

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET

PROJECT	
Participant:	Câmara Municipal de Vouzela
PIC number:	897501813
Project name and acronym:	Rural Alliance for Greater Democratic Participation - RurAll

EVENT DESCRIPTION			
Event number:	5th		
Event name:	Women in Rural Democracy: Empowerment and Participation		
Type:	Seminar		
In situ/online:	[in-situ]		
Location:	Križevci, Croatia		
Date(s):	18-21st May, 2026		
Website(s) (if any):	https://krizevci.hr/		
Participants			
Female:	32		
Male:	28		
Non-binary:	0		
From country 1 [Bulgaria]:	2		
From country 2 [Croatia]:	41		
From country 3 [France]:	3		
From country 4 [Greece]:	1		
From country 5 [Hungary]:	1		
From country 6 [Italy]:	1		
From country 7 [Latvia]:	1		
From country 8 [Lithuania]:	0		
From country 9 [Malta]:	1		
From country 10 [Poland]:	1		
From country 11 [Portugal]:	3		
From country 12 [Slovakia]:	2		
From country 13 [Slovenia]:	1		
From country 14 [Spain]:	2		
Total number of participants:	60	From total number of countries:	13
Description			

Provide a short description of the event and its activities.

From 18 to 21 May 2026, the fifth RurAll Network of Towns meeting was held in Križevci, Croatia, under the central theme "Women in Rural Democracy: Empowerment and Participation", bringing together 60 participants from 13 European countries, including 41 local participants and 19 international participants, with a gender-balanced composition of 28 men and 32 women.

The event gathered representatives of rural municipalities, civil society organisations, educational actors, local stakeholders and European partners within the framework of the CERV Programme, with the purpose of reflecting on the role of women in democratic life, the connection between rural cultural heritage and civic participation, and the importance of building more inclusive, resilient and participatory rural communities.

The main objectives of the meeting were to strengthen democratic participation in rural areas, encourage the active involvement of women and young people in local decision-making, improve understanding of European institutions and their role in supporting civic engagement, exchange good practices on equality, inclusion and rural development, and consolidate long-term cooperation among partner territories through dialogue, peer learning and shared European values.

The programme began on Monday 18 May with the arrival of participants, hotel check-in, an initial meeting at the hotel and a welcome dinner, which created a positive and open atmosphere for the delegations and allowed the first informal exchanges among local citizens, institutional representatives and international partners.

On Tuesday 19 May, the participants travelled to Križevci, where they were officially received by Mr. Tomislav Katanović, Mayor of Križevci, who welcomed the delegations and introduced the local context, followed by words of appreciation from Mr. Carlos Oliveira, Mayor of Vouzela, the presentation of the delegations, the exchange of institutional gifts and an official group photo. This institutional reception provided a strong basis for dialogue between the host municipality and the European partners, highlighting Križevci as a historic town with a strong civic identity, educational tradition and active community life.

The programme then continued with the presentation and guided visit of the social enterprise HEDONA, where participants learned about its model of social entrepreneurship, inclusion practices, local impact and employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. This visit was one of the most significant practical experiences of the event, as it showed how rural economic initiatives can combine productivity, social responsibility and empowerment of vulnerable groups, while also demonstrating how women-led or inclusion-oriented initiatives can contribute to local development.

The delegation then visited Srednja škola Ivan Seljanec Križevci, where students presented Križevci and Croatia through a programme entitled "Connecting Rural Cultural Heritage and Democratic Participation", focusing on local traditions, youth participation, rural development and the relationship between heritage and democratic values. The involvement of the secondary school gave visibility to young people as active actors in the future of rural democracy and reinforced the educational dimension of the project.

After a traditional Croatian lunch and networking moment, participants discovered the heritage of Križevci through a guided walk across the historic centre, including the main square and key cultural and historical landmarks, allowing them to better understand the town's identity, its tradition of dialogue and its role as a meeting point between history, education, sustainability and civic responsibility.

On Wednesday 20 May, the programme continued with an official visit to the European Parliament Liaison Office in Croatia, where Ms. Maja Ljubić Kutnjak welcomed the participants and introduced the work of the office. The session included presentations on the role and functioning of EU institutions, an overview of the European Parliament's work in Croatia, and an open discussion on democratic participation and civic engagement in rural areas, giving participants a clearer understanding of how European institutions operate and how rural communities can connect more effectively with EU-level democratic processes.

This institutional component was followed by the presentation of good practices by the project partners under the theme "Women in Rural Democracy: Empowerment and Participation", where each delegation shared examples related to women's participation in local decision-making, civic engagement initiatives, equality and inclusion projects, and the strengthening of local rural communities. The session was highly participatory and practical, enabling partners to compare different territorial realities, identify common challenges and reflect on transferable approaches to increase women's visibility, leadership and influence in democratic life.

The day also included informal exchange moments, the presentation of the next project meeting in France, an evaluation and dissemination session, participant feedback, the exchange of impressions and dissemination planning, before the final dinner.

On Thursday 21 May, the event concluded with check-out and departures, closing a four-day programme that successfully combined institutional dialogue, educational activities, social economy experiences, cultural heritage and peer learning.

The evaluation of the event reflected a very high level of satisfaction with the organisation, content, hospitality and overall structure of the meeting. Participants particularly valued the balanced rhythm of the agenda, which connected formal European and municipal dialogue with concrete local experiences, including the visit to HEDONA, the involvement of the secondary school, the workshop on women's participation and the cultural discovery of Križevci.

The event was considered especially relevant because it linked gender equality and democratic participation with the everyday realities of rural communities, showing that women's empowerment is not only a matter of representation, but also a condition for stronger, more legitimate and more inclusive local governance.

The main outcomes of the meeting included a deeper understanding of the role of women in rural democracy, greater awareness of how EU institutions can support civic engagement at local level, stronger cooperation among partner municipalities, increased visibility of youth and educational actors in democratic processes, and the identification of social entrepreneurship and heritage-based initiatives as effective tools for inclusion and community cohesion.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	01.04.2022	Initial version (new MFF).