

GIZ-Gender Competition 2024

Project Title “ –New Face of Woman in Rural Areas”

Project theme – Gender and youth-focused program in Rural areas in Serbia - the Mentorship program supported by network “Jezgro” (network “Core”) is focused on promoting gender equality, female entrepreneurship and woman empowerment as well as creating gender and youth-based opportunities through workshops, development of mentorship network for above stated vulnerable groups of population – women, youth, Roma, and returnees. More info on www.jezgro.rs

The aim of the project - is to support women in rural areas to co-create new possible models of work and life in the rural areas that will support and increase quality of life and local community.

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1. Promoting gender equality: Women in the rural areas have an extremely important role and potential in their local community, but often represent an "invisible workforce" - they make up to 55% of the unemployed rural population in Serbia and 74% of unpaid assisting household members, of whom, 93% do not pay mandatory pension and disability insurance. In addition to living on the countryside, a number of women in rural areas are in a difficult socio-economic position because they live in economically less developed parts of Serbia. Almost 10% of local governments areas in Serbia (19) are categorized as devastated areas, i.e. below 50% of the national average gross income. Another 25 municipalities share similar fate and an average of 60% below the national average gross income.

The **key support** is through **education and shared knowledge, financial support** for their empowerment through starting certain entrepreneurial ventures, through creating opportunities for their **networking** and, providing quality **mentoring** support when starting their own business. What we see and learned is that If we empower women in the right way, they can play a key role as **drivers of change in rural areas** shaping their political, social, economic and cultural environment. In that sense, they create the foundations and the basis for the development of a sustainable and good economy in every community.

Our project "New Face of Woman in Rural Areas" through its activities is offering new learning models, establishing a rural mentoring system, support diversification of businesses and strengthen networking of women in rural areas. Rural mentoring "New Face of Woman in Rural Areas" nurtures the feminist principle, female energy and life wisdom that one carries as a woman, with the goal of influencing society to change for the better by creating a new paradigm of business.

The network “Jezgro” (network Core) showcases the good practices and knowledge from successful households, structured mentoring in order to develop business and improve the capacity of small business to promote local products, and above all the opportunity for quality networking and for women from rural areas to remain in a safe environment for personal manifestation of creative socially responsible ideas and projects. **As an impact, we expect that these kind of activities (education, networking, mentorship program, social and economic empowerment) at the end of the project will lead to a better understanding of what the "New Face of Women from Rural Areas" can be, and be recognized by the local community as something that can increase quality of life.**

The "Jezgro" network, by using different modalities of work, is contributing to improvement of the quality of life of women in the rural areas and help the economic empowerment of women through work on their

personal development and help them successfully realize the desired entrepreneurial idea, improve their rural business or the community in which they live. The target group of the project are women who live or are in different ways related to rural areas.

So far we achieved following results with our project: a) developed the profile of New face of woman in rural areas as desired profile which we want to strengthen through our project activities; b) developed Competency model with educational program which supports development of knowledge, skills and behavior of new face of women in rural areas; c) we had capacity building activities for network “Jezgro” and now we have network of 92 women from rural areas with different personal and business stories, more than 30 mentors who are supporting our work and mentorship program, 19 mentoring pairs who are participating in our mentorship program that have started in October 2023, more than 100 women and men who were participating on our workshops all around Serbia; d) we have developed platform for learning, sharing and networking; e) we provide free access for all women in our network to e-learning platform “Krojačeva škola” with more than 150 courses for business and personal development.

2. Gender as a quality feature of our work - Our activities are guided by the value of equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation or gender identity. Through defining and acting through our activities within the project, we act in such a way to sustainably ensure raising awareness, acceptance and application of this value among our users, partners and stakeholders. Results so far:

- Based on research and understanding of the limiting attitudes within women, especially women in rural areas, we designed the Competence Model for the New Face of Woman in Rural Areas in Serbia in such a way that the competencies that will help women acquire new knowledge and thus be more competitive in the market, and ultimately, we lead them to change in their behavior.
- Changing behavior means creating new narratives on a personal level, and a new attitude towards women and their position in the local community, on a social and professional level. We defined this change through the Profile of our ideal woman coming from rural areas, which we called the New Face of the Woman in Rural Areas. This profile is defined in cooperation with partners and stakeholders. Our results in the form of a Brochure and a description of these behaviors, as well as beliefs and attitudes, were submitted to the Commissioner for Protection of Equality. This is precisely why our most important goal is education and networking through the New Face of Women in Rural Areas project and the empowerment of women in the direction of seeing the equal opportunities they have in relation to men, (following the defined profile of the New Face and the Competence model) through formal and informal learning and learning from other women in the community – peer learning, formed around the project New Face of Women in Rural Areas and “Jezgro” network.
- We empower women to take care of their physical and mental health, to accept the concept of a creative and innovative way of thinking, to acquire the skills and knowledge they need for the specific field of work, employment and starting small businesses through education on entrepreneurship, communication and leadership and visionary management; through education in the field of digital literacy and marketing, especially digital marketing, we empower and support them on the path of digital transformation of society and business. We coordinate our activities following national regulations, by creating equal opportunities that are defined in the Republic of Serbia by the Law on Gender Equality, primarily Article 3.

- The contribution and importance of Roma women and returnees who are beneficiaries of the project and who actively participate from the very beginning, is very important, because they feel safe and secure in the community of women gathered around this project. Their contribution is reflected in the sharing of the experience and knowledge they possess, with which the attitude-knowledge-behavior-knowledge coupling provides a feedback loop for other women from the community who do not know or are not informed about the unfavorable position of Roma women and returnees in Serbia. In this way, we empower target groups by connecting them, but also by creating empathy among different groups of women, gathered around a common determinant - their life and work in the rural areas.
- At the lectures and workshops that were held during August and September 2023, we also had men who were interested in the topics of lectures and in learning.
- Through education and formal and informal meetings, we encourage women to actively participate in decisions related to health and reproductive health, to get involved at the local level and to lobby in front local authorities and decision-makers, to actively participate in creating opportunities for themselves and for their position in society.

3. Implementation of feminist core principles in our project strongly correlate with empowering the feminine core in every woman who is user of our project activities or member of network “Jezgro” (Network Core). As the name of the project says "New Face of Woman in Rural Areas", our activities first begin with the fight against stereotypes and prejudices about women from the rural areas, which are negative, through the creation of a new definition and image of that woman, through education, networking and their personal awareness of their rights and opportunities as women, especially when it comes to unequal access to property and traditional roles imposed on them. With this project, we are working directly on changing patterns and giving a new approach in accordance with the goals of sustainable development - to leave no one behind - by rebranding the image of women from rural areas, by telling their life stories in a new way and thus creating new beliefs by promoting their freedom and the power of their personal action in their own lives and the lives of their local communities. Through the project, we defined and created a competency model that, accompanied by a mentoring program and education, and through the use of innovative technologies, aims to strengthen the users to develop their ideas, that is, to take control of their finances and therefore the quality of their lives (lectures such as are entrepreneurship, communication and leadership skills).

- The project includes marginalized groups of women - Roma women, returnees, single mothers, mothers of children with special needs. Roma women are not only beneficiaries, but we also have mentors who are Roma women and who, by their example, act as role models not only for other Roma women but also for all beneficiaries of the project. With this, we clearly highlight and contribute to inclusion, reduction of multiple discrimination and exercise of rights to economic resources, access to ownership, inheritance, and natural resources.
- The education and workshop program follows the competence model of the New Face of Women in Rural Areas, which consists of 7 competencies necessary to empower rural women in a modern and authentic way. In addition to knowledge and practical tools, our focus is to teach and empower them to negotiate and get support for the realization of their idea not only in their immediate environment but also in the wider community.
- Lectures at the “Jezgro” network platform and e-courses at the “Krojačeva škola” platform give them opportunities and access to different modalities on how to develop a small business, to strengthen internal capacities, develop resistance to ambiguity and unforeseen situations, and

above all to strengthen personal security in the digital world, by which we contribute to change of the policy of equal opportunities. By empowering them, raising their self-confidence we are creating a safe community based on solidarity.

- We bring women with practical experience and expertise that start topics of wider importance, such as lectures in the field of sustainable tourism and waste reduction, thus giving them new perspectives, making them more sensitive to waste reduction in households and developing awareness of environmental protection and the 5 goals of sustainable development.

4. We see cooperation as the essence of our project activities – one of our mottos is “empowered by networking”. Except the capacity building activities in network “Jezgro”, we are also very active in advocating and lobbying the general public to become direct support in empowering women from rural areas, returnees and Roma women, but also as co-creators in creating a new image of women. What we did till now and what is planned:

- The Viber Community was created for users of the content of the project New Face of Women in Rural Areas, which currently counts more than 90 active members. This community provides equal access to education for all women who are part of it, not only women who passed in the mentoring program with their own idea. This community is also a place where the members themselves actively participate in the presentation and self-promotion of their products and services, selflessly sharing the knowledge and experience through exchange in the network, but also giving pro bono lectures by experts and mentors that participate in the project.
- This digital community opens opportunities for mutual cooperation and connections based on similar needs or skills that are recognized as lacking, so the need for association arises. One of the examples of cooperation achieved through the Community is the example of the cooperation between the architect Kristina Kljajić, who is an expert in the old ways of earthen construction, and Aleksandra Rašković, who had the need to renovate her hundred-year-old house in an original way, without which she was not able to proceed with the realization of her entrepreneurial idea with which she applied to be part of this Community.
- The principle of cooperation is also reflected in the way women are brought together through the mentoring program, which is designed to bring together women from the same or similar industry, so that in the future they can also achieve business cooperation.
- During the designing process and writing of the Brochure The New Face of Woman in Rural Areas, we collaborated with various stakeholders and advised domestic laws and European competence frameworks that are needed for labor markets for the future. A great help were women and men with domain expertise who recognized the importance and value of the project and the far-reaching results of the project and got involved on a voluntary basis, to use their knowledge and skills to help the development of the mentoring program The New Face of Woman in Rural Areas and the network “Jezgro”.
- The main partners and stakeholders come from local self-government, academia, NGOs and private business.

Quality communication is a pillar of successful implementation and realization of each activity. As a CSRE team, which is dedicated and actively working to change the image of women from the rural areas, we as individuals are deeply moved by the possibilities that open up to us by working in this field, which brings us personally and individually a new level of understanding of the possibility of influence that we can have with our actions in the future. This makes us especially grateful to have the trust and confirmation of our network and community to act in its best interest in this field.