

LIVING LAB ITALY



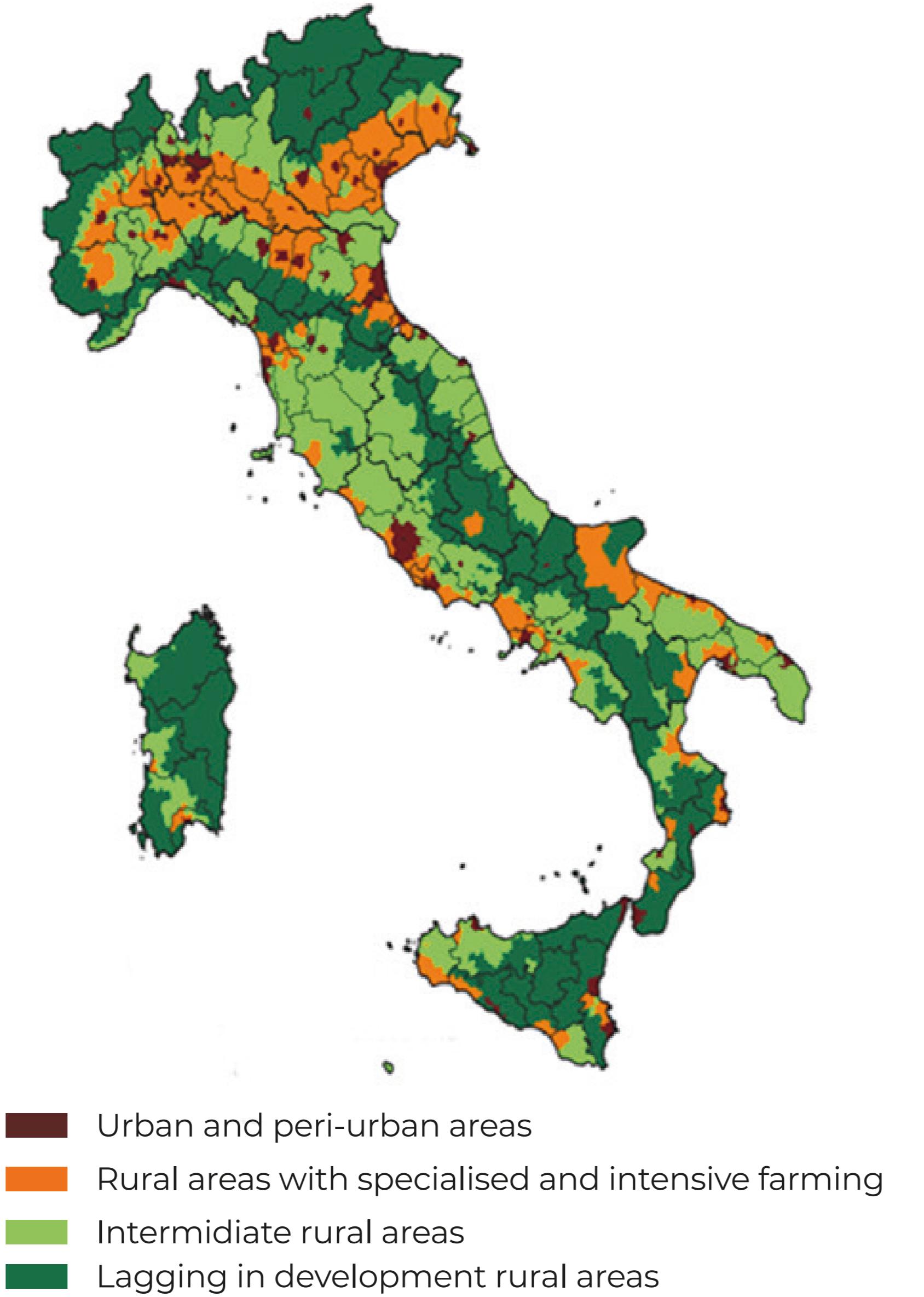
As reported in the ISTAT Agricultural Census 2020 in Italy only 31,5% of farm managers are women, with diversification and multi-functionality as specific features of many women-managed farms. According to the Unioncamere Observatory for Women's Entrepreneurship, women's start-up businesses in agriculture made up 0.9% of the total in 2022. Women's visible presence in agriculture is increasing, though very slowly, and female participation in rural activities varies considerably across the Italian regions. In the Puglia region, 31% of the total agricultural enterprises are led by women (Aforisma-CIA 2021), with the region being in 2nd place at the national level.

The CAP strategic plan for Italy for 2023-2027 envisages several measures to support young farmers and women: payment for adopting and maintaining organic production practices, animal welfare and non-agricultural productive investments in rural areas often specify young farmers and women as beneficiaries in some areas of Italy.

With Legislative Decree No. 105 of 30 June 2022, implementing Directive (EU) 2019/1158, significant changes have also been made regarding the regulation of parental leave and flexible work arrangements are facilitated to improve work-life balance and better share family responsibilities.

The Italian LL is mostly operating within the territory of the Bio-district "delle Lame", in the Puglia region, purposely focusing on agro-ecological transition practices and challenges. It connects selected women innovators with a diversified group of local multi-level actors including mainstream and more gender-sensitive initiatives, institutional and innovative grassroots organisations. It will also establish connections with promising national dynamics in terms of legislation and support for women's entrepreneurship and labour in farming and rural territories.

Overall, such women-led enterprises have proven to stay viable on the market through recent uncertain, difficult times, relying on women's determination, exploiting their different backgrounds, creativity and propensity to reconcile tradition and innovation. The Living Lab will capitalise on an emerging wave and willingness to change reported locally in many rural women's and



Official definition of rural areas used in Italian programmes of public intervention.

Source: Mantino, F.; De Fano, G.; Asaro, G. (2022). <https://doi.org/10.3390/land11111883>

women farmers' roles, gradually switching from figureheads or invisible farmers' wives or sisters to active participants in the sector's governance and farm decision-making, resilient innovators in the diversification of farm and rural activities and, in some cases, important players behind regional key value chains' good performance as well as committed supporters of organic and sustainable agriculture and social innovation. The LL will work for their professional needs to effectively navigate through procedural, financial, and technical complexities. It will build on their innovation pathways, outcomes and flaws and learn from their stories to strengthen promising change trends.

In order to make it easier for women to work in agricultural and rural contexts, without it becoming an exception and thus dispel the myth that only few women can make it, it is important to have support from the local institutions, administrations and stakeholders in general.

In order to facilitate women's empowerment in rural areas, the **main activities and themes to focus on are the "acquisition of awareness and skills"** to contribute to the development of rural areas themselves, "the ability to activate innovation processes" in response to socio-ecological challenges, and "the strengthening of identity" as innovators.

Thanks to the discussions and open exchange during the Living Labs, together with the individual journey of each woman participant, it will be possible to reflect on innovative specific processes to activate as a group, in the framework of the Bio-district "delle Lame".

At present, they are engaged in innovating their products, but also in organisational and processing innovation.

The women's innovator journey will be supported through LL meetings and mentoring talks. Innovation goals will be developed or refined. Participants will be encouraged to use the LL to progress their innovation goals, sharing insights and engaging in knowledge sharing, exploring common problems and identifying opportunities. Participants will be encouraged to use the network and get as much as possible in terms of expertise, trainings, contacts and business opportunities, for supporting their innovation journey.



The **Italian LL participants** are women innovators operating in the framework of the Bio-District «delle Lame» in Puglia (south of Italy). It is working with ecological farm women innovators operating in well-established regional agriculture value chains (wine, olive oil and vegetables), innovative chains (such as lavender) and in multi-functional farms providing recreational, educational services, tourism and social innovation solutions to local communities.

Stakeholders are representatives from the Bio-District itself, local authorities, consultants and experts, researchers, business developers, digital facilitators, experts in local development, entrepreneurs and activists in the women's empowerment field. Stakeholder participation will be essential to support the individual journey of every woman innovator, with experiences, relationships, skills, and the group journey within the Biodistrict real-life context. As the innovation objectives and individual paths take shape, other stakeholders can be involved to strengthen networking, diversity and improve concrete support.