnergyBag was created by Gotland's energy consultancy, EnergiCentrum to enable Gotlanders to introduce energy efficient measures in their homes.
- Often the tools used to help monitor inefficiencies in the home are expensive, and so the EnergyBag was devised to give Gotlanders access to these tools to help understand how to make their homes more energy efficient, saving them money on heating, and reducing waste emissions in the process.
- The Bag that has been produced is free to borrow from all of the island's libraries. Because of its' success, the reservation list is now over 15 weeks long.



EPIC- eHealth Project

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Isles of Scilly,
Cornwall, United
Kingdom



Led by: University of
Plymouth- other
(university)



Beneficiaries: Older
people, People with
disabilities, General
public, Other specific
groups

- EPIC, led by Uni of Plymouth and funded by European Regional Development Fund (2017-2023) focuses on strengthening digital health ecosystem.
- The project has supported research and development-led growth in enterprises, working closely with health and care users, workers and commissioners to develop useful solutions and adopt technological developments in health and care.
- As a result, it has created jobs and truly useful solutions.
- The collaborations allows for solutions such as wearable devices, smart home devices and environmental sensors, platforms that provide remote healthcare etc.



Fem4Forests: Forests in Women's Hands

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Zakarpatska, Ukraine



Led by: Slovenian Forest Institute



Beneficiaries: Women

- Part of an international project, funded by the EU, Fem4Forests aims to learn about the experiences of women in forestry and forest management to identify best practices of women empowerment, developing and testing tools to help women reach career goals.
- In testing out different pilot actions, female forestry professionals and female forest owners are able to engage in a network of new best practices.



Garden Courtyard in Waiern

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Waiern, Carinthia, Austria



Led by: Diakonie GmbH



Beneficiaries: People with Disabilities

- Garden Courtyard is a small farm and employment workshop which employs people with disabilities.
- Those who work there grow, harvest and sell high quality organic vegetables created on the farm, gaining useful skills and economic independence.
- The farm also offers the chance for visitors to get out into nature, as well as meeting people and attending workshops/seminars.
- The solution provides opportunities for disabled people to engage in agriculture, gardening, processing, marketing and selling, meeting various people and the vegetables produced also supply other initiatives.



Garfagnana Community of Food and Agrobiodiversity

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Garfagnana, Italy



Led by: Garfagnana Community of Food and Agrobiodiversity



Beneficiaries: General public, Other specific groups

- Social promotion association aimed at enhancing and promoting local agrobiodiversity.
- Included on the 'National Register of Food Districts, since 2022 the association provides a place for community members to develop skills, promote local economic circuits and support the sharing of knowledge between members. The group define strategic projects, promote training and education towards the local community, as well as influencing policy.
- They have also created tourist itineraries to promote local agrobiodiversity.



GeR- Ganaderas en red (Network of livestock women)

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Spain



Led by: individual livestock women-informal group



Beneficiaries: Women

- GeR is a network that aims to provide support to female livestock farmers and shepherds across Spain, helping them to overcome barriers related to their profession, and barriers specific to women in the sector. This support is provided through the collecting, exchange and dissemination of knowledge and experiences to help innovate and become more competitive. The network meet for regional meetings and training, fostering a supportive environment, boosting self-esteem.
- As well as providing support through their networks, GeR also seeks to increase awareness of women in the area, challenging the idea of 'machismo'. To do this, the network is active on social media, as well as using campaigns addressed to administrations to help influence policymakers. In broadcasting the work of those in the networks, GeR challenges the view of livestock being associated with men.



GrowBiz

Source: via SIMRA, RURACTIVE partner



Scotland



Led by: Jackie Brierton (see page 16)



Beneficiaries: All groups

- GrowBiz Scotland provides free support services for those considering becoming self-employed, starting or growing an existing small business or social enterprise in rural Scotland.
- With more than 14 years of expertise, GrowBiz has developed a unique approach to community-based support for sustainable rural entrepreneurship in Scotland. GrowBiz has identified 4 key areas : support under-represented groups, eradicate digital exclusion, build self-sustaining peer networks and challenge age-old perceptions of rural.
- GrowBiz also champions a number of additional solutions, including Perthshire Artisans, REDS, WRAP.



Integrate All- Sewing

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Sierra del Segura, Albacete, Spain



Led by: Local Association 'Entre Todos por la Integracion Sociolaboral en la Sierra del Segura'



Beneficiaries: Women

- The solution, created by a local association aimed at promoting local development (with collaboration from other key actors of the area), trains people at risk of social exclusion in general social and labour skills.
- The first of these programmes, 'Costurizate' focuses on training women in dressmaking skills. The 'Costurizate' course has run twice so far, with 17 women involved in the first run, and 21 in the second.
- Its success led to it being selected by a programme of national awards, granted by one of the biggest banks in Spain. As a result of the solution the company has created 6 jobs for people at risk of social exclusion.



Italian National Forum of Social Farming

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Italy



Led by: Italian National Forum of Social Farming



Beneficiaries:
Women, Young people, Older people, People with disabilities, General public

- The forum aims to bring together different initiatives in social farming and find better ways to communicate among different groups (farming, social services and health providers).
- Bringing together associations, farms and people into common space, the forum advocates for improvement of services for disadvantaged, people with disability, youth, women and elderly in the agricultural sector. Part of this involves the development of a Charter of Principles of Social Agriculture as point of reference.
- The group has carried out conferences, provided space for development of new legislation, created training courses and peer to peer exchanges, as well as connected at an EU level with DG Agriculture and European Rural Network. Supports numerous initiatives developing around social farming with goal of sharing knowledge and info and facilitating creation of networks.



Learning-growing-living with female farmers

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



South Tyrol, Italy



Led by: Associazione delle Donne Coltivatrici Sudtirolesi



Beneficiaries:
Women, Young people, Older people

- This solution involves the creation of a cooperative on a farm to provide childcare for female farmers.
- As well as providing daycare, some of the cooperative members have expanded their farms to become a place of learning for children to receive an environmental education with direct engagement with agricultural resources and the environment as teaching elements. The hands-on approach engages children, developing their awareness for environmental, sustainable and rural resources in the process.
- The service includes individually adapted care accommodating up to 6 children, flexible care hours, integration into the family structure, summer care as well as care for children at different events. There are currently 106 active day carers who are organised in the social cooperative. Its success has meant it has now been extended to also offer elderly care in 2014.



Lika Women's Social Cooperative

Source: SIMRA



Lika-Senj County, Croatia



Led by: n/a



Beneficiaries:
women

- A cooperative of women, this solutions offers them the opportunity to earn money through selling traditional crafts.
- Under the brand name 'Curly Sheep', members manufacture natural and unique handmade products, making use of natural and recycled materials from the surrounding areas.
- By using near-forgotten trades to produce a variety of products such as clothing accessories, souvenirs and more practical items, local traditions are passed on to the next generation: culture is preserved at the same time as economic opportunities are provided.



Listen-Touch-Feel

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Zagori, Greece



Led by: EcoMuseum Zagori



Beneficiaries: People with Disabilities

- "Listen-Touch-Feel" is an educational activity from the EcoMuseum Zagori which increases access to local heritage for those who are visually impaired.
- Designed for this specific group, the activity involves an interpretive tour and audio walk of the Three Stone Bridges of Zagori. Complimented by 3D printed models that they can inspect whilst guides provide additional information and sound recording models, participants are given the opportunity to engage with local heritage in new ways.



Livo School- Village House

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Livo village, Pudasjärvi, Finland



Led by: Livokas ry (Village of Livo association)



Beneficiaries: all groups

- This solutions aims to provide basic services and hub for local people.
- The village had experienced the erosion of local services provision, including the elementary school in the 1990s. In early 2000, Livokas ry, a village association bought the school and transformed it to become a village hall.
- Relying on voluntary work, it has a small grocery store, cafeteria, secondhand store, library, rooms for hobbies and crafts, small petrol station and caravan park. Also rents accommodation and space for events, boats and canoes as well as arranging a variety of events.



Mobile bike repair shop

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



West Gotland Region, Sweden



Led by: Fyrbodal Association of Local Authorities- local public body



Beneficiaries: all groups

- As part of the wider Tur&Retur' (Round trip) project, the guide for running a ride-sharing service, the aim of this particular solution is to increase access to bicycle repair services in rural areas to increase the number of people cycling regularly.
- By bringing repair service to them, the threshold for getting a bike repaired is lower. The intended impact was to increase the access to bicycle services as a means to increase cycling in the Orust municipality.



Monitoring of the elderly with sensors in their homes in rural areas

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Zamora, Spain



Led by: Diputacion de Zamora (see page 15)



Beneficiaries:
Women and Older people

- This solution provides additional support to help older people successfully in their homes by using sensors throughout the home to help detect when assistance is needed, as well as the use of a 'Silver Caregiver' who monitors the sensors, as well as providing company, and assistance with daily tasks.
- Using an Internet of Things system, older people's quality of life is ensured, whilst allowing for independence and privacy.
- The success of the project also creates new jobs for carers, the majority of whom are women, who are often empowered locals who receive training in the project.



Mushroom picking association

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Tabuyo del Monte, León, Spain



Led by: five local women



Beneficiaries:
General public

- Set up by five local women, this solution has created local employment and stemmed depopulation through selling wild, organic mushrooms from the mountains and from farms. The company, "Del Monte de Tabuyo" uses mushrooms for their own restaurant, online and local shop.
- The company is provided wild mushrooms from a local cooperative. The mushrooms bought have strong connections with the territory and collaboration with local cooperative, whose members pick the mushrooms and organise courses.
- The production process is supplied from renewable energy source and products are gathered from surrounding areas or farms, that cultivate using techniques based on tradition and organic farming. Economic opportunities that have arisen create employment and therefore allowing for sustainable populations.



Noszvaj Folktales Route

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Noszvaj, Heves, Hungary



Led by: Noszvaj Tourism Association and young women interested in folktale therapy



Beneficiaries: General public

- This solution has created a 'folktale' route in the area to help drive tourism. As part of the development of this route, the project also created a 'folktale' accommodation brand with special requirements for quality.
- As well as boosting tourism, the route also seeks to preserve local heritage and stories



O4O (Older People for Older People)

Source: via SIMRA and RURACTIVE partner



Several countries



Led by: University of the Highlands and Islands



Beneficiaries: Women, Young people, Older people, People with disabilities, General public

- O4O was a project aimed at supporting communities to meet the service and support needs of their older citizens, exploring the possibility and potential benefits for communities to develop and initiate services for older members of the population.
- Alongside working with communities to develop social enterprises (facilitating community entrepreneurship), O4O also aimed to tackle negative perceptions of older people among communities.
- A toolkit was created with a step-by-step instruction to help communities create projects that will meet the needs of older people in remote rural communities. A range of projects, sensitive to local needs were created including transport schemes, community radio and IT training.

Pannonian Nature Experience Days

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Burgenland, Austria and western Hungary



Led by: Burgenland Tourism GmbH



Beneficiaries: Young People, Older People, General Public

- An annual event, it lasts for three days throughout Burgenland and offers visitors insight into the nature on offer.
- Pannonian Nature Experience Days were initially created in 2011 by Burgenland Tourism, boosting tourism in the area by increasing access to the natural beauty nearby. From 2017, the Nature Experience Days were also extended into Hungary to show off the entire western Pannonian region.
- The event has also collaborated with other key tourism activities, such as cycling and water tourism to boost the industry further.
- Between 2017 & 2019 over 50 nature experiences were offered, with 6,000 visitors attending. Part of this success is down to innovative advertising strategies and an online booking tool to help reach new groups.

Perthshire Artisans

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Perth and Kinross, Scotland



Led by: Caron Ironside, GrowBiz (see page 19)



Beneficiaries: General public

- Founded in 2020 to support small, creative businesses in the local area, Perthshire Artisans is a community of artisans that meet both in person and online, and who are part of a curated platform for selling their products.
- For a small fee, members are able to build a strong brand and share information, knowledge and peer support to others. The platform also promote the artisans, their creative processes and products to the wider public, as well as providing a curated, e-commerce platform for the artisans to sell their products.
- Online and in person events boost artisans' confidence, helping them feel valued, supported, heard and connected.



Poru-Panuma Reindeer Farm

Source: via *RURACTIVE* partner



Panuma, Northern
Ostrobothnia, Finland



Led by: Oinas-Panuma
family



Beneficiaries: Women,
Young People, Older
People

- This farm provides tourism services at their wilderness farm around the year. Founded by the Oinas-Panuma family, the women have created alternative income streams beyond the traditional reindeer herding tasks done by the family men.
- Building on their long history of small-scale farming and reindeer herding in the area, the innovators have spent the last 25 years expanding their focus to offer tourism accommodation, services, catering and wilderness programmes.
- Whilst the male family members continue traditional responsibilities, the women have diversified income streams through a focus on tourism.



Programme for subsidisation of Social and Solidarity Economy Entities

Source: via *RURACTIVE* partner



Zagori, Greece



Led by: EcoMuseum
Zagori



Beneficiaries: General
Public

- The programme aims to increase tourism to the region, targeting different forms such as conference tourism and research tourism, domestically and within Europe. The museum has also developed educational programmes tailored to curricula to increase school tourism.
- In attracting people, they can foster knowledge exchange and collaboration, which can lead to economic growth and innovation in the area, whilst also fostering an appreciation of local heritage.
- The programme attempts to reach out and accommodate for those with disabilities and the elderly to ensure inclusivity and accessibility.
- This process of expanding tourism locally and internationally resulted in three new jobs and has diversified tourism base.

RurAbility- the voice of rural youth

Source: via *RURACTIVE* partner



Gonnosfanadiga,
Sardinia, Italy



Led by: Associazione
Culturale G_elevato2-
local association



Beneficiaries: Young
people, Older people,
People with
disabilities, General
public

- Inspired by the European Youth Goals, the solution provides young people the opportunity to realise their potential in the rural areas they grew up in. The project involved developing tools and enhancing skills to make young people's voices heard. Competitions, such as the one to create the RurAbility logo, took place throughout the project, with expert panels involved in judging them.
- The result of this was a blog written by local youths on topics of interest, as well as the virtual and real creation of a Narrative Path, which gathers stories from locals about the area's history (from the mid 1900s to present).
- As well as providing their own stories, young people connected with their elders through the sharing of stories.





Photo Credits: Franca Bernardi and Lucia Giovannetti for the solution Garfagnana Community of Food and Agrobiodiversity.

Rural Enterprise Directory Scotland (REDS)

Source: via RURACTIONE partner



Scotland, United Kingdom



Led by: GrowBiz



Beneficiaries:

Women, Young people, Older people, People with disabilities, Migrants and minorities

- The Directory, created by GrowBiz following the effects of Covid-19 on small businesses across rural and island Scotland, aims to help businesses thrive in a sustainable and resilient way.
- Featuring a diverse range of enterprises, REDS is the only comprehensive directory of Scotland's rural businesses.
- Through membership of REDS, businesses have access to promotional work by GrowBiz, one-to-one enterprise support (both from GrowBiz and their national network of partners) and collaboration designed specifically for the challenges encountered by businesses operating in rural and island areas.





SAIA (SmartAgriHubs) - Sensoring and AI Algorithms for Early Crop Disease Detection

Source: *DESIRA GNOME*



Portugal



Led by: Wageningen University & Research



Beneficiaries: Women, Other specific groups

- A Flagship Innovation Experiment developed within the SmartAgriHubs project leveraging digital tech for early detection of plant pests in grapevines, cork trees and olive trees. The technology assess key tech for crop observation such as remote sensors, AI tech and weather forecast models – establishes data patterns of symptoms to create risks maps that support farmers in mitigating negative environmental impacts of production.
- The result of creating this map is early detection, as well as minimising the use of pesticides and other chemicals.
- Within the SmartAgriHubs project there was a Gender Task Force that, at the end of the project, launched the [Gender Alliance for Innovation in Agriculture](#) (GAIA).



SardiniaSpop Tourism - valuing rural tourism-related companies in Sardinian depopulated areas

Source: via *RURACTIVE partner*



Sardinia, Italy



Led by: RU.RA.LE. Association for Social Promotion



Beneficiaries: rural hospitality and tourism-related companies

- SardiniaSpop Tourism was created in 2020 funded by the European Solidarity Corps, and carried out by 6 young women originally from the area who wanted to encourage people into their depopulating area.
- It aims to use 'pop' ways of communication (graphical and written) to share the work of local businesses to try and encourage tourism, as well as aiming to create a network of small rural tourism/hospitality related companies in small villages of under 3000 inhabitants. All of the companies involved were mapped, and then came together for an event, with promoters trained and assisted by a 'community manager' to help design and facilitate the work. Identifying companies' needs and desires, they could co-produce solutions, creating prototypes and potentially implementing them.



She Moves Mountains

Source: via *RURACTIVE partner*



Zagori, Greece



Led by: EcoMuseum Zagori (see page 18)



Beneficiaries: Women

- She Moves Mountains is a project aimed at empowering marginalised women in the mountainous region of Zagori through fostering a supportive environment, highlighting the vital role they play in maintaining the region's traditions and practices.
- The project involved providing the women with skills and tools for personal and career growth, as well as establishing a Women's circle to exchange experiences.
- Work to increase the visibility of women in the region involved a Live Story Sharing Event where they shared their stories with a wider audience, including local businesses, helping to foster connections and lead to new opportunities.



The Growing Club

Source: via SIMRA



Galgate, Lancashire,
United Kingdom



Led by: local female
business owners



Beneficiaries:
Women

- The Growing Club provides business support to female business owners, sole traders and founders.
- The founder, a businesswoman from Lancashire felt many coaches are not attuned to the experiences specific to women.
- Starting out as a Lancashire-wide conference to help network with other local businesswomen, The Growing Club now runs multiple programmes that cover business training, and a 12-month funded project focusing on how to start and grow a sustainable business. Support is targeted at women and specific vulnerable groups, such as domestic abuse survivors, those with mental health struggles and recently released prisoners.
- Run by 7 volunteer trustees and with a team of volunteers who mentor start-ups, help with admin, evaluate work and fundraise, over 40 women have been supported.



These Legs Are Made For Walking

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Ranua, Northern Finland



Led by: Reindeer
Herding Cooperative,
Niemelä



Beneficiaries: Other
Specific Groups
(reindeer herders,
shoemakers)

- The profitability of the long tradition of reindeer herding in Northern Europe is currently under threat by increased land use, surge in predators and impacts of climate change.
- This solution involves the set-up of a slaughterhouse in Ranua to capitalise on the leg skin business- shifting slaughter practices to profit from leg skins, creating more revenue streams, e.g. from shoemakers in Mongolia.
- The slaughter model adopted in Ranua was attuned to the local issues identified by reindeer herders.
- The result of this solution is a diversification of income, whilst remaining compatible with traditional practices of the reindeer herding livelihood.



Training Programme Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) “Rebuild Ukraine”

Source: via RURACTIVE partner



Switzerland



Led by: Bern University
of Applied Sciences



Beneficiaries: Women,
Migrants and minorities,
Refugees.

- The training programme “Rebuild Ukraine” aims to prepare ‘leaders of change’ for post-war Ukraine, adopting ‘building back better’ principles endorsed during the Lugano Recovery Conference (2022). Ensuring participants acquire knowledge on sustainable and resilient reconstruction practices.
- Involving 20+ partners from diverse sectors participants learn about key areas involved in rebuilding, from principles of circular economy, to energy efficiency, and smart villages and cities.
- The project fosters collaboration between Swiss companies and universities, along with Ukrainian stakeholders to co-design rebuilding projects.



Viu Els Ports- Experiences based on local products

Source: via *RURACTIVE* partner



La Mata de Morella,
Castellón, Spain

- This solution involves the creation of tourist attractions to help boost the local economy. Inspired by local, seasonal products, ecotourism options are developed based on experiences of these offerings.



Led by: Local entrepreneurs

- One example of this is a beekeeping tourism project in Villores which introduces visitors to beekeeping, showcasing its value and using workshops to demonstrate the practice. Interest in the products generated by the experience also helps boost sales of local products.



Beneficiaries: General public, Other



Women Branch of the Vakıflı Village Cooperative

Source: via *SIMRA*



Hatay- Vakıflı
Village, Türkiye

- Vakıflı, the only remaining Armenian village in Türkiye is home to only 135 people. This solution, which was created in 2002, when women of the village came together to create a woman branch of the church, to sell home-made products to tourists visiting the church, has worked to help the village's future.



Led by: Women
Branch of the
Vakıflı Cooperative

- In selling jams, liquors, pomegranate syrup and olive oil, the group has created livelihoods, making living in the village more sustainable. Inspired by the women's success, Vakıflı Cooperation was founded in 2004 by villagers.



Beneficiaries:
Women, General
public

- The innovators started to work as the Women Branch of the Cooperative, with, their products now sold in a small shop in İstanbul. The success allows for the preservation of culture as living there is economically feasible. Cooperative became well known and a short documentary. Success fostered positive intercultural relationships.



WRAP® - Wellness Recovery Action Plan

Source: via *RURACTIVE* partner



Fife and Perth and
Kinross, Scotland,
United Kingdom

- WRAP® is a training programme and personal plan to help support wellbeing, with useful tips for daily life. Developed in the USA in the 1990s, GrowBiz received funding from the Scottish Government to train 60 people in Perth and Kinross and offer 10 of these people to become trainers.



Led by: GrowBiz

- Following the funding, GrowBiz has continued to run workshops and taster sessions to provide rural business owners the tools to manage their mental health. They have now run over 13 workshops to over 140 people in Perth and Kinross and Fife. As well as this, the organization supports other local organisations to access funding to deliver WRAP® workshops to their communities.



Beneficiaries: all
groups

- Participants report positive experiences, feeling more able to cope with potential difficulties of being a rural business owner.



Photo credits: Sabrina Tomasi from the SardiniaSpop Tourism solution

07

More Resources on Rural Women-Led Innovation




More Resources on Rural Women-Led Innovation

RURACTIVE is not the only European Funded project which pays attention to women-led innovations in rural areas. Across different programmes, there are several others which seek to support women-led innovation and elevate women voices to demonstrate that innovation and entrepreneurship in rural areas is a space for all. Check them out if you are interested in women-led innovation and experiences in rural areas!

- **FLIARA: Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas** is a Horizon Europe project that aims to create a European wide rural innovation ecosystem, which supports women-led innovation practices in farming and rural areas. The project has captured more than 200 cases of women-led innovation across Europe, providing insights into their projects and innovation journeys: <https://fliara.eu/innovators/> . The project has developed a toolkit platform that offers accessible resources that facilitates knowledge transfer, learning, and capacity-building for women engaged in innovative practices, as well as for those supporting them: <https://fliara.eu/toolkit/>
Project website: www.fliara.eu
- **GRASS CEILING: Gender Equality in Rural and Agricultural Innovation Systems** is a Horizon Europe project that aims to empower rural women and increase the number of socio-ecological innovations led by women in agriculture, the rural economy and rural communities. The project launched a European Policy Forum for women-led innovation and has developed an online academy a free online learning space which is composed of a variety of learning materials, that include stories and video testimonials on the entrepreneurial experiences of some of the women participating in the project.
<https://www.grassceiling.eu/online-academy/catalogue/video-journeys>
Project website: www.grassceiling.eu

- **SOFAR: Sustainable Rural Regions through Women Social Agripreneurship and Social Farming** is an Erasmus+ project that aims to empower women farmers in the field of social agripreneurship, involving catalysts from academia and NGOs, creating educational and employment prospects for women and marginalized leaders in rural settings. The project has produced a [map of skill needs of rural women in the field of social agripreneurship](#), and a [collection of good practices](#). Their [Social Agripreneurship Guide](#), with 10 training modules, serves as a practical and educational tool to promote sustainable social enterprises in agriculture, with a strong focus on empowering women and fostering rural economic resilience. Project website: <https://sofarproject.eu/>
- **SWIFT: Supporting Women-led innovation in Farming Territories** is a Horizon Europe research-action project on feminist and agroecological innovations. The SWIFT Portal (<https://hub.urgenci.net/swift/>) is a dynamic web space that presents all of the outputs and materials developed within the project, including videos, podcasts, online games, zines, policy briefs and academic articles. Their goal in bringing together these resources is to amplify the social innovations being carried out by women and gender-diverse people in European agricultural territories, to share knowledge, build networks and promote the transformation of agri-food systems. One of the core features of the Portal is the interactive map of innovations for agroecological and feminist futures in Europe (<https://hub.urgenci.net/swift/agroecological-initiatives>). Project website: www.swiftproject.eu
- The **EU CAP Network** published in 2023 a brochure showcasing CAP-funded projects led by women and initiatives that are advancing gender equality in rural areas: https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/rural-women-projects-brochure_en And in 2024, the network organised a workshop to explore, showcase, network and champion innovations spearheaded by women in agriculture and rural areas across the EU. Insights from the sessions were published in https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/publications/eu-cap-network-workshop-women-led-innovations-agriculture-and-rural-areas_en
- **W-POWER: Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in sparsely populated Northern communities**, was an Interreg Northern Periphery and Arctic 2014-2020 project aiming to promote women entrepreneurship in sparsely populated Northern and Arctic communities. The project developed a learning programme and resources and to support women entrepreneurs and a gender-sensitive coaching concept (model and tools) to support advisory bodies to confront existing and potential women entrepreneurs: <https://w-power.interreg-npa.eu/outputs-and-results/> .
- Project website: <https://w-power.interreg-npa.eu/>



Many thanks to everyone who has contributed their stories and experiences, both within the Catalogue and for this Booklet. We hope that insight from this can be used to inspire other female innovators to help drive change in their communities.



RURACTIVE

www.ruractive.eu



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