

15 october  
2024

# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN...

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The General Assembly of the United Nations established the International Day of Rural Women in 2007 to highlight “the critical role and contribution of rural women ... in enhancing agricultural and rural development, improving food security and eradicating rural poverty”.

The celebration provides the opportunity to give a voice to rural women worldwide.

In Italy, women account for more than half the overall population (30 million in 2023), 42% of which living in hilly and mountain areas. Furthermore, a significant portion of women is engaged daily in agriculture.

## Women-led holdings in Italian agriculture: a snapshot from Italian National Statistics Institute data (7th General Agricultural Census)

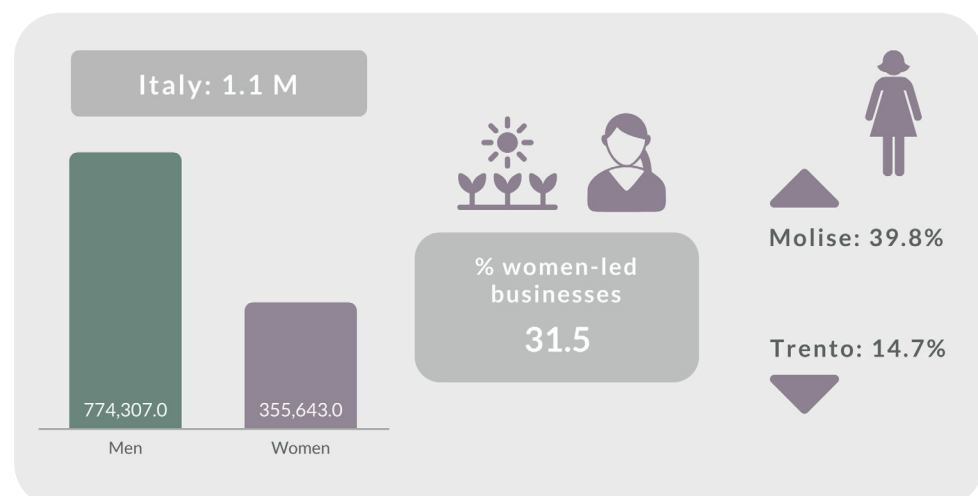
The contribution of women in agriculture is a composite and complex issue, unfortunately characterised and identified by a cultural background often resulting in missed opportunities and by dynamics difficult to perceive due to shortage of available information.

The actual role of women in the primary sector has been (and still is) disguised and remains not adequately acknowledged. Nevertheless, despite these setbacks, women play a crucial role in providing healthy, quality and environmental-friendly products.

At present, the Agricultural Census remains the most comprehensive source of information and allows to give an overview of the presence and relevance of women in the primary sector and outline possible, achieved and ongoing change.

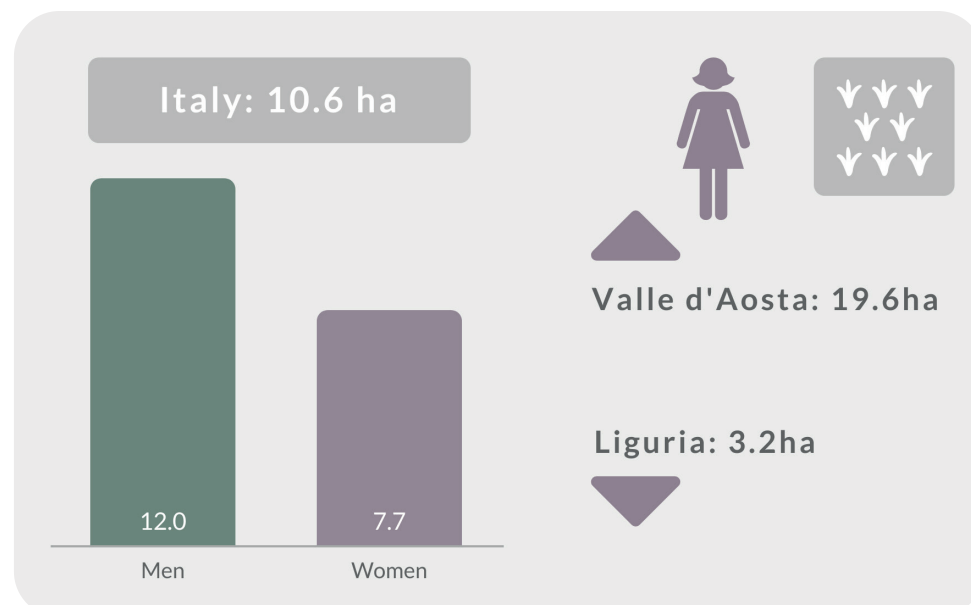
Using 2020 Census data, this leaflet gives insights into the contribution of female-led rural businesses, highlighting women's management choices and paths of growth and emergence.

## Number of farms by gender of farm holder



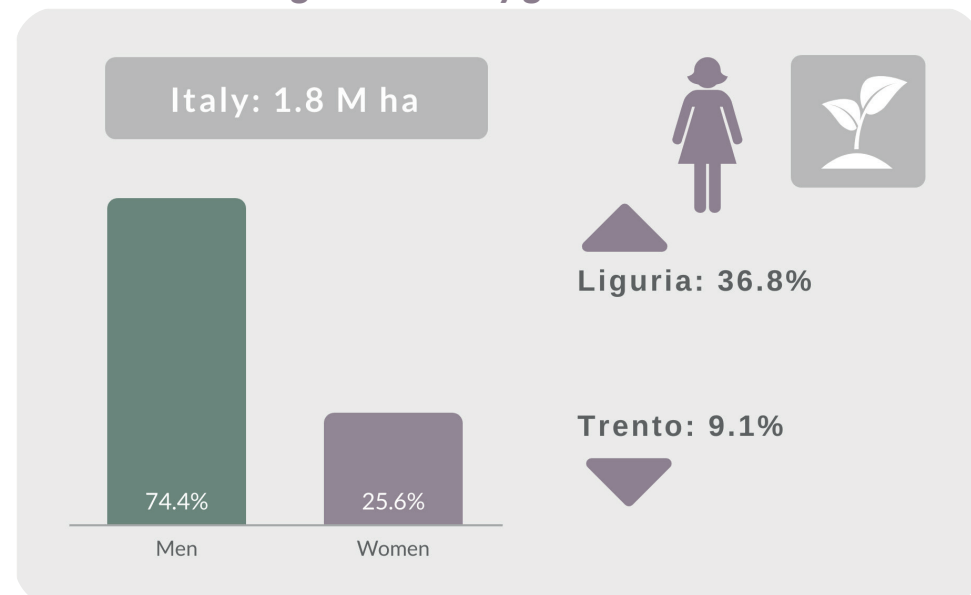
In Italy, women-led businesses account for less than one third of the total (31.5%). National average lies in a range from nearly 15% in the Province of Trento to 40% observed in Molise.

## Average UAA by gender of farm holder



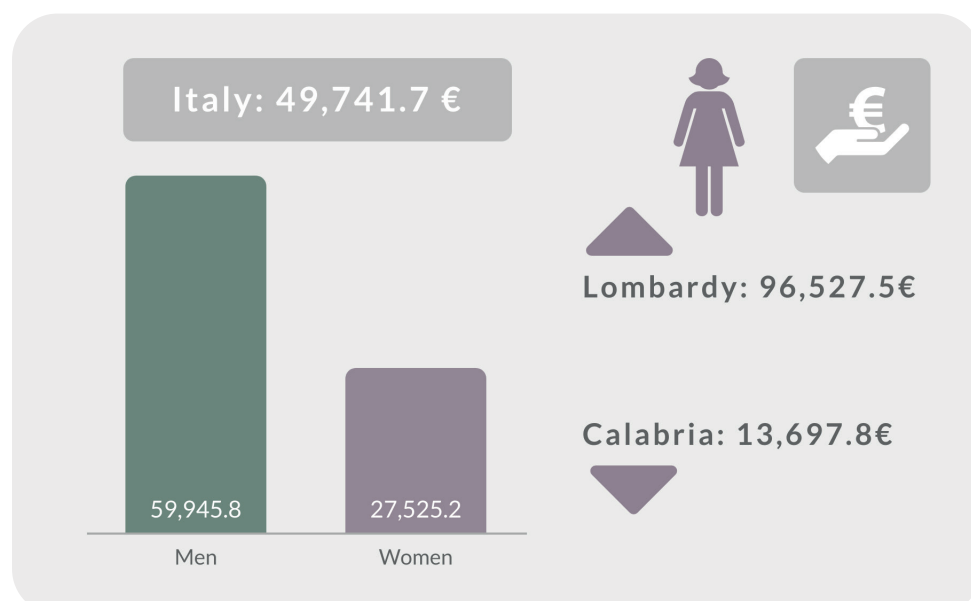
As regards to average farm surface, it should be noted a clear weakness of female-led businesses due to their small size. The average woman-led farm is nearly 4 hectares smaller than average male-led one. Moreover, it is observed a very wide range at national level, varying from Valle d'Aosta, where the largest women-led farms are based, to Liguria, where the smallest average size farms are.

## UAA of organic farms by gender of farm holder



Details on organic UAA widens the gap between women and male farm holders observed in terms of total UAA. Only 25.6% of organic UAA is referred to women-led farms. And this is suggestive of the difficulties faced by women often lagging behind men.

## Average output production of farms by gender of farm holder



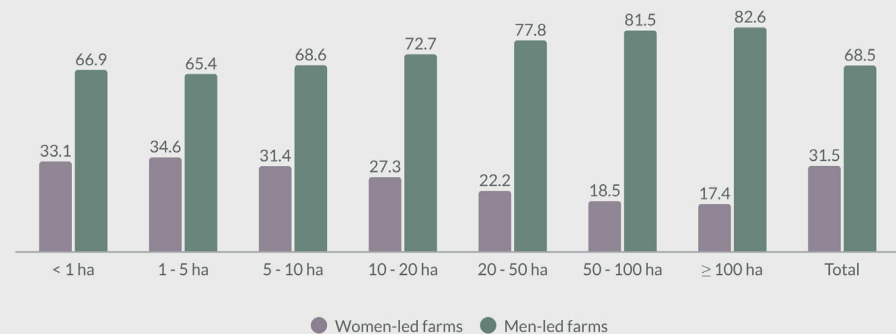
Women-led farms are on average smaller than men-led ones and thus contribute to a lesser extent to the national standard production, namely 17.5%. Nevertheless, interesting cases emerge, such as in Lombardy, where women-led farms lie above national average with a standard production of 96,527 Euros.

15 october  
2024

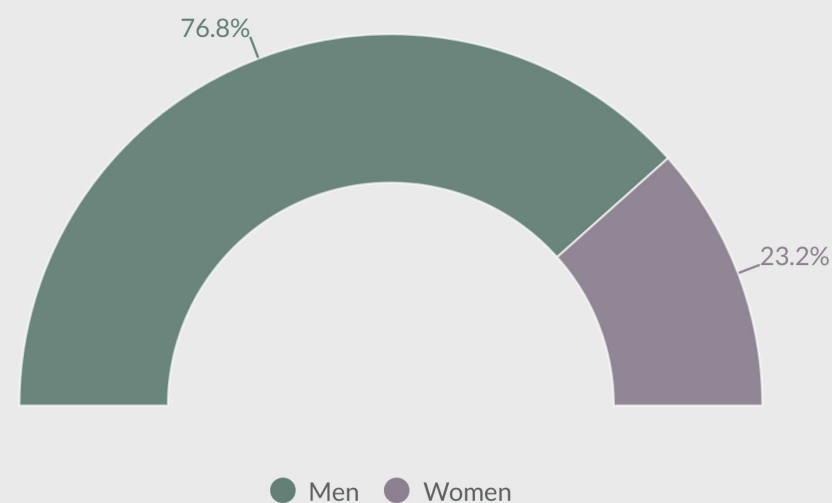
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Farms by gender of farm holder and UAA group (%)

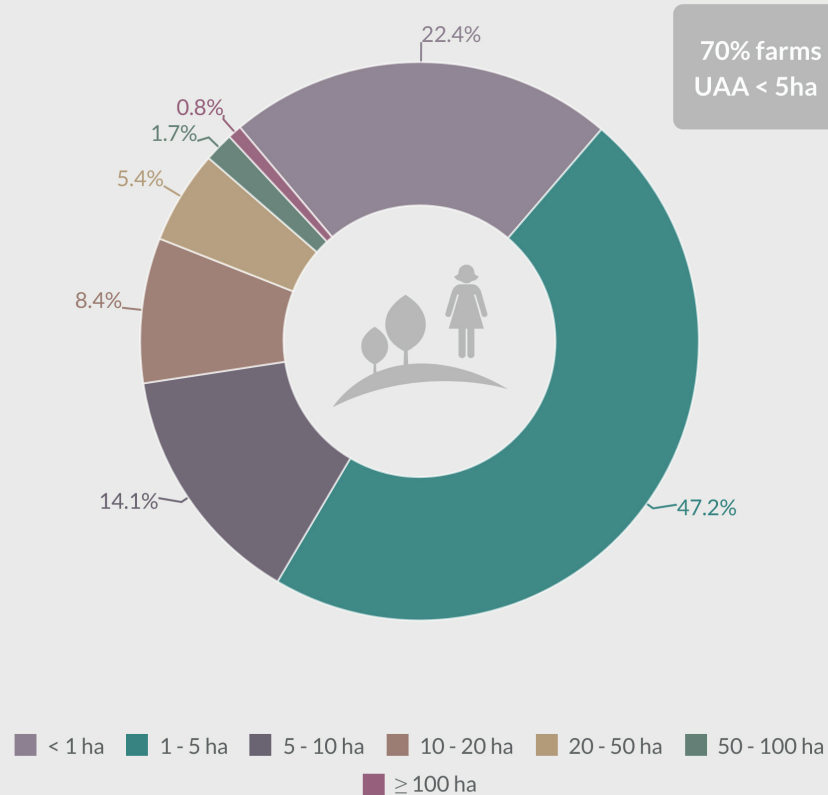


Farms with livestock by gender of farm holder



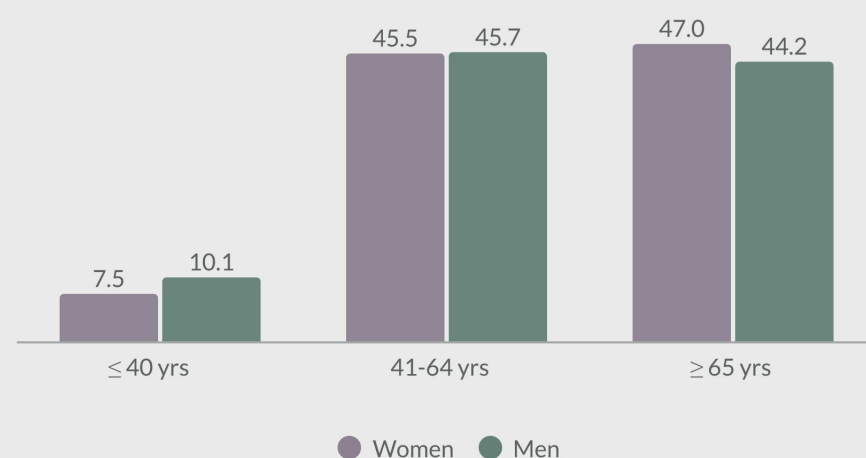
Only 23% of farms with livestock is women-led. Animal farming remains almost exclusively a male domain. However, may we believe that it is so because of lack of adequate skills in women entrepreneurs?

Distribution of women-led farms by UAA group (%)



The distribution by UAA range allows to better specify average farm size. In fact, it emerges that as much as 70% of women-led farms are under 5 hectares and 22% less than 1 hectare.

Distribution of farms by age group and gender of farm holder (%)



Farms by gender of farm holder and typology of association membership (%)



The snapshot of Italian farms with reference to the average age of holders together with membership of Producers Organisations or other associations reveals a certain consistency between men and women, indicating that the problem of ageing in agriculture as well as the reasoning behind the membership to producers' networks involves all the farmers in the same way, regardless of gender.

Distribution of farms by Type of Farming (TF) and by gender of farm holder



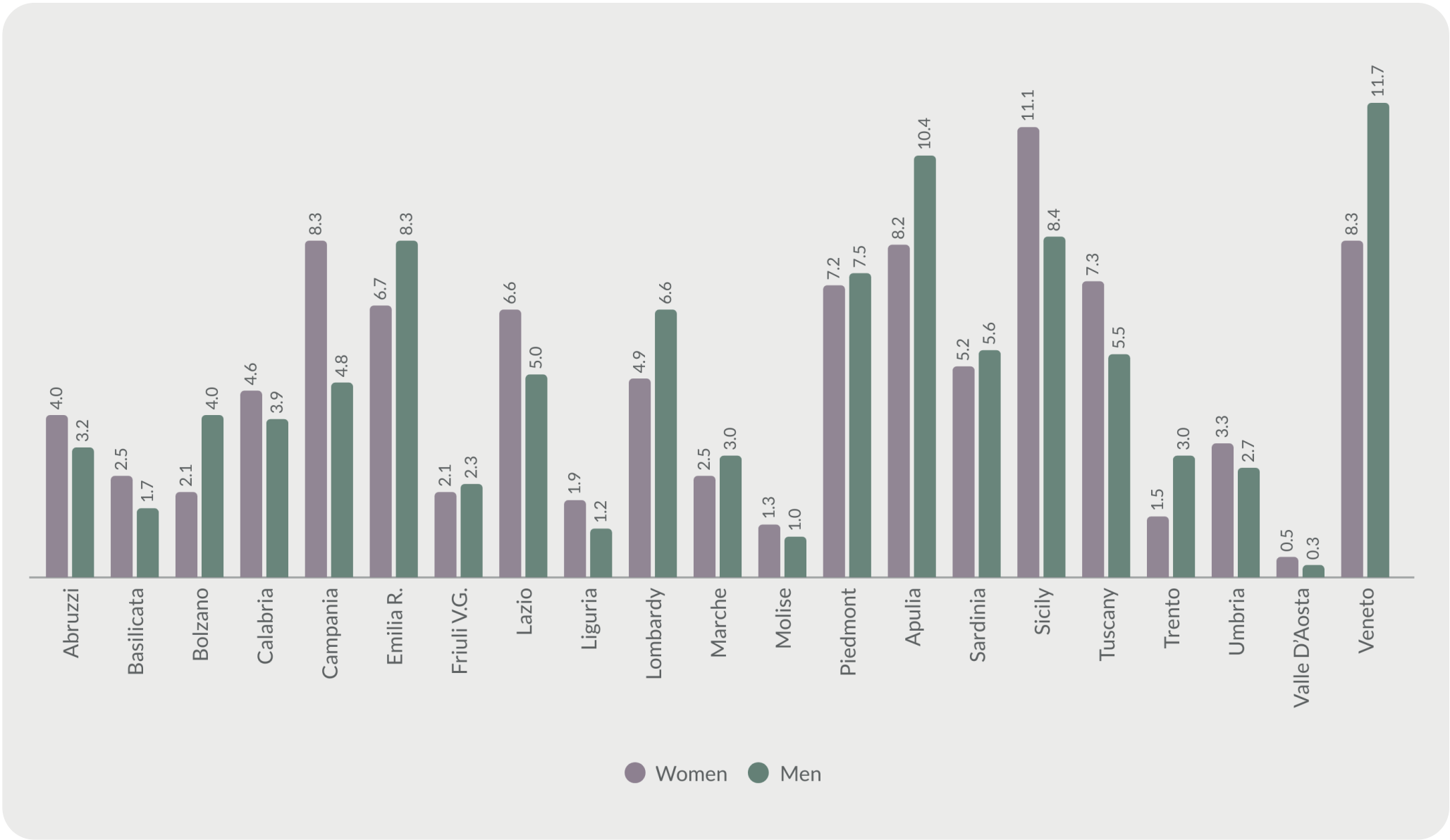
Women-led farms have mainly a mixed Type of Farming (TF). Highest rates are observed for farms with mixed cropping/livestock or non-classified. In principle, these characteristics suggest a more comprehensive, complex and even more expensive management, however in women-led farms (smaller than men-led ones, as already highlighted) easiest solutions may be found thanks to women's ability to organise business processes at the same time on multiple fronts.

15 october  
2024

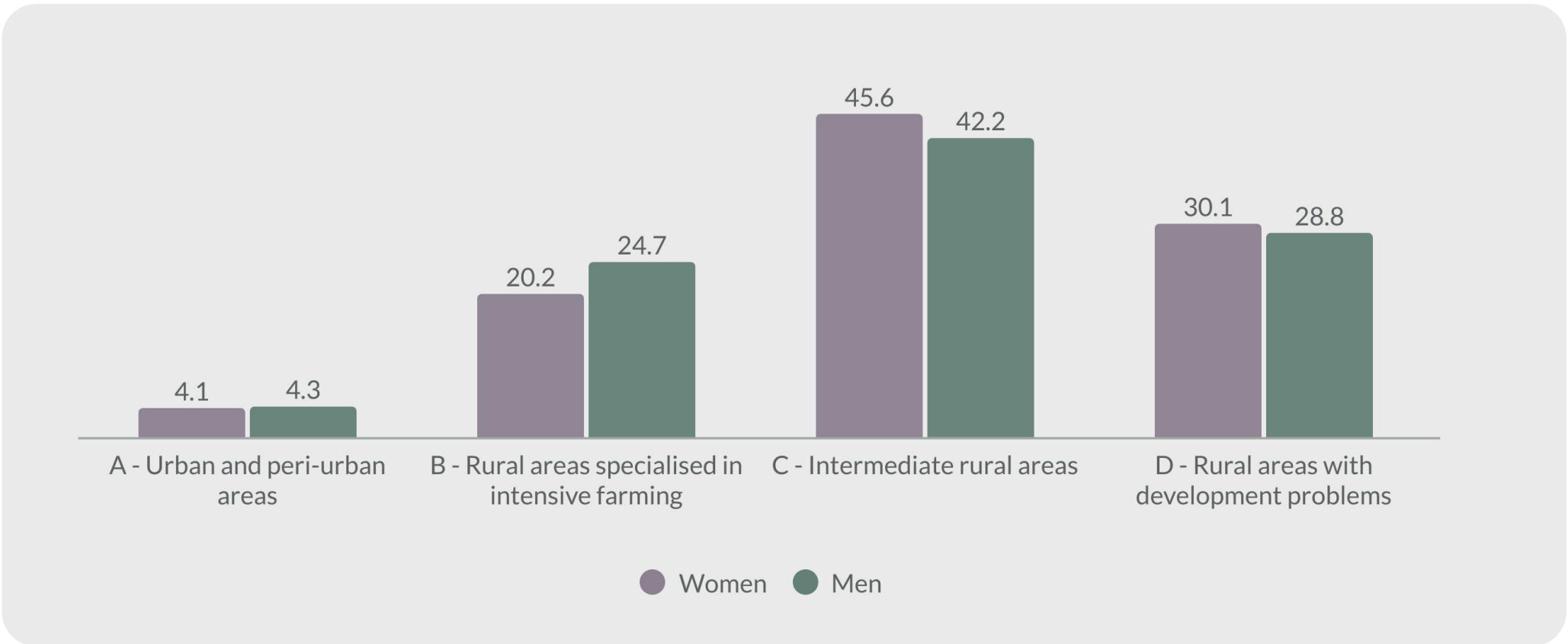
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% of farms with holders that attended training courses



Distribution of farms by gender of farm holder and typology of rural area (%)

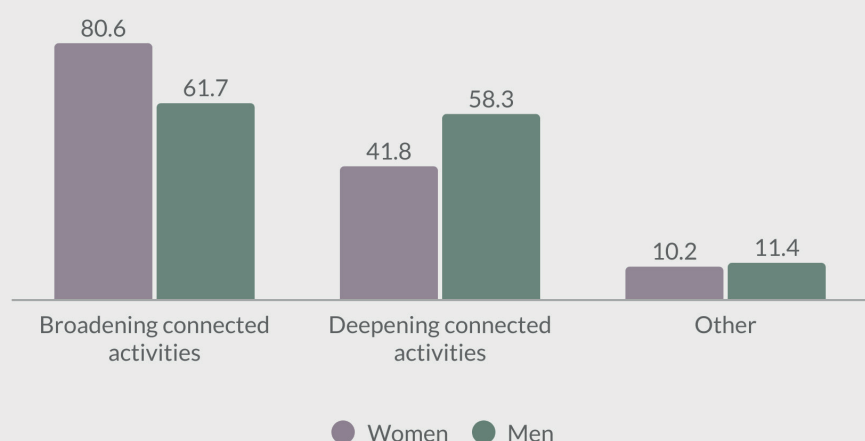


The previous two infographics are interesting since, in a few cases, women entrepreneurs come to the fore compared to men, suggesting virtuous behaviours which differentiate them. The first one allows to assume that women entrepreneurs have greater willingness to keep abreast and undertake training courses. At a territorial level, in several regions the percentages of skilled women entrepreneurs exceed those of men entrepreneurs. The second one, concerning the distribution of farms in the different typologies of rural areas, unequivocally shows that women-led farms are mainly based in intermediate areas and in areas with overall development problems, namely the areas lacking in infrastructures and services and characterised by more vulnerable supply chains. Does it imply that women can better manage situations with scarce resources?

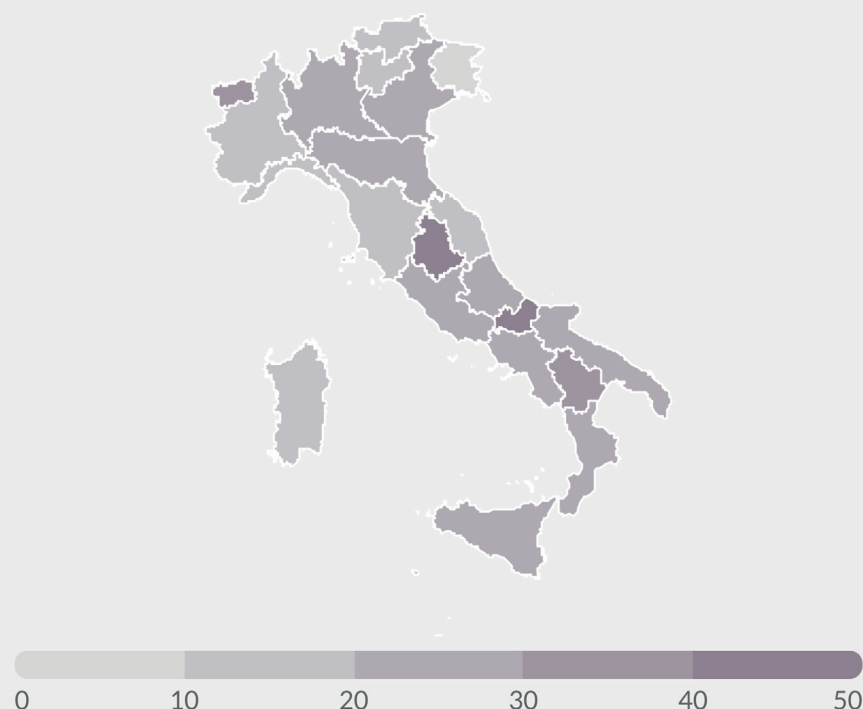
15 october  
2024

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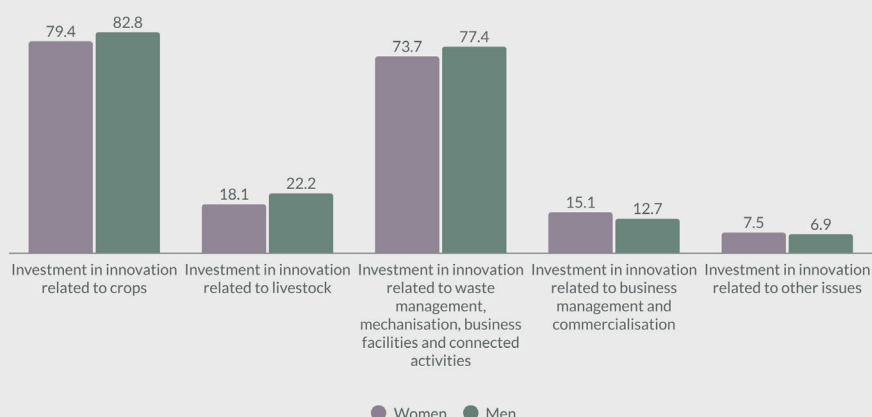
Farms with other gainful connected activities by gender of holder and typology of activity (%)



Rate of farms led by young women entrepreneurs on the total young farm holders (%)

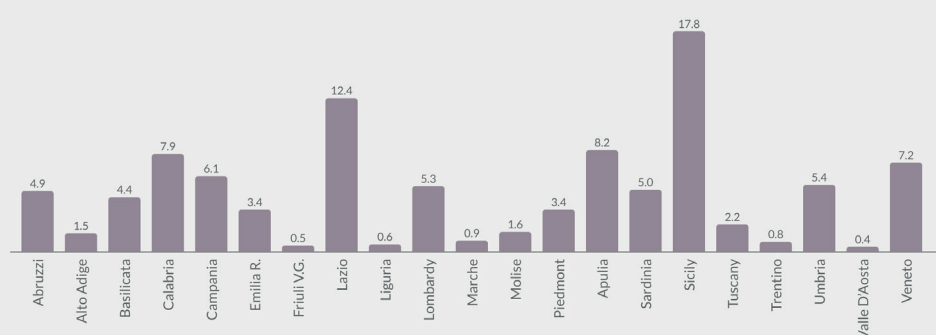


Farms investing in innovation by typology of investment and gender of holder (%)



Regarding multifunctionality and connected activities, data highlight that women-led farms primarily focus on expanding outside of agriculture (broadening), whereas men-led farms mainly develop features closely linked to agriculture (deepening). As concerns the ability to make investments functional to innovation, women-led farms lag behind men-led ones for all innovation typologies considered. Both occurrences appear to contribute to outline women-led farms as structurally more vulnerable and more distant from primary functions of agriculture, as if they were positioned in a kind of subsidiary space carved for them in which also investment and innovation are of minor importance.

Farms led by young women entrepreneurs on the national total (%)



The last two infographics are taken from the Farm Accountancy Data Network (FADN) database and are focused on female and male young farm holders. Keeping in mind that FADN data is based on a sample survey, it can be observed that most of the young women farm holders as a percentage of total young farmers are located in Umbria and Molise. Whereas, examining the territorial distribution of the young women farm holders, it is noted that they are concentrated mainly in Sicily and Lazio. Moreover, FADN data highlight a gap between women-led and male-led enterprises also in economic terms. This is certainly not explained by the lack of entrepreneurial skills, but rather due to challenges ensuing from work-life balance and probably also to impaired access to credit, notably representing the issues which weigh heavily on occupational choices of women.



15 october  
2024

# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN...

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## Women's participation in the CAP Policy

Gender mainstreaming is the process of integrating a gender perspective into the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, programs, and projects across all sectors and levels. The adoption of gender mainstreaming ensures that the concept of gender equality is embedded within policies, rather than being treated a separate self-standing issue.

In the context of the Rural Development Policy, gender equality has always been mentioned in European Regulations, including those for the current programming period (2023–2027). However, its implementation has been largely entrusted to the Member States. The European Commission issued only non-binding recommendations to promote gender equality in the programming of Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) at the national level, therefore the actual adoption of this principle varies greatly.

In Italy, these recommendations were incorporated into incentive measures envisaging reward mechanisms for projects led by women. Despite the limited attention to gender issues in agricultural policy, women have actively taken advantage of the opportunities provided by the RDPs, submitting several innovative projects.

The following insights are based on data from the Annual Implementation Reports (2014–2020), ReteLEADER database, and Regional Development Complements (RDCs) from the current programming period.

## Women Beneficiaries of Rural Development Programmes 2014–2020

The analysis of women's participation in the 2014–2020 Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) suffers from the lack of gender-disaggregated data. At the national level, such data are available only for Sub-measure 4.1 (Investments to improve agricultural holdings) and Measure 6 (Farm and business development).

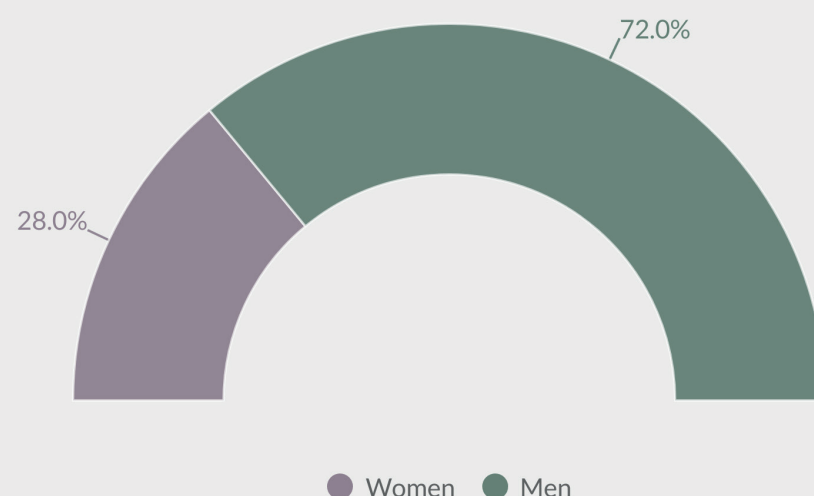
However, monitoring data for specific interventions within Measure 6 — such as generational renewal, farm diversification and multifunctionality, non-agricultural activities in rural areas, and renewable energy production — are aggregated and therefore not available by gender. This limitation hinders a more detailed understanding of women's engagement in these initiatives.



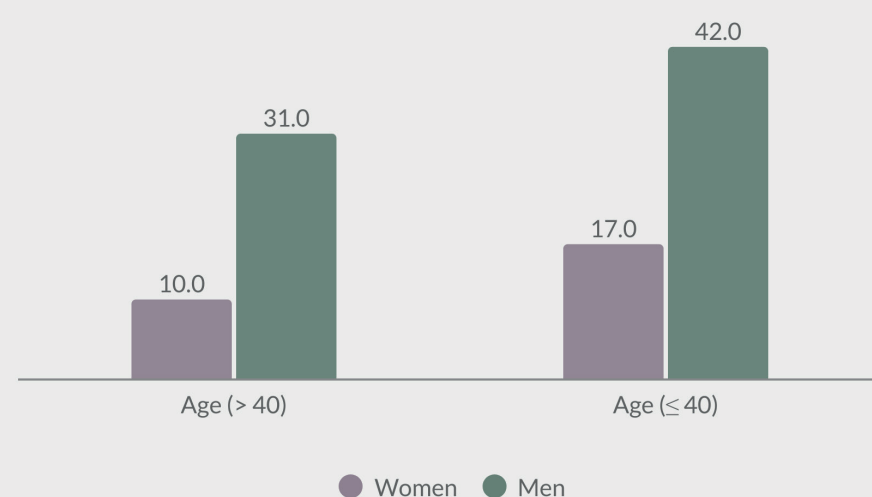
## Sub-measure 4.1 Investments to improve agricultural holdings



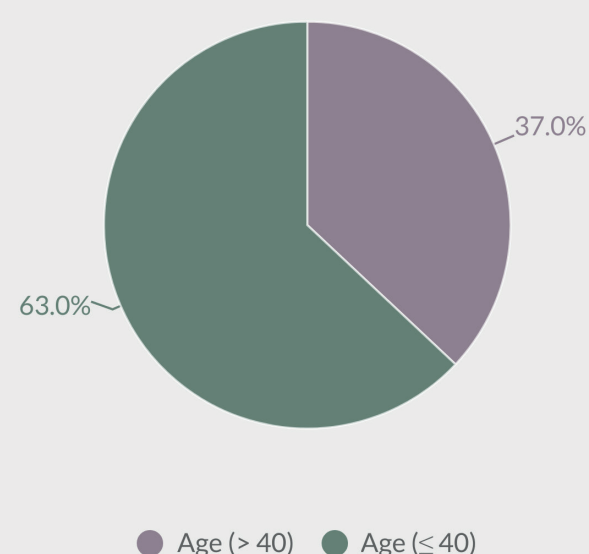
### Beneficiaries by gender



### Beneficiaries by gender and age (%)



### Distribution of women by age



28% of the 33,000 projects financed under Sub-measure 4.1 were submitted by women seeking to enhance the competitiveness of their enterprises. This measure, in fact, supported investments such as the purchase of farm equipment, machinery, and improvements in infrastructure, including electrification, hydraulic and sewage systems, greenhouses, and others. However, only 17% of them were led by young female entrepreneurs, compared to 42% submitted by their male counterparts. Notably, among the 6,000 farms that received financing, 63% were managed by women over the age of 40.



15 october  
2024

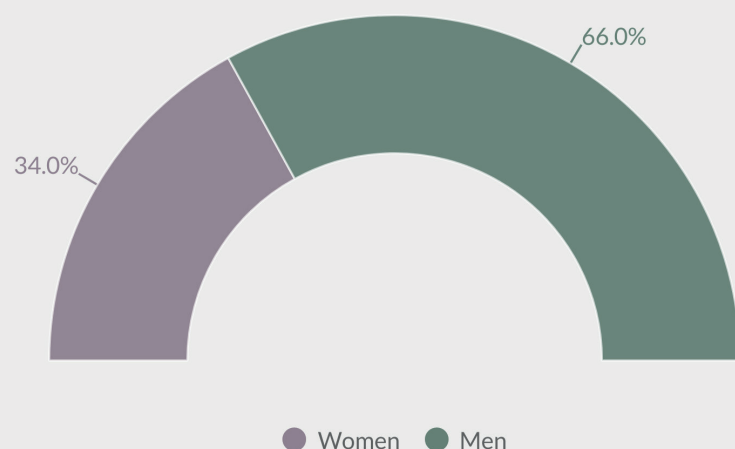
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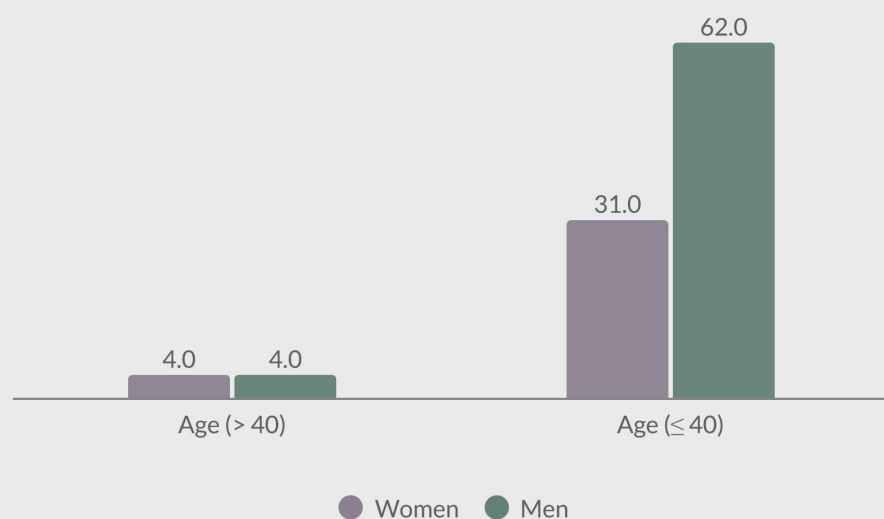
### Measure 6 Farm and business development



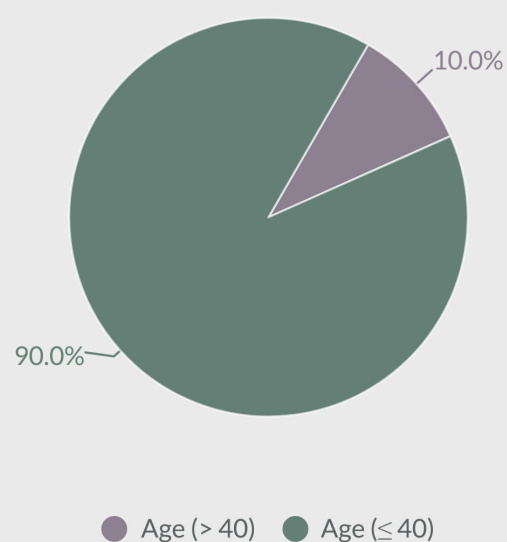
#### Beneficiaries by gender



#### Beneficiaries by gender and age (%)



#### Distribution of women by age



34% of the over 27,000 projects financed under Measure 6 - Farm and Business Development were submitted by women. Most of the recipients were young farmers, 31% of which young women entrepreneurs receiving funds for both establishing new farms and undertaking diversification activities. Notably, 90% of the 8,000 women-led businesses financed are led by young women under the age of 40.

### Gender equality and inclusivity in decision-making processes

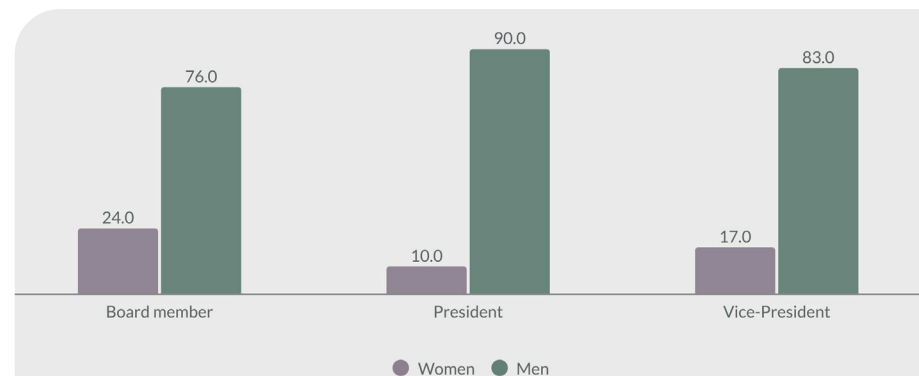
Female presence in policy governance is a key element in ensuring gender equality. The representation of women in institutional bodies, such as agricultural and rural partnerships (e.g., Monitoring Committees), is required by European Regulations. However, this representation is often limited to meeting minimum requirements to satisfy the obligation.

The only exception is the Calabria Region, which actively includes representatives of women divisions of trade organizations as members of the Monitoring Committee.

### The Role of women in LAGs' Boards of Directors

The participation of women in decision-making roles within the LEADER approach — a well-established component of the second pillar of the CAP Strategy — is pivotal to understand the importance of women in the governance of territorial interventions in agriculture and rural development. However, the presence of women in LAGs' (Local Action Group) Boards remains limited. 24% of women hold the position of Board-Member, while men dominate decision-making levels, with only 10% of women appointed as Presidents.

#### The Role of women in LAGs (%)



15 october  
2024

INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN...  
... LET'S LEARN MORE

Reward mechanisms referred to gender equality in the selection criteria of CAP interventions

With the CAP Reform of 2023, DG Agri recommended to integrate the gender principle across all interventions, including those under the first CAP Pillar. Additionally, the use of gender indicators for most interventions was also encouraged. Italy has fully embraced this recommendation by adopting gender indicators for all CAP interventions.

At the regional level, the implementation of gender principles in CAP interventions (Regional Development Complements, RDC) translated into reward mechanisms and priority in selection criteria for projects submitted by women. 18 out of 21 regions have adopted these incentive mechanisms for 20 types of interventions. Most of these interventions with reward mechanisms focus on diversification activities, including both new businesses (non-agricultural startups) and new activities (diversification into non-agricultural businesses).

These interventions were previously included under the former Measure 6. Women's participation in agricultural activities is also incentivised within the animal welfare intervention in zootechnical farms. This highlights the significant role of women in livestock farming.

Intervention	Description	Number of RDCs
SRD03	Non-agricultural diversification	10
SRA30	Animal welfare	9
SRE04	Non-agricultural start-ups	7
SRA29	Organic production	5
SRE01	Establishment of young farmers	3
SRE 03	Starting new forestry businesses	3
SRD01	Investments in Competitiveness	2
SRD02	Climate investments	2
SRD06	Prevention and restoration of agricultural potential	2
SRD14	Non-agricultural productive investment	2
SRA14	Breeders as guardians of biodiversity	1
SRA15	Farmers as guardians of biodiversity	1
SRA18	Apiculture	1
SRA27	Forestry and environmental commitments	1
SRD04	Non-productive investments in environmental management	1
SRD11	Non-productive forestry investment	1
SRD15	Forestry productive investments	1
SRE02	Establishment of new farmers	1
SRG05	Leader preparatory support	1
SRG06	Leader-implementation strategies	1
TOTAL		55

The brochure was edited  
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For more information, click here to visit the [Gender Equality webpage](#)

