AWARE

Advancing Women's employment in the Agri-food sector through Re-skilling and Empowerment

Deliverable D2.2

International Report - women's inclusion in the agri-food sector: skills' needs, opportunities and barriers

PARTNERS

Social Innovation Initiative

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1. Abstract

The AWARE project aims to reduce long-term unemployment (LTU) among disadvantaged women (primarily migrants, victims of gender-based violence, mothers in rural areas) by upscaling the Rural Social Innovation (RSI) model retrieved from the successful experience of the InnovAgroWoMed project and enriching it with a tailored gender-sensitive approach.

Consequently, the initial part of the AWARE project was focused on research (coordinated by Confesercenti Palermo) that was intended to update and implement the RSI model developed by the InnovAgroWoMed project.

In the AWARE project, WP 2 "Mapping disadvantaged women's skill needs and improving connections with local communities and employers in the agri-food sector" was divided into three tasks:

- A2.1 Updating existing [InnovAgroWoMed] research on women's skills needs and main barriers in the agri-food sector;
- A2.2 Community mapping & reaching out to long-term unemployed women;
- A2.3 Fostering collaboration with employment actors & creation of the Expert Consulting Bodies.

The first two tasks were implemented through research, divided into a desk phase and a field phase. The third phase, focused on the involvement of institutional partners, companies and VET professionals through the signing of protocols, is currently underway.

As specified, the implementation of the research- divided into tasks A2.1 and A2.2- was based on the previous research conducted for the InnovAgroWoMed project, an initiative carried out within the ENI CBC Med programme.

The research conducted for the AWARE project therefore took the RSI model into consideration and updated it to make it suitable for the purposes of AWARE. The RSI model can be considered useful to assess the participatory dynamics of local contexts—rural ones in particular—and their ability to adapt to social innovations, such as inclusion through community collaboration. To update and implement the RSI model, the framework proposed by the OECD in its paper *Assessing the framework conditions for social innovation in rural areas* (2024) was mainly used, applying some adjustments to make it consistent with the AWARE research.

In the context of the implementation of the provisions relating to tasks A2.1 and A2.2, the following activities were carried out:
A2.1 As desk research (conducted in all partner countries), to complete a set of quantitative indicators:

- Data collection
- Analysis of the quantitative indicators.

A2.2 As field research (carried out in four partner countries), to complete a set of qualitative indicators:

- Two interconnected community mapping events (workshop and focus group) involving:
  - 3 women from disadvantaged situations;
  - 3 representatives of agri-food companies;
  - 3 VET professionals.
- Individual interviews with new participants:
  - 5 vulnerable women;
  - 5 VET professionals;
  - 5 agri-food businesses.
- Analysis of the qualitative indicators.

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The data and information acquired during the research phases, their processing and analysis, the use of quantitative and qualitative indicators, and the implementation of field surveys (community mapping events like workshops and focus groups, and interviews) have allowed us to define a general analytical framework to assess whether and how gender gaps influence the employment of women from disadvantaged backgrounds in the labour market, particularly in the agri-food sector.

To understand whether local contexts (both national and regional) are "sensitive" to these issues and whether they offer opportunities to implement social innovation through inclusion processes, a RSI measurement model was applied.

The OECD proposes to measure the level of social innovation in rural environments and in the territories under investigation (here called local social “ecosystems", as specified by another OECD paper from 2021) by applying a score to the result observed with respect to a set of quantitative and qualitative indicators, that are weighted based on perceived importance and relevance. In our case, after analysing the data and information, the level of RSI was measured through an evaluation of the effectiveness perceived by the partners and expressed on the basis of a Likert scale.

The approach to measuring the level of social innovation present in local social ecosystems through the RSI model is strategic.

Analysing women's inclusion in the agri-food sector and studying their skills needs, opportunities, and obstacles is more effective if we place these factors within a broader vision of the economic, social, and cultural dynamics relating within local social ecosystems. This is why the collection of information on opportunities and obstacles for disadvantaged women in (re)entering the labour market was included within a broader research framework. Both the desk research (Task A2.1) and the field research (Task A2.2), conducted in each partner country, required to contextualise the needs of specific long-term unemployed women, taking into account the dynamics proceeding in local social ecosystems.
The research findings are very interesting because they show us the direct needs of this target group as well as the indirect needs, which can be linked to the socioeconomic dynamics of the local community. The research results –organized according to the RSI model– were grouped according to the dimensions and sub-dimensions scheme proposed by the OECD.

Here is some synthetic information obtained through desk and field research.

A. Taking into account the Dimension A (Culture and behaviours):
   - Local cooperation and community engagement are recognized as positive factors, but operational development is still needed. Social innovation is perceived as positively present in the region, with margin of improvement.
   - The perception of quality of life is quite good overall, but is strongly influenced by factors such as employment, income, gender, and existing infrastructure.
   - The gender gap has a significant impact on employment (sensitive issues: childcare and household responsibilities, age and gender discrimination, lack of government support, and mismatches between skills and job opportunities).
   - Implementing training programs is essential. Investments in basic economic and accounting skills, digital and IT skills, and customer service are needed.
   - Agri-food sector can offer good job opportunities for new professional profiles, especially if combined with the tourism sector. Food processing, sustainable agriculture, and digital transformation could see growth in this sector.
B. Taking into account the Dimension B (Laws and regulations):
   - Social innovation lacks dedicated budgets, and few economic resources are allocated to improving the social and environmental regulatory framework. There is not a commonly used

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definition of “social innovation” among local institutions, although there is growing awareness in the matter and potential for its development.
- In the agri-food sector, the situation appears somewhat better.
- Bureaucracy and administrative regulations are considered complex and as an obstacle.

C. Taking into account the Dimension C (Policy framework):
- There is insufficient public attention to social innovation, either in terms of coordination or implementation.
- Generally, there is no explicit national or local strategy to promote social innovation. As a matter of fact, a non-specific, cross-cutting and indirect policy is implemented.
- Overall, there is a lack of systemic and structured mechanisms for the diffusion of social innovation, while coordination is generally promoted by NGOs and associations.

D. Taking into account the Dimension D (Actors community):
- Local actors, generally, present some critical issues in terms of collaboration and social innovation, although some efforts are made at the regional/local level.
- However, there is a significant presence of stakeholder networks or community partnerships linked to social innovation at the local level.
- A lack of information at the local level is lamentable.

E. Taking into account the Dimension E (Resources available):
- Financial resources to enhance social innovation at the local level are still insufficient.
- However, tangible and intangible infrastructures exist in local areas that could improve the situation.
- There are some resources and opportunities within local communities that are useful for the gender-sensitive inclusion of vulnerable women in the workforce, but these are considered insufficient and fragmented at various levels.
- Challenges in creating opportunities also negatively impact the agri-food sector and the collective management of social assets.

Summarizing the research findings in a few words, we could say that local social ecosystems (i.e., the areas in which the project partners operate) are quite ready to embrace innovation in their social fabric, and therefore to develop inclusion policies with a tailored gender-sensitive approach. However, awareness among local communities must be improved and greater investment (financial and in terms of training) must be ensured to implement the social and inclusive effectiveness of social ecosystems and the agri-food sector. The AWARE project can offer concrete support in this regard.

2. Introduction

The project called "Advancing Women's employment in the Agri-food sector through Re-skilling and Empowerment" (acronym: AWARE), funded under the ESF+ Social Innovation+ Initiative programme, aims to reduce long-term unemployment (LTU) among disadvantaged women (primarily migrants, victims of gender-based violence, mothers in rural areas) by upscaling the Rural Social Innovation (RSI) model retrieved from the successful experience of the InnovAgroWoMed project and enriching it with a tailored gender-sensitive approach.

AWARE project is based on the collaboration of an international partnership including employment actors, vocational education and training (VET), research, public and non-profit entities. A strength of the project is its focus on promoting sustainable and fair working conditions for women and encouraging their social inclusion through collaboration with the community. It is therefore important to underline the relevance the project attributes to collaborative relationships with communities and key employment stakeholders.

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Deliverable D2.2 of the AWARE project includes the production of the document titled "International Report- women's inclusion in the agri-food sector: skills' needs, opportunities and barriers".
In accordance with the provisions of the Grant Agreement, "the Report will collate the national desk research (A2.1) and field research and community mapping outcomes (A2.2) from each partner's country. It will be a foundational document to comprehend local and national contexts, existing opportunities and resources; to elaborate tailored training materials; and to inform future strategies for key stakeholders promoting employment opportunities among disadvantaged women and gender-sensitivity in the workplace."

The report is the result of a research whose aim is to analyse the gender gap in the agri-food sector to promote employment opportunities for disadvantaged women and gender sensitivity in the workplace. The research aimed to offer a specific analytical perspective. Indeed, the analysis focused on a broader social dimension, which includes concepts such as RSI and community collaboration. This perspective led the partners to develop the research for the AWARE project by linking it to the research conducted for InnovAgroWoMed and to the studies carried out by the OECD to develop the RSI model. For this reason, much attention has been paid to the internal dynamics of regional and local communities. The approach to analysis consisted of designing and implementing new solutions to the social problems and challenges currently posed by the labour market—including the agri-food market—for disadvantaged women, taking into account contextual factors.

Therefore, the research, which occupied the initial phases of the project, was based on quantitative and qualitative indicators that provided contextual information and not only on issues that strictly concern women from disadvantaged situations. In this sense, it was very useful to focus on updating and implementing the RSI model, which provides information on the socioeconomic dynamism of territories and their inclusive attitudes.

The desk research collected and analysed quantitative data by consulting official European, national, and regional sources. This first part allowed us to analyse an initial set of data that helped define the social and cultural context in which the project is set.

During the field phase, stakeholder engagement was considered crucial. Therefore, many activities focused on direct surveys conducted with local stakeholders, such as employment agencies, vocational education and training (VET) institutions, research institutions, and public and non-profit organizations. The surveys were conducted through workshops, focus groups, and interviews. Particular attention was paid to the employment conditions of disadvantaged women, which is the focus of the AWARE project. The research approach was particularly cautious with these women, given the specificity of their psychosocial profiles.

Measuring existing social innovation in local ecosystems (i.e., in the areas where the AWARE project partners operate) represents a third crucial part of the research: after collecting and analysing quantitative and qualitative data, the partners assessed their respective territories' capacity to embrace social innovation and thus develop gender-sensitive work environments.

The following diagram summarizes the research phases and the conceptual framework that defined its structure, highlighting the flow of the activities carried out.

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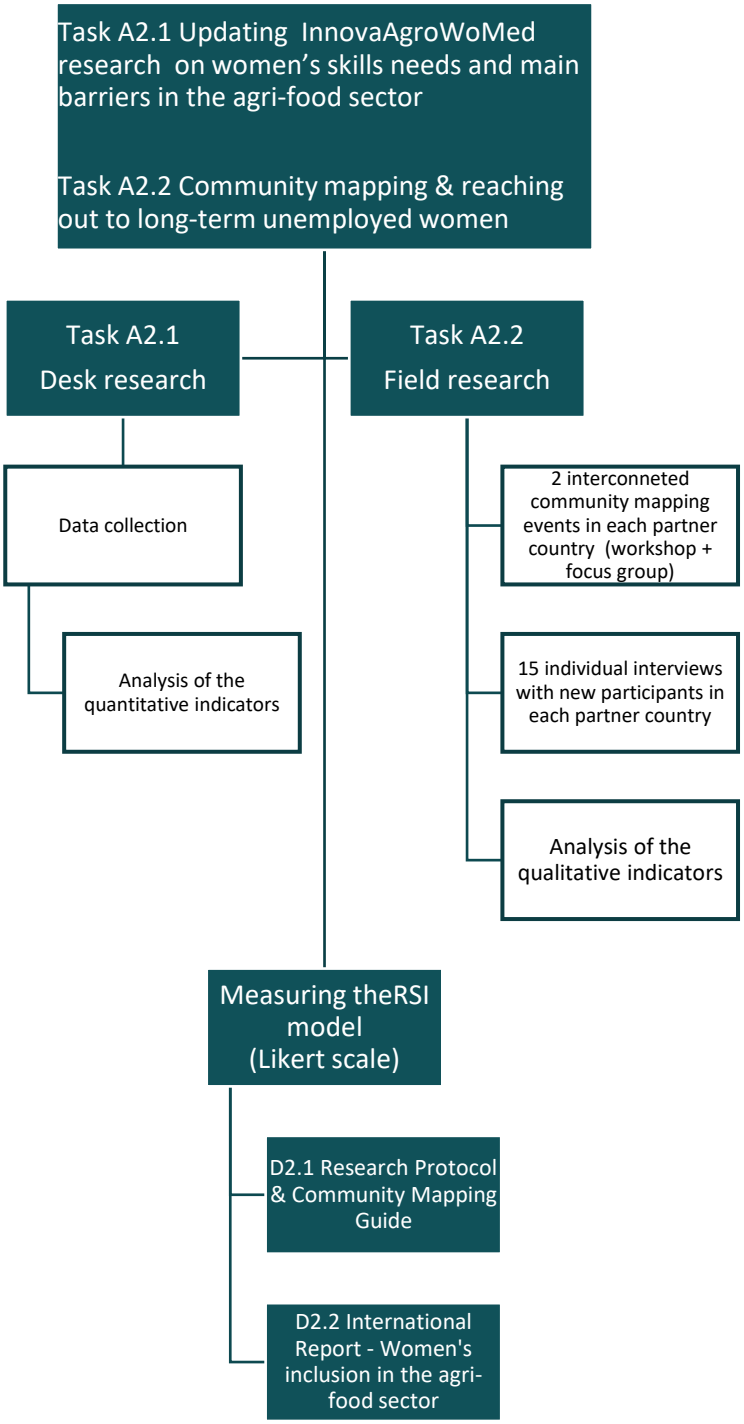
Figure 1. *AWARE research phases and conceptual framework*



The research conducted through Tasks A2.1 and A2.2 followed a rational flow of data collection, processing, and analysis by the project partners. The results allow us to draw some useful conclusions for defining future strategies aimed at promoting employment opportunities for disadvantaged women and gender sensitivity in the labour market. The results are commented below according to the type of research (desk, field and measurement of the level of RSI).

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3. The starting point: InnovAgroWoMed research

The document taken into consideration for the review and updating of the desk research of the InnovAgroWoMed project is titled *3.2 New Curricula and Training model*.

The document shows:

- in the first part (Chapter 1), the research framework, the methodologies employed and the research guidelines outlined by the coordinating unit at that time, namely the University of Rome TorVergata;
- in the second part (Chapter 2), the results of the desk and field research conducted in the respective countries by the project partners.

In summary, the research was developed following this methodological path:

i. analysis, on a national basis, of some socioeconomic and cultural data;
ii. cross-referencing of these data with variables related to the national/local context (local characteristics; role and condition of women in society; training needs);
iii. definition of the theoretical content of two training models deemed particularly effective for the project: "Agent for creation" (entrepreneurial profile) and "Agent for transition" (employability profile);
iv. proposal, for each country, of agri-food sectors (value chains) in which include new professional profiles with the greatest opportunities for success.

More in detail, the document is structured as follow:

- Chapter 1: the central theme of the first part focused on social innovation, especially applied to rural environments (1.1 paragraph title: *Theoretical framework: key drivers and barriers for rural social innovation*). The theme of Rural Social Innovation (RSI), in fact, represents the theoretical background of the research. To this end, the authors of the document drew on the relevant scientific literature. Specifically, they suggested several research directions to the partners regarding civil society, sustainability, local value chain organization, cooperation between various stakeholders, training programs, and networks between public administrations. For each of these topics, the authors also provided the partners with work paths regarding: a) the variables relevant to analyzing the local context; b) the proposed research methods.
  The introductory section also contained analytical elements with reference to the research approach and some theoretical/practical aspects of the training models to be applied (1.2 paragraph title: *Research approach and framework for a new training model*). Here, the authors proposed to implement the topics indicated in paragraph 1.1 through the research to be conducted by the partners in their respective countries.
  The approach was as follows: the secondary data collected with the desk research was triangulated with interviews, case studies, and focus groups directly with key local stakeholders (field research). This was done to validate the most relevant supply chains in terms of products and agri-food sectors on which the new curricula would focus.
- Chapter 2: the second part of the document was dedicated to the researches conducted by the partners in their respective countries. They were based not on a rigid framework but rather on a methodological architecture that was used by each partner in its essential lines. In fact, they were not perfectly superimposable.

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Table 1. *The operational framework of the InnovAgroWoMed research*

A. Desk Research	A.1 Local context	With a focus on: population distribution; economic context and income levels; role and condition of women in society; sustainability dimension.
	A.2 Existing training models	With a focus on some local successful examples.
B. Field Research	B.1 Stakeholder mapping	Phase 1: preliminary interviews with stakeholders for the identification of the value chains and training needs.
		Phase 2: interviews with stakeholders for the validation of the identified job profiles and of the draft training content.
	In section B1 ("stakeholder mapping"), the training needs for the two different professional profiles were organized on the basis of the six variables ("areas of interest") called "Key RSI Competence Areas": Entrepreneurial/Managerial skills; Digital skills; Social Innovation Awareness; Sustainability Sensitivity; Personal/Soft skills; Sectorial skills.	
	B. 2 Value chain selection process	
C. Local training needs		
D. Training model		

The topic that we considered crucial in InnovAgroWoMed research was Rural Social Innovation. In fact, the regions involved in the InnovAgroWoMed project had been identified "as suitable for the implementation of the Rural Social Innovation (RSI) model, that serves as the backbone of innovative trainings on the agri-food sector, exclusively addressed to women" (*3.2 New Curricula and Training model*, p. 3, cit.).

The AWARE project research was therefore planned on the basis of the theoretical approach to the concept of RSI on which the InnovAgroWoMed project research focused, adapting the model to the needs expressed by the new dynamics of the agri-food labour market and current inclusion policies.
Indeed, the potential expressed by the agri-food system in terms of productive dynamism, resilience, and engagement with local communities can be considered a powerful location factor for AWARE project's placement strategies. Social innovation factors demonstrate the aptitude of actors to embrace and implement social, economic, and cultural changes in the agri-food sector, aiming to ensure the well-being of the local population, including businesses and workers.

Highlighting these territorial potentials, embodied by the RSI model, can help understand and overcome the obstacles faced by long-term unemployed women in vulnerable situations at the local level.

4. Updating and contextualizing the RSI model

Compared to the RSI model used in the InnovAgroWoMed research, the AWARE research introduces the concept of social ecosystem as a space in which a set of actions aimed at promoting the

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development and growth of social innovations is implemented, also by improving interactions between stakeholders. In ecosystems, a term borrowed from biology, we can observe an increase in interdependence and the potential for symbiotic relationships between actors as the systems themselves develop: "When, within a specified territorial area, different actors actively and regularly co-operate towards a common goal, and identify effective forms of partnership that create both individual returns and shared value, they make up an ecosystem" (OECD, 2021, p. 23).

The concept seems particularly pertinent to the research that has conducted for AWARE. Indeed, what has been analysed is not only the situation of female unemployment in the partners' countries, but how this condition relates to local contexts. Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics that drive local contexts and whether they constitute social ecosystems, as identified by the OECD.

The approach used for the AWARE research also broadened the area of investigation to other agri-food sectors that do not exclusively coincide with the agricultural sector.

Food systems encompass typical food production activities (on-farm activities related to growing crops and raising livestock, fishing, aquaculture, forestry, logging, foraging, and hunting).

In a wider sense, the agri-food sector refers to all the people, institutions, infrastructure, and environment related to the production, processing, distribution, preparation, and consumption of food. Food systems also conventionally include the production and processing of non-food agricultural goods, such as forest-derived products (e.g., timber, paper), fibre, and tobacco (FAO, 2023).

Table 2. *International Standard Industrial Classification (ISIC) of all economic activities codes identifying agri-food systems*

Categories	ISIC divisions
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	Agriculture
	Forestry and logging
	Fishing
Food processing and services	Manufacture of food products
	Manufacture of beverages
	Food and beverage service activities
	Undifferentiated goods- and services-producing activities of private households for own use
Manufacture of non-food agricultural products	Manufacture of tobacco products
	Manufacture of textiles
	Manufacture of leather and related products
	Manufacture of wood and of products from wood and cork, except furniture
	Manufacture of paper and paper products

Source: *FAO, 2023*

The inclusion of products and processes not directly generated by agricultural production demonstrates that food and non-food activities belong to the same supply chain. This consideration allows for an increase in the number of businesses and stakeholders that can be involved in the AWARE project.

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5. Scientific references and methodological framework of the AWARE research

In order to conduct up-to-date research that is adequately linked to scientific models, it was decided to take into consideration a recent OECD study.

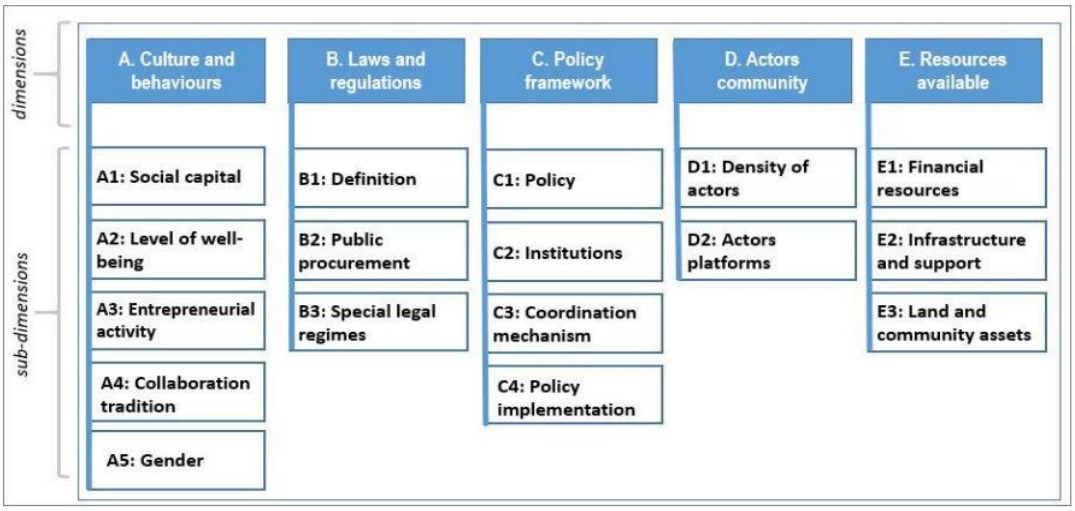
The paper *Assessing the framework conditions for social innovation in rural areas*, published by the OECD in 2024, is based on the assumption that social innovation can be a factor that allows rural areas and the agri-food sector to profitably face contemporary challenges.

The OECD study identifies factors that can support social innovation and measuring the effectiveness of their ecosystems. Awareness of the capabilities or potentialities that a country or region can demonstrate in the field of rural social innovation can help us to improve the accountability and sustainability of development interventions. Furthermore, measuring the capacity to engage in social innovation in rural areas and agri-food systems could help identify the strengths and weaknesses of the production and commercial environments in which we intend to implement the AWARE project.

The OECD research model involves studying five dimensions: "Culture and behaviours", "Laws and regulations", "Policy framework", "Actors community" and "Resources available". The dimension of culture and behaviours analyses local traditions, behavioural and societal attitudes of the population and stakeholders, and existing needs. Here, particular focus is given to the gender gap. The dimension of laws and regulation shows the existing legal and regulatory frameworks of a given territory. The dimension of policy framework shapes the scope and efficacy of interventions. The dimension of actors' community tracks the quality and diversity of local social innovation actors and their interactions. The dimension of resource available analyses the presence of resources on which local actors could rely on. Each dimension is further subdivided into sub-dimensions, for a total of 17 sub-dimensions. The model analyses the subdimensions using indicators, which can be quantitative or qualitative.

The use of indicators allows us to create a practical analysis model to measure the capacity to engage in social innovation, and thus to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a local social ecosystem, particularly in the agri-food sector. Each social ecosystem develops internal dynamics of inclusion/exclusion of women from the labour market.

Figure 2. *OECD RSI model – Dashboard structure – Dimensions and sub-dimensions*



Source: *OECD, 2024*

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A key advantage of this approach is that it can help understand the dynamics that influence, at various territorial levels, the status of women's unemployment in partners' countries, focusing on the agri-food sector. The analysis aims to highlight the barriers faced by long-term unemployed women in vulnerable situations, considering these obstacles as part of a territorial system, more precisely, a social ecosystem. Specifically, the focus isn't on indicators strictly related to the condition of women from disadvantaged backgrounds, but on broader territorial contexts. In fact, the two factors are closely interconnected. The practical ways of conducting research using this model are explained in the template.

The theoretical framework developed by the OECD to test the RSI model was based on 68 quantitative and qualitative indicators. For the AWARE research, 51 indicators were taken into consideration (partly adapted to the needs of the project), of which 19 were quantitative and 32 were qualitative.

The following is the RSI indicator template adopted for the AWARE research, consisting of six sections, each of which indicates:

1. The subsection highlighted in the OECD model dashboard (see Figure 2);
2. The indicator number;
3. The indicator;
4. The indicator type (quantitative or qualitative) and its geographical location (TL2 Country, TL3 Region or Province);
5. Suggested sources (to which others can be added);
6. The cells in which to enter the search results for each partner country.

Table 3. *Dimension 1. Culture and behaviours – Suggested indicators*

Sub-dimension	*Indicator number*	*Indicator*	*Type*	*Source (suggested)*	*Cells (to be completed with percentage, comments, etc.)*
A.1 Social Capital	*A.1.1*	*Level of civic engagement*	*Quantitative, TL2 (Country)*	*European Parliament https://www.europarl.europa.eu/at-your-service/files/be-heard/eurobarometer/2020/civic_engagement/report/en-report.pdf* *National statistics*	*To be completed during desk research*
	A.1.2	*Percentage of people involved in volunteer activities*	*Quantitative, TL2 (Country)*	*Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/ILC_SCP19/default/table?lang=en* *National statistics*	*To be completed during desk research*
	A.1.3	*Participation in civil society as being member of social grouping*	*Qualitative*	*Focus groups; interviews*	*To be completed during field research*

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A2: Level of well-being	*A.2.1*	*Overall level of perception of life satisfaction*	*Quantitative, TL2 (Country)*	*Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Quality_of_life_indicators_-_overall_experience_of_life* *National/Regional statistics*	*To be completed during desk research*
	A.2.2	*Overall level of perception of life satisfaction per region*	*Qualitative*	*Focus groups; interviews*	*To be completed during field research*
A.3: Entrepreneurial activity around social innovation	*A.3.1*	*Level of innovation in the economies of the countries*	*Quantitative, TL2 (Country)*	*Global Innovation Index https://www.wipo.int/web-publications/global-innovation-index-2024/en/index.html* *National statistics*	*To be completed during desk research*
	A.3.2	*Perception of the level of innovation of companies operating at a regional level*	*Qualitative*	*Focus groups; interviews*	*To be completed during field research*
A.4: Collaboration tradition	*A.4.1*	*Number of institutional partnerships operating in the agri-food sector*	*Quantitative, TL3 (Region)*	*Regional statistics* *This indicator can be completed by reporting data and information on partnerships operating in the agri-food sector at regional level, as in the case of the networks created thanks to the Leader/CLLD programme.*	*To be completed during desk research*
	A.4.2	*Is the usefulness of cooperation between companies perceived?*	*Qualitative*	*Focus groups; interviews*	*To be completed during field research*

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	A.4.3	Has there been collaboration of research or industry with civil society locally, over the last 3 years?	Qualitative	Focus groups; interviews	To be completed during field research
	A.4.4	Are underrepresented groups (women, persons with disabilities, migrants, etc.) involved in collaboration locally?	Qualitative	Focus groups; interviews	To be completed during field research
A.5: Gender or other diversity indicators	A.5.1	Share of businesses run by women	Quantitative, TL2 (Country)	World Bank https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/ic-wef-llco-zs National statistics, census	To be completed during desk research
	A.5.2	Percentage of women 25-64 years old by educational attainment	Quantitative, TL3 (Region)	Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tgs00109/default/table?lang=en Regional statistics	To be completed during desk research
	A.5.3	Are there obstacles that long-term unemployed women in vulnerable situations face in re-entering the labour market and advancing their careers? If so, what are they?	Qualitative	Focus groups; interviews; policy documents	To be completed during field research
	A.5.4	Share of women in management positions (SDG 5.5.2)	Quantitative, TL2 (Country)	ILOSTAT https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/ National statistics	To be completed during desk research

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	A.5.5	Gender pay gap (SDG 8.5.1)	Quantitative, TL2 (Country)	ILOSTAT https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/country-profiles/ National statistics	To be completed during desk research
	A.5.6	Employment by sex and age	Quantitative, TL2 (Country)	ILOSTAT https://ilostat.ilo.org/topics/employment/ National statistics	To be completed during desk research
	A.5.7	Share of farms by their manager's gender	Quantitative, TL2 (Country)	European Commission https://agridata.ec.europa.eu/extensions/DataPortal/structural-data.html	To be completed during desk research
	A5.8	Needs for women in training	Quantitative, TL2 (Country)	CEDEFOP https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports	To be completed during desk research
A.6 Additional suggested background indicators	A.6.1	Level of unemployment	Quantitative, TL2 (Country)	Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics_and_beyond National statistics	To be completed during desk research
	A.6.2	Life expectancy and mortality data	Quantitative, TL2 (Country)	Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Mortality_and_life_expectancy_statistics National/Regional statistics	To be completed during desk research
	A.6.3	National and regional income distribution and poverty	Quantitative, TL2 (Country)	Eurostat National/Regional statistics	To be completed during desk research
	A.6.4	Regional skill needs (if available, male/female)	Quantitative, TL3 (Region) Qualitative	Regional statistics; regional policy documents Focus groups; interviews	To be completed during field research

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	A.6.5	Percentage incidence of the agri-food sector with regard to the total production systems	Quantitative, TL2 (Country); TL3 (Region)	Eurostat National/Regional statistics	To be completed during desk research
	A.6.6	Direct production category or secondary activity in the agri-food sector where the inclusion of new professional profiles is most effective	Qualitative	Focus groups; interviews; policy documents	To be completed during field research

Source: *our elaboration on OECD data, 2024.*

Table 4. *Dimension 2. Laws and regulations – Suggested indicators*

Sub-dimension	*Indicator number*	*Indicator*	*Type*	*Source (suggested)*	*Cells (to be completed with percentage, comments, etc.)*
B.1: Definition of social innovation	B.1.1	Is there a commonly used definition of "social innovation" among local institutions?	Qualitative	Interviews The definition of social innovation is that of a condition involving "conceptual, process, product, or organizational changes, with the ultimate goal of improving the well-being of individuals and communities." (OECD, 2025, p. 14).	To be completed during field research
	B.1.2	Is there a special budget provided for social innovation?	Qualitative	Annual plan, national and regional budgets	To be completed during field research
B.2 Public procurement	B.2.1	Do local public procurement rules allow integrating social or environmental clauses?	Qualitative	Interviews, local procurement processes analysis	To be completed during field research

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	B.2.2	*Has a concrete effort been made in recent years to simplify administrative procedures?*	*Qualitative*	*Interviews, local procurement processes analysis*	*To be completed during field research*
B.3: Special legal regimes	*B.3.1*	*Are there gaps, not allowing all local actors (such as social enterprises) benefit from public support?*	*Qualitative*	*Local surveys, focus groups and interviews*	*To be completed during field research*
	B.3.2	*Is there a presence of a special legal status for social enterprise?*	*Qualitative*	*Legal frameworks, focus groups and interviews* *More information about social enterprises in EU https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/proximity-and-social-economy/social-economy-eu/social-enterprises_en*	*To be completed during field research*
	B.3.3	*Are there any social enterprises operating locally in the agri-food sector?*	*Qualitative*	*Local surveys, focus groups and interviews*	*To be completed during field research*

Source*: our elaboration on OECD data, 2024.*

Table 5. *Dimension 3. Policy framework – Suggested indicators*

Sub-dimension	*Indicator number*	*Indicator*	*Type*	*Source (suggested)*	*Cells (to be completed with percentage, comments, etc.)*
C.1: Social innovation policy	*C.1.1*	*Is there a dedicated strategy (national or local) focused on social innovation promotion?*	*Qualitative*	*Local policy documents; focus groups and interviews*	*To be completed during field research*

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	C.1.2	Is social innovation a topic mentioned in documents relating to the agri-food sector at the national and local level?	Qualitative	National and local policy documents; focus groups and interviews	To be completed during field research
C.2 Institution(s) dealing with social innovation	C.2.1	Do the institutions that govern the local agri-food sector allocate a budget to promote the development of social innovation at the local level?	Qualitative	Local policy documents; focus groups and interviews	To be completed during field research
C.3 Social innovation coordination mechanism	C.3.1	Is there a coordination mechanism in place to meet and share information around social innovation locally involving various stakeholders?	Qualitative	Local policy documents; focus groups and interviews	To be completed during field research
C.4 Social innovation implementation	C.4.1	Is social innovation part of a local action plan or is it specifically mentioned in local activities, especially those related to the agri-food sector?	Qualitative	Local policy documents; focus groups and interviews This indicator concerns the presence of local public-private partnerships that operate with the aim of developing social innovation.	To be completed during field research

Source: *our elaboration on OECD data, 2024.*

Table 6. *Dimension 4. Actors' community – Suggested indicators*

Sub-dimension	Indicator number	Indicator	Type	Source (suggested)	Cells (to be completed with percentage, comments, etc.)

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D.1: Density of social innovation actors	*D.1.1*	*# cooperatives per capita*	*Quantitative, TL2 (Country); TL3 (Region) if available*	*CICOPA https://www.cicopa.coop/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Cooperatives-and-Employment-Second-Global-Report-2017.pdf National observatories, national and local data; local registration office*	*To be completed during desk research*
	D.1.2	*# associations per capita*	*Quantitative, TL2 (Country); TL3 (Region) if available*	*(More information https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/sectors/proximity-and-social-economy/social-economy-eu/associations_en) National observatories, national and local data; local registration office*	*To be completed during desk research*
	D.1.3	*# social enterprises per capita (when legal status exists)*	*Quantitative, TL2 (Country); TL3 (Region) if available*	*National observatories, national and local data; local registration office*	*To be completed during desk research*
D.2 Actors engagement platforms	*D.2.1*	*Are stakeholders' networks or community partnerships related to social innovation present locally?*	*Qualitative*	*Focus groups and interviews*	*To be completed during field research*
	D.2.2	*Is there publically available information on the possibilities for stakeholder collaboration?*	*Qualitative*	*Local surveys and interviews*	*To be completed during field research*

Source*: our elaboration on OECD data, 2024.*

Table 7. *Dimension 5. Resources available – Suggested indicators*

Sub-dimension	*Indicator number*	*Indicator*	*Type*	*Source (suggested)*	*Cells (to be completed with percentage, comments, etc.)*

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E.1: Financial resources	*E.1.1*	*Are there public local programmes to finance social innovation?*	*Qualitative*	*Focus groups and interviews; local action plan*	*To be completed during field research*
	E.1.2	*Is participatory budgeting applied locally?*	*Qualitative*	*(More information https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2024)762412) Focus groups, interviews, local action plan and budget*	*To be completed during field research*
E.2 Infrastructure and support	*E.2.1*	*Is there available public local support infrastructure (incubators, accelerators)?*	*Qualitative*	*Focus groups, interviews; local action plan*	*To be completed during field research*
	E.2.2	*Are there resources (tangible and intangible) and opportunities within local communities that you would consider useful for the gender-responsive inclusion of vulnerable women in the workforce? If yes, which ones?*	*Qualitative*	*Focus groups and interviews; local action plan*	*To be completed during field research*
	E.2.3	*Are there targeted capacity building programmes by private business development support organisations available locally? If yes, which ones?*	*Qualitative*	*Focus groups and interviews; local action plan; research on the internet*	*To be completed during field research*

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E.3 Land and community assets	*E.3.1*	*Are there incentives for a socially innovative local approach to the agri-food sector?*	*Qualitative*	*(More information https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/overview-vision-agriculture-food/vision-agriculture-and-food_en#about-the-vision) National and local regulations; focus groups and interviews*	*To be completed during field research*
	E.3.2	*Have local authorities been creating opportunities to allow innovative approach of land use?*	*Qualitative*	*National and local regulations; focus groups and interviews*	*To be completed during field research*
	E.3.3	*Are there examples of community land ownership or similar applied locally?*	*Qualitative*	*National and local regulations; focus groups and interviews*	*To be completed during field research*
	E.3.4	*Are there examples of community asset transfer to social economy or civil society actors?*	*Qualitative*	*National and local regulations; focus groups and interviews*	*To be completed during field research*

Source*: our elaboration on OECD data, 2024.*

Templates were developed to offer some flexibility in compilation. Each data and information must be contextualized, also based on the availability of sources. As is clear from the templates, some indicators had to be inserted during the desk research phase, others during the field research. The final result is correctly and fully completed templates.

6. How was the desk research organized (Task A2.1)

First, Confesercenti Palermo, the task leader, conducted a thorough analysis of the InnovAgroWoMed research aimed at identifying its key points, the methodology adopted, and the data to be updated. Based on the results of this analysis, the research method for the AWARE project was decided.

Secondly, the aforementioned partner presented the chosen methodology to the rest of partners, which was discussed during the Kick-Off Meeting held in Palermo on November 4-5, 2025. After gathering input from all partners, the Guidelines and Template were distributed as the main tool to conduct the

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desk research. Namely, each member received a template consisting of five tables (one for each research dimension, as structured by the OECD, see Figure 2), each divided into six sections:

1. The sub-dimension;
2. The indicator number;
3. The indicator;
4. The indicator type (quantitative or qualitative) and its geographical correspondence (TL2 Country, TL3 Region or Province);
5. Suggested sources (to which others could be added);
6. The cells within which to insert the results of the research conducted for each partner country.

For the purposes of the desk research, partners were instructed to fill out only the quantitative indicators, as the qualitative ones will be investigated during task A.2.2 "Community mapping & reaching out to long-term unemployed women". Furthermore, partners were asked to divide the data by gender, where possible, to underline any form of gender inequality, and to retrieve the most recent data available.

Thirdly, partners completed the template, providing a single desk research report per country. Subsequently, after receiving the results of the researches conducted in each country, they were first compiled in a single template. This is structured as the one completed by the partners, but with a cell dedicated to the data of each country. Then, to simplify the comparability of the results, an Excel file was created with exclusively the desk research indicators. This is composed of nine sections, such as:

1. The sub-dimension;
2. The indicator number;
3. The indicator;
4. Key points of each response submitted for Cyprus;
5. Key points of each response submitted for Germany;
6. Key points of each response submitted for Greece;
7. Key points of each response submitted for Italy;
8. Key points of each response submitted for Spain;
9. A summary of the results for each indicator.

Finally, for the comparability of the data, it is important to highlight that, although similar sources were used, for each indicator partners did not always retrieve the information from the same data-set or referring to the same year, according to the availability of the data. As mentioned, the templates were developed to offer flexibility in compilation. Each data and information needed to be contextualized, also based on the availability of sources.

The partners from each country completed, in a coordinated manner, the data under their own responsibility. Confesercenti Palermo, as leader of WP2, was responsible for coordinating the data collected based on the dimensions and sub-dimensions of the OECD model and preparing a summary of the results. It should be also noted that for this part of the research, Confesercenti Palermo provided partners with both specific guidelines and templates to complete, which also served as a technical and practical guide for conducting the activities.

The results were then integrated with those obtained through field research in order to have a final template complete with quantitative and qualitative indicators.

The following figure shows the search flow.

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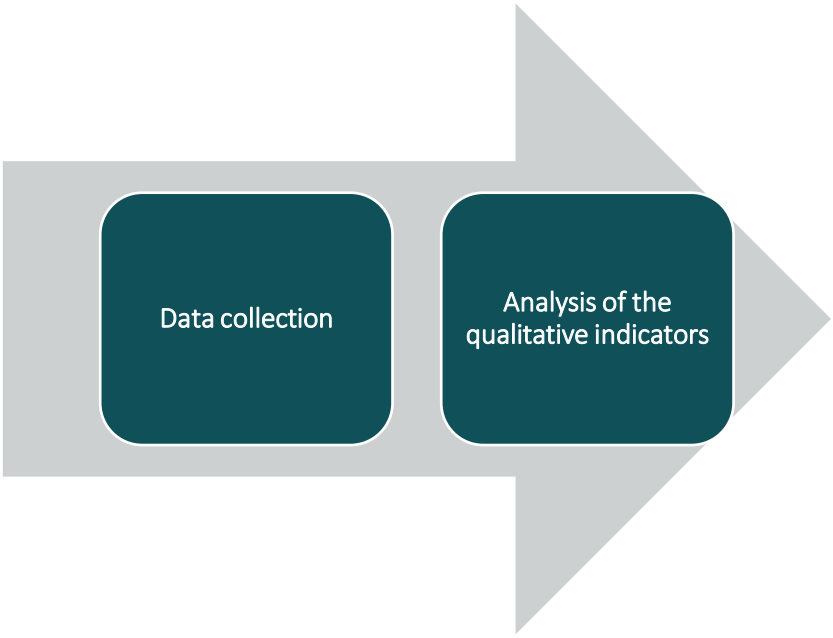
Figure 3. ***The methodological framework of the AWARE desk research***



7. The main results of the desk research

The results obtained through the desk research conducted by the partners are quantitative. The elements emerging from this collection, therefore, provide only basic information, which requires the integration of qualitative data to create a more precise analytical framework.

From the desk research it emerged that, in the realms of social capital, engagement with civil society organisations (CSO's) is fragmented and of rather modest intensity among partner countries, albeit with varying degrees of involvement. According to the 2020 Eurobarometer survey on civic engagement, the phenomenon is more widespread in Spain and Germany, while it appears less intense in Cyprus, Greece and Italy.

Regarding participation in volunteering activities, all partner countries, with the exception of Germany, where the percentage is highest, recorded a participation level below the EU-27 average in 2022.
With respect to the level of well-being in partner countries, they all registered a level of life satisfaction approximate to the EU-27 average. Cypriots have the highest overall level of subjective perception of well-being.

Entrepreneurial activity focused on social innovation remains at a good level, while, in terms of collaborative traditions, the number of institutional partnerships operating in the agri-food sector varies from country to country, both in nature and number. However, the agri-food sector has a significant impact in the countries involved in the project. The density of social innovation actors varies, again, from country to country. The highest density of cooperatives is observed, in order, in Italy, Greece and Spain, while a high density of social enterprises is typical of Spain, Germany and Cyprus.

A particular focus on gender policies, other forms of diversity and additional contextual indicators provide an interesting framework for AWARE's objectives.

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In all partner countries, life expectancy at birth is over the average EU-27 rate.
Women's educational attainment varies from country to country. The variations are even more significant at the regional level, where some areas have deficiencies in female education. However, the situation appears set to improve.

A common trend in partner countries concerns employment by sex and age, which is characterised by persistent gender inequalities, with higher male employment rates than female. Additionally, unemployment remains a critical challenge, especially for women. The situation regarding female unemployment is less penalizing for Germany, which has the lowest female unemployment rate (3.9% in September 2025). Elsewhere, the female unemployment rate appears to be slowly decreasing.

Looking at income distribution and poverty at national and regional level, the EU-27 average of people at risk of poverty or social exclusion has slightly decreased over the last two years (from 21.4% in 2023 to 21.0% in 2024). According to the data reported, Cyprus shows the lowest levels of poverty while Spain and Italy are the two partners with the most population at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

Analysing the gender gap in partner countries reveals significant discrimination against women in the labour market. According to the reported statistics, Spain appears to have a higher percentage of the gender gap. Italian statistics also highlighted significant gaps that vary by sector and position.

With respect to the share of women in businesses, the data collected shows a great under-representation of women in business ownership (15.3% in Germany, 21.2% in Italy, 22.2% in Greece) and in management positions. According to these statistics, approximately only one third of managerial positions, or less, are held by women. This trend is reflected also in the agri-food sector, where less than one third of farms are managed by women, revealing gender gaps and female underrepresentation in leadership positions and agricultural decision making. Within partner countries, Greece is at the top with 33% of farm managers being females, followed by Italy (31.4%), Spain (30%), Cyprus (23%), and lastly Germany, where only 11% of agricultural holdings are managed by women.

Regarding the needs of women in education, there appears to be a general need for training with high-level qualifications, due to changes in the labour market: an increase in jobs requiring high-level qualifications and a decrease in those requiring low-level qualifications; while the need for intermediate qualifications varies from country to country.

It's not easy to draw conclusions from these initial quantitative data. Some contradictions likely emerge regarding the gender gap in countries with strong and dynamic yet unstable economies, such as Italy and Spain. Greece and Cyprus appear to show potential, but this potential needs to be tested based on the evolution of their respective economies. Meanwhile, Germany, with its steady economy, has social ecosystems better able to absorb the female workforce (although it remains to be seen whether this is also the case in the agri-food sector).

It should also be emphasized that differences are more pronounced between regions than between countries. Within countries, in fact, there are gaps between stronger and weaker areas, differences that have repercussions on social innovation ecosystems.

8. How was the field research organized (Task A2.2)

Task A2.2 of WP2 included a "Community mapping & reaching out to long-term unemployed women". As specified in the Grant Agreement, “guided by Confesercenti, partners will conduct comprehensive

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field research through a process of community mapping to examine the specific needs of long-term unemployed women to re-enter the labour market. This participatory research approach was chosen as a powerful method to engage the community in the needs assessment and better identify the tangible and intangible assets and resources available, while empowering women in acquiring a holistic understanding of their needs."

The activities scheduled by Task A2.2 were the following:

1. Two interconnected community mapping events, to be held in each partner country, involving:
   - 3 women from disadvantaged situations,
   - 3 representatives of agri-food businesses,
   - 3 VET professionals.

   Guided by partners, participants were asked to collectively reflect on the existing assets and opportunities that can facilitate disadvantaged women's inclusion in the agri-food sector (social networks, pre-existing platforms or apps to search/offer job opportunities, employment guidance centres in the area, public support services for childcare or other family related responsibilities, etc.).
2. Individual interviews with new participants: 5 vulnerable women, 5 VET professionals, and 5 agri-food businesses (tot. 15) in each implementation country.
   These interviews aimed to obtain specific insights into the up-skilling, re-skilling, and skill development needs pertinent to the agrifood sector in each local and national context; informing the further development of tailored training contents (A3.2).

The use of these research methods should have ensured stakeholders' and participants' engagement since the project's initial phases, fostering ownership and sustainability of the results. Participants' data should be anonymised in compliance with the conditions set in the Ethics Guidebook (section 2.7 Ethics and EU values).

Some measures have been applied to make the connection with the OECD RSI model more suitable for the purposes of the AWARE project.

Confesercenti Palermo then proposed to the partners—who accepted—to organize the activities of Task A2.2 as follows.

Given the purposes of the two interconnected community mapping events, the proposed meeting methods and the profile and number (9) of stakeholders to be invited, Confesercenti Palermo suggested organising at least one of the events as a focus group.

Since the proposal calls for the same stakeholders to participate in both events, the second event could have been organized as a workshop (or conference, roundtable, or meeting), inviting focus group participants and other stakeholders. The workshop could have provided an opportunity to discuss the focus group findings and begin to more precisely delineate the needs and dynamics of the local agri-food labour market. The implementation of this event was also preparatory to the implementation of Task A2.3, which requires that, after reaching the target groups (A2.2), the consortium develops a strategy to build long-term collaboration with local businesses and other employment actors.

With regard to individual interviews, given the high number of applicants (15), unless otherwise indicated, the interviews would have been conducted partly online. The hybrid modality could also have been applied to the focus group and the workshop if circumstances had required it. It should be highlighted that the survey activities involved women with a psycho-social profile that required sensitivity, caution and privacy.

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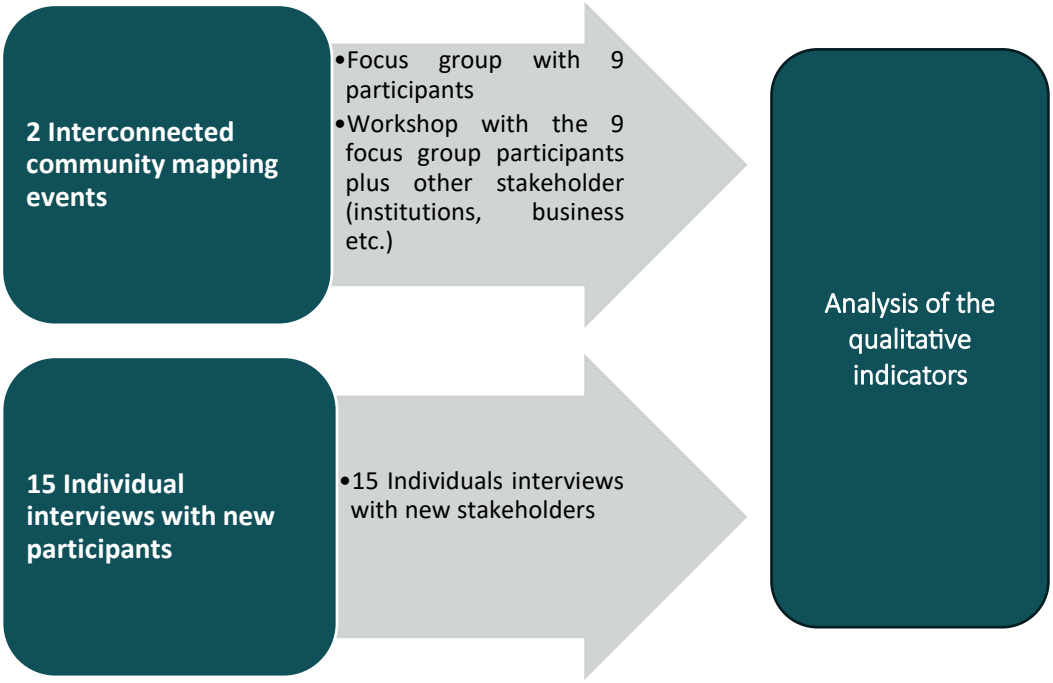
Figure 4. The methodological framework of the AWARE field research



In this case, Confesercenti Palermo also provided partners with the technical and scientific support needed to clarify and implement the management procedures.

This support included providing partners with the following materials:
- Template attendance sheets;
- Template consent forms;
- Organizational templates for conducting focus groups, workshops, and interviews;
- References and cross-references to relevant scientific literature and operational models discussed in the literature.

In total, the following participants have been engaged in this segment of research:

- 36 key stakeholders, involved in two community mapping events, with the following profiles: 12 women in vulnerable situations, 12 VET professionals and 12 representatives of agri-food companies;
- 60 stakeholders, involved in individual interviews, with the following profiles: 20 women in vulnerable situations, 20 VET professionals, and 20 representatives of agri-food companies.

Added to these are all the stakeholders, both public and private, involved in the workshops.
The field research was completed with the identification of qualitative indicators, which were reported in the OECD RSI model template adapted to the AWARE project.

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9. The main results of the field research

The field research foreseen by Task A2.2 of the AWARE project was conducted using different data collection tools:

- 2 interconnected community mapping events (divided into a focus group and a workshop or a second workshop);
- 15 Individual interviews.

The results of these activities allowed the partners to complete the qualitative indicators section of the framework designed to assess the level of RSI according to the model developed by the OECD.

A. Focus group

Each partner country organized a focus group, either online, hybrid, or in person.

All countries revealed a general openness to innovation and inclusion, but it is seen as fragmented and uneven, and not well rooted in local contexts rather than being systemic practices. Even in Italy, where companies are quite favorable to apply social innovation and/or inclusion when they have the opportunity, there are relatively fewer enterprises that are willing to "go further". On one hand, it's the result of the low interest from subsidy-supported workers, on the other hand, the reasons behind this are the absence of legal contracts after probationary or internship periods, and prejudice and stigma from employers, who often perceive these women as fragile and incapable of asserting their rights. In Cyprus, there is limited knowledge on social innovation, and collaboration exists but is mostly informal, while in Greece cooperation is seen as useful but difficult in small rural areas, especially among competitors. Also, it has emerged that in all partner countries women face both structural and personal barriers in re-entering the labour market, such as: lack of public transportation especially in rural areas, family caregiving without the appropriate support, age and gender discrimination, the mismatch between skills and jobs available. Generally, it can be stated that there is a clear need of both basic and advanced skills, both tailored for the agrifood sector (such as packaging, food processing, production), and for personal growth in the realms of, such as basic economics, entrepreneurship, IT skills, languages. Considering the perception of the participants to the focus group, public institutions have limited engagement in innovation, cooperation an inclusion. In all countries a lack of financial support has been registered, especially targeting women, since existing ones are considered insufficient and limited to strict conditions. Furthermore, it has been stated that private institutions and NGOs are more effective than public initiatives.

Overall, there are forms of collaboration, but these seem to appear fragmented and not systemic. Therefore, certain forms of collective participation take place mainly through local associations and informal networks, in all partner countries. Specifically in Italy, participation in social innovation practices seem to be easier for small enterprises, rather than in medium and big enterprises. Even in this realm, some antagonist episodes have been registered both against migrant workers and spaces dedicated to helping women who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, and participants pointed out the lack of public understanding of their work. Nonetheless, generally the community often acknowledges the professionalism and values of these local realities.

From the focus groups held in the four partner countries, it has emerged that in Cyprus, Greece and Italy there is a moderate potential for social innovation, but the lack of systemic policies and strategic structural support obstacles the development of its full potential. As matter of fact, many of the issues reported by the participants, may be reconducted to widespread lack of systematic information,

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therefore greater integration among institutional actors, educational bodies, and social organizations is needed. On the other hand, Spain registered a high aptitude towards social innovation if applied to logistics and work-life balance.

B. Workshop or focus group

As a second event, Cyprus, Greece and Italy held a workshop, while Spain held a focus group. The events were held either online, hybrid, or in person, and in all partner countries the participation was mixed: both women and men took part to the events.

The four events focused on women's obstacles and opportunities in the labour market, especially in the agrifood sector. In Cyprus, participants discussed gender roles in the agri-food sector (jobs traditionally for men); potential employment opportunities of the agri-food business "Theodoros' Orchard"; barriers, motivation and realistic pathways to employment. In Greece, both the needs of long-term unemployed women, and the VET / agri-food businesses offers were tackled. Italy's workshop examined specifically the status of social enterprises, the importance of environmental social governance (ESG) for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), and the growing interest for social innovation together with the persisting obstacles, such as bureaucracy. As a matter of fact, while at the European and national levels there is increased attention to social innovation strategies, regional governance (Sicily) is described as bureaucratic and reactive rather than proactive. Self-employment and micro-enterprises could be more viable for women's empowerment than formal "social enterprises", which have become overregulated and complex. Public institutions focus heavily on financial accountability and bureaucratic compliance, while private foundations and EU programs focus more on impact and results. In Spain the willingness to re-enter the labour market emerged, as well as the existing opportunities in the agri-food sector were recognised, but with reduced confidence due to uncertainty and a perceived mismatch between skills and expectations. Barriers are not only related to demand, but also to self-perception, and limited access to information. In fact, participants showed limited awareness of public programmes and funding opportunities. Existing support mechanisms may be underused because of low visibility and even if cooperation between employers, training providers and community actors is important, it is not sufficiently visible or coordinated.

All four partner countries reviewed a mixed scenario, with potential for the development of social innovation through the creation of more accessible and tailored working opportunities for woman. In Cyprus the local context shows moderate, but untapped, potential for the development of social innovation processes, since there are still strong traditional gender roles, even if there is potential for women to take on alternative roles. Social innovation could be strengthened by redefining job roles to make them more inclusive, improving working conditions, promoting flexible employment models, raising awareness on women's opportunities in the sector. Overall, a positive attitude towards participation and change emerged, despite structural barriers remain. Finally, the session confirmed that participatory approaches are essential for building trust and gathering meaningful information. Greek participants suggested that long-term unemployed women would benefit from greater visibility, role models, gender-inclusive language, access to technology, childcare support and safe work environments. They also stressed the need of inclusive learning environments that consider their needs, direct engagement with communities, gender quotas, financial incentives for companies employing more women and supportive workplace cultures. Overall, there is potential to develop social innovation processes if institutional support, training and inclusive practices are strengthened. Focusing on the status of social enterprises and local institutions actions, in Italy, participants expressed mixed conditions. On one hand, the presence of a growing interest towards social innovation, not only among entrepreneurs, but also within networks that support them and act like mediators with public administrations, is supporting the creation of official policies and instruments that give practical advantages to socially involved entrepreneurs. From this point of view, to cite an example, Confesercenti

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Palermo is currently developing an official recognition for ethically active SMEs. On the other hand, it has been pointed out that resources for promoting social innovation in Sicily are inadequate and fragmented, especially from an institutional standpoint, mostly due to bureaucracy. However, mutual networks and peer support such as learning from other women who have successfully started independent businesses—are viewed as the most effective form of empowerment. Finally, also participants in Spain perceived that the local context presents mixed conditions: while traditional practices and fragmented support systems still limit inclusion, there is growing awareness of the need to create more accessible opportunities for women.

C. Interviews

All partner countries conducted the interviews via phone calls, online view calls, or by structured online questionnaires.

All selected interviewees had, to varying degrees, interest in social innovation. In Cyprus and in Italy, agrifood businesses showed a relatively open attitude, reflected in the application of inclusive and cooperative practices. Nonetheless, LTU women in Cyprus expressed mixed views, which were often shaped by negative personal experiences. While some demonstrated strong motivation and adaptability, others highlighted a lack of trust in systems and employers, citing toxic work environments and inequalities. At the same time, VET professionals' perspective was more mixed in Italy: either very positive or more sceptic on the potential of social innovation. On the other hand, VET professionals in Cyprus highlighted limited awareness of social innovation, which they often associate with specific projects rather than systemic practices, while cooperation takes place mainly through NGOs and informal. Also in Greece interviewees described a moderate level of openness towards innovation and cooperation, although traditional mindsets and social norms remain barriers, particularly for women. Awareness of inclusion is increasing, but practical implementation remains limited.

Regarding the existing barriers to the market access, they were detected in all partner countries, and the main identified obstacles are:

- Language and cultural barrier for migrant women;
- Gender discrimination in the employment sector;
- Traditional business structures in rural areas;
- Ageism especially for women over 50;
- Low levels of education, gaps in maintaining and upgrading their skills due to long-term unemployment, and digital divide;
- Family responsibilities and lack of childcare support.

To face such obstacles and limitations, in all partner countries interviewees stressed the importance of training as a tool for redemption and autonomy. Participants emphasised practical, job-oriented training. Key skills include digital skills, communication and teamwork, entrepreneurial thinking. Also, technical agri-food competences have been identified as training needs, especially since it has been highlighted that the agrifood sector is constantly evolving, with the emergence of increasingly specific and ever-widening sectors. Therefore, the emergence of new supply chains is an opportunity to incorporate new segments of people, but it must be accompanied by greater training that combines territorial skills and hard knowledge related to agri-food processes.

As a matter of fact, it has been stated that, in addition to previous experience, an important skill for re-entering the workforce in this sector is flexibility and a willingness to learn. Furthermore, flexible training pathways adapted to women's needs emerged: flexible, accessible, and inclusive training options are essential, especially for women with caregiving responsibilities. As a matter of fact, it has been recorded

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that the most important aspect for a valuable reintegration is to follow the individual's aspirations and interest, and to shape their path accordingly.

With regards to the behaviors of public institutions towards innovation, cooperation and inclusion, interviews in all partner countries highlighted the absence of a structured systemic support, rather than a fragmented, uneven, and often informal participation. Therefore, more targeted measures, investment and clearer strategies are needed to support women's inclusion and social innovation in the agri-food sector.

It is relevant to note that in Italy some agrifood business owners did respond positively, reporting that in their experience there had always been a least some level of shown interest towards innovation by the institutions, through fud, projects, permanent support to organizations supporting social innovation etc. On the other hand, interviews to the VET professionals revealed that there is a lot of interest and curiosity towards social innovation, especially from a commercial point of view. However, public institutions should be more active, since projects exist, but their implementation is hindered. As a matter of fact, all respondents mentioned at least one or more policy that finance or support social innovation, however it must be mentioned that all mentioned tools are indirect support forms for social innovation.

In relation to the collective participation (or lack thereof) of communities, public opinion and social actors in local processes of social innovation interviews across partner countries recorded mixed experiences. However, there is a common perception that local communities have been reportedly identified as probably the main pillar of social innovation practices. Therefore, collaboration among different stakeholders exist, but it remains informal and unstructured, while participation is facilitated primarily through NGOs, community organizations, and training providers. As a matter of fact, in Spain, 46% of interviewees (7 out of 15) are active in informal networks (neighborhood associations, NGOs, energy communities). There is a strong community spirit, but it is not yet strategically linked to professional innovation. It is also relevant to highlight that in Italy, vulnerable women expressed different feelings and perceptions, moving from a lack of sense of community to a strong sense of community and reciprocal support. While in Cyprus, LTU women's participation varies, with some involvement in local associations (e.g., rural women's groups), but overall limited participation in structured initiatives. Issues of trust and accessibility influence participation levels.

In conclusion, interviews with different target groups (vulnerable women, agrifood businesses and VET professionals) across Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Spain revealed mixed attitudes towards social innovation. Overall, on the one hand, the context in all partner countries show potential for social innovation, but on the other hand, a sense of regret over the lack of action emerged. Furthermore, the interviews highlighted common challenges across all sectors, particularly with regard to structural barriers, a lack of coordination, and insufficient investment in skills and capacity building. At the same time, there is a clear willingness on the part of stakeholders to support change. Therefore, the final feeling is that there are the opportunities to foster social innovation, but new tools have to be created, and local institutions need to be more involved.

Taking into account the methodological framework developed by the OECD to investigate the RSI model, and the resulting dashboard structure, which included the division of the indicators into 5 dimensions and 17 sub-dimensions, we try to summarize, below, some of the main conclusions of the field research.

- Dimension A (Culture and behaviours)
  Across all partner countries potential for participation in civil society as being members of social grouping emerged, although it seems to be informal and uneven, lacking a formal structure

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and/or support from local institutions. Therefore, the need of an improved public involvement in terms of infrastructure and legislation information arose.

Similar patterns have been recorded among partner countries in the overall level of perception of life satisfaction. In particular, this seems to be mixed across the territory and varies from urban to rural areas. However, the perception of the quality of life seems to be greatly conditioned by factors such as employment, income, gender, and existing infrastructure.
Regarding the perception of the level of innovation of companies operating at a regional level, it can be stated that social innovation in partner countries is uneven and fragmented. Social enterprises can become drivers of inclusive local development if duly supported, especially in Cyprus, Greece and Spain. In Italy, and especially in Sicily, social innovation is perceived as positively present in the regional, with margin of improvement.

The perception of the usefulness of cooperation between companies is perceived differently among partner countries. While in Cyprus and in Italy there are associations that push for cooperation and create active networks of companies, in Greece and Spain, although it is recognised that cooperation may be useful, it is harder to implement. At the same time, while in Greece and Italy there is no significant evidence of cross-sector collaboration (collaboration of research or industry with civil society locally), in Cyprus and Spain some cooperation channels exist through NGO's and specific projects. However, this collaboration appears to be fragmented and insufficiently structured. Finally, with regards to the involvement of underrepresented groups (women, persons with disabilities, migrants, etc.) in collaboration locally, their participation has been reported partner countries. However, some barriers have been registered both in Spain and in Greece, where they participate to the labour force mostly as workers and are left out from decision making processes. On the other hand, in Italy participants to the field research highlighted the social engagement of companies that fully support collaborative initiatives.

The field research highlighted various obstacles that long-term unemployed women in vulnerable situations face in re-entering the labour market and advancing their careers, across all partner countries. These mainly concern childcare and household responsibilities, age and gender discrimination, lack of state support, mismatch between skills and job opportunities.
In order to overcome such barriers, regional skills needs have been identified, as well as direct production category or secondary activity in the agri-food sector where the inclusion of new professional profiles is most effective. Regarding the former, regional skills needs that emerged concern both general knowledge skills and specific agricultural skills. These include, on one hand, basic economic and accounting skills, digital and IT knowledge, customer service; on the other hand, logistics, food processing, sustainable agriculture, digital transformation. When analysing such needs, it is deemed important to take into account that the inclusion of new professional profiles seem to be more effective in different areas of the agrifood sector. Specifically, inclusion potential is higher in activities combining labour demand, lower entry barriers and opportunities for practical training or gradual upskilling. This both from a strictly agricultural knowledge point of view, and from an amplified sector definition regarding broader activities, such as tourism related to it.

- Dimension B (Laws and regulations)
  The field research also focused on the laws and regulations that concern social innovation, specifically on the definition of social innovation, public procurement, and special legal regimes. In this realm, concerning the definition of social innovation, it has emerged that there is not a commonly used definition of "social innovation" among local institutions in partner countries, although there is growing awareness in the matter and potential for its development. At the

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same time, there is no special budget provided for social innovation in partner countries, although social innovation projects may be funded through broader programmes. Some examples are European funds or sectoral initiatives (Greece), as well as broader employment, entrepreneurship, rural development or social inclusion programmes (Spain). Finally, in Italy, there are funds that support social innovation in some aspects, such as easier access to funds for those companies that consider environmental social governance or direct financial support for hiring vulnerable groups, but it must be highlighted that these financial advantages are not directly dedicated to "social innovation" policies, being this not an explicitly mentioned concept. Furthermore, it has emerged that in Cyprus and Greece participants to the field research did not report knowledge or implementation of local public procurement rules allowing integrating social or environmental clauses. In Italy and Spain participants as well didn't provide detailed technical knowledge on such rules, but regulatory possibility exists, since it has been specified that environmental clauses are integrated into some actions such as requesting for funds and loans. Also, regarding concrete efforts made in recent years to simplify administrative procedures, in all partner countries participants to the field research mentioned bureaucracy and administrative complexity as an obstacle. As a matter of fact, although digitalisation occurred, only local authorities in Italy mentioned some progress made in the bureaucratic simplification process.

It has been considered relevant to investigate the existence of special legal regimes. The presence of a special legal status for social enterprises has been recorded across partner countries, although there is lack of information and use. It must be noted that in Spain participants did not refer to any legal status, although NGOs, associations, cooperatives and social economy actors were recognised as relevant local actors. Furthermore, in Cyprus, Greece and Italy participants explicitly referred to social enterprises operating locally in the agri-food sector, while in Spain there are likely local examples, but visibility and recognition of such actors as "social enterprises" remains limited. However, gaps not allowing all local actors (such as social enterprises) benefit from public support emerged, such as lack of information and visibility, eligibility constraints, administrative burden, and weak support systems.

- Dimension C (Policy framework)
  In the realms of policy framework, the field research focused on social innovation policy, institutions dealing with social innovation, coordination mechanisms and social innovation implementation.

  From the investigation it has been recorded that except in Cyprus, where from 2020 some steps have been taken, in Greece, Italy and Spain there is no dedicated national and local strategy focused on social innovation promotion. There is a policy addressing, but it is not specific and more transversal and indirect. At the same time, social innovation was not identified as a specific topic mentioned in documents relating to the agri-food sector at the national and local level, rather in a transversal way through topics connected to it, such as innovation, sustainability, skills development, inclusion and rural competitiveness and entrepreneurship.
  Participants to the field research did not indicate that the institutions that govern the local agri-food sector allocate a budget to promote the development of social innovation at the local level. Therefore, there is an absence targeted financial support, while support is perceived through broader European or national programmes.

  Regarding the existence of a coordination mechanism in place to meet and share information around social innovation locally involving various stakeholders, partners registered mix experiences. Overall, there is a lack of systemic and structured mechanism, while coordination is generally promoted by NGO's and associations. Nonetheless, the lack of information on

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access to social innovation mechanisms is one of the major critical issues encountered during the interviews and focus groups, especially in Italy.

Finally, social innovation is not part of a local action plan, nor it is specifically mentioned in local activities, especially related to the agri-food sector, in partner countries. However, some local actions reflect social innovation as a transversal and cross-cutting theme.

- Dimension D (Actors community)
  When asked about the presence of stakeholders' networks or community partnerships related to social innovation locally, participants identified active cooperation instruments, such as solidarity networks and trainers like KEEAED in Cyprus; Local Action Groups (Italian acronym: GAL) or Fisheries Local Action Groups (Italian Acronym: FLAG) in Italy. In Greece participants agreed that collaboration is not widespread, and where it exists it is informal, isolated or connected to specific projects. Finally, in Spain, informal and formal community networks emerged, but they are not yet strategically connected to labour inclusion or innovation processes in a structured way.

  On the other hand, on publicly available information on the possibilities for stakeholder collaboration, partner countries recorded mixed responses. Some did not know about it (Cyprus); Greeks did not identify specific centralised information, making it scattered or difficult to access. In Italy, communities and businesses are trying to create cooperation tools that fill in the information gap; while in Spain, information is available through public employment services, local associations, training centres and project-based initiatives, but only partially and in a fragmented way.

- Dimension E (Resources available)
  The research also examined the resources available to develop social innovation by focusing on financial resources, infrastructure and support, and land and community assets.

  Firstly, no public local programs to finance social innovation have been reported, but existing support seems to come from broader regional, national or European schemes, except for the Kourion municipality in Cyprus. Also, In Cyprus and Spain no references to the application of participatory budgeting were made. In Greece it is reported to be absent or extremely limited, since local communities have little involvement in budget allocation decisions, while in Italy there are many positive experiences of participatory budgeting, even in the agri-food sector.
  Concerning support and infrastructure, some incubators and public local support infrastructures have been recorded, with the peculiarity of being more diffused in urban areas in Greece and Italy; however, they seem to be insufficient, while in Spain even if basic support infrastructure exists, it is not specifically linked to women's inclusion or rural social innovation, and no data has been reported in Cyprus. At the same time, overall, there are some resources and opportunities within local communities useful for the gender-responsive inclusion of vulnerable women in the workforce, but they are considered be insufficient and fragmented, at different levels. In Greece, existing resources' relevance for farmers and rural users was questioned by participants, given the digital exclusion they face; furthermore, programmes should follow a shared model, combine hands-on training with local needs, and address psychological, linguistic and practical barriers to women's inclusion. Also in Italy available resources and opportunities are considered insufficient and characterised by scarce information, although some efforts are being made, especially at a national level through the PNRR. In Spain, on the other hand, participants highlighted useful resources, although their coordination remains limited, while in Cyprus KEEAED and PITCH project for tools were mentioned. On the other hand, some targeted capacity building programmes by private

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business development support organisations have been identified in partner countries, however barriers persist. In Cyprus the IDEA accelerator, KEEAED, and GrantXpert company were mentioned. In Greece, training and infrastructure-related programmes exist, including private companies developing agricultural technology systems, but performance and trust are uneven; therefore, a broader gap remains between research, training and real-world application. Italian national and regional programs offer several opportunities, relying on European funds from the PNRR, but constantly changing markets and ongoing crises weaken their effectiveness. Finally, in Spain capacity building opportunities likely exist, but awareness and accessibility appear limited among target groups.

Finally, with regard to land and community assets, incentives for a socially innovative local approach have been identified in all partner countries, but not always directed to the agri-food sector. While in Cyprus, mentors, hackathons, prizes were mentioned, in Greece, incentives are largely linked to EU-funded programmes and sustainability initiatives, and in Spain to sustainable agriculture, local food chains, agrotourism and practical training. On the other hand, in Italy it has emerged that the agri-food sector is one of the most dynamic and open to social innovation, but it is suffering from the effects of the crisis that has hit agriculture, while related sectors (restaurants, distribution, etc.) and sustainable agriculture are more reactive. Furthermore, the field research did not identify systematic local authority initiatives for innovative approach of land use in Greece and Spain, where existing opportunities seem to be limited and related to rural development initiatives and diversification strategies in Spain. In Cyprus the Pame Kaimakli initiative was mentioned, while in Italy existing national and regional programmes appear to be insufficient, not adequately exploiting opportunities. As a matter of fact, examples of community land ownership or similar have been identified only in Italy, out of all the partner countries, with some cooperatives and social enterprises operating in Sicily, although the situation still appears not to be sufficiently mature. Finally, community asset transfer to social economy or civil society actors was not addressed in Cyprus and in Italy; in the latter, it emerged that the experience of collective cooperativism is not as developed in Sicily as in other parts of the country. Furthermore, no specific examples were reported in Spain, where local civic actors are present, but structured asset transfer models do not appear to be widespread or visible in the analysed context. Greek participants, on the other hand, indicated existing samples, that however remain rare and mostly national rather than local.

10. Measuring the level of RSI in social innovation ecosystems of partner countries

Is it possible to measure the level of social innovation in the contexts we have analysed and in which we intend to develop the AWARE project? The OECD addresses this topic in its document *Assessing the framework conditions for social innovation in rural areas* (2024, cit.). Of course, the model adopted by the OECD does not perfectly match our framework, but it has been useful in guiding our strategic actions.

According to the OECD, “measuring the capacity to engage with social innovation in rural areas could help identify a local ecosystem’s strengths and weaknesses.” (p. 22).

The OECD proposes to measure the level of local social innovation by applying a score to the result observed with respect to each indicator. To calculate these results, indicator scores are weighted based on perceived importance and relevance. The OECD even proposes to apply fractional scores for each indicator, allowing the intensity of the response to be indicated: 0.0, 0.25, 0.75 and 1.0.

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The OECD defines the approaches to measuring scores as "potential." This means that researchers are given the possibility to adapt the measurement to the contexts being tested.

In this case, also considering that many indicators are qualitative, Confesercenti Palermo proposed measuring the level of social innovation by applying a perceived effectiveness rating based on a Likert scale: 1 (not at all effective); 2 (slightly effective); 3 (moderately effective); 4 (very effective); 5 (extremely effective). By "effective", we mean the ability to produce the desired or hoped-for effect and results. Sometimes the evaluation can be related to the degree of intensity of a phenomenon (participation, innovation, etc.) or to the number of units (cooperatives, social enterprises, etc.). In this case, the Likert scale refers to the values of perceived intensity: 1 (very low); 2 (low); 3 (moderate); 4 (high); 5 (very high).

The higher the score on the five dimensions of the OECD model, the higher the level of social innovation in rural contexts and in the agri-food sector of our interest.

The evaluation has been conducted by the partners for the indicators to their respective countries. In the case of two partners per country, the evaluation has conducted jointly or by a single partner selected for this purpose. Evaluations were based on the researchers' perceptions and not on pure numerical quantifications. Therefore, it was preferable for the evaluations to be conducted by researchers familiar with the different social and economic contexts. The final results have been reviewed by Confesercenti Palermo to harmonize and homogenize the evaluations, as much as possible (in this case, calculating the median of the values).

The overall assessment was carried out at the end of the desk and field research, using columns specifically added to the models.

The impact assessment of the OECD RSI model was also carried out with reference to the different social ecosystems referred to in the partner countries.

These models were thus developed to assess the level of RSI both in relation to the dimensions indicated by the OECD model and in relation to local social innovation ecosystems.

The values relating to the level of RSI for each indicator were expressed by the partners per country following the Likert scale model (1-5). Confesercenti Palermo then calculated the median of the values expressed for each individual indicator with reference to the respective dimensions and sub-dimensions. The median can be considered the representation of the value of each individual indicator (both quantitative and qualitative).

Table 8. *Template for measuring the level of RSI distinguished dimensions and sub-dimensions*

Dimension	Sub-dimension	Indicator number	Indicator	Cyprus Value (1-5)	Greece Value (1-5)	Italy Value (1-5)	Spain Value (1-5)	Median
Dimension A Culture and behaviours	A.1 Social Capital	A.1.1	Level of civic engagement	3	2	3	3	3

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	A.1.2	Percentage of people involved in volunteer activities	2	2	2	3	2
	A.1.3	Participation in civil society as being member of social grouping	2	1	2	3	2
A2: Level of well-being	A.2.1	Overall level of perception of life satisfaction	2	2	4	3	2,5
	A.2.2	Overall level of perception of life satisfaction per region	2	2	4	3	2,5
A.3: Entrepreneurial activity around social innovation	A.3.1	Level of innovation in the economies of the countries	2	2	4	3	2,5
	A.3.2	Perception of the level of innovation of companies operating at a regional level	2	3	3	2	2,5
A.4: Collaboration tradition	A.4.1	Number of institutional partnerships operating in the agri-food sector	2	1	4	2	2
	A.4.2	Is the usefulness of cooperation between companies perceived?	4	4	4	3	4
	A.4.3	Has there been collaboration of research or industry with civil society locally, over the last 3 years?	2	2	2	2	2

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	A.4.4	Are underrepresented groups (women, persons with disabilities, migrants, etc.) involved in collaboration locally?	2	2	3	2	2
***A.5: Gender or other diversity indicators**	A.5.1	Share of businesses run by women	3	2	1	3	2,5
	A.5.2	Percentage of women 25-64 years old by educational attainment	3	3	1	3	3
	A.5.3	Are there obstacles that long-term unemployed women in vulnerable situations face in re-entering the labour market and advancing their careers? If so, what are they?	4 Family responsibilities/childcare, social isolation, language barriers, low self-confidence, financial stress	4 Gender stereotypes, care responsibilities	5	4	4,5
	A.5.4	Share of women in management positions (SDG 5.5.2)	2	1	2	2	2
	A.5.5	Gender pay gap (SDG 8.5.1)	3	3	3	3	3
	A.5.6	Employment by sex and age	2	2	2	2	2
	A.5.7	Share of farms by their manager's gender	3	4	2	2	2,5
	A5.8	Needs for women in training	3	3	4	2	3

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	A.6 Additional suggested background indicators	A.6.1	Level of unemployment	4	4	3	4	4
		A.6.2	Life expectancy and mortality data	3	3	5	3	3
		A.6.3	National and regional income distribution and poverty	3	3	4	3	3
		A.6.4	Regional skill needs (if available, male/female)	3	3	4	3	3
		A.6.5	Percentage incidence of the agri-food sector with regard to the total production systems	2	2	1	3	2
		A.6.6	Direct production category or secondary activity in the agri-food sector where the inclusion of new professional profiles is most effective	4	4 Digital	3	4	4
	B.1: Definition of social innovation	B.1.1	Is there a commonly used definition of "social innovation" among local institutions?	1	1	1	2	1

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Dimension B Laws and regulations		B.1.2	Is there a special budget provided for social innovation?	1	1	2	2	1,5
	B.2 Public procurement	B.2.1	Do local public procurement rules allow integrating social or environmental clauses?	1	1	3	3	2
		B.2.2	Has a concrete effort been made in recent years to simplify administrative procedures?	1	1	1	2	1
	B.3: Special legal regimes	B.3.1	Are there gaps, not allowing all local actors (such as social enterprises) benefit from public support?	3	4	4	3	3,5
		B.3.2	Is there a presence of a special legal status for social enterprise?	3	3	4	3	3

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		B.3.3	Are there any social enterprises operating locally in the agri-food sector?	3	3	4	3	3
Dimension D Actors community	C.1: Social innovation policy	C.1.1	Is there a dedicated strategy (national or local) focused on social innovation promotion?	2	1	2	2	2
		C.1.2	Is social innovation a topic mentioned in documents relating to the agri-food sector at the national and local level?	2	2	1	2	2
	C.2 Institution(s) dealing with social innovation	C.2.1	Do the institutions that govern the local agri-food sector allocate a budget to promote the development of social innovation at the local level?	2	2	2	2	2
	C.3 Social innovation coordination mechanism	C.3.1	Is there a coordination mechanism in place to meet and share information around social innovation locally involving various stakeholders?	1	1	4	2	1,5

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	C.4 Social innovation implementation	C.4.1	Is social innovation part of a local action plan or is it specifically mentioned in local activities, especially those related to the agri-food sector?	1	1	2	2	1,5
Dimension D Actors community	**D.1: Density of social innovation actors**	D.1.1	# cooperatives per capita	2	1	4	3	2,5
		D.1.2	# associations per capita	2	2	4	3	2,5
		D.1.3	# social enterprises per capita (when legal status exists)	2	2	4	2	2
	D.2 Actors engagement platforms	D.2.1	Are stakeholders' networks or community partnerships related to social innovation present locally?	2	1	3	2	2

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		D.2.2	Is there publicly available information on the possibilities for stakeholder collaboration?	2	1	2	3	2
Dimension E Resources available	E.1: Financial resources	E.1.1	Are there public local programmes to finance social innovation?	2	2	3	2	2
		E.1.2	Is participatory budgeting applied locally?	1	1	2	2	1,5
	E.2 Infrastructure and support	E.2.1	Is there available public local support infrastructure (incubators, accelerators)?	1	1	3	2	1,5
		E.2.2	Are there resources (tangible and intangible) and opportunities within local communities that you would consider useful for the gender-responsive inclusion of vulnerable women in the workforce? If yes, which ones?	2 Yes, PITCH project and its tools	1	4	3	3

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		E.2.3	Are there targeted capacity building programmes by private business development support organisations available locally? If yes, which ones?	2 Yes, IDEA accelerator, KEEAED	1	3	3	3
	E.3 Land and community assets	E.3.1	Are there incentives for a socially innovative local approach to the agri-food sector?	2	1	3	2	2
		E.3.2	Have local authorities been creating opportunities to allow innovative approach of land use?	2	1	3	2	2
		E.3.3	Are there examples of community land ownership or similar applied locally?	1	1	3	1	1
		E.3.4	Are there examples of community asset transfer to social economy or civil society actors?	1	1	3	1	1

The median of the ratings expressed —according to the Likert scale— was also calculated for each country: this data —the result of an exploratory test— allows us to have a general representation of the level of RSI for each social ecosystem/country. The calculation of the medians for each social ecosystem/country was organised with reference to the dimensions indicated by the OECD RSI model. The result does not pretend to provide objective values but only a synthetic framework of the degree of attitude that each social ecosystem/country shows towards the RSI model.

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Table 9. *Template for measuring the level of RSI distinguished by dimension and ecosystems/countries*

	Dimension	From indicator	To indicator	Cyprus	Greece	Italy	Spain
1	Cultures and behaviours	A.1.1	A.6.6	2,5	2	3	3
2	Laws and regulations	B.1.1	B.3.3	1	1	3	3
3	Policy framework	C.1.1	C.4.1	2	1	2	2
4	Actors' community	D.1.1	D.2.2	2	1	4	3
5	Resources available	E.1.1	E.3.4	1	1	3	2

11. Some conclusions

1. The RSI model tested in the InnovAgroWoMed project and its implementation using the model developed by the OECD have been very useful in understanding the opportunities and obstacles disadvantaged women face in their re-integration into the labour market, especially in the agri-food sector. The methodological framework developed for the research envisaged in Tasks A2.1 and A2.2 appropriately took into account factors not exclusively related to the work environment and direct labour market dynamics. The opportunities and obstacles that disadvantaged women typically face are not determined exclusively by existing laws and regulations, but, more often, by contextual conditions (economic, cultural, social) that demonstrate the community's attitude (represented by the behaviour of businesses, civil society and public bodies) toward the positive resolution of disadvantaged situations through concrete inclusion initiatives.
2. Looking at the research results, we can say that entrepreneurial activity focused on social innovation and the capacity for cooperation of the community (here considered as a collective entity) are at a good level in the partner countries, especially in the agri-food sector. Indeed, the agri-food sector has a significant impact in the countries involved in the project. The dynamism of social ecosystems is an important factor in the development of social and employment inclusion policies, and from this perspective, the areas examined appear suitable. However, critical points still remain, such as the lack of adequate budgets, the deficiency of policies strictly aimed at social innovation (especially in rural areas), the poor dissemination of information, the low commitment –at least formally– of public institutions towards innovation, cooperation and inclusion. Overall, there are forms of collaboration, but these seem to appear fragmented and not systemic.
3. Based on the experience gained through consultation of documents and discussions with stakeholders, we can suggest some practical actions to develop greater awareness of the issue of RSI: a) promote best cooperation practices (especially in the agri-food sector) through their involvement in the project; b) raise awareness among public bodies to strengthen social innovation policies; c) help circulate information through a specific dissemination strategy.
4. With regard to the socioeconomic conditions of the project's target population and the phenomenon of long-term unemployment, women face both structural and personal barriers to reintegration into the labour market, such as: lack of public transportation, especially in rural areas,

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caring for family members without adequate support, age and gender discrimination, and the mismatch between skills and available jobs. Another problem is likely psychosocial, due to reduced self-confidence caused by uncertainty and a perceived mismatch between skills and expectations. Obstacles are not only related to demand, but also to self-perception and limited access to information.

5. What solutions can be adopted to reduce LTU among disadvantaged women? The research shows some insights: in general, there is a clear need for both basic and advanced skills specific to the agri-food sector (such as packaging, food processing, and production), as well as for personal growth in areas such as basic economics, entrepreneurship, IT skills, and foreign languages. Another key element that emerged is focusing on self-employment and microenterprises, perhaps more effective solutions for women's emancipation than formal "social enterprises," which today appear overly regulated and complex.
6. It could be argued that in the partner countries (and therefore in their respective social ecosystems) there is good potential for developing projects that implement inclusion policies and a targeted, gender-sensitive approach to achieve the goals of reducing long-term unemployment among disadvantaged women. However, there are still some general, limiting conditions that need to be addressed: unemployment remains a key challenge, especially for women.
7. In conclusion, we suggest using the AWARE project in practice to achieve the following objectives: a) involve the community (businesses, civil society and public institutions), provide it with information through a specific dissemination strategy and raise awareness on the problem of LTU among disabled women; b) provide training to the women involved in the project in both basic and specialized skills, aimed at their inclusion in the agri-food sector; c) promote training and operative meetings between disadvantaged women and businesses (taking into account the sensitivity of the approach) to align supply and demand and create gender-sensitive work environments.

In all these cases, the activities envisaged in Task A2.3 can be of great help.

12. References

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