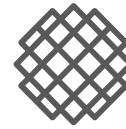




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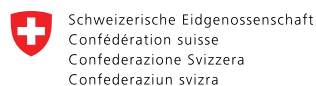
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JOINT REPORT

COOPERATIVE PERFORMANCE AUDIT

GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN FROM RURAL AREAS THROUGH THEIR INCLUSION IN THE LABOUR MARKET



Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



JOINT REPORT

COOPERATIVE PERFORMANCE AUDIT

GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT
OF WOMEN FROM RURAL AREAS THROUGH
THEIR INCLUSION IN THE LABOUR MARKET

July 2024

Basis and reasons for performing the audit

“Mutual experience benefits all” is the motto of the International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI), and parallel audits like this prove that this motto is much more than words.

The Supreme Audit Institutions of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo* signed a trilateral cooperation agreement in March 2023 to conduct a cooperative performance audit for gender equality and the empowerment of women from rural areas through their inclusion in the labour market. The topic of the audit is significant, from the point of view that it will help to evaluate whether the measures and projects implemented by the competent institutions are effective in ensuring the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market, which will ensure their effective participation in economic and social development of rural areas.

Gender equality is one of the key aspects for ensuring the prosperity of the whole society and is a commitment of the country arising from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015 at the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, which established 17 goals and 169 under goals to be achieved by 2030 by all countries in the world. Even though gender equality is treated as a horizontal issue that needs to be solved during the implementation of the Goals in general, a special goal 5 is foreseen, which is specifically aimed at gender equality. This goal seeks to empower women and girls to realize their full potential, which inevitably implies the elimination of all forms of discrimination.

This report is the result of the cooperative audit, carried out in accordance with the activities established in the trilateral agreement. By signing the agreement by the Chief State Auditors of the three Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs), cooperation in the application of the principles, standards and guidelines of INTOSAI and good practices, as well as the promotion of professional and technical cooperation, providing mutual support in training of employees, exchange of information, as well as exchange of experiences for the advancement of the state audit methodology.

In addition to the added value for future improvements in the field of audit, the significance of this cooperative audit, which was carried out with the support of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women - “UN Women”, is also the improvement of professional knowledge on performance audit and cooperation between the participants, i.e. the willingness of SAIs to share their experiences, as well as the desire to learn from each other and support their own development.

The report in front of you includes general observations and determined situations, as well as general conclusions from national audit reports on the position of rural women in society and the actions taken by the competent institutions for their inclusion in the labour market.

State Audit Office of Republic of North Macedonia, Maksim Acevski, State Auditor General

National Audit Office of Kosovo, Vlora Spanca, State Audit General

Supreme Audit Institution of Albania, Arben Shehu, Chairman

*All references to Kosovo should be understood to be in the context of UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999). For the European Union, this designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AAD	Agency of Agriculture Development
ALMP	Active Labour Market Programmes
DCM	Decision of the Council of Ministers
EARK	Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo
ESARNM	Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia
INSTAT	Albanian Institute of Statistics
INTOSAI	The International Organization of Supreme Audit Institutions
IPARD	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development
ISSAI	International Standards of Supreme Audit Institutions
KPGE	Kosovo Program for Gender Equality
LSGUs	Local Self-government Units
MAFRD	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development
MAFWM	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management
MLSP	Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
NAES	The National Agency for Employment and Skills
NSES	National Strategy on Employment and Skills
NSGE	National Strategy on Gender Equality
RDP	Rural Development Program
SAI	State Audit Institution
UJ	Unemployed Jobseekers

Summary

By conducting independent audits of government activities, Supreme Audit Institutions (SAIs) play an important role in contributing to the effective implementation of policies.

The audit is a key instrument of the accountability process regarding the spending of public money and provides a contribution to the proper administration of resources and delivery of services to citizens. The performance audit is an independent review in order to determine whether the activities of public institutions are in line with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness and whether there is room for improvement of their work.

The main objective of the SAI of Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Albania and Republic of Kosovo's participants in this cooperative audit, was to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of policies, programmes and measures aimed at promoting the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market, with a focus on increasing their participation and identifying opportunities for improvement. This audit aims to provide recommendations for improving the system in the specific audit field.

To achieve the purpose of the audit, each SAI designed and implemented a separate performance audit, complying with certain common reference areas. That means that each SAI identified the main areas that are significant for the activities of the state authorities, for the subject of the audit. The concept of the audits is similar, with certain differences in relation to the identified national challenges and risks.

The audits were performed in accordance with the INTOSAI Professional Standards Framework, the Code of Professional Ethics of State Auditors, the principles of the International Standards of Supreme Auditing Institutions (ISSAI), as well as in accordance with national regulations and methodological acts.

The audit covered the period from 2019 to 2023, and in order to monitor progress, activities that were undertaken during the audit were taken into account.

Based on the conclusions of the conducted national audits, we give the following general message:

The measures and activities to promote the gender equality of women from rural areas through their inclusion in the labour market, undertaken by the competent public institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo, are not efficient and effective enough to include women from rural areas in the labour market and keep them in rural areas. Competent public institutions in the three countries have undertaken a series of activities to strengthen the position of women in society, but satisfactory results have not yet been achieved for the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market.





Based on the main conclusions, the three SAIs gave recommendations to the subjects of the scope of the audit, in order to strengthen the position of rural women in society and their greater inclusion in the labour market, which mainly refer to the need for:

- ◆ Providing complete information on the specific needs and demands of women from the rural area and include specifically designed gender-responsive measures focused on rural women that will promote their inclusion in the labour market in the strategies, operational plans and programmes.
- ◆ The data from the implemented programmes for the promotion of employment and professional training should contain informations disaggregated by gender by rural and urban areas.
- ◆ Monitor and evaluate the effect of the measures to determine their achievement and effectiveness in terms of empowering women.
- ◆ Investing in rural public infrastructure and providing adequate conditions for childcare in kindergartens and homes for the elderly.

Stereotypes and discrimination must be eliminated. Rural women possess the capability, knowledge, and desire to secure their future, become successful entrepreneurs, and contribute to the overall social progress.

It is time to recognize their significant contribution to family, community and country and ensure that they are supported and protected as equal members of society. Their social and economic empowerment will create social well-being, economic development, better quality of life in rural areas and sustainable communities.



1. AUDIT BASED DATA

1. AUDIT BASED DATA

North Macedonia

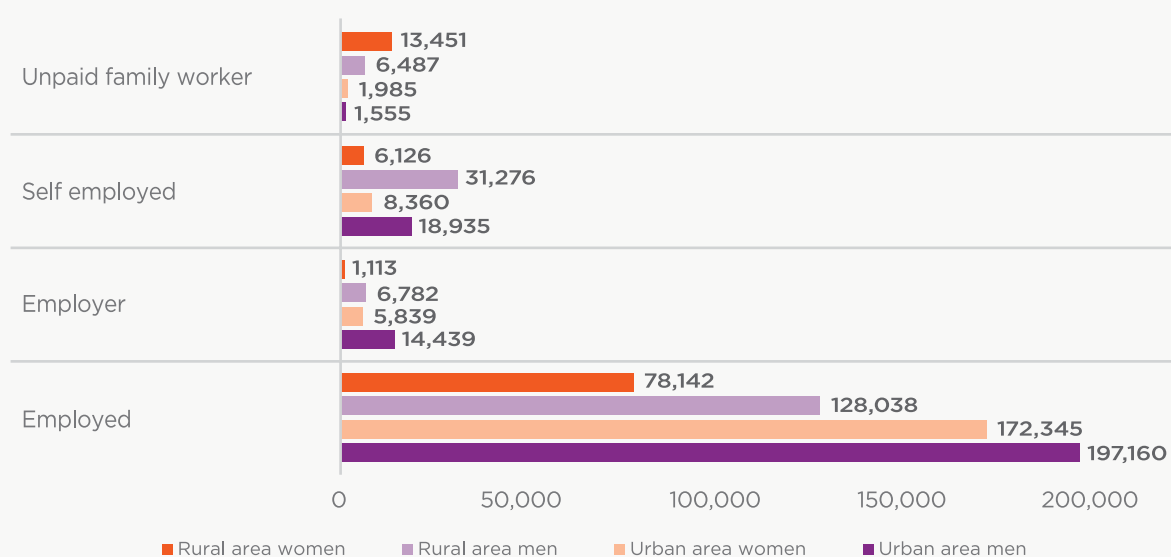
The number of inhabitants in villages in the country is decreasing, and depopulation and limited opportunities for rural residents are evident every day. Data from the State Statistical Office shows that 62% of total 1.781 settlements have less than 100 inhabitants and 205 settlements are without a single inhabitant.

Population in rural areas is faced with lack of infrastructure, water supply, sewage, public transport, health care and social institutions, kindergartens, homes for housing for the elderly, etc. It should also be emphasized that the majority of young people are not seeing progress in the quality of life in rural areas. For that reason, they are moving to urban areas or places where they have better living conditions.

Many of the Sustainable Development Goals specifically target rural women and women who are actively involved in agriculture as a key link in achieving socioeconomic development and sustainable future. However, the significant role of women for the survival of rural areas is unnoticed and unrecognized by the public.

Gender inequality between women and men is particularly pronounced in rural areas. Rural women make a significant contribution to the development of rural communities in all regions. They face more restrictions than men in accessing key resources, such as land ownership and access to finance. They face challenges for inclusion in the labour market, use of benefits, pay for their work engagement, unpaid domestic work, low level of involvement in family decision-making, etc. The following Figure 1 depicts the situation of employed persons in the country based on their economic status, gender, urban and rural area.¹

FIGURE 1:
Overview of employed by economic status and gender, urban and rural areas in 2022



¹ Data source: State Statistical Office.

It can be observed that women in rural areas are underrepresented in the categories of employed, employers, and self-employed, in comparison to the other categories, but they dominate in the group of unpaid family workers.

It has been identified that closing the gender gap in access to assets, resources, services, and opportunities is one of the most effective approaches in combating rural poverty.

Rural women bear significant responsibility in upbringing and advancement of the future generations, as well as the survival of rural areas. It is time to recognize their significant contributions to our families, communities, and country, and to ensure they are supported and protected as equal members of society.

Albania

Since 1995, the “International Day of Rural Women” is celebrated in order to appreciate the contribution of rural women in agriculture and the achievements with respect to the general well-being of the community, despite the challenges and stereotypes they face.

Rural areas in Albania have an economic activity primarily focused on the agriculture and husbandry sector. In certain smaller municipalities in the north, such as Has, Tropoja, Kukës, Puka, Vau-Dejës or Malësia e Madhe, the majority of employed and self-employed persons are women and girls.

There are numerous challenges and conditions facing rural women. They have to do daily chores, as well as work in agriculture.

The situation resulting from the challenges facing the world has also affected the agriculture sector due to the increase in the price of fuel and agricultural inputs, as well as the difficulties to sell agricultural products, which impact the livelihood of rural women. National strategies and the projects undertaken by various associations highlight the need to identify the issues of women and girls in the vast majority of municipalities. The heads of centres or associations working to empower rural women state that their studies have found that, although approximately 96% of agriculture jobs are performed by women, the resulting revenues are not managed by them.

In addition to other daily chores, women and girls also work hard in agriculture and animal husbandry. Even though in Albania women play a key role in the agriculture sector as they comprise around 55% of the labour force, they are the heads of only 7% of farms across the country. In the procedures followed to access the labour market, they often face issues, such as: in applying, in opening a business, or in running a business in the relevant properties, etc.

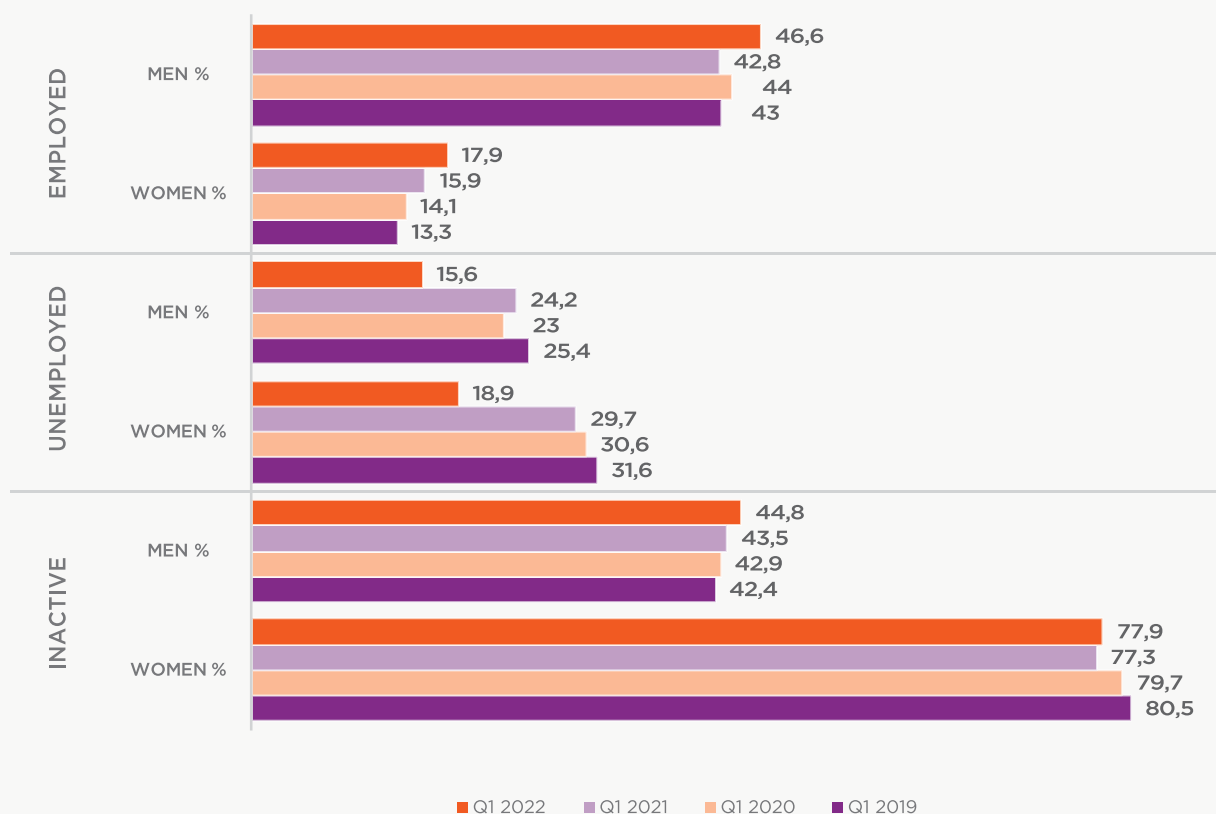
Other factors with direct impact on the employment of rural women include the issues resulting from the infrastructure, their relevant area of residence, the lack of transport, potable water and 24h health centres, as well as the lack of crèches and kindergartens with lunch. Although such factors concern the entire community, they primarily affect the lives of women and girls in rural areas. As per the above, central structures and local self-government units in particular should take measures to mitigate the hindering factors and encourage rural women to become part of the labour market.

Kosovo

The legal framework in terms of ensuring and guaranteeing gender equality is quite advanced in Kosovo. In this context there are also some public policies foreseen and approved by the Government, dedicated to women employment which has been also involved in Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024 (hereinafter: KPGE). However, gender equality in practice still remains an unachieved standard, where women are underrepresented in many areas of society such as decision-making, employment and other social spheres. According to the data of the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, women continue to be discriminated against man in employment, moreover their participation in the labour market continues to be the lowest compared to other countries in the region.

In the following chart, we have presented the labour force indicators of the first quarters for the period 2019- 2022.

FIGURE 2:
Labour force indicators by gender in Kosovo



Source: Data obtained from KAS, Labour Force Survey Q1 (2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022)

In above chart, the labour market is presented divided in three categories: inactive, unemployed and employed workforce in Kosovo. The number of inactive women during the first quarters and for four years, is around 77-80%, the number of unemployed women is around 19-32% and the number of employed women is only around 13- 18%. Furthermore, unemployment women have continued to decline from 2019 to 2022. The labour market is characterized by a high degree of inactivity, which according to the chart indicates that around 77% of women are not looking for work at all. The gap created among unemployed and inactive women in the labour market is due to the fact that they continue to face challenges arising from society, but also as a result of the lack of institutional actions to prevent or change the situation. Improving the participation of women at the country level in the labour market should be a high priority not only in terms of equality, but also in terms of the positive economic impact for the country in general.

Women are under-represented in the agricultural sector due to the unregistered workforce, lack of ownership, low level of education and their lack of information/education. The percentage of women in Kosovo who work in agriculture and agribusiness is approximately the same as that of men; however, the results of their work are not sufficiently evidenced, as their employment in this field is not formalized. Similar results have been presented in other reports, with special emphasis on women who live in rural areas, who are less likely to participate in the labour market compared to women living in urban areas. The most important public intervention regarding development of rural businesses and economic diversification is the grant scheme of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (hereinafter MAFRD). The MAFRD has drafted certain affirmative action/favourable policies for women in the programme for agriculture and rural development to facilitate the employment of women from rural regions and their empowerment in agricultural businesses.



2. **AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE**

2. AUDIT OBJECTIVES, SCOPE

North Macedonia

The audit objective was to assess whether the measures and projects implemented by the competent institutions at central level are efficient in ensuring inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market, thus ensuring their effective participation in the economic and social development of rural areas, as well as to provide recommendations for overcoming the identified shortcomings to achieve added value from the audit.

The main audit question was:

“Are measures and projects implemented by the competent institutions at central level efficient in ensuring inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market, thereby ensuring their effective participation in the economic and social development of rural areas?”

The specific objectives were:

- ◆ To evaluate whether conditions have been created for the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market.
- ◆ To assess the degree of investment in vocational training of women from rural areas and the support for job creation and
- ◆ To assess the investment in public services in rural areas (childcare in kindergartens and homes for the elderly).

The selection of the institutions covered by the audit was carried out based on their competence in the implementation of measures, activities and projects related to rural areas, rural women, or the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market. The audit covered the following entities: Government of the Republic of North Macedonia; Ministry of Labour and Social Policy; Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management; Agency for Financial Support of Agriculture and Rural Development; Employment Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia and the National Federation of Farmers of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Current laws and by-laws, strategic documents, collected data, information, statistical reviews and other documents were used as criteria for this audit.

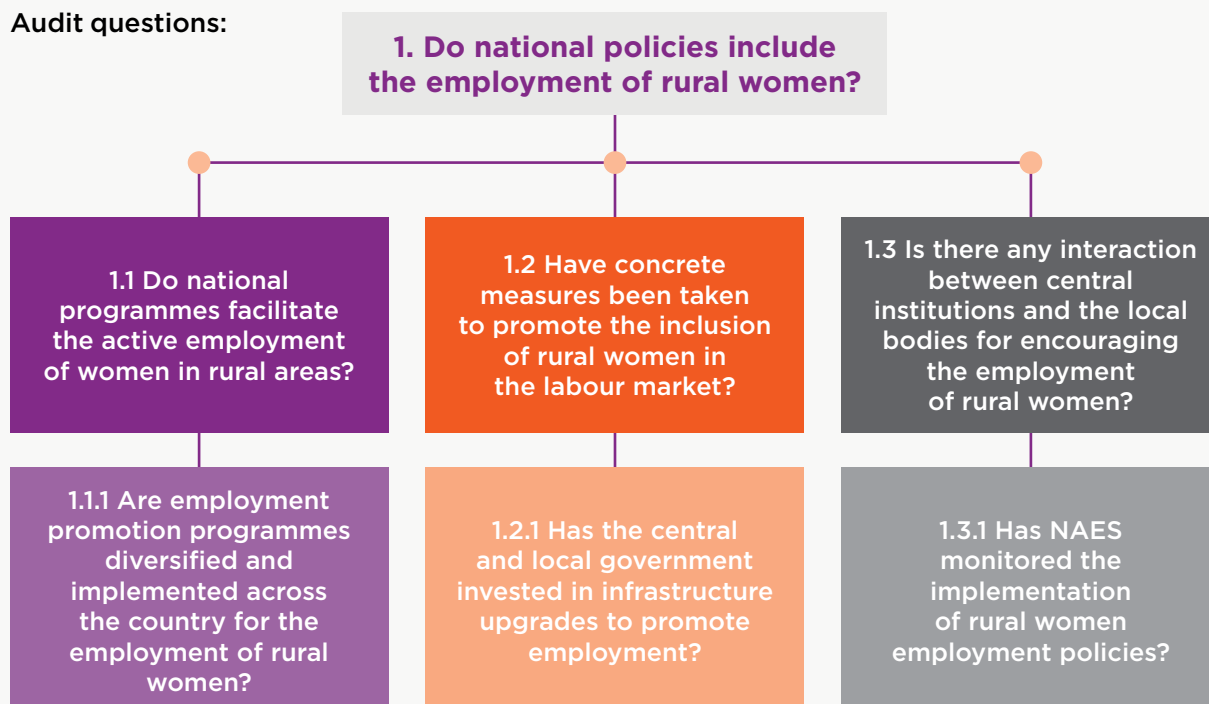
To obtain relevant and sufficient audit evidence that would lead to audit findings, conclusions and recommendations, we applied various techniques from the performance audit methodology.

Albania

The main objective of the audit titled “Gender equality and the empowerment of rural women through labour market involvement” consisted in the review of policies and their effectiveness in terms of the quality performance of the services provided to promote the employment of rural women, focusing primarily on the role and responsibilities of the audited entities with respect to the achievement of their institutional goals. Therefore, the audit team sought to conduct an unbiased and objective review of the institutions under audit with regard to:

- ◆ The review of employment promotion programmes to assess whether such programmes were diversified and tailored to specific regions based on gender, as well as whether they were effectively and efficiently implemented across the country by ensuring gender equality;
- ◆ The review of employment promotion programmes for the category receiving economic assistance and unemployment assistance to facilitate their exit from the economic assistance scheme;
- ◆ The review of the provision of conditions facilitating the employment of rural women, such as investments in public services, crèches or kindergartens, as well as transportation from rural areas to job centres;
- ◆ Cooperation and coordination between LSGUs and regional/local NAES’ on the employment of women, including rural women. Effectivity of the cooperation agreement between NAES and LSGUs.
- ◆ Monitoring of employment policy implementation and usage of process-generated information in terms of goal accomplishment.

Audit questions:



The performance audit titled “Gender equality and the empowerment of rural women through labour market involvement” sought to review employment promotion programmes to establish whether they include the employment of rural women. Furthermore, the audit assessed whether the responsible structures at central and local level cooperate with each other. The audit took place in 13 LSGUs, namely the Municipalities of Shkodra, Kukës, Lezha, Dibra, Kruja, Elbasan, Kavaja, Divjaka, Lushnja, Berat, Pogradec, Vlora, Gjirokastra and the National Agency for Employment and Skills. The audited period was 2019-2023.

In reference to Economic Assistance (AE), the audit team focused only on reviewing the impact of employment programmes on women exiting the Economic Assistance scheme instead of auditing the actual scheme.

Kosovo

The objective of this audit is to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of policies, programmes and measures aimed at promoting the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market, with a focus on increasing their participation and identifying opportunities for improvement. This audit aims to provide recommendations for improving the system in the specific audit field. Audit questions in order to respond to the audit’s objective, the following questions were asked:

1. Have the competent institutions properly implemented the programmes and have affirmative measures for rural development influenced the gender perspective?
2. Are the measures and programmes monitored to assess their impact on the inclusion of rural women in the labour market, the achievement of gender equality, and women’s empowerment?

The audit was carried out in the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development (MAFDR), the Agricultural Development Agency (ADA), and the Employment Agency (EARK), whereby the main focus was on the Agriculture and Rural Development Program, i.e. the two following measures:

- ◆ Investments in physical assets in agricultural households – focusing on supporting investments in these sectors: fruits, vegetables (including potatoes), milk, meat, grapes and eggs.
- ◆ Farm diversification and business development - supporting a range of agricultural and non-agricultural activities through sectors such as: handicrafts, rural tourism development, honey production, non-timber products, aquaculture and poultry farming.

The two measures were selected due to the fact that through them women farmers have priority in benefiting from investment grants and are scored with additional points.

The audit covered the period 2019 - 2023, although some circumstances before this period may be audited to collect data for conducting comparative analyses.

Various techniques are used to answer the audit questions in order to provide appropriate evidence.

3. AUDIT FINDINGS

3. AUDIT FINDINGS

3.1. North Macedonia

3.1.1. Created conditions for inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market

In terms of planning and inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market at the national level, a series of medium and long-term planning documents and strategies have been prepared, such as:

- ◆ Strategy on Gender Equality 2013-2020 as well as Strategy on Gender Equality 2022-2027
- ◆ National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2014-2020
- ◆ National Employment Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia 2016-2020

These strategic and programme documents represent a solid basis for creating measures and undertaking specific activities to strengthen the position of rural women and their inclusion in the labour market.

In the **Strategy on Gender Equality 2022-2027** in one of the priorities - agriculture, it is determined that in rural areas, women need to be empowered in terms of managing agricultural property and land, as well as building their self-confidence and decision-making capacities. The empowerment of women from rural areas should also be aimed at building their capacities and knowledge for applying to programmes for financial support in agriculture and other programmes where opportunities are offered for opening one's own business and self-employment, such as: local hairdressers, shops for making and selling traditionally made products, development of rural tourism, etc. Measures are planned for inclusion of women from the informal economy to the formal economy. It also identifies the need to adopt measures to increase the number of registered female farmers and holders of agricultural holdings through appropriate valuation of their work, as well as legal amendments to recognize their rights to social benefits, including sick leave, parental leave and pensions.

The National Plan for Gender Equality 2022-2024 defines the manner of implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2022-2027, through specific activities with their holders, time frame, allocated financial resources and indicators for evaluation. We found that this document has been prepared, but has not yet been approved by the Minister of Labour and Social Policy. Despite the fact that the National Action Plan has not been adopted, we have determined that some activities are currently being implemented.

The National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2018-2020, for the implementation of the Strategy on Gender Equality 2013-2020, foresees an activity for development of plans and programmes for greater involvement of women from rural areas in the labour market. The activity was supposed to be implemented in 2020 by competent institutions, but it has not been determined in what way. Due to the Covid crisis, the Operational Plan for the implementation of the action plan for gender equality of the MLSP for 2020 has not been adopted and the planned activity has not been implemented.

The Operational plan of the **National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2014-2020**, is implemented through the five-year National Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development, the IPARD Programme 2014-2020 and the Government's annual programmes for financial support of agriculture and rural development.

It is planned that regular monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy will be carried out based on the submission of annual information to the Government prepared by the MAFWM.

In 2017, at the mid-point of the Strategy implementation period, it was planned to conduct an analysis of the status of the Strategy implementation and the effects of the implemented policies and, subsequently, based on the findings of the analysis to update the text of the Strategy.

The review of the achievement of the strategic commitments and the updated text of the Strategy were scheduled to be submitted to the Government for approval by June 2017 at the latest.

The procedures for mid-term evaluation of the implementation of the National Strategy and its update should have been regulated as an obligation in the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development.

In relation to the implementation, achievement and monitoring of the National Strategy, the audit determined the following:

- ◆ the Operational Plan lists the measures for each area through the competent institution, time frame, expected results/indicators and indicative amount of funds and source of financing. Expected results/indicators are narrative, and don't include quantitative and qualitative indicators, which makes evaluation and trend tracking difficult.
- ◆ regular monitoring of the Strategy implementation was not carried out by submitting annual information to the Government prepared by the MAFWM by the end of the current year and
- ◆ no analysis has been conducted on the implementation of the Strategy and the effects of the implemented policies and evaluation, and no amendments to the Law on Agriculture and Rural Development have been initiated, to ensure that the mid-term evaluation and update of the Strategy will become a legal obligation.

In the **National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development** for the period 2014-2020, in order to start a process of revitalization of depopulated rural areas, it is foreseen to adopt special legal solutions to support the almost completely abandoned areas or areas in the phase of serious depopulation in the country. The goal is to provide greater support for encouraging economic activities and investments in infrastructure by designing a special package of measures that are needed for each of the regions. The special legal solutions should be based on comprehensive studies and analyzes of the development potential of each of the regions, based on which the policies and measures for economic and population revitalization of the regions will be defined.

We found that that the necessary analyses and special laws have not been prepared.

The main goal of the **National Employment Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia 2016-2020** is "Increasing employment, the quality of employment, the quality of jobs and productivity, with a special focus on vulnerable groups of the population." Women with lower level of education and women from rural areas are identified as a vulnerable category in the labour market because they are less likely to find a job (if they are active), and some of them are also less likely to be active in the labour market, and one of the most important reasons for this is household responsibilities.

Despite the fact that the issues and challenges faced by women in rural areas in terms of their inclusion in the labour market are identified in the Strategy and they are determined as a vulnerable category in the labour market, they are not recognized as a vulnerable group in the outcomes of the objectives which should contribute to the achievement of the overarching goal for increasing, quality of jobs and productivity.

The adopted National Employment Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia 2021 - 2027, together with the Employment Action Plan 2021 - 2023, does not include any activities related to women in rural areas, i.e. specific goals and measures for inclusion in the labour market related to opportunities for training and employment for women in rural areas.

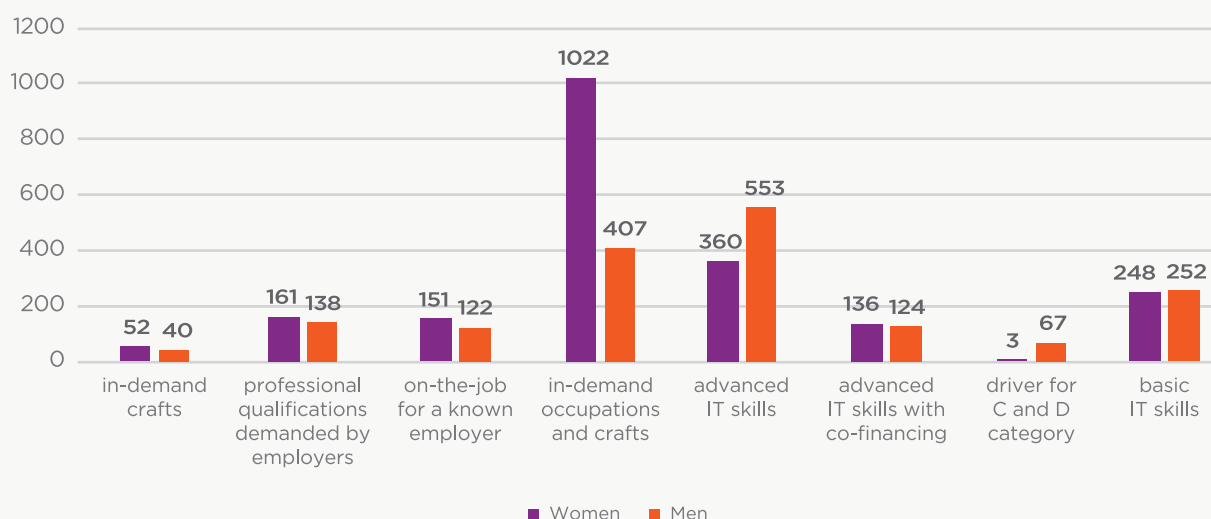
This results in lack of specific employment and training measures adapted to the needs of women in rural areas and aimed at ensuring their inclusion in the labour market.

3.1.2. Investment in vocational training of women from rural areas and support for job creation

Training is an important part in the process of inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market. It is intended to contribute to the improvement of their knowledge and skills for inclusion in the labour market. For this purpose, the audit performed an analysis of the training programmes conducted by the Employment Agency. The results showed that in the period 2019-2022, training programmes in 8 areas were conducted with 3.836 participants. For this purpose were spent 215.959.000 denars.

The following chart presents the total number of participants in each training by gender.

FIGURE 3:
Participants in trainings by gender in the period 2019-2022



From the collected data we determined that the Employment Agency does not maintain records of data on training participation disaggregated by gender in rural and urban areas.

Employment measures are an important part in the process of inclusion of rural women in the labour market. MLSP adopts annual Operational Plans for active programmes and measures for employment and services on the labour market, which determine the programmes, measures and services for employment that should ensure creation and support for creation of new jobs and increase the opportunities for employment of unemployed persons, especially the young and the long-term unemployed. Its implementation is under the competence of the Employment Agency in partnership with other responsible institutions.

The audit performed an analysis of data from the implemented measures for employment or measures to support employment in the period 2019-2022 and determined that in 2019 measures were implemented for 6,074 people, of which 3,147 were women; in 2020 measures were implemented for 9,977 of which 4,387 women, in 2021 measures were implemented for 9,846 persons, of which 4,427 were women and in 2022, measures were implemented for 10,226, of which 4,563 were women. This situation indicates an increasing trend in the coverage of the population in measures for employment and support for employment in the period 2019-2022.

With analysis we determined that the gender perspective is not included in the measures for employment. The measures are general and intended for all citizens in the country. In the operational plans for employment there are no measures that meet the needs and specifics of women in rural areas that will enable their easy and quick inclusion in the labour market. Also, support measures for self-employment do not support the establishment of businesses in agricultural activity, with the exception of organic agricultural production.

The reports on the implementation of the Operational Plans contain data on beneficiaries of measures divided by gender but there is no data divided by rural and urban areas.

Furthermore, we found that the Employment Agency does not monitor the effects and long-term sustainability of the measures and activities for training and inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market in order to assess whether they contribute to sustainable employment.

We emphasize that the institutions have taken measures and started projects for strengthening rural women as follows:

- ◆ In February 2023, the Government adopted the Program for social security support for women engaged in agricultural activities, and the objective is to provide non-refundable financial support to women who are engaged in agricultural activity and have the status of insured individual farmer. This Program will allow women farmers to use maternity benefits during the period they are prevented from performing agricultural activity due to childbirth. The benefits are not covered by the regulations in the field of labour relations for paid maternity leave. The financial support under this Program is granted to women that have given birth in the period from 1 December 2022 until 1 December 2023.

Until the adoption of a legal solution, this measure can contribute to improving the situation of women in rural areas.

- ◆ In 2023, the Government adopted information on the implementation of the Project “50 villages, 50 stories”. The project aims for integrated rural development targeting villages with potential for agritourism, rural tourism, socioeconomic development, cultural heritage and with the aim of their development component, promotional opportunity and reduction of migration.

The project timeline is four years, starting this year until the project closes in 2026. We believe that such projects hold exceptional significance and that their execution should be top priority for the government with the aim of improving the situation in rural areas, promoting their revitalization, retaining the population, and ultimately, facilitating creation of new employment opportunities for women in rural areas.

- ◆ According to the national programme for financial support of rural development, measure 112 - Assistance to young farmers for starting agricultural activity has been implemented. With this measure, non-refundable financial support for starting agricultural activity is given to young farmers, who are starting to engage in agricultural activity for the first time. The funds are intended for investments and purchase of fixed assets, operating costs related to the acquired assets and other costs foreseen by the Program.

From the performed analysis of the requests submitted upon published public calls, for the funds allocated under this measure, we determined that the number of both submitted and approved requests is decreasing among men and women. Women from rural areas think that the procedure is too slow, long and complex. Extensive documentation is required, and the process from application to approval and payment of the approved funds takes a long time. Also, it is necessary to invest one's own funds, before receiving the funds for which they applied.

- ◆ In 2019, gender-responsive measure 115 - Support for an active female member in the agricultural household was introduced for the first time. This measure supports women-owned agricultural holdings with financial support of 3.000 euros in 2019 and 6.000 euros in 2022, for an investment that will add value to their production and skills and encourage income-generating activities.

We found that in 2022, 66% less financial support requests were submitted compared to 2019.

The MAFWS has not carried out evaluation of the measure in order to determine the needs for possible interventions, as well as monitoring its effect. With the support of UN Women, the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences and Food, within the project "Towards Gender Responsive Policies and Budgets in Agriculture and Rural Development", published a publication on strengthening the role of women in agriculture. The publication contains analysis of the effect of measure 115 i.e. its influence on empowering women. The analysis was conducted on a sample of 300 women in different statistical regions of the country, divided into three equal groups of 100 each: control (who did not apply), rejected (who applied but were rejected) and approved (who applied and received financial support).

The research findings showed that 93.5 % of women consider that the measure is successful in terms of strengthening their position. The low amount of financial resources to cover the investment is the main reason for those who consider that the measure is not a successful tool for empowerment.

The main conclusion of the study is that there is no direct effect of policy interventions on empowerment, but it has a positive impact on women's attitude, income generation and strengthening their position in the household.

We would like to share a story of successful women from the rural area. In 2000, a woman made the life-changing decision to move from the city to the village. In 2014, despite lacking prior experience in the field, she applied for self-employment grant to the Employment Agency and received a non-refundable grant of 3.000 euro, along with relevant training. Using this grant and training, she established her own company as an individual farmer, specializing in keeping cattle.



Burrata making process



She currently owns 15 cows that produce milk, and she uses the milk to make burrata, which is a unique product that no one else in the country produces. She sells the milk to a dairy factory and the burrata to well-known hotels and restaurants in Skopje.

In order to provide food for the cows, she has taken 3 hectares of arable land on concession, where she grows clover and barley. Additionally, she has received funding from the MAFWM programmes, including 10.000 euro for a dairy farm for buttermilk production (certified food operator) and 6.000 euro for equipment through Measure 115 - Active female member in 2023. In the same year, she hired a woman from a rural area to assist her with logistics and marketing. She expressed satisfaction with her current income and a desire to continue this work in the future. The main challenge she highlighted is to find workers, as few people are willing to do this job. We should view these successful rural women as role models and motivators for other women in rural areas.

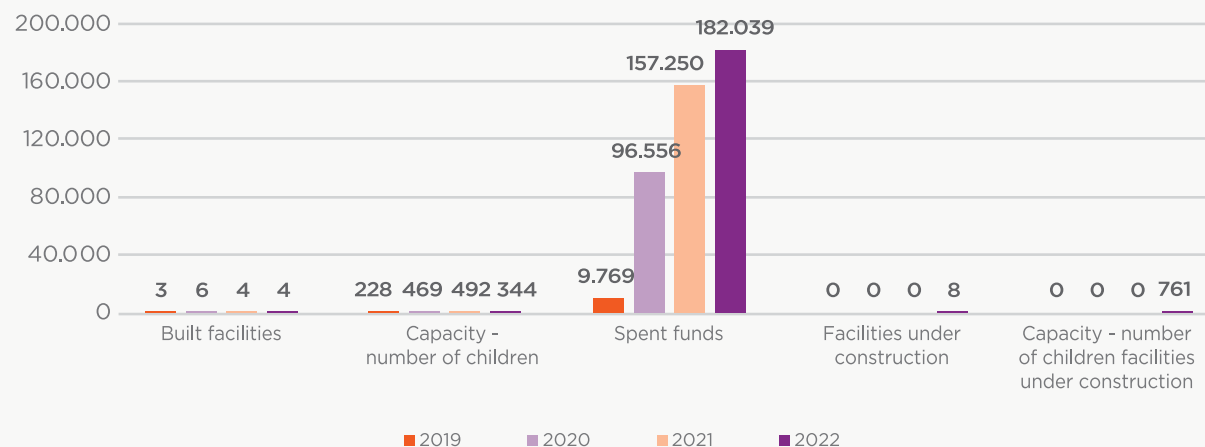
3.1.3. Investments in public services in rural areas (childcare in kindergartens and homes for the elderly)

The high inactivity rate among women throughout the country, particularly in rural areas, is primarily attributed to the persisting traditional role of women in households. This pertains primarily to their household duties, the care of family, children, and elderly members.

Investing in preschool childcare facilities in rural areas is a good basis for retaining the young population in rural areas. For these reasons, the audit performed an analysis of the situation with kindergartens in rural areas and determined that the MLSP, in accordance with the Law on Budget Execution, adopts annual programmes for construction, equipping, and maintenance of child protection facilities. Based on the examination of implementation of the annual programmes for the period 2019 – 2023, we determined that 17 new child protection facilities were constructed with a capacity to accommodate 1.533 children, for which were spent 445.614.000 denars, and 8 childcare facilities with a capacity of 761 children are currently under construction. Also, reconstruction, adaptation and extension works were implemented for childcare facilities with total capacity of 1.435 children.

The figure below illustrates the situation with already constructed facilities, facilities that are under construction, and their capacity - the number of children to be accommodated in rural areas.

FIGURE 4:
Built and under construction child protection facilities in rural areas, 2019 - 2022



We also determined that analysis by rural area has not been conducted to determine the need for construction of childcare facilities for children of preschool age, including timelines, competent institutions and required funds.

The National Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2027 includes an objective to improve the quality of work for women, and an indicator under this objective - construction of homes for the elderly in rural areas.

The audit found that in the country, there are five public institutions for elderly care with total capacity of 637 beds and only one of them is registered as a public health facility - the Gerontology Institute in Skopje. These five public institutions for elderly care are in urban municipalities Skopje, Kumanovo, Prilep, Bitola and Berovo.

The MLSP adopts annual programmes for construction, equipping, and maintenance of social protection facilities and homes for the elderly in accordance with the Law on Budget Execution. Upon examination of the annual programmes for the period 2019-2023 and their amendments and implementation, the audit found that it is planned to build 2 new homes for the elderly and to reconstruct part of the existing ones. The planned construction activities have not been realized.

We also examined the number and capacity of private facilities for the elderly, and we found that there are 40 private social protection facilities for the elderly with a capacity of 1.637 beds. Around 78% of these are established and operating on the territory of Skopje. Only six other towns have homes for the elderly with a total capacity of 353 beds, which is not sufficient to meet the population's needs.

The audit found that the lack of institutional mechanisms for long-term care for the elderly is especially problematic for rural areas, where access to specialized health facilities is also lacking. State homes, which are more economical for the population than private ones, are not sufficient to meet the needs.

3.2. Albania

3.2.1. Do national programmes facilitate the active employment of women in rural areas?

In Albania, the role of rural women continues to face a lack of promotion and support. Although there have been numerous projects and initiatives to strengthen the position and decision-making role of women in rural development, their effectiveness has been insufficient. The empowerment of rural women in Albania should be supported through a more helpful climate, with actual and long term initiatives focusing on the gaps and on the role that the woman in rural areas should have. Rural labour markets do not offer many opportunities to women. Women are discouraged from searching for a job that is not farm-related and work primarily in agriculture. Actually, a high percentage of women contribute to family chores, meaning that they are the ones who perform the unpaid labour in the agricultural economy of the home. The addressing of obstacles that rural women and girls face constitutes one of the priorities of the Albanian government, as an integral part of the undertaking to increase gender equality and social inclusion.

In March 2019, the new Law No. 15/2019, dated 13.03.2019 “On Employment Promotion” was adopted. The Law on Employment Promotion paved the way for the restructuring of the National Employment Service at the National Agency for Employment and Skills, the reconceptualization of relations with employers, the establishment of a labour market information system, etc.

Based on the Law, public employment policies include employment services and active and passive labour market programmes, which aim to promote the employment of unemployed jobseekers, and the integration and social inclusion of special groups. The law provides for the implementation of new employment promotion programmes that include the engagement of unemployed jobseekers in different employment programmes², such as: on-the-job training, internships, self-employment, community employment, for which subsidies are foreseen at a set cost percentage for: compulsory health and social insurance, salaries, work environment furnishing and reasonable adjustment, transport to and from work, crèches and kindergartens for children in charge, respectively according to programmes.

Employment promotion programmes have been approved by the DCM on Employment Promotion, and they have been subject to constant changes over the years according to the government’s priorities for increasing the employment level. They are in line with the state employment policies to support jobseekers, and employers to open new sustainable job positions, and include the involvement of unemployed jobseekers in various employment programmes, public positions, self-employment, vocational internships or on-the-job training programmes, for which a given percentage of cost subsidy is provided in accordance with the relevant legal acts.

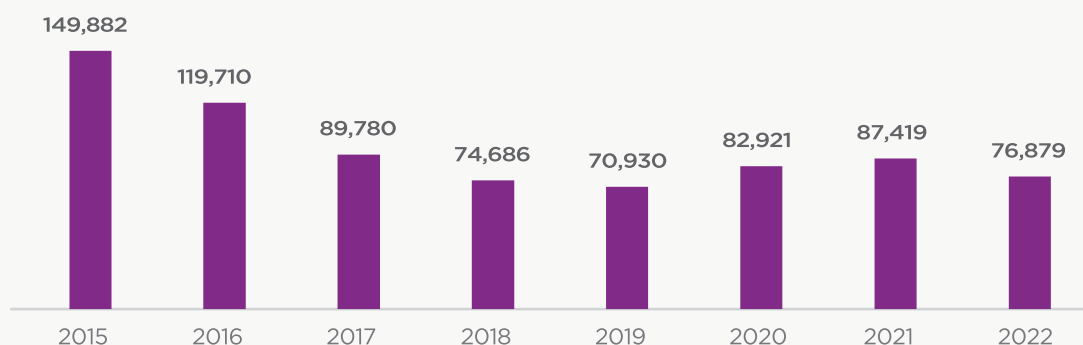
² Article 23, paragraph 4, sets forth: Secondary legislation acts pursuant to Law No. 7995, dated 20.9.1995, “On Employment Promotion” shall remain in effect until new secondary legislation pursuant to this law is adopted, unless they contradict the provisions of this law”.

The employment promotion policies in Albania are implemented by way of the National Agency for Employment and Skills. Specifically, for the audited period, the National Agency for Employment and Skills has implemented the four following DCMs to provide support to unemployed jobseekers through active Employment Promotion programmes:

- ◆ Decision No. 17, dated 15.01.2020 “On Procedures, Criteria and Rules on the Implementation of Employment Promotion Programmes through Employment, On-the-job Training and Internships”, as amended.
- ◆ Decision No. 348, dated 29.04.2020, “On the Procedures, Criteria and Rules on the Implementation of the Promotion Programme through Self-employment”;
- ◆ Decision No. 535, dated 8.7.2020 “On the Procedures, Criteria and Rules on the Implementation of the Public Community Works Programme”;
- ◆ Decision No. 608, dated 29.07.2020, “On the Procedures, Criteria and Rules on the Implementation of the Employment Promotion Programme through the Employment of Unemployed People as a result of COVID-19”, as amended.

Regarding unemployed jobseekers registered at Employment Offices to benefit from NAES programmes (in reference to the annual analyses of NAES for 2019-2022), it results that the recorded unemployment rates are as follows:

FIGURE 5:
The annual average of unemployment registered in years



Source: NAES

Employment promotion programmes have been designed to also address the needs of disadvantaged categories of unemployed jobseekers. Decision No. 17, foresees the implementation of employment promotion programmes for: employment programme, on-the-job training, and internships.

The purpose of such programmes is to provide employment, training and internships to unemployed jobseekers who have difficulty entering the labour market. In such programmes, the needs and profile of the jobseeker must be tailored to the job vacancy requirements offered by the employer.

Decision No. 348, (Self-employment programme) establishes the procedures, criteria and rules on the implementation of the self-employment programme, which aims at promoting self-employment and assisting jobseekers to undertake new ventures and businesses.

The NAES analyses the data only gender based (women/men) but upon the request of the audit team, only for the fourth quarter of 2023 they were able to provide more data including rural women for all administrative units as it is showed in the table below.

The UJ register by gender, fourth quarter of 2023:

	Municipality	Berat	Dibra	Kruja	Elbasan	Lushnja	Gjirokastra	Pogradec	Lezha	Shkodra	Kavaja	Vlora	Kukës	Divjaka	Total
Urban areas	Total	814	1,557	483	2,23	1,388	1,422	1,358	586	1,938	1,302	2,161	3,828	131	19,198
	Women	402	822	241	1,29	776	705	725	360	994	715	1,235	1,961	67	10,293
	Men	412	735	242	940	612	717	633	226	944	587	926	1,867	64	8,905
	Women % of the total	49.4	52.8	49.9	57.8	55.9	49.6	53.4	61.4	51.3	54.9	57.1	51.2	51.1	53.6
	Women heads of household	112.0	75.0	29.0	242.0	141.0	114.0	137.0	91.0	143.0	146.0	261.0	219.0	8.0	1,718
	Women heads of household % of the total	13.8	4.8	6.0	10.9.	10.2	8.0	10.1	15.5	7.4	11.2	12.1.	5.7	6.1	8.9
Rural areas	Total	151	301	1,501	336	800	391	609	609	639	632	81	352	578	6,98
	Women	76	177	815	208	455	208	312	369	372	362	51	217	319	3,941
	Men	75	124	686	128	345	183	297	240	267	270	30	135	259	3,039
	Women heads of household	15	14	123	31	53	19	43	60	34	47	11	20	46	516
	Women % of the total	50.3	58.8	54.3	61.9	56.9	53.2	51.2	60.6	58.2	57.3	63.0	61.6	55.2	56.5
	Women heads of household % of the total	9.9	4.7	8.2	9.2	6.6	4.9	7.1	9.9	5.3	7.4	13.6	05.7	8.0	7.4
Total women		478	999	1,056	1,498	1,231	913	1,037	729	1,366	1,077	1,286	2,178	386	14,234
% of rural vs. urban women		15.9	17.7	77.2	13.9	37.0	22.8	30.1	50.6	27.2	33.6	4.0	10.0	82.6	27.7

Source: NAES/Authors: Audit team

Based on the analysis of the data above, it was noted that the majority of registered UJs reside in rural areas as opposed to urban areas. Kruja Municipality is the only outlier, with UJs residing primarily in urban areas.

This high rate of unemployment recorded in rural areas is a clear indication that the challenges faced by Albanian women in rural areas, such as: combatting gender stereotypes, gender inequality, preventing all forms of violence against them, accessing health and social services, etc., should first be identified and then combatted.

The audit team found that:

- ◆ Employment promotion programmes, implemented by NAES for the period 2020- 2023, are general, not focusing on women, especially on rural women. These programmes aim to be implemented countrywide and focus on vulnerable groups, but there is no evidence to what extent they apply in rural areas.

The referencing data and their analysis are for women in general, and the used indicators are not divided into rural women or women residing in a city. Even other data (such as education level, age group), which are administered by NAES, are limited only to the national level, and there are no urban or rural classifications.

- ◆ NAES, in order to judge the effectivity of the currently approved programmes, has not measured or analyzed the level of employment outcomes from these programmes for rural women. Currently, NAES, through its structures, has been tracking the results for the benefited programmes by unemployed jobseekers only in 2020. According to the provisions of the programme implementation regulations, this process had to be completed 6 months after their completion.
- ◆ The assessment of the needs of special groups for support from ALMPs has not always been done in cooperation with Local Self-Government Units. Specifically, NAES has drafted and diversified ALMPs based only on the available database. However, the study of the database does not provide a panorama of all regions. The same applies to LSGUs, which have further analyzed the actual needs of women in order to empower them. In the case of Dibra, these needs have not been addressed by NAES. As a result of this situation, there have been no reports assessing the needs for employment and training services in uncovered areas.
- ◆ The audit did not show that vocational training courses were held in rural areas. Therefore, no women, who attended vocational training courses, were identified from these areas. NAES itself has data on trainees who attended vocational training courses according to their municipal units, since the Vocational Training Centres are located in the main cities. However, these data are not disaggregated by urban-rural origin.

3.2.2. Have concrete measures been taken to promote the inclusion of rural women on the labour market?

The National Strategy for Gender Equality (NSGE) 2016-2020 and its Action Plan drafted by the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth with the contribution of the Interinstitutional Working Group³, is envisaged as a roadmap toward an equitable society without violence, in which: the needs of women and men are equally taken into consideration and addressed; women are respected, protected, encouraged, and supported to progress similarly to men; girls and boys grow up happy and joyful through principles of equality and non-discrimination; - thus, a society based on sound families, supportive communities, and consolidated institutions that observe the legislation and perform their duties responsibly. Referring to this strategy, one of the sub-objectives indicating the empowerment of rural women includes sub-objective “1.3.14. The provision of crèches and kindergartens in rural areas”, implemented by local government units, which must report to the central level for its implementation. The budget available for accomplishing the objective according to this strategy for the period 2017-2020 is 80,000,000.00 ALL, for the period 2019-2020 it is 24,000,000.00 ALL every year, for the period 2017-2016 it is 16,000,000.00 ALL every year.

Through special questionnaires, the audit team has assessed what measures, the Local Self Government Units have taken:

- ◆ Reducing the barriers that keep women, young women and girls away from the labour market.
- ◆ Constructing, rehabilitating, and maintaining local roads (providing regular public transport in all Administrative Units);
- ◆ Constructing, rehabilitating, and maintaining preschool educational facilities of the educational system in kindergartens and crèches. From the official data collected by 12 out of 13 local government units, they vary according to their demographic distribution, which are as follows:



The audit team found that:

- ◆ According to the audit data, collected by the Local Self Government Units part of the audit, in almost 80% of them, the ratio of crèches and kindergartens is not in fair proportion to the rural and urban administrative units that belong to a Municipality. Referring to the official data from the audited Municipalities, there is an absence of crèches in rural administrative units and in some urban units as well. Consequently, full coverage and a fair division according to urban and rural areas, with kindergartens and crèches, is not ensured.
- ◆ According to the audit data collected by the audited Local Self-Government Units, in some Local Government Units, public transport is not accessible except in urban administrative units. Consequently, no condition has been provided to facilitate bringing women and girls as close as possible to the labour market.

³ According to Order of the Prime Minister No. 15, dated 21.01.2016 “On the Establishment and Functioning of the Inter-Institutional Working Group for the Development of the Strategic Document on Gender Equality Issues 2016-2020”.

3.2.3. Is there any interaction between central institutions and the local bodies for encouraging the employment of rural women?

According to the NAES administrated data, the level of unemployment is more pronounced in women, residents of rural areas or less-educated persons etc, Women and girls are significantly disadvantaged in all employment indicators.

Indicator	2019		2020		2021	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Labour force participation rate	68.0	53.0	66.9	52.3	67.2	52.6
Employment rate	60.1	46.9	59.2	46.1	59.5	46.4
Unemployment rate	11.6.	11.4.	11.5	11.9	11.3	11.8
Percentage of long-term unemployed	63.1	63.7	59.7	59.1	60.5	65.5
Long-term unemployment rate	7.3	7.3	6.9	7.1	6.9	7.7
Inactivity rate	32.0	47.0	33.1	47.7	32.8	47.4

Data source: NAES

Referring to the INSTAT data, the informality in the labour market is still a problem in Albania. During 2021, one in five employed persons works for free in the family business and this indicator is higher for women than for men, this is also true of employment in rural areas.

The National Strategy for Gender Equality and the Action Plan 2016-2020, have as their first strategic goal, “The Economic empowerment of women and men”. The objectives of this goal relate to the increase of the participation of women and girls in the labour market as a result of the implementation of the Employment and Skills Strategy 2014-2020 with gender in mind. Another specific objective relates to the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women.

In the National Strategy for Gender Equality and the Action Plan 2021-2030, the strategic goal “Economic empowerment of women and men” has been further expanded, aiming not only at the socioeconomic empowerment of women, young women and girls from all groups, e.i from rural areas but also the advancement towards environmental economy and digitization. To fulfill this goal, one of the objectives is “Increasing the access of women, young people and girls, from all groups to financial services and products, as well as to productive resources”. While analyzing these objectives as well as implementing the National Strategy on Employment and Skills 2019-2022, the audit team examined the activity of institutions at the central and local level related to the focus of our audit, “the employment of rural women”.

With the completion of the NSES 2019-2022, the new employment strategy 2023-2030 has been drafted, which has not yet been approved. In implementation of the objectives of the National Strategy on Employment and Skills 2019 - 2022, it has been determined that NAES will develop several activities aimed at establishing interaction between central institutions and local structures to promote employment in general. Namely, all measures must be taken by NAES to implement the service plan in the uncovered areas¹⁹. To realize this, some cooperation agreements will be signed with the Local Self-Government Units in which mutual roles will be defined, as well as the type of services that will be offered in areas not covered by employment offices. One-stop shops will also be set up near Local Self-Government Units.

Implementation of cooperation agreements signed between NAES and LSGUs Lezhë, Elbasan and Lushnje. The National Agency for Employment and Skills has signed a cooperation agreement with the Local Self-Government Units, for the purpose of strengthening and coordinating employment policies at the regional and local level. Namely, 16 agreements have been signed with different municipalities (Elbasan, Gramsh, Librazhd, Peqin, Cërrik, Përrenjas, Fier, Lushnje, Patos, Roskovec, Korça, Maliq, Lezha, Laç, Mirdita and Delvina) since the adoption of the NSES in 2019 and until 2021. From these 16 agreements, the audit team audited the implementation of 3 agreements, such as Lushnje, Lezhë and Elbasan.

The signing parties agree to cooperate to enable institutional support and the integration of jobseekers in the labour market. The goal is to coordinate institutional efforts at the central, regional and local level with the main objective of reducing the level of unemployment and addressing the social problems faced by individuals in these municipalities as effectively as possible.

The audit team found that:

- ◆ The obligations defined in the agreements signed by Lushnje, Lezha, and Elbasan Municipalities were not implemented. The activities carried out to promote employment were not documented. Administrative Units located far away from Local Employment Offices did not record jobseekers in a register to be periodically submitted to the Local Employment Office. Furthermore, no responsible person was assigned at Administrative Units to coordinate the work and keep in constant contact with the local Employment Office in order to address employment issues. On the other hand, the NAES did not record the progress of the implementation of agreements concluded with the Municipalities of Elbasan, Lushnja and Lezha. Moreover, no assessment was conducted with regard to their effectiveness in improving the employment situation.
- ◆ The National Agency for Employment and Skills did not establish one-stop shops at Local Self-Government Units, which lack local employment offices, thus not complying with the National Strategy on Employment and Skills.
- ◆ The employment services provided by the National Agency for Employment and Skills, are not fully coordinated with Local Self-Government Units. The communication among central and local structures failed to identify the needs of women in general and rural women in particular.
- ◆ With regard to the National Agency for Employment and Skills, despite the periodic monitoring of the implementation of the activities to be carried out for the purpose of achieving the goals of the National Strategy on Employment and Skills 2019-2022, there is no information on the actual use of the monitoring results to improve employment policies, or as to which are the specific improvements made in reference to the monitoring results.

3.3. Kosovo

3.3.1. Selection criteria of Rural Development Program do not ensure the support of gender equality

Referring to the annual Rural Development Program and administrative instructions, the number of criteria for selection of the grant beneficiaries has changed over the years. The criteria have been removed or added as well as scored with different points depending on the programmes and annual guideline.

The distribution of points foreseen as affirmative tools for evaluation of applicants for rural development grants, has had an undeniable effect on both measures. In measure 1 “Investments in physical assets and economic development” the affirmative points are conditional on verification of ownership, while in measure 302/7 “Diversification of farms and business development”, there was a big difference in affirmative points for gender in some of the sectors. We highlight that for the measure 302/7 the points have fluctuated to a great extent depending on the sectors, in some cases from 55 to 5 points.

Therefore, women applicants under measure 1 “Investments in physical assets and economic development” received affirmative points only if they had ownership of the land for the last three to five years. Female applicants in measure 302/7 “Diversification of farms and business development” received foreseen points only if they have proven three years of ownership in open businesses. This means that the affirmative points did not have an impact on the direct support of women.

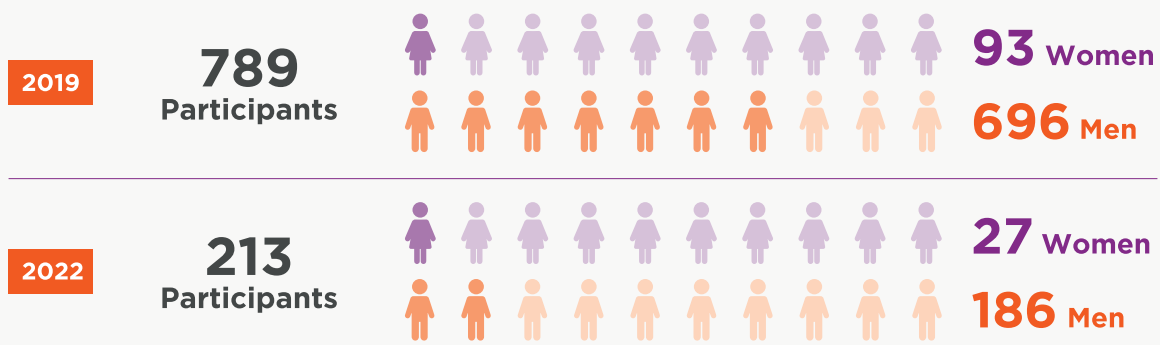
The negative consequences of the constantly changing criteria and scoring procedures can be seen in two aspects: First, since in Kosovo the age of women involved in agriculture is mainly 45-55 years old, the benefit of points as a young farmer has stimulated youth but has excluded women farmers⁴, because they do not enter the “young farmer” category. Second, women throughout Kosovo enjoy real estate ownership in only 17% of properties, and for agricultural lands this percentage barely reaches 4%, therefore conditioning the measure on real estate has excluded many more women than men.⁵ Meanwhile, the reduction of affirmative points in some of the sectors of the measure 302/7 and in particular the handicrafts ones has increased the number of male beneficiaries that for the years 2019- 2022 reaches the figure of 45-55% of the beneficiaries. This shows that even the sectors that are expected to help the inclusion of women in the labour market are clearly far from this goal.

3.3.2. Failure to inform women about Rural Development Programmes

Furthermore, the Managing Authority within the Ministry (MAFRD) cooperates with the Agency of Agricultural Development (AAD) to organize information sessions on the Rural Development Program and publishes information materials on the Ministry’s website. The ministry is responsible for informing interested parts and give instructions for completing forms and other information for applicants. However, there are still deficiencies in conveying information to women living in rural areas.

⁴ Gender analysis of the project, Vocational training and opportunities for generating income in agriculture for women and youth living in rural areas of Kosovo, August 2020 [https://iadk.org/Uploads/Documents/Pdf/AL/1008/Analiza%20Gjinore_Final\(Shqip\).pdf](https://iadk.org/Uploads/Documents/Pdf/AL/1008/Analiza%20Gjinore_Final(Shqip).pdf)

⁵ Article, Non-formality affects women in agriculture Radio Evropa e lirë 2023 <https://www.evropaelire.org/a/joformalite-ti-cenongrate-ne-bujqesi-/32303973.html>



The low number of women participants in the information sessions has been occurred due to the lack of meetings and discussions with women interested for agriculture activities. The ministry hasn't foreseen other more advanced ways to convey information to all women from the rural areas.

From the table it can be observed that in the information sessions held in 2019 and 2022, the number of women is significantly lower compared to the number of men. In 2019, about 12% of the participants were women, while 88% were men. Whereas, in 2022, about 13% of the participants were women and 87% were men. The low participation of women may have occurred because the information sessions are held only during the period when calls for applications are announced, and regular meetings are not held with the target groups throughout the year.

3.3.3. Shortcomings in the Rural Development Program monitoring process

It is confirmed that, in the absence of detailed analyses of performance indicators separated by gender, the monitoring reports do not provide adequate information for stakeholders regarding the achievement of objectives according to the purpose of Rural Development Program (RDP) measures, as it is emphasized that priority will be given to projects carried out in mountainous areas, proposed by women entrepreneurs, young farmers and projects that will create new jobs in rural areas. The non operationalization of the monitoring committee has caused that the monitoring reports of the RDPs are not further processed and approved.

3.3.4. Delay in announcing calls for applications

The main goals of the allocation of grants are: increasing production and productivity, diversifying activities in farms and rural businesses, creating new jobs, therefore one of the biggest problems for them has been delays on announcement of applications.

All calls for applications for farmers and households during the period 2019-2022 were made in the second half of the year, while the announcement for 2023 was made at the end of this year. This procedure was not following climate change and was not in accordance with seasonal agriculture work.

Delays in the drafting and approval of the Rural Development Programmes have caused other chain delays both in the announcement of calls for applications as well as in the selection of grant beneficiaries.

3.3.5. Registration and application review procedures do not sufficiently support the female gender

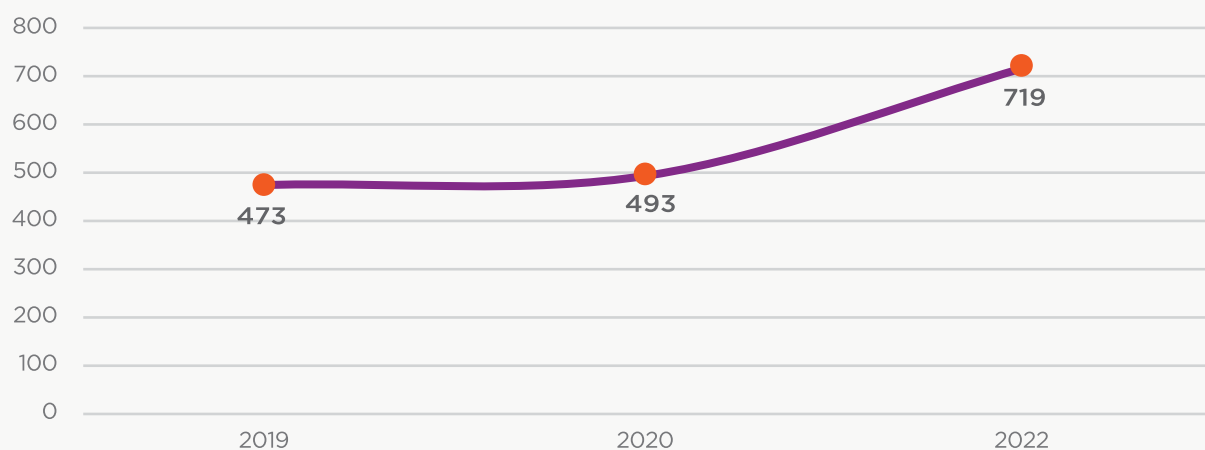
The Agency of Agricultural Development (AAD), as the implementing authority of the program for rural development, during the registration of applicants in the system, doesn't make specific gender registration of grant applicants. Regarding the gender aspect, AAD only has data on the number of beneficiaries by gender and not of the number of applicants. The lack of gender registration for applications can create obstacles when designing policies that aim to support the overall development, with a special focus on improving the status of women in rural areas.

Also, during the verification of the fulfillment of the eligibility criteria, it was noticed that a significant number of women applicants are rejected due to the non-fulfillment of this criteria. AAD does not review all appeal cases. On the other side, the electronic system makes an automatic selection of applicants based on the time when the application arrives, without considering gender preference.

3.3.6. The increase in interest in some of the agricultural sectors did not increase the number of women beneficiaries

It has also been observed that despite the increase in the number of applicants, the level of female beneficiaries has decreased, as can be seen in the comparative analysis between the applicant/ beneficiary ratio.

FIGURE 6:
Development trend of women applicants for the measure:
“Investments in physical assets in agricultural holdings”, period 2019-2022



There is an increase in interest during the years 2019-2022 for the grants provided under measure 1, “Investments in physical assets and households” but compared to the total number of all applicants, 76-87% of them are rejected, and beneficiaries by women are in a low number of 13-24%. The rejection of women applicants occurred due to complicated procedures during the review and verification for fulfilling the eligibility or even selection criteria.

The cause of this non-proportional development between applicants and beneficiaries included conditions with ownership, the age of the farmer and other conditions.

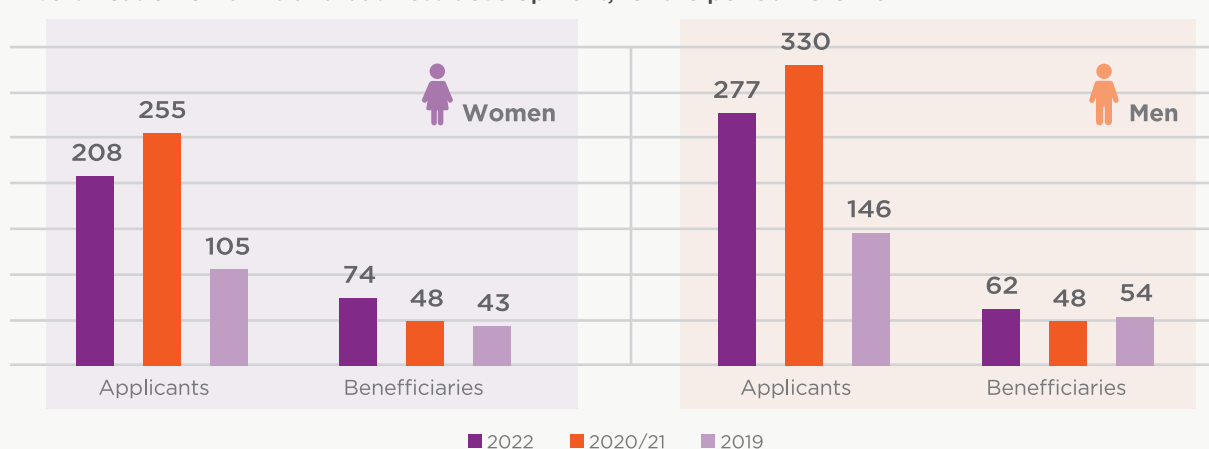
3.3.7. Conditioning of affirmative measures makes their purpose ineffective

The affirmative points are not applied to all application cases, due to the ownership criterion, as it was emphasized above that women receive affirmative points only if they have owned land or businesses in the last 3 years.

Moreover, affirmative measures are conditional on women to be land or business owners for three to five years, thereby making their goal ineffective, because it limits the participation or support of women and girls who have just started their activity.

This condition can be seen on graphic below where is presented relation between the grant's applicants and beneficiaries.

FIGURE 7:
Number of applicants and beneficiaries by gender, measure 302:
Diversification of farms and business development, for the period 2019-2022



During 2019, 54.4% of the beneficiaries were women, while 45.6% were men. In 2020/21, the number of female beneficiaries has slightly decreased, while the number of male beneficiaries has increased and reached a ratio of 50:50. Whereas, in 2022, the number of women beneficiaries continued to decrease, reaching 44.3%, while the number of men beneficiaries has continually increased and reached 55.7%.

At this point should be emphasized that this measure is foreseen to involve women on the labour market, and has more to do with women's nature.

3.3.8. Shortcomings in the process of controls of grant beneficiaries

It was confirmed that the inspection is not consistently carried out from the agency, allowing issues such as non-application of criteria or the opening of new job places not be verified as foreseen in the project.

The second control that is done after the investment did not identify the lack of evidence for the employees as well as the reason for non-implementation of the criterion against which the project was scored. Therefore, the number of employees or the opening of new jobs foreseen in the project cannot be confirmed.



Observation of beekeeping raised by a female beneficiary, Location: Lubishtë, City of Vitia, Gjilan

Some of the samples during audit process has shown the readiness of women to successfully fulfill project benefited by the ministry. On this manner, we would like to emphasize that among other activities supported by the ministry, beekeeping is an activity that is cultivated to a large extent by women in Kosovo. Below is presented the photo of a good exam of beekeeping development at one of the villages observed:

In this project, a woman- grant beneficiary, has managed to establish 100 beehives, placing them in 3 locations as part of a family business. This project has been successfully implemented and achieved productivity. The project is assessed as completed.

3.3.9. There is a lack of data and professional training services disaggregated by urban and rural areas

What's the most important for starting awareness for equal and balance gender employment, we have confirmed that the Employment Agency of Kosovo (EARK) does not have available specific data for women/men employment in urban and rural areas, which could give a real number of job seekers, work mediations, training needs or other services.

The Employment Agency does not have gender-disaggregated data for urban and rural areas regarding registration, employment services, participation in active labour market measures and vocational training of the registered unemployed persons. In particular, the lack of services for the vocational training of women farmers causes this category to have difficulties in their inclusion in the labour market.

4. NATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

4. NATIONAL CONCLUSIONS

4.1. North Macedonia

The measures and activities for promotion of gender equality of women from rural areas through their inclusion in the labour market, undertaken by the competent public institutions, are not efficient and effective enough for the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market and retention in rural areas.

National strategies in this area provide a solid basis for rural development, but it is necessary to develop specific measures and activities adapted to the demands of women in rural areas and their inclusion in the labour market. Currently, women in rural areas and their inclusion in the labour market are not considered among the strategic priorities of the government. By setting this as a strategic goal, the government will not only improve the condition of women in rural areas, but it will also have an effect on the prevention or reduction of emigration of people from rural areas.

There are measures that contribute to improving the situation of rural women, such as the first gender-responsive measure - Measure 115 - Support for an active female member of an agricultural household, as well as measures for inclusion of rural women in the labour market, which were developed by the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, such as Measure 112 - Assistance to young farmers for starting an agricultural activity and Measure 7 - Diversification of farms and business development.

The employment measures implemented by Employment Agency are applicable to all, men and women in the country and there are no measures specifically designed to promote the inclusion of rural women in the labour market. There is no disaggregated data on the beneficiaries of the measures based on their place of residence, rural or urban environment.

To increase the efficiency of the process of inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market, it is imperative to design direct measures that will facilitate the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market and ensure their participation in the development and design of these measures at national and local level. It is also essential to provide more support to women in rural areas through field visits and promotion of government measures to familiarize them with their opportunities, methods and procedures for applying and using these measures.

For better inclusion of rural women in the labour market, it is necessary to increase the number of nursing and educational institutions and homes for the elderly in rural areas. In addition, it is crucial to improve public services for rural women, including but not limited to health, social, cultural and public services, which are essential to living in rural areas.

Continuation of the Social Security Program for women engaged in agricultural activity, or a permanent solution to their social security in a legal solution, may contribute to improving the conditions of women from rural areas.

An integrated and comprehensive data collection system should be established to enable analysis of available data for each measure individually. This system should enable a detailed analysis of the measures and their effects, as well as giving a complete picture of the situation for each measure.

The improvement of this process should generate multiple effects in several areas, taking into account the interrelationship between the processes that occur or should occur in rural areas, where women play key role.

4.2. Albania

The employment promotion programmes carried out by NAES during 2019 - 2023 are general and not divided on a gender basis, much less focusing on rural women. Data related to employment promotion programmes do not include rural women. There is a lack of government policy documents targeting rural women, or addressing the difficulties faced by rural women regarding employment, poverty, and access to health services, education, infrastructure, social security, etc.

The lack of measurable quantitative or qualitative gender indicators in the programmes implementation and in the performance card, which are necessary to monitor the progress of the outcomes achieved and the fulfillment of specific goals, contributes to the lack of efficiency and effectiveness of the programmes managed by NAES by affecting the effectiveness of their implementation for the empowerment of rural women.

Moreover, there has been a lack of effective coordination between RDNAES and RDPVTs regarding the drafting and analysis of rural women's employment needs.

Lack of crèches in almost all rural AUs, as well as the lack of kindergartens in some of them, greatly affects the level of employment for women from rural areas and does not lessen the barriers that prevent women, young women and girls to get as close as possible the labour market.

Lack of transport coverage and logistic infrastructure especially in the rural administrative units, hinders the strengthening of women's position in society and their access to the labour market.

The National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021-2030 aims at the economic empowerment of women through their socioeconomic empowerment, including "rural women". On the other hand, the National Strategy on Employment and Skills 2023-2030 (the draft is currently undergoing public consultation), defines the decent employment of women and men through the implementation of comprehensive labour market policies as a strategic goal. The Employment Strategy does not define any other classifications within the women's group, unlike the Strategy on Gender Equality, which even includes "women from rural areas" as a separate group. So, the NSES 2023-2030 (draft) did not observe the general principle of national strategies aligning with the NSDEI 2030 framework that also includes the NSGE 2021-2030.

In regards to our audit objective "the employment of women in rural areas", seen from the point of view that municipalities are the first institution where individuals turn for any problem, including the request for employment, it is not found that women in general, or women in rural areas are defined as a separate group. In the documents that define the commitments of the municipalities or the NAES, such as the agreements, no goals or specific activities have been set for women in general or for women in rural areas in particular, with the aim of informing them about the opportunities of employment.

In the implementation of employment policies for our focus group i.e "rural women" but not only, cross-institutional collaboration and coordination with local self-government units also plays a fundamental role. Currently, despite the existing cooperation between the National Agency for Employment and Skills and the municipalities, the services delivered to jobseekers, i.e. rural women in our case, are ineffective. The information exchange with Local Self-Government Units does not lead to the addressing of issues that prevent rural women from accessing the labour market.

Periodic monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy on Employment and Skills 2019-2022 was carried out for each activity and the relevant monitoring reports were drawn up.

Based on the audit focus, the data were grouped into women and men. No strategy activity data pertain to rural women. Moreover, there is no finding as to whether the monitoring of the activities carried out to implement employment goals has facilitated the identification of issues or the addressing of issues for improvement. There is no clear indication as to the drafting of employment promotion policies in reference to the monitoring results and if so, what type of policies.

4.3. Kosovo

Responsible public institutions have undertaken a series of actions to strengthen the position of women in society, but no satisfactory results have yet been achieved for the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market. Rural Development Programmes and affirmative measures have failed to ensure equal support for both genders and there is no evaluation of the achievement of the program's goals from a gender perspective. Affirmative measures are conditional on women to be land or business owners for three to five years, thereby making their goal ineffective, because it limits the participation or support of women and girls who have just started their activity. There is a lack of greater activation in properly informing women about the use of their right guaranteed by law.

Whereas the lack of functioning of the Monitoring Committee has caused problems in the monitoring process of Rural Development programmes and as a result they have no data to reflect the results achieved or their impact on the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market, the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women.

The Employment Agency does not have gender-disaggregated data for urban and rural areas regarding registration, employment services, participation in active labour market measures and vocational training of the registered unemployed persons. In particular, the lack of services for the vocational training of women farmers causes this category to have difficulties in their inclusion in the labour market.

The programmes and measures of the MAFRD do not ensure the support for gender equality. The change of criteria and their scoring was done without any analysis, thus affecting the affirmative measure and the principle of inclusiveness. In the absence of property, candidates have lost score for both criteria and this double effect shows a negative implication between them.

The Managing Authority cooperates with the AAD to organize information sessions on the RDP and publishes information materials on the Ministry's website, such as instructions for completing forms and other information for applicants. However, there are still deficiencies in conveying information to women living in rural areas.

Delays in the drafting and approval of the Rural Development Programmes have caused other chain delays both in the announcement of calls for applications as well as in the selection of grant beneficiaries.

AAD does not have complete information on the number of applicants based on gender for the benefiting grants. This lack of information can create obstacles when designing policies that aim to support the overall development, with a special focus on improving the status of women in rural areas.

Grant applicants are subject to administrative and substantive documentation verification procedures. Due to the complicated and often inaccessible procedures for women farmers with a low level of education, as well as the electronic system used for the selection of beneficiaries, it is impossible to select grant beneficiaries according to an objective judgment based on the principle of gender equality.

The Ministry has not managed to carry out ex-post evaluations of RDPs, through which the impact of investments made through grants would be evaluated. The lack of constant situation assessment, cause and consequences has contributed to the unreasonable increase of restrictive measures and the implication of criteria that has made it impossible to involve women to a greater extent as beneficiaries of funds.

The monitoring reports do not provide sufficient information for the achievement of the objectives according to the program measures. The reports contain general data on applicants by measures, rejects and beneficiaries but not disaggregated by gender.

The control directorate showed deficiencies in the process of appointing inspectors by appointing same inspectors twice in a row, while internal procedures require rotation of inspectors for control. The second control that is done after the investment did not identify the lack of evidence for the employees as well as the reason for non-implementation of the criterion against which the project was scored.

5.

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. North Macedonia

- ◆ To perform regular monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development including a mid-term review of the achieved results and strategic objectives, as well as an ex-post evaluation of the Strategy implementation and the outcomes achieved subsequent to the conclusion of the Strategy period.
- ◆ To adopt special laws to support completely abandoned areas or areas in the phase of significant depopulation.
- ◆ To include specifically designed gender-responsive measures focused on rural women that will promote their inclusion in the labour market in the strategies, operational plans and programmes.
- ◆ To monitor and evaluate the effect of the measures to determine their achievement and effectiveness in terms of empowering women and increasing production, income, i.e. the impact of financial support under the measures.
- ◆ To continue the implementation of the Program for Social Security Support of Women Engaged in Agricultural Activities and find a legal solution to overcome this challenge for women from rural areas.
- ◆ To initiate and accelerate the implementation of the “50 villages, 50 stories” Project.
- ◆ To review the criteria for Measure 115 - Support for an active female member of an agricultural household, with the aim of increasing the number of female applicants and exploring the possibility of providing an advance payment.
- ◆ To prepare an analysis for rural areas to determine the need for constructing childcare facilities for children of preschool age, including the timeframe, competent institutions and financial resources.
- ◆ To prepare an analysis including priorities by regions, municipalities, timeframe and required financial resources and undertake activities for the construction and opening of public homes for the elderly in rural areas.

5.2. Albania

- ◆ The National Agency for Employment and Skills should also focus on the real needs of rural women regarding employment promotion programme services, training services, and market information systems.
- ◆ The National Agency for Employment and Skills should collect and analyze the data upon realization of employment promotion programmes by dividing them according to urban-rural administrative areas, as well as by adding the category “rural women” to the data analysis.
- ◆ The National Agency for Employment and Skills should propose to the Ministry of Finance priorities according to geographical areas, economic sectors, and the rural women’s employment needs, as well as draft concrete employment programmes for their inclusion into the labour market, for the rest of the implementation of employment promotion programmes.
- ◆ The National Agency for Employment and Skills, in cooperation with local self-government units, should enable the opening of vocational courses for rural women and girls, determined by the priorities and development of each rural area.
- ◆ Local Self-Government Units, in accordance with the regional strategies for the development of rural areas, should take measures to evaluate the situation in these areas, regarding the coverage of crèches and kindergarten as well as designing investment plans dependent on the needs, proportional to the number of residents.
- ◆ Local Self-Government Units, should take measures to identify and evaluate the needs of every administrative unit for public transport in order to bring it closer to the urban areas.
- ◆ Local Self-Government Units, should evaluate the state of the infrastructure in rural areas and draw up an investment plan depending on the situation, the number of residents and the ascertained needs.
- ◆ The National Agency for Employment and Skills shall monitor the implementation of the terms of the active agreements it has with the Local Self-Government Units. In the future the aim shall be the gathering information according to administrative units in order to identify rural women who want to be employed. Also, the agreements to be concluded with the municipalities in the future, shall include activities with a focus on the rural women group.
- ◆ The National Agency for Employment and Skills shall collaborate with Local Self-Government Units in order to establish one stop shops for dealing with employment issues in those municipalities where there are no local employment offices.
- ◆ The National Agency for Employment and Skills in collaboration with Local Self-Government Units shall identify rural women’s needs to participate in the labour market as well as to plan funds in order to finance their employment encouraging programmes.
- ◆ The National Agency of Employment and Skills shall analyze the results of the monitoring of the activities developed in fulfillment of the objectives of the National Employment Strategy and undertake specific activities that address the problems found by the results of the monitoring.

5.3. Kosovo

The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development should strengthen the impact of policies, programmes and measures aimed at promoting the inclusion of women from rural areas in the labour market in order to:

1. Provide complete information on the specific needs and demands of women in the agricultural sector by including detailed and comprehensive gender analysis in the design of the programme, promoting gender equality.
2. Fully review affirmative measures, to define criteria that take into account the different circumstances of women in rural areas.
3. Play a pro-active role and increase awareness campaigns throughout the year, taking into account the specific needs and challenges faced by women in rural areas.
4. Ensure the functionality of the Monitoring Committee, through continuous supervision of the programmes. Monitoring reports should contain more gender-disaggregated analytical indicators to facilitate a comprehensive evaluation of the programme's impact.
5. Announcements of calls for applications and selection of applicants should be made in time, so as not to cause delays in the cultivation/production of various agricultural crops related to climatic conditions.
6. Develop mechanisms for the most objective examination of applications, in particular to pay attention to appeal and reconsideration procedures in cases where such procedures are initiated.
7. Modify the electronic data system for the registration and selection of beneficiaries to reflect the number of women and men applicants more clearly and to ensure an objective evaluation based on the principle of gender equality.
8. Strengthen internal controls in order to adequately implement regulations and procedures, including proper rotation of inspectors, to identify and correct deficiencies in the process.

We recommend the Ministry of Finance, Labour and Transfers to ensure that the Employment Agency of the Republic of Kosovo:

1. Includes gender-disaggregated analyzes in urban and rural areas in their employment and vocational training reports.
2. Develop training programmes that meet the needs of women in rural areas, making them accessible and adapted according to educational levels



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