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Croatian women driving changes: Are their contributions being recognised?

Croatia

3.1. Introduction

Rural women in Croatia are vital economic and social actors, yet their contributions remain undervalued, unrecognised, and insufficiently recorded. Less than one-third are registered as family farm managers, and their work is often invisible in statistical records. Rural and agricultural policies fail to address gender inequalities, challenge stereotypes, or promote equal opportunities.

Despite these challenges, women are key drivers of rural tourism and social innovation, often acting as change-makers within their communities. This practice abstract sheds light on the position of rural women in Croatia's economy and development, presenting data on their social and legal standing, ownership status, innovative involvement, and representation in policies to highlight the barriers to gender equality.

3.2. Key Statistical Findings

3.2.1. Women's legal position and ownership of capital in agriculture

Women account for less than 30 % of farm managers in Croatia, with this percentage decreasing due to an ageing farming population and the inability to attract younger women to family farming (29.04 % in 2023). Female farm managers are predominantly associated with the smallest economic farm sizes and rarely own land.

Wages for women employed in agriculture, forestry, and fisheries are 90 % of those earned by men in the sector, reflecting a slow narrowing of the pay gap. However, a lack of gender-specific economic data, particularly for rural non-farming women, hampers effective policy-making to address these disparities.

Gender stereotypes and traditional roles limit access to childcare and elderly care services in rural

areas, with one in six municipalities lacking kindergartens and retirement homes serving only 3.68 % of the elderly population. Women's participation in politics and decision-making processes is also notably low.

3.2.2. Women's involvement in innovative initiatives

Statistical records on women's business start-ups, farm diversification, and innovative activities are virtually non-existent. Similarly, there is no standardised public register of Local Action Group (LAG) members.

Nonetheless, case studies reveal that women are pivotal in rural tourism activities and social innovations, such as community-supported agriculture and educational programs on family farms. Women often lead these initiatives as enthusiastic individuals driving positive community change, but their efforts frequently go unrecognised.

3.2.3. Gender dimension in strategic documents

Rural and agricultural policies in Croatia lack measures to promote gender equality or raise awareness of women's rights. Gender mainstreaming is absent from the Croatian CAP Strategic Plan and related documents, which fail to include specific, measurable actions for women.

Although a strategy to promote women's entrepreneurship was in place for 2014-2020, it has not been renewed, and no measurable outcomes have been reported.

3.3. Conclusion

The absence of accurate, gender-disaggregated data and targeted policy measures exacerbates the challenges faced by rural women in Croatia. Despite these obstacles, many women are innovating within rural contexts, addressing environmental, economic, and social issues. However, their contributions remain insufficiently recognised and institutionally supported.

From the lack of childcare facilities to limited political representation, systemic barriers impede gender equality in rural Croatia. Empowering women through better policies, data collection, and public recognition is an essential step toward unlocking their full potential and ensuring their contributions are adequately valued.

Location: Croatia

Contacts:

University of Zagreb Faculty of Agriculture: Ramona Franić (ramonaf@agr.hr), Nataša Bokan (nbokan@agr.hr), Tihana Kovačiček (tkovacicek@agr.hr), Marina Tomić Maksan (matomic@agr.hr)

Croatian Chamber of Agriculture: Tajana Radić (tajana.radic@komora.hr), Staka Perić (staka.peric@komora.hr)

More info:

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Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are, however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.