

Synthesis

Unleashing the potential of Mediterranean women in rural areas: constraints and solutions in the COVID-19 era

Webinar to celebrate the United Nations' International Day of Rural Women

- Date and time: 15th of October 2020, 11.00 to 13.00 CET
- Video conference held through Webex Platform
- 80 people registered online and up to 60 were connected simultaneously which makes a participation of 75% of registered.

11:00 Welcome words and introduction of the webinar by Ms Joumana Sweiss, Programme officer at ENI CBC MED Branch Office in Valencia

After giving an overview the ENI CBC MED Programme, Ms Sweiss explained the reasons why we should celebrate the international day of rural women in the Mediterranean area highlighting the role women play in these areas as a driving force for the local economy, preserving the territories, the environment and the Mediterranean cultural identity. She mentioned some examples of the main social and legal barriers women face in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region.

11:05 Union for the Mediterranean support to women's empowerment and gender equality: strategic objectives and projects by Ms Anna Dorangricchia, senior expert 'Social and civil affairs', Secretariat of UfM

Gathering reliable data on the real situation of women and girls in the MENA region is a big challenge. Ms Dorangricchia tackled the issues of gender-based policies, presented the UfM, explained what the labeled projects are. She also mentioned the endorsement of UfM last July of a set of indicators related to gender equality and women empowerment in the MENA region which is crucial to ensure a good monitoring. This is the result of a wide consultation involving national authorities, civil societies and joined efforts with CIHEAM among others. She also invited all the participants to register to the [Women4Mediterranean Conference 2020](#) organised by the UfM from 16th to 20th November 2020.

"Women in the Arab World will lose approximately 700,000 jobs as a result of the Covid-19 outbreak" (UN- ESCWA policy brief 2020)

11:20 Situation of the employment of rural women in Arab countries: the experience of CIHEAM-Montpellier by Ms Elen Lemaître-Curri, deputy director of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Montpellier (CIHEAM IAM), France

Ms Lemaître-Curri started her presentation with macro data highlighting that rural women in the MENA region represent 40% of total women in the region. Only 21 % of them are in the labour market compared to 77 % for men. Moreover, figures for young women (under 25) are even higher (32%) leading to a very high unemployment rate, 4.4 more than the world average. She then focused on the fact that the economic contribution of rural women is

underestimated in agriculture, their wages are lower than men and they lack social protection and security at work. Adding to that, very few women hold a position as farm managers. As the previous speakers, she also emphasized on the lack of quantitative data and disaggregated gender data in the MENA region.

After presenting some CIHEAM rural studies, trends and projects' impact, she concluded with some recommendations such as having longer term multidimensional projects, include men also to foster changes in perceptions and behaviours, include gender sensitive indicators and involve women in nutrition and food security programmes.

"Gender gap is closing in education and health but not in economy" (based on ILO estimate 2019)

11:35 The RUWOMED project and beyond: the social economy as a vehicle to drive women's equality in rural Palestine by Ms Kirsten Sutherland, project manager, Association of Cooperation for Peace (ACPP), Spain

"Bringing women together especially across geographical, national, faith-based, urban vs rural and other front lines has an enormous transformative potential. It produces tangible energy."

Kirsten Sutherland, ACPP, Spain

RUWOMED, an ENPI CBC MED project, was a turning point for the Spanish NGO, *Assamblea de Cooperación por la Paz*. This project which started back in 2009, addressed gender inequality and women empowerment in rural areas in Palestine, Lebanon and Spain.

Ms. Sutherland, who coordinated this project, shared this inspiring experience and quoted many women who benefited from this project and it impacted them on an economic, social and cross-border level. She concluded her presentation saying that she is glad to be part of this sisterhood of RUWOMED and benefit from the inspiration that irradiate from Palestinian and Lebanese rural women colleagues.

"RUWOMED became a defining feature of our NGO's identity and work." Kirsten Sutherland, ACPP, Spain

11:48 Ms Israa Hindawi, Director of the Women's Cooperative Society for Saving and Credit in Jaba', Jenin, Palestine

"Social and economic empowerment is a prerequisite for women to be able to take decision and take part in the political arena." Israa Hindawi

Ms Hindawi is a live testimony of how to empower Palestinian rural women and help them face one of the main challenges when it comes to economic empowerment: how to market their products. Therefore, she created the women cooperative society for saving and credit, with 700 members and which is entirely run and managed by women. Each woman has shares in the cooperative and the benefits are redistributed at the end of year. It was created in March this year thanks to a project funded by the *Generalitat Valenciana*, a regional administration in Spain. She explained the importance of each member having an individual project adding to the common ones. They also run a hall for wedding, a restaurant at the

American university and shares at the stock exchange. She also mentions that 5 members of this cooperative are members in municipal councils.

To sum up part of the discussion raised by participants: social and economic empowerment is a prerequisite for women to be able to take decision and take part in the political arena. So political empowerment comes as a consequence of this but was not initially an aim when creating the cooperative.

Ms Sutherland recognized that one of the weaknesses of RUWOMED project was the absence of this political aspect. They took it into account in their following project by building alliances with relevant women organization which have advocacy capacities at political level to address policy barriers.

12:06 Challenges and solutions for women to access the labour market in rural areas by *Mr Hedi Bchir*, project coordinator at the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (CAWTAR), Tunisian partner of the InnovAgroWoMed project

Mr Bchir presented CAWTAR organization and addressed some of the challenges rural women face in Tunisia: overcome stereotypes linked to the culture and traditions, lack of access to knowledge, finance, property and land due to unfair inheritance laws, resources such as water. They face different types of violence (physical, mental and psychological), salary inequality, lack of safe transport to go to work.

He told us as an anecdote of a project funded by a development organization related to access to water, which failed as it did not take into account the social dimension to improve women's condition. Then he presented InnovAgroWoMed and explained how this project will integrate the rural social innovation dimension to support women in creating their own job or find one.

12:16 Rural Social Innovation, a powerful tool to promote women employment in the era of COVID-19 by *Ms Nathalie Colasanti*, research fellow at the University of Rome 'Tor Vergata', Italy. Coordinator of the InnovAgroWoMed project

Ms Colasanti started her speech explaining the key concept of social innovation as engaging the society with different actors to address societal problems. Then, she moved to the concept of Rural Social Innovation (RSI). The idea is to put the product at the centre of the innovation process and to announce it by using traditional skills and knowledge. She explained the idea to promote short supply chain will help connect local producers with consumers and the community more broadly. This is particularly relevant in the era of COVID-19 when during the lockdown farmers could not export their products, faced mobility restrictions.

In this context, InnovAgroWoMed will use agriculture and traditional knowledge, together with some digital skills to improve rural women conditions. To sum up, the project aims to apply RSI to support job creation to women and promote local economy.

12:33 Testimony on the challenges faced by a woman entrepreneur by *Ms Souha Ben Mehrez*, agricultural engineer and beekeeper, Tunisia

Ms Ben Mehrez graduated in June 2018 as an agronomist engineer specialized in animal production. She started applying in many companies of the sectors with no success. She realized she will have to wait a long time so she decided to start her own business as a

beekeeper. Knowing that this sector is mainly run by men, that she has no money and no professional experience, she needed first to convince her family who was reluctant.

After some months, his father accepted under the condition that her uncle has to accompany her to the farm and the countryside. She faced a tremendous pressure to first reimburse her father and gain his trust. Little by little, workers got used to have her as manager, her family was proud of her and honey production increased. But still she could not cover all the expenses. She started a second and third job in telecommunication and transport companies even though she is overqualified for these jobs but knowing perfectly why she was doing it. Things got worse with covid-19 outbreak and the lockdown. She could not go to the farm, shops where she used to sell her honey were closed so she decided to step back, take some time to rethink her strategy, acquire new skills so she can return to business more prepared.

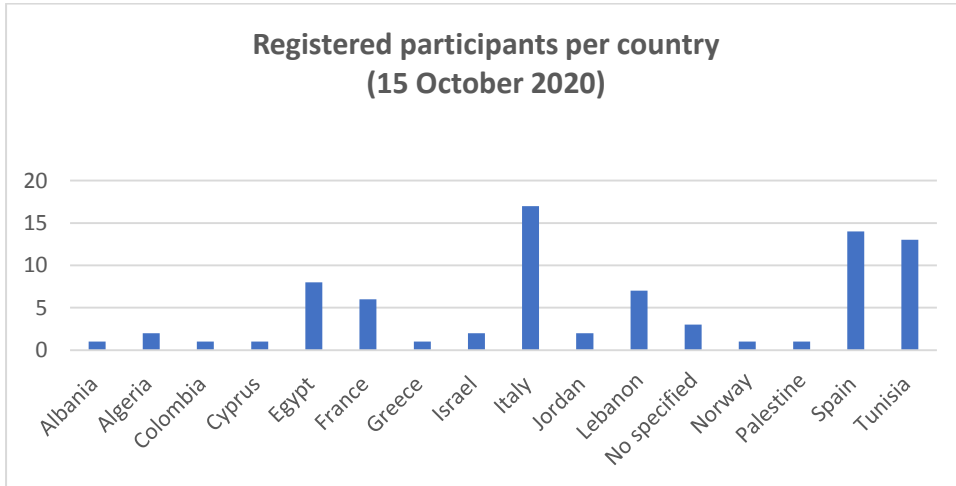
She currently works for an international NGO related to environment protection and she plans to improve her communication skills to be back on business.

12:44 Opportunities from the ENI CBC Med Programme to promote training, employment and business creation for women by *Mr Martin Heibel*, communications manager, ENI CBC Med Programme

Mr Heibel highlighted how complementary and inspiring were the speakers and how by joining our forces, we can be stronger and deliver better support in order to improve rural women employment.

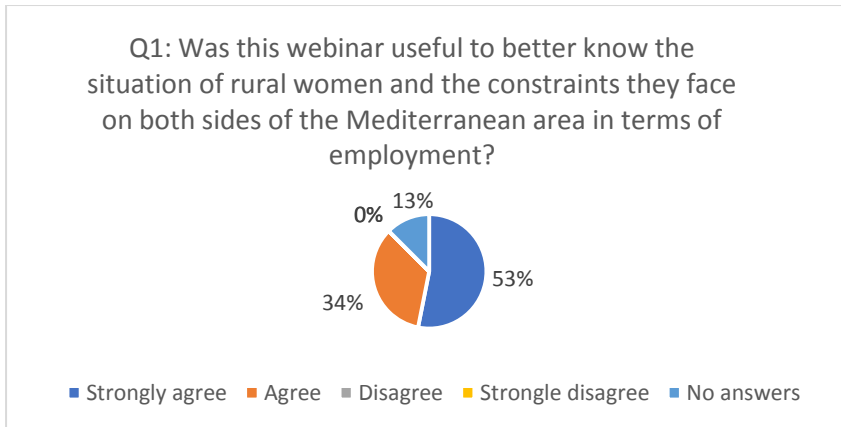
He explained the different kind of support ENI CBC MED Programme provides through grants, training and mentoring, technical support, vacancies and tenders which are regularly published on the [programme website](#). He also mentioned how important it is to showcase the results of pilot cases to local authorities to boost women employment. He gave some examples of subgrants (what he calls small grants) which amount to 7 million euros currently available through calls within the running projects. There are small grants in the sector of sustainable tourism, preserving the Mediterranean diet, development value chain in organic food system and also innovation in the sector of treatment of grape waste just to mention a few. Besides small grants, there are also projects providing with professional skills and abroad traineeships in the blue and circular economy for example.

Registered participants per country:



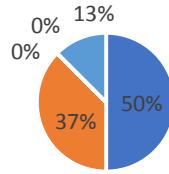
Survey Results

Question 1



Question 2

Q 2: Did you find it useful to bring new ideas about what can be done to improve women employment in rural areas in the Mediterranean?

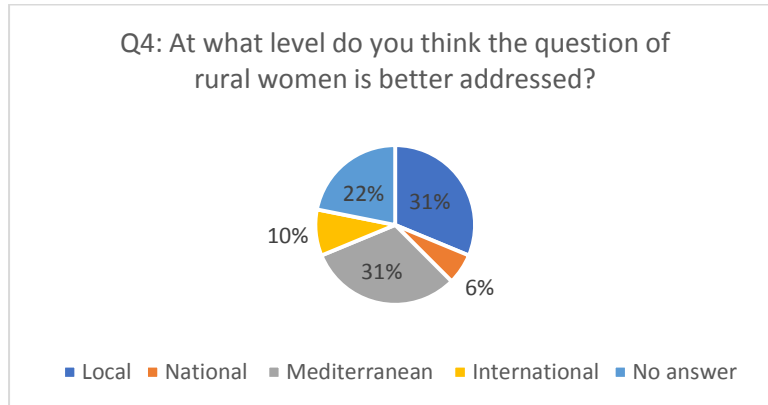


■ Strongly agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly disagree ■ No answers

Question 3: Which specific needs of rural women do you think could be addressed by the future Interreg NEXTMED Programme?

- grants
- training assistance grants
- social services
- issues related to insurances
- fees, salaries
- financial education and political empowerment
- facing prejudices to allow women start business initiatives in sectors traditionally addressed by men
- sustainable opportunities
- professional training,
- taking into account the integrated empowerment of rural women, beyond economic empowerment, to take into account greater social and political empowerment
- bettering social position and skills, improving political representativeness
- training in cooperative manner
- innovation
- cascading of successes by the women themselves to neighbouring areas
- approaches need to be integrated to be efficient in the long term - professional skills + business creation + cooperative organisation/strengthening + inclusive approach...
- financial inclusion
- new skills, equality and inclusion
- women and environment/ tourism
- women and livestock
- The pandemic has also heightened the vulnerability of rural women's rights to land and resources. 1. Gender-responsive investments to expand basic infrastructure, healthcare and care services in rural areas could be relevant. 2. Improve gender data collection and capacity at national level building on data gathering.
- Beekeeping is one of the most important project which increases women income directly and indirectly
- 13/32 (41 %) no response.

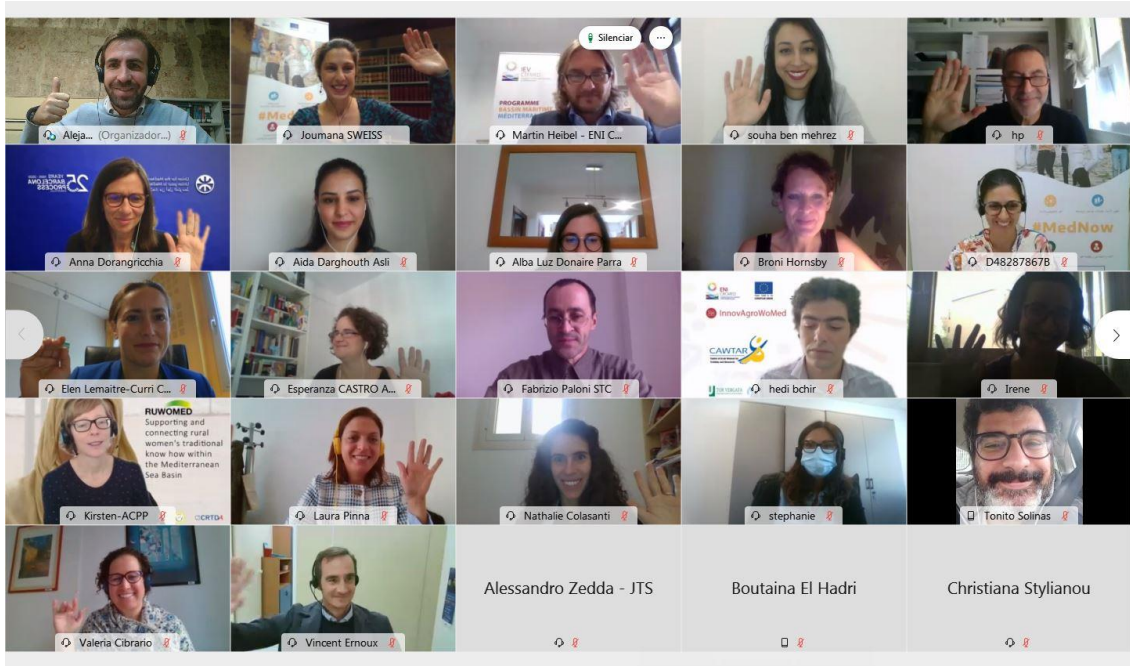
Question 4



Question 5

5. What would you suggest to improve future webinars?

- everything was ok. Thank you all and special thanks to Joumana
- more presentations and concrete data
- more slides, very useful for keeping concentration
- make the presentations available before the event , in order to have the chance to deep the reflection
- I liked the mix of more institutional/academic topics, and practical experiences and approaches. The participation of a diversity of profiles from different Mediterranean countries was really important. I don't have any more suggestions
- selection of experts and field experiences
- show more opportunities and how to address the issue of those who are not taking really care in their projects
- more live testimonies by women
- inform us beforehand if there would be sharing of slides presented so that we be able to not juggle writing notes
- it is good I think you are not need
- No answer: 22/32 (69%)



A screenshot of a Zoom meeting grid showing 25 participants. The participants are arranged in a 5x5 grid. The first row includes participants like Aleja... (Organizador...), Joumana SWEISS, Martin Heibel - ENI..., souha ben mehrez, and hp. The second row includes Anna Dorangricchia, Aida Darghouth Asli, Alba Luz Donaire Parra, Broni Hornsby, and D48287867B. The third row includes Elen Lemaitre-Curri..., Esperanza CASTRO A..., Fabrizio Paloni STC, hedi bchir, and Irene. The fourth row includes Kirsten-ACPP, Laura Pinna, Nathalie Colasanti, stephanie, and Tonito Solinas. The fifth row includes Valeria Cibrano, Vincent Ernoux, Alessandro Zedda - JTS, Boutaina El Hadri, and Christiana Stylianou. Some participants have their video off, and some have their audio off. There are also some logos and text overlays on some of the video thumbnails.