



# CIHEAM

International Center for Advanced  
Mediterranean Agronomic Studies

## **Justice in the Fields and in our Plates:**

### ***Women's rights as a driver of sustainable food systems transitions***

March 5, 2026

Madam Petra Kežman  
Deputy Secretary-General,  
Dear panelists,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to open this webinar on the occasion of International Women's Rights Day, within the framework of the International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026.

Let me take a moment to introduce CIHEAM and the essential work we do in the region.

The International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies is an intergovernmental organization created almost 65 years ago. Today, it brings together 13 Member States from both shores of the Mediterranean and operates approximately across 40 countries in the Mediterranean, Balkans, Middle East, Sub Saharan Africa, Far East, ecc.

Through our four Institutes - Bari, Chania, Montpellier and Zaragoza - our General Secretariat in Paris, and our offices in various countries, we work to advance food security, sustainable rural development, scientific cooperation, and the training of future decision-makers and field professionals.



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Our mission is clear: to support the transition of Mediterranean agricultural and food systems towards more sustainable models - environmentally and economically capable of addressing climate challenges, reducing inequalities, generating value and meeting social expectations.

**However, without justice and equity, there can be no real transition.**

The theme that brings us together today - women's access to justice in rural areas and agrifood systems - therefore lies at the very heart of our mandate.

Across the Mediterranean basin, women are central actors in food production, processing and marketing. Yet they continue to face structural barriers in accessing land, decent work, effective recourse mechanisms and value chain governance.

When land rights are insecure, when grievance mechanisms are inaccessible, when participation in decision-making is limited, it is not only individual inequalities that widen. The very foundations of our food systems are weakened.

**For CIHEAM, justice is not a peripheral concern.** It is a structural condition for food systems transformation. And this concept does not apply only to the women in the agri-food systems but involves the various stakeholders of the food environment, very often weakened in their fundamental rights.

This conviction guides our action at multiple levels.



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This webinar, organized within the Sustainable Food Systems Platform, follows the **International Symposium organized in CIHEAM Zaragoza with UfM and AECID**, dedicated to women's empowerment and innovation in Mediterranean agrifood systems. It highlighted the inseparable link between innovation, access to resources and inclusive governance.

Then, the **UfM regional conference held in Cairo last October**, which brought together 80 participants from seven Mediterranean countries.

This dialogue resulted in a **CIHEAM-UfM Joint Declaration and a Regional Agenda for Innovation** supporting women entrepreneurs in agrifood value chains - a concrete roadmap to strengthen access to finance, markets and decision-making.

Together with the Union for the Mediterranean, we are also establishing a **joint Task Force** dedicated to innovation and women's economic empowerment in agrifood value chains. This reflects our commitment to move from advocacy to structured and sustained action.

Moving beyond theoretical policy frameworks, our field initiatives provide tangible evidence that women's empowerment is a practical and achievable reality. **It is a tangible driver of food security, economic resilience and territorial stability.**



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Across our cooperation initiatives, **CIHEAM integrates a gender perspective to strengthen agricultural productivity, entrepreneurship and climate resilience.** From supporting women farmers with agricultural inputs and livestock services, to reinforcing SMEs and cooperatives, to establishing dedicated women's centres-such as in Raqqa, Syria - our projects show that strengthening women's agency directly enhances local resilience.

Initiatives focused on water management, agroecology, and biodiversity provide communities - and women especially - with the necessary tools to manage limited resources sustainably and build resilience against climate-related shocks.

In this context, CIHEAM will present the **Youth and Women's Declaration** advocating for greater participation in water governance at the Arab Water Forum next April in Jeddah, and will reaffirm these priorities at its upcoming Meeting of the Ministries of Agriculture of the CIHEAM countries in Italy next November.

Through these steps, we aim to ensure that the International Year of the Woman Farmer 2026 becomes not merely a symbolic recognition, but a moment of concrete and measurable commitments.

Because strengthening women's role is not only about equality. It is about investing in the productivity, stability and resilience of our Mediterranean region.

This is precisely the purpose of today's discussion: to explore how access to justice - whether in land rights, labour protection, grievance mechanisms or cooperative governance - can become a structural pillar of Mediterranean food systems transformation.



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I warmly thank our partners from the Union for the Mediterranean and all distinguished speakers who will share their expertise and offer their knowledge to our enlarging community.

Let us use this moment not only to reflect, but to advance actionable commitments.

**Justice is a structural condition for food systems transformation.  
We are committed to dismantling barriers for women.**

I wish all of us focused, forward-looking and constructive discussions.

Thank you.