

THE WOMEN'S ACADEMY FOR RURAL INNOVATION

Dear #RuralChangeMakers,

I am honoured to be the Honorary President of this inaugural edition of The Women's Academy for Rural Innovation. As a Spanish citizen myself I am also delighted that this inaugural edition is taking place in Spain – moreover, in my own region of Castilla y León! I believe this to be an excellent choice to host this first edition. Castilla y León is a great example of a vibrant rural ecosystem in the heart of Europe. It is not only a beautiful area, but it also has a rich history. **Many of the innovators and pioneers who have written its history are, indeed, women** – even if their names have not featured in history books as prominently as they would have deserved.

Coming back to the present times, I am delighted to highlight that promoting female empowerment, closing the gender gap and opening doors for women at all levels and in all sectors are key objectives of the European Union. I am pleased to see that three of the four most important EU institutions are, today, in fact headed by women. However, this is not enough. **We have a long road ahead until equality is a reality for all** – so a day should not pass without us, equality defenders, engaging in activities, actions and initiatives that seek to foster it – like the one that brings us together.

Women from rural areas such as yourselves can often face a double-divide – gender and urban/rural. This is why I have spent the past decade, and beyond, speaking of and fighting for the need for public services to guarantee and support the rights of rural women to access education, health and employment and education opportunities. **Promoting rural development and gender equality has been a crucial part of my work** as a Member of the European Parliament. When I was first democratically elected by the citizens of Spain to represent them in 2004, I made it one of my priorities to build a better environment for rural women across the EU – one in which they could thrive, and become the leaders this world needs.

I am encouraged to see these same objectives and values reflected in The Women's Academy for Rural Innovation. It is an important, much-needed initiative **and I fully support its goal of empowering female leaders from Europe's regions to shape a positive future for themselves, their communities, and the next generations of Europeans.**

I am convinced that we will only be serving our society well when we are able to empower all citizens to reach their full potential. **We must ensure that everyone has an equal chance to benefit from technological development, and that nobody is left behind in the digital revolution**, as the motto of this Academy goes.

While the 15 women taking part in this first Academy come from a range of backgrounds - including agriculture, entrepreneurship and sustainability - it is clear to me that what they all have in common **is a strong commitment to making a difference in their community.** The Academy is a fantastic opportunity to acquire a range of skills that will allow you to place your region on the map.

I hope that you will all make the most of the opportunity and the chance to learn from experts and mentors here in Spain. And most importantly, I hope that you will all enjoy it – that you will share ideas and experiences with each other, and **be inspired to take the next step in realising your ambitions.**

I look forward to meeting you all.

With my best wishes,

Iratxe García Pérez

Member of the European Parliament
Chair of the S&D Group in the European Parliament
Honorary President, The Women's Academy for Rural Innovation 2022



More info on our Partners: <https://www.europeanleadershipacademy.eu/about/partners/>