SITRA
Soft Skills as a tool for creativity in rural areas

Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union

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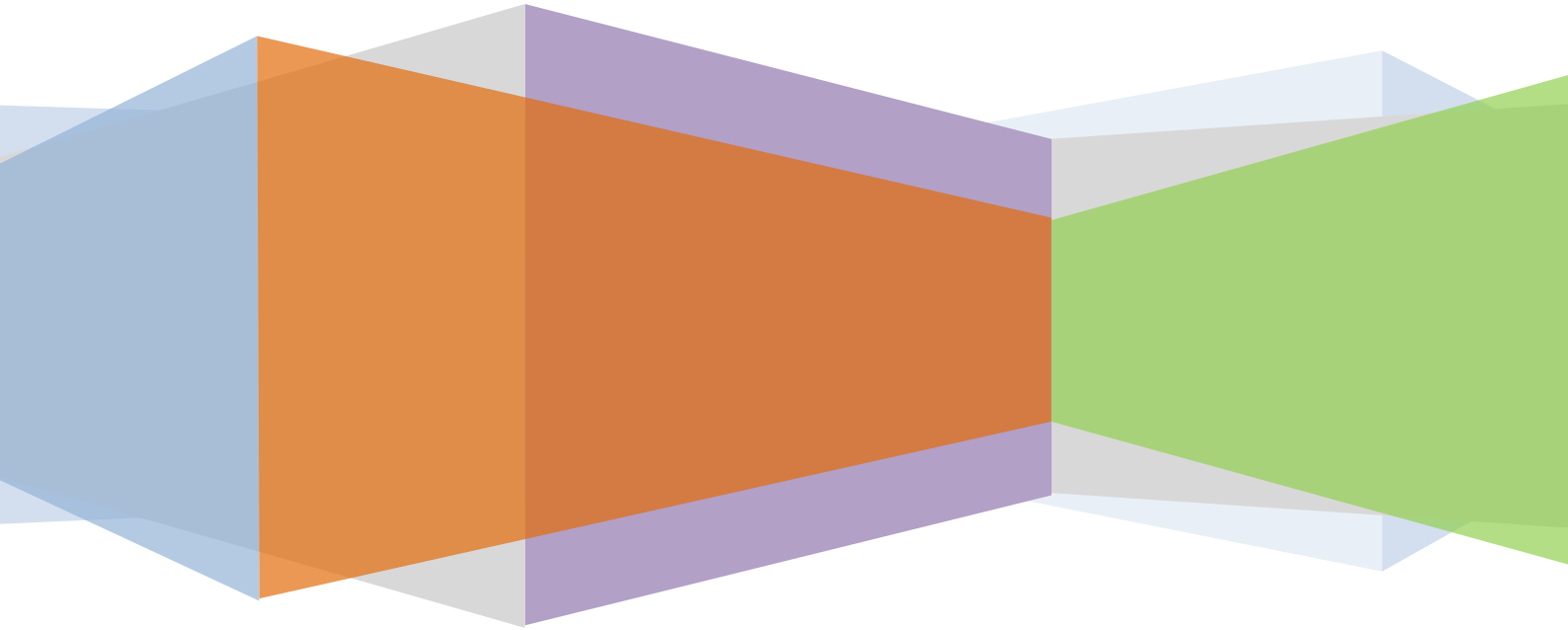
Task 1.1 Common Report about the State of the Art



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INDEX

1. Introduction

The labour market is constantly changing, and so are the competencies and skills required. Agribusiness is no exception and, as a consequence, it demands new profiles of entrepreneurs and leaders who are capable of adapting to the new challenges of the economic environment. Among these required skills, soft skills are indispensable, as in any other sector.

The need to involve soft skills in the agribusiness sector is beginning to be recognized. Skills such as creativity, teamwork, critical thinking and effective communication are skills that can help considerably in solving problems and adapting to the constant changes of day-to-day life and the labour market. However, most workers in the agricultural sector are not trained in these skills. The knowledge that these professionals receive is merely focused on technical skills, so there is a great lack of soft skills among graduates in this type of studies, something that can negatively affect the productivity and effectiveness of the sector, especially in today's changing labour world.

Therefore, the main objective of our project is to help agribusiness entrepreneurs to overcome the most important difficulties in their day-by-day by detecting, developing and improving soft skills, building a training system in order to generate the skills and abilities demanded by the new labour context.

The project consortium is composed of five organisations from five different countries (FR, PO, IRL, SPand MK) and in this point of the project an analysis will be carried out by the five countries of the consortium to identify the importance of soft skills with respect to the new generations of agribusiness entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas. The objective will be to establish the current state and research routes that will allow explaining, contextualizing and better understanding the benefits of the development and mastery of these skills in the target group.

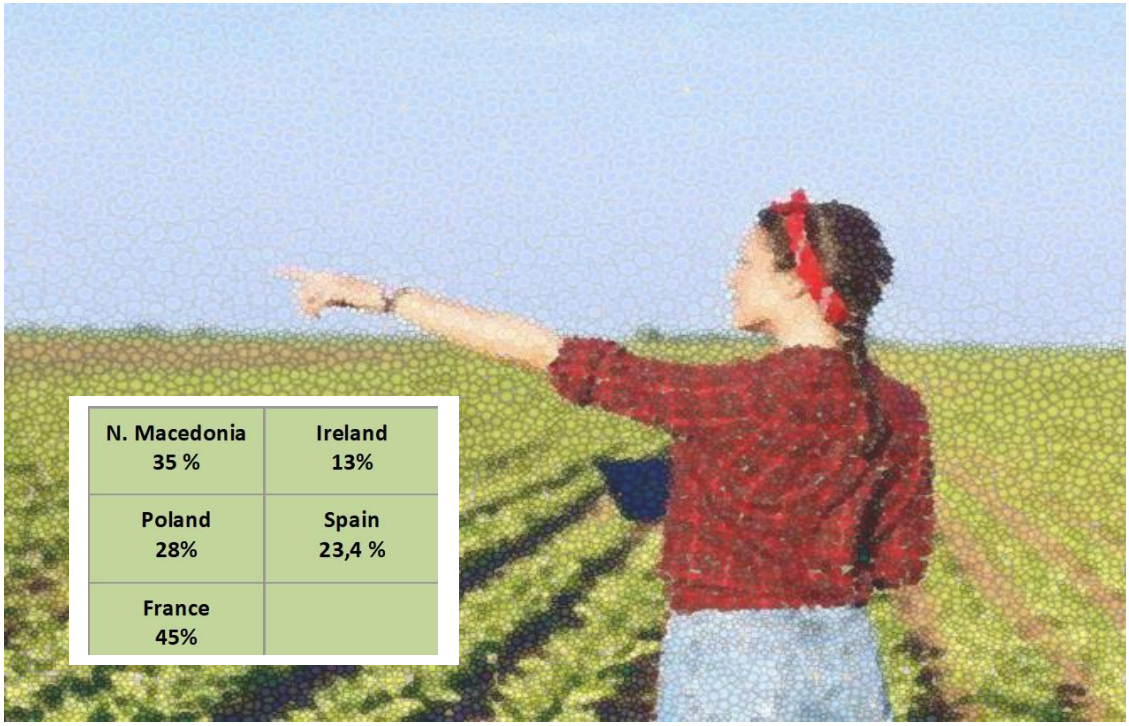
2. Figures and stats.

- ***Impact of the agrobusiness sector in our countries: Importance in the GDP, number of people employed in the sector, importance of women's employment in the sector, trends in last years...***

All partner countries have stated that the agricultural sector is of great importance for each of them. In **Macedonia**, for example, the agricultural sector is the third most important sector and its share of GDP has been **10-12%.** In **Ireland**, agriculture also plays a vital role in the country's economy, as it does in **Poland**, where the sector has undergone major changes and improvements in recent decades and whose current contribution to national GDP is **2.6%.** In **Spain**, the agricultural industry is of important not only economically but also socially, territorially and environmentally. This sector contributed **2.7%** to GDP in 2017. Also, in **France,** the agricultural sector has a huge importance and it has a dominant position in the agricultural production on the continent. However, French agriculture has suffered a succession of difficult harvests and a decline in export sales at the end of 2010.

Number of people employed in the agricultural sector.	
Macedonia	2017-2019 343,747 employees - 19% self-employed - 12% unpaid family labor
Ireland	2019 164,400 employees - 4,2% of the total Employment
Poland	2020 16,3 million employees
Spain	2019 1,3 million employees
France	2020 678,700 employees

Women participation in the sector:



All countries have indicated that women's participation in the sector is low compared to that of men, as well as women's participation in other sectors. **Macedonia** states that *"The high percentage of rural women who are not active in the labor market stems from their engagement in the home, such as childcare, care for the elderly, and other unpaid household chores. Even when a woman's labor is paid, they earn only 33% of what men earn in the same sector*". On the other hand, **Ireland** and **Spain** have reported that the number of women employed in this sector has been growing steadily in recent years. In **France**, a quarter of the heads of exploitation or co-managers are women.

- ***Main products and markets. Volume and importance of imports in the agro-livestock sector. Main markets.***

In **Macedonia**, agricultural trade is becoming increasingly competitive. As a result, there is an rise of 28% in the value of exports to reach 624.5 million euros in 2019, while imports during the same period increased to 837.2 million euros in 2019. "*Horticulture, with 34%, is by far the largest single contributor to the total value of agricultural production, followed by fruit growing with 12.2%, while other plant sub-sectors contribute between 5 and 10%. Half of the value of livestock production is*

contributed by dairy production with 11.5%, while the other sectors have an individual share of less than 5%".

In **Ireland**, local food products are exported to over 180 countries around the world, reaching 14.5 billion euros in 2019. "*This growth in exports was driven by an increase of €453m (+10%) in dairy exports, €269m (+19%) in beverages, €96m (+22%) in cereal and cereal preparations, €63m in pig meat (+8%) and €53m in Miscellaneous Edible Products & Preparations (+20%).*" Irish exports of agricultural products accounted for 9.5% of total merchandise exports and 11% of imports in 2019.

In **Poland**, cereals are the most produced. This country is the world's second largest producer of potatoes, and the sixth largest producer of milk (16%) and pigs (11%). Total intermediate consumption of agricultural products was valued at 15,982.6 million euros in 2019. Agricultural exports contribute to 10% of Poland's total exports and, of these, 65% of agricultural production is consumed by EU countries.

In **Spain**, agri-food, fisheries and forestry exports have experienced a large increase in recent years, reaching a figure of 53,180 million euros in 2019. Spain is one of the main exporters of agricultural products, ranking seventh in the world. Its agricultural production includes fruit (50%), vegetables (36%) and cereals (2%). Imports in 2019 reached 38,964 million euros and the main imported products were fish and crustaceans. On the other hand, pork, citrus fruits and olive oil were the most exported products in 2019, accounting for 40% of total agricultural exports.

In **France**, exports of agricultural products amount 65,690 million euros. Approximately one eighth of the total value of the country's visible exports is related to agriculture and associated food and beverage products. The main agricultural products that place France among the top producers on the world market are sugar beet, wine, milk, beef, cereals and oilseeds. France remains the world leader in the production of speciality dairy products. Agricultural production focuses on the following food crops: sugar beet, wheat, maize, barley and potatoes. France accounts for 18 % of European agricultural production, ahead of Italy and Spain. The major field crops (cereals, oilseed, protein crops, beet…) represent a little over 45 % of agricultural area.

KEY ASPECTS

Macedonia

Increase in the value of exports: €624.5 mill. in 2019,

Main product: Tobacco

Ireland

Exports to over 180 countries, reaching €14.5 bill. in 2019

Main Products: Dairy Products, Beverages and Fish

Poland

World's second largest producer of potatoes

Intermediate consumption of agricultural products: €15,982.6 mill. in 2019

Main Product: Cereal

Spain

Agri-food, fisheries and forestry exports increase reaching €53,180 mill in 2019

Main Products: Fruits, Vegetables and Cereals

France

exports of agricultural products amount €65,690 mill

France accounts for 18 % of European agricultural production

Main Products: sugar beet, wine, milk, beef, cereals and oilseeds

- ***Demographics and depopulation. Impact in rural areas. Consequences in social and economic aspects.***

All countries have stated that depopulation is a problem that significantly affects rural areas and as a consequence the agricultural sector.

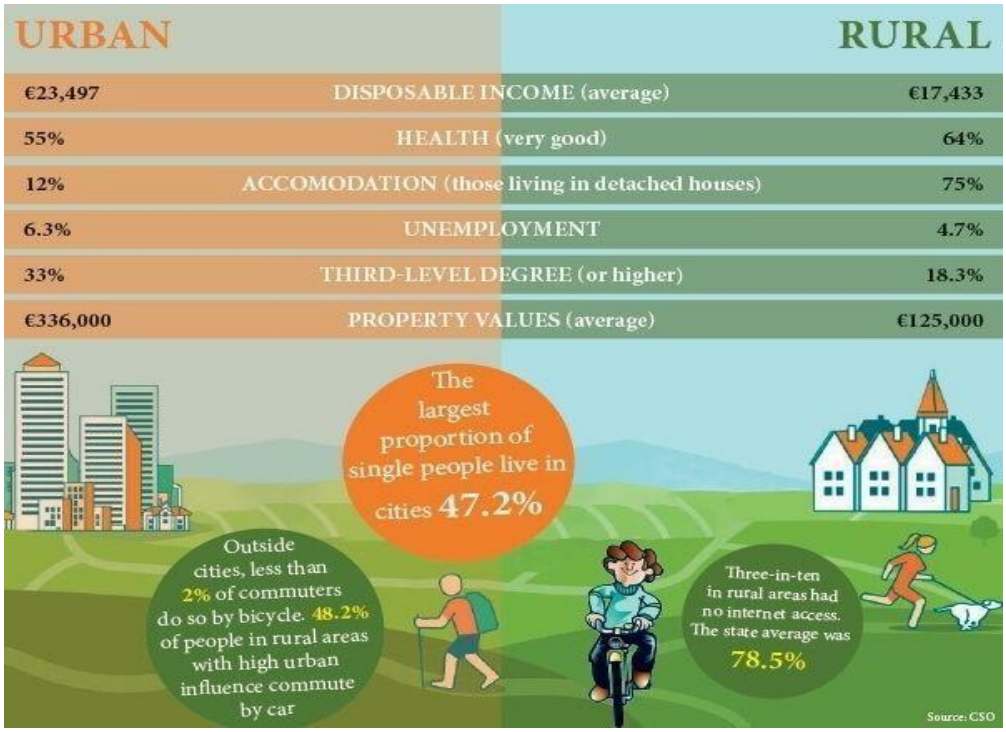
On the one hand, rural areas in **Poland** are perceived as areas with few social and employment opportunities and difficulties in meeting basic needs. Commercialisation and industrialisation have negatively affected these villages and the way of life there, so there is a pronounced migration to cities. Women are the most affected by these migrations as they have the least opportunities in rural areas.

On the other hand, **Spain** has seen a large increase in population in recent decades, but this growth is not uniform. In the last two decades, the population of villages of 1,000 inhabitants or less has lost a total of 142,000 inhabitants, which means that 140 villages are uninhabited. Ninety percent of the population lives in 30% of the territory, which is a serious concern which in turn affects many other areas such as the economy and the environment.

In **Macedonia,** the problem seems to lie in the poor conditions to which the rural population is exposed. Difficulties in accessing certain services (banks, postal services, means of transport...), as well as the deterioration of infrastructures are some examples: "*Small and economically weak rural municipalities have significant problems in maintaining the quality and access to basic services, especially for settlements with smaller populations, which results in greater dissatisfaction with the quality of life of the rural population compared to those living in urban areas*". As a result of this situation, numerous migratory movements are taking place, 43.7% of which were to Skopje. As is the case in Poland, women are most present in these migratory movements.

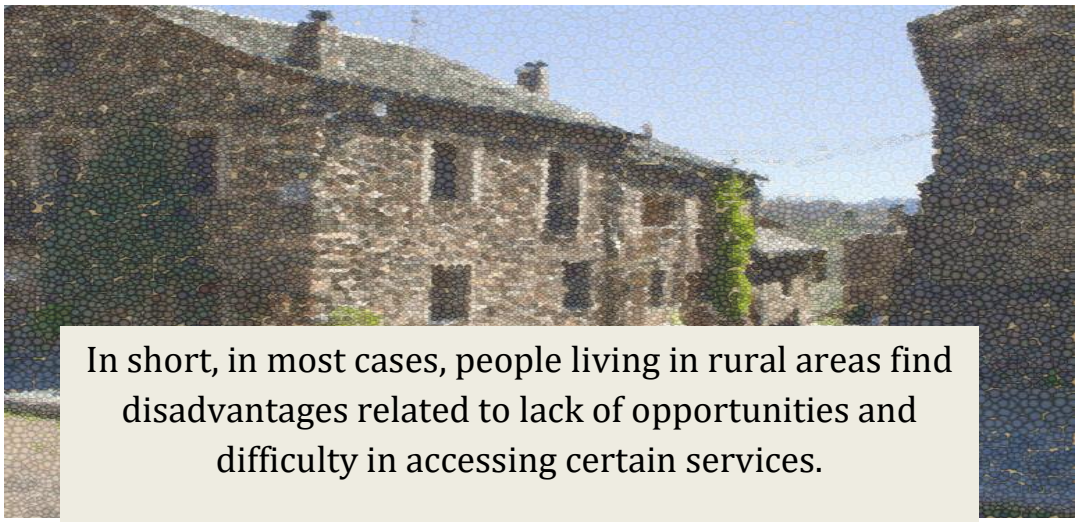
Regarding **Ireland,** rural areas do not seem to be as disadvantaged as in the other partner countries. Around 30% of the population live in rural areas, which is higher than the European average (27.3%) although there has been a fall in the number of people living in these areas. The living conditions of people living in rural areas are quite adequate. Some examples of this are that unemployment figures are higher in independent urban cities than in rural areas and that health is considered to be *"very good",* even better than in urban areas. The only drawback of living in these areas is that the proximity to some services is often more distant than from urban areas.

Living conditions in urban and rural areas in Ireland:



Brexit presents Ireland with a particular challenge for businesses and communities in rural Ireland. A series of studies indicate that the consequences of Brexit will be hardest on Ireland's rural areas. This is because these areas are more dependent on sectors and businesses that are vulnerable to the impact of Brexit, especially the agri-food and fisheries sector.

In **France**, the proportion of self-employed women in rural areas is about 38%. France is one of the countries with the highest number of self-employed in rural areas.



In short, in most cases, people living in rural areas find disadvantages related to lack of opportunities and difficulty in accessing certain services.

➢ ***Public support to agrobusiness.***

As the agribusiness sector is so important to each country, there are a multitude of government support and resources to help farmers and farms.

In the case of **Macedonia**, "*Support plays a key role in the sustainability of the activity for most of the Macedonian agricultural holdings, i.e. it contributes to increasing the development and investment potential of those with larger production capacities and better business management. By supplementing farmers' incomes and maintaining agricultural production, direct payments also affect the provision of social stability to the rural population, especially those dealing with sub-sectors with insufficient comparative advantage or living in areas with natural limitations*.". "*In the period from 2014 to 01.12.2020, for financial support policies in agriculture and rural development, a total of MKD 53.3 billion or EUR 866.7 million was paid from the national state budget or an average of EUR 123.8 million per year*."

With regard to **Ireland,** there is the Irish Rural Development Programme (RDP) for the period 2014-2020 which was formally adopted by the European Commission in May 2015. It contains a set of measures addressing all agricultural sectors and supports community-led local development through the LEADER measure.

EARFD and National funding for the 2014-2020 Rural development program:

	€ Millions
Measure 1- Knowledge transfer and information actions	€126
Measure 2- Advisory service , farm management and farm relief service	€8
Measure 4- Investments in Physical assets	€425
Measure 7-Basic service and Village renewal in rural areas	€6
Measure 10- Agri-environment-climate	€1.531
Measure 11- Organic farming	€56
Measure 12-Natura 2000 payments	€73
Measure 13- Payments to areas facing natural or other specifics constraints	€1.491
Measure 14- Animal Welfare	€100
Measure 16- Co-Operation	€62
Measure 19- Support for LEADERSE Local development	€250
Measure 20- Technical assistance	€8
Measure 13- Early Retirement Scheme & Transitional)	€9
Total	€4.145

On the **Polish** side, two government ministries, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and the Ministry of Economy, are responsible for the main strategies to support agro-industrial initiatives. Examples of their work include:

- Try Fine Food programme (Poznaj Dobrą Żywność Program)
- An annual program promoting specific dishes from various regions and looking at how to develop products originating from systems of food quality
- External trade cooperation programs to promote Polish cuisine abroad.

In **Spain,** given the importance of agribusiness in Spain, there is a great deal of support for the sector and its workers. The most popular is the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, a European policy which sets out each state's subsidies to its farmers to guarantee the supply of quality food, protect biodiversity, tackle climate change and encourage young people to go into farming.

At the regional level, such as Andalusia, a multitude of aids and subsidies are also offered for:

- Livestock
- Agricultural structures and infrastructures
- Business creation for young farmers
- Organic production
- Sustainable rural development
- Agricultural self-employed workers

- **Impact of COVID-19 on the agricultural sector**

Ireland and France have referred to the situation of the agricultural sector with regard to the impact of the Coronavirus crisis. In the case of **Ireland,** it is stated that the forecasts of a significant fall in COVID-19 related farm income by 2020 appear to have been avoided after a gradual recovery in commodity prices and the provision of government support to the primary sector. Among the support provided by the Irish government to this sector, the €50 million support scheme for up to 42,000 farmers stands out.

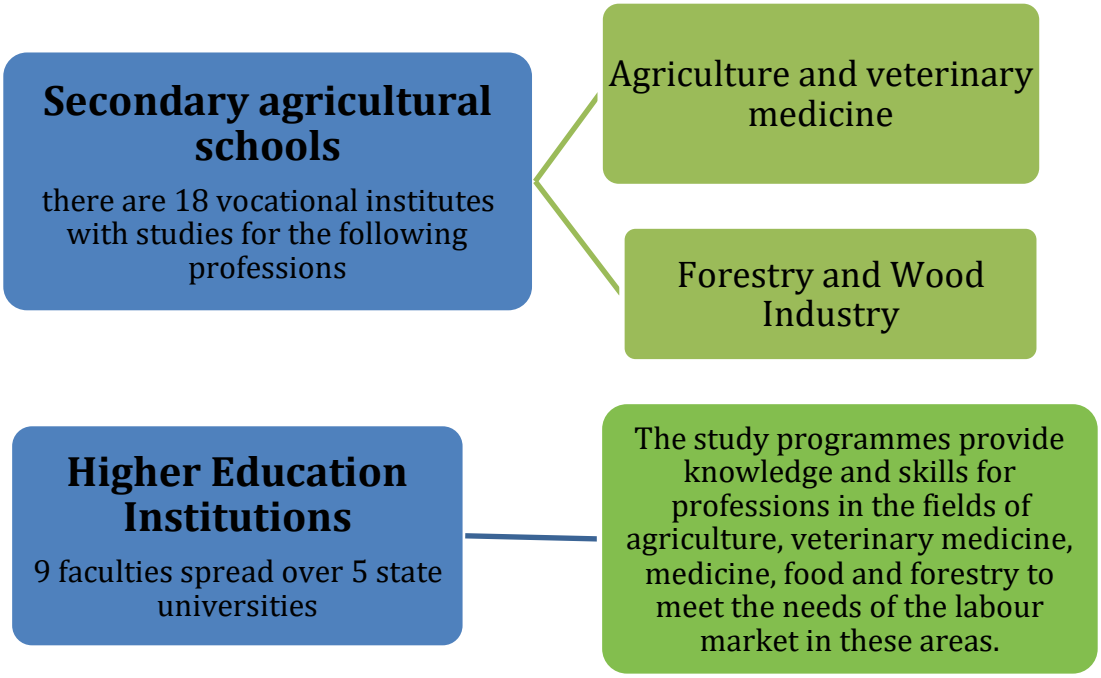
In **France**, on the other hand, the agricultural industry is expected to be impacted by the crisis. Social distancing measures that have led to the temporary closure of establishments, as well as weather conditions throughout 2020, have led to a 2.1% drop in agricultural production. However, medium-term expectations until 2023/24 remain positive overall.

3. Training and skilling

- **Status of university and non-university studies in the sector.**

In all partner countries there is a wide range of educational provision related with the agricultural sector, both at university and non-university level. However, some of the obstacles that can be seen may be the lack of interest in this type of studies, as well as the lack of specialisation and academic offer for some people interested in certain specific branches of the sector.

Two types of educational training are offered in **Macedonia**:



However, the number of students is slowly decreasing due to the lack of interest in these areas.

With regard to **Ireland**, there is a large educational offer in the areas of Agriculture, Horticulture, Livestock and Food. This offer is divided into:

- Universitites
- Institutes
- Colleges
- Courses taught by organizations (Teagsac, Rural Ireland...), associations and companies related to the sector

UCD Ireland's Global University, Agriculture, Food Science and Human Nutrition is one of the university's leading disciplines.

"UCD's Food and Agribusiness Management programme aims to provide graduates with the necessary combination of skills in business and science required for managerial and professional careers in the food production and marketing chain, and the businesses and organisations that support it. The students initially study core agricultural science subjects, and then develop a keen understanding of the Irish and international food systems with specialist agribusiness and finance modules. They value and therefore help their students to become active, autonomous learners and critical thinkers, with an ultimate aim of fostering professional development, leadership and entrepreneurial spirit".

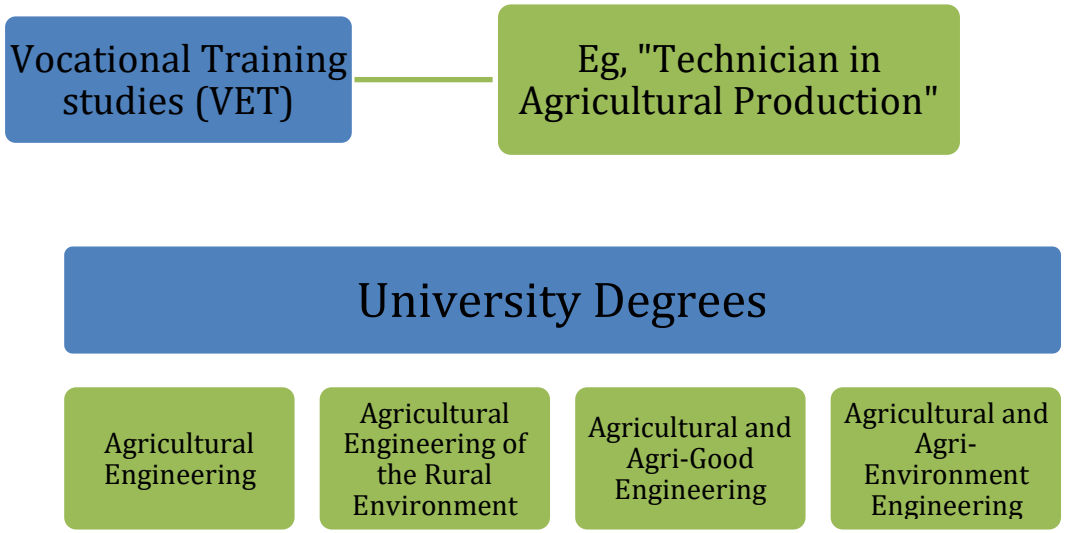
Numerous efforts are being made in **Poland** to increase the educational offer with regard to the agribusiness sector. In order to acquire responsibility for a farm, an individual must have training in the area, so there are studies related to agriculture that are present all over the country. These are university and non-university studies through which students can choose the modalities that best suit their needs.

Apart from the fundamental areas and subjects (agriculture, horticulture, veterinary science...), the contemporary Polish student also needs to study:

- Economy
- Organization
- Accounting
- Marketing

All of them related to and associated with agriculture and agribusiness. This offers farmers the possibility to participate in defining their future and that of their farms.

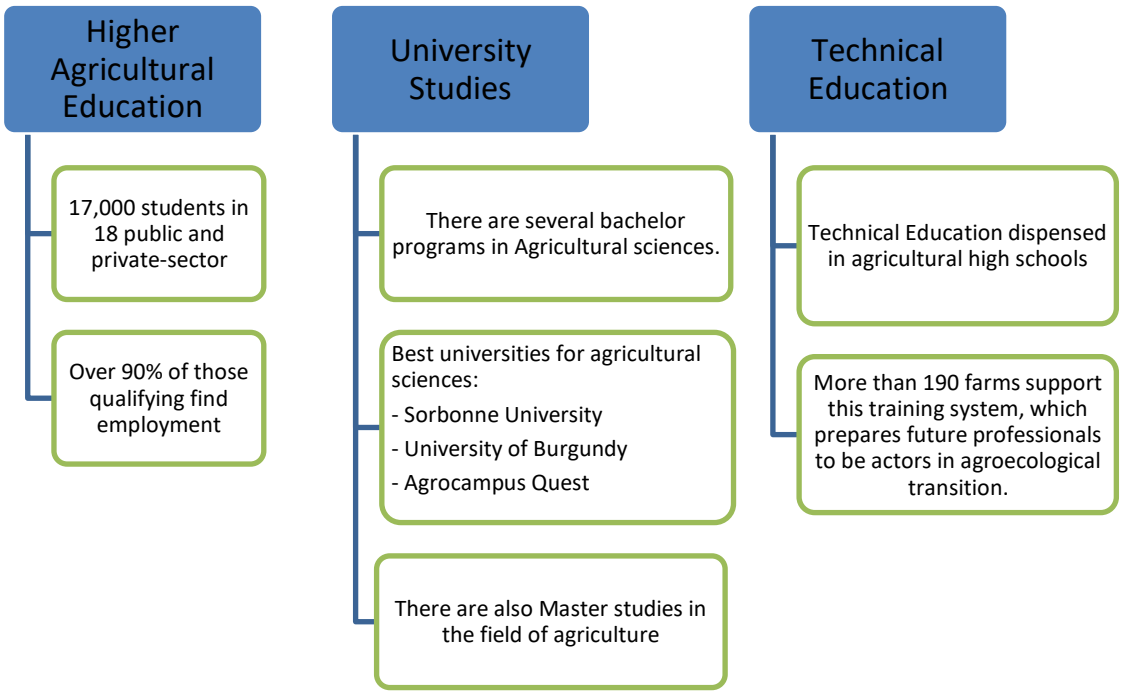
On the other hand, **Spain** also has an important offer of studies in the sector. The most important of these are:



Despite this offer of studies, 80% of Spanish agricultural entrepreneurs have not received certified training. This does not prevent them from being in charge of a farm, but they will be disadvantaged when it comes to adapting to the continuous changes and needs of the market.

In **France,** agricultural training is a key component in public agricultural policy in France and it is typified by a very high proportion of young trainess who find employment.

Status of the agricultural education in France:



- **Female Vs Male percentage of students.**

In **Ireland**, more and more young people are interested in this sector. Agricultural science is gaining in popularity (22% more students in 2019). Of the 7,987 students studying agricultural science, **4,680 were male** and **3,307 female.**

In the case of **Poland,** **30% of students at technical universities** in 2019 were women, so the presence of women in technical universities tends to be lower than in the case of men.

With respect to **Spain,** as in Poland, only 29% of students in technical degrees are women. This low presence is even more pronounced in agriculture-related studies, with **only 0.6% of students being female**. The only exception can be observed at the Polytechnic University of Madrid, a popular university in terms of the offer of this type of studies and where there is a fairly equal distribution of both sexes.

- **Profile of entrepreneurs in the agribusiness sector.**

Polish entrepreneurs are starting to adjust their business activities in the agri-food sector to technological changes and the increasing consumption of organic and ecological products. Moreover, these business activities are favoured by the possibility of obtaining EU funding.

In **Spain**, the agricultural sector is very heterogeneous. Many agricultural entrepreneurs are still anchored in a traditional way of working and will find it difficult to adapt to new market challenges in a few years' time. However, there are more and more workers in this sector who have training and education, as well as a wide range of skills to adapt to change and reinvent themselves.

Regarding **France**, about 13.000 people enter farming in France every year, a figure that stood at over 20,000 per year 10 years ago. Agricultural institutions distinguish two main categories of new entrants into farming:

- Continuers, who come from a farming family and get established on the family farm
- New farmers getting started outside of a family farm

On the other hand, french farmers are better equipped and the number of farmers with tablets and smartphones has been increasing since 2013. This means that they can follow the new trends in theis sector and try modern techniques in agricultura. In the

past, traditional farmers mostly implemented the same methods to increase their production. However, today technology gives them chance to try different methods. This means that farmers also become more creative and competitive in order to survive in the sector.

- **Awareness of the new demanded skill set**

The agribusiness sector in **Ireland** is characterised by an ageing, male-dominated workforce, which is determined by farm ownership. As this sector is a major contributor to the national economy, the government wants to take measures to change this situation. These measures include:

Training, education, skills and network

- **Teagasc** – the Agriculture and Food Development Authority – is the national body providing integrated research, advisory and training services to the agriculture and food industry and rural communities. This body provides:

- **Regional Skills**: Partnership for skills. The department of further education has release long term plan call National Skill Strategic program 2025.
- **Skillnet**: Skillnet Ireland is a business support agency of the Government of Ireland. Our mandate is to advance the competitiveness, productivity and innovation of Irish businesses through enterprise-led workforce development. One of their networking program is: Farm Business Skillnet.

In **Poland**, thanks to the increase and diversification of education, *"younger Polish farmers are keenly aware of the need for developing agribusiness skills. Awareness is developed both by educational programs and government initiatives seeking to develop the agribusiness sector".*

In **Spain**, new professionals in the sector are also aware of the need to develop new skills in order to adapt to the changes and needs of the market. They know that either they reinvent themselves or they will not survive. However, a large number of entrepreneurs and agricultural workers are stuck in the same way of working as they were 20 years ago.

Jobseekers seem to lack basic employment skills in **Macedonia**:

"Basic technical skills are more often thought to be lacking than advanced technical skills. Therefore, it follows that the lack of a sense of work ethic among jobseekers seems to be an important factor in terms of unemployment in Macedonia. Job seekers do not have the skills required by employers. Despite high unemployment, employers still have difficulty hiring workers with appropriate skills. As a consequence, skills shortages are an obstacle to the growth of companies"

4. Creativity in the sector

- ***New trends, new products, new kinds of business, alternative exploitation of the rural resources, aspects of innovation…*** *Situation and impact in our countries*

Most of the trends mentioned by the partners are related to:

The current situation characterised by environmental degradation, lack of natural resources, climate change, as well as concerns about the continuing depopulation of rural areas require innovative solutions at the agricultural level that can alleviate this situation. Partner countries are aware of the need to change and innovate in this respect in order to adapt to these circumstances.

Macedonia states "*due to the complete absence of a systemic approach in the field of knowledge and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas decades ago, the focus in the next strategic period of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, will be on establishing the necessary infrastructure and integrating limited capacities. The model of integrated Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System to be established in the country will promote targeted cooperation between a group of stakeholders - farmers, forest breeders, advisory providers, entrepreneurs, consumers, researchers and etc., who jointly implement a project. The system should enable the creation and sharing of knowledge in an open way with an enabled space for contacts of the actors to meet and develop ideas through the formation of the so-called Agricultural Innovation Partnership Operational Groups. The groups will support the development of innovative bottom-up solutions to make agriculture smarter, more efficient and more sustainable*".

With regard to **Poland**, concern for national food security and ecological preservation of land has prompted the country to investigate **innovative technologies that can alleviate pressure on land and production.** Some notable trends are Agrotourism and Organic Farming, which are gaining some popularity.

Spain also refers to organic agriculture as an innovative trend that is gaining more and more strength in the country. In fact, Spain is **the largest organic producer in the EU** and the 4th largest in the world. The average annual increase of the total organic surface

area is 7.5% in recent years. Moreover, students' interest in agroecology training is growing and the sustainability approach is increasingly permeating subjects related to the management of agri-food systems in university education.

Ireland has many examples of innovative practices:

The Irish agrotechnology sector has a well-deserved reputation for innovative products that enhance the success of traditional farming practices while offering affordable solutions in areas such as machinery, farm management software, sensors, grassland management, etc.

Examples of innovative companies in this sector include the following:

Combining tradition with innovation	Keenan Systems – innovation and technology to offer new services to customers
Integrating technology with traditional farming equipment	**Dairy Master** – manufacture of high-tech dairy equipment
Helping farmers do the basics better	**Prodigy Attachments** – production of machinery that reduces physical workload and labour costs
Labor-saving devices	**Moocall** – produce sensores portátiles que predicen el inicio del parto
The trend towards technology	**Herdwatch** – one of the pioneers of the agritech sector in Ireland, developing the first mobile farm management app

In **France**, there are in total, **41,600 farms which are involved in organic farming,** representing nearly 9,5% of all farms, so there is a great interest in organic agriculture in the country. The French organic market is the secong largest in the European Union, with €9.8 billion.

Another interesting point is that an entrepreneurial spirit is sweeping the country, while the education system is turning out some of the world's best mathematicians, engineers and designers. Therefore, agriculture is also affected from this spirit.

5. Conclusions

5.1 National Conclusions

Ireland

There are many conclusions drawn from the study carried out on agri-food in Ireland.

From its economic importance, through its pressing problems to its unbeatable implementation of technology in the sector.

The agri-food sector in Ireland, despite its economic importance, faces major problems:

* Aging of workers in the sector.

* Depopulation of rural areas.

* Economic impact of Britain's exit from the European Union.

* Lack of entrepreneurship in sectors such as fish farms or food farms or rural tourism.

The agricultural world in Ireland is very conscious of making its farms and operations sustainable not only economically, making its farms more profitable and competitive, but also ecologically reducing the level of emissions, recycling animal waste, and the use of renewable energy.

Also noteworthy is the introduction of technology in the agricultural sector which is having a positive impact on production processes.

The society (in general) is more aware of how food is produced and are demanding more sophisticated food and health solutions with environmental, sustainability and societal challenges becoming more and more relevant. There is a strong focus on the importance of the food for health, understanding the effect of the food we eat, the link between producing and food and the impact of the environment with a focus on our natural resources.

This will be possible by building a new generation of leaders who can respond to these demands.

We have observed that there is a wide educational and quality offer of all levels and very affordable and attractive for future components of the sector.

However, it has a marked technological and technical profile and human skills or soft skills are just part of the educational or training networks of the sector and there is no specific type of soft skills programme focused on the agri-food sector.

Macedonia

Agriculture (including fisheries) is the third largest sector by services and industry in North Macedonia. In North Macedonia, the agricultural production, is focused on gardening and viticulture, production of cereals and fruit growing, and livestock production. In rural areas live around 45% of the total population in North Macedonia. About 87% of the total area of the country is considered as rural area. Agriculture is the most important economic activity in rural areas, which affects the alleviation of poverty and unemployment.

Most businesses in rural areas are small companies focused on local or regional markets. Larger facilities in rural areas cover almost the entire food processing industry (with the exception of meat processing and slaughterhouses). In general, the development of industry in all regions is limited by the quality of road and business infrastructure and increasingly by the lack of skilled labor. The bigger businesses in rural areas are buyers and processors of fruits, vegetables, and wineries that are export-oriented.

The education system in agriculture consists of secondary agricultural schools and higher education institutions. Non-formal education is not institutionalized, but is implemented irregularly, within national and international projects. There are eighteen vocational high schools with curricula for the following professions: agriculture and veterinary medicine (in 10 schools), forestry and wood industry (in 7 schools) and food (in 5 schools). Higher education in agricultural sciences, forestry, wood industry, veterinary medicine and food technologies takes place at nine faculties that are part of the five state universities. The faculties offer a significant number of study programs of first, second and third cycle education. The study programs provide knowledge and skills for the professions in the field of agriculture, veterinary medicine, food and forestry and cover the needs of the labor market in these areas. there is a lack of skills that contributes to unemployment in Macedonia. Many of the unemployed seem to lack some of the essential skills that enable employment, and so, despite the high level of unemployment, employers still have difficulty in finding workers with the necessary skills. The existence of inequality between the required and offered skills indicates that unemployment in Macedonia, to some extent, is structural in nature. Therefore, it is

necessary to invest in skills, including "soft" skills, in order to reduce unemployment in Macedonia. The lack of the skills of the job seekers can be identified as result of the poor qualifications structure offered in the formal education.

Regarding to acquiring the necessary skills needed for employment in the agriculture sector, in the recent years, young people have become increasingly involved in non-formal education. They become aware that the formal education alone is not enough and that the activity outside the universities is very important. The challenge of being up to date with market needs is undoubtedly of great importance in order to be successful in the market. The reality is that the formal system of vocational education can not meet the requirements of the private sector and from here undoubtedly arises the need for an additional system, the so-called system of non-formal education

Poland

- Poland's agricultural sector has been experiencing a slow but continual growth over past the years; this growth is encouraged by the country's participation in the European Union, which allows it to participate in EFTA.

- agricultural products form a staple of the Polish diet and a small, but important, part of its exports.
- depopulation of villages has been an ongoing problem in Poland for several years despite migration of individuals and families from cities to more urban areas, villages are still experiencing a depopulation trend which is especially noticeable in the lack of female presence.
- The necessity of more extensive education in the agricultural sector has led to the formation of university and non-university programs of upper- and continued- education schemes which train participants in new trends, scientific developments, and additional aspects of agricultural, especially in terms of agribusiness and agriculture.
- Awareness of new skills needed in Poland has pushed young farmers and agricultural students to participate in EU and Polish educational programs to learn the skills and competencies needed for participating in the modern agricultural world.
- Creative developments in agriculture emerge frequently from educational and EU partnership programs, which give students the education and knowledge necessary to pursue developing innovation which is necessary in their lives and the general agricultural live in Poland.

Spain

In Spain, the agribusiness is vital and constitutes a fundamental part of the economy. However, it is one of the most backward sectors. An example of this is that **women** have not yet reached the level of equality that they have achieved in other sectors. This is due to the fact that agriculture is still seen as a male activity.

Despite the importance of the agribusiness in Spain and the magnitude of its exports, the worrying **depopulation** of the country puts agricultural production at risk in many areas. Spain is one of the European countries where depopulation is of most concern, not only because of the aging of rural areas, but also because of the serious environmental and economic consequences that this can generate.

Therefore, the subsistence and regeneration of the rural environment goes together with the regeneration of the agricultural sector. If there is no interest in the rural environment, there is no interest in agriculture either. However, the COVID-19 crisis has brought a glimmer of hope to the rural world, making a large part of the population aware of the importance of rural areas and agricultural activity.

Young people play a fundamental role in this regard. It is necessary to **ensure an effective generational change**, since in the next ten years, six out of ten farmers will reach retirement age. In Spain, most young farmers have not received vocational training, but now more than ever this is necessary. In addition to the multitude of technical skills that these young people need to acquire to adapt to the enormous technological changes that the sector is undergoing, it is also necessary to equip them with personal and human competencies such as soft skills. Unfortunately, the curricula they receive lack this type of training.

Although, as mentioned above, a large part of the Spanish sector is still very traditional, another part of it is reinventing itself and adapting to the needs and changes in the labor market. A clear example is that Spain claims to be the first organic producer in the EU, which means that when there is a need, the sector is able to reinvent itself to achieve the best results.

France

- Since the founding of the European Union, France has maintained a dominant position in agricultural production on the continent. Yet France is the EU's leading agricultural nation, accounting for more than one-fifth of the total value of output, and alone is responsible for more than one-third of the EU's

production of oilseeds, cereals, and wine. France also is a major world exporter of agricultural commodities, and approximately one-eighth of the total value of the country's visible exports is related to agriculture and associated food and drink products.

- France accounts for 18 % of European agricultural production, ahead of Italy and Spain. The major field crops (cereals, oilseed, protein crops, beet…) represent a little over 45 % of agricultural area. The fruit and vegetable sector provides 450,000 direct jobs and counts about 75,000 companies.

- In rural areas the share of women in self-employment is about 38%. France is among the greatest number of self-employed people in rural areas.

- Due to the global COVID-19 outbreak at the beginning of 2020, which dealt a significant blow to French farmers' revenue flow, agricultural production falls in value by 2.1%. Social distancing measures, which led to temporary closures of cafés, hotels, restaurants, farmers' markets and schools, caused French agricultural producers to struggle to sell their production stocks to food producers and foodservice chains.

- Weather conditions are, however, the dominant factor in the drop in crop production, in particular grain production (−12.1%). The French agricultural sector will face some challenges in 2021, but the medium-term outlook to 2023/24 remains positive overall.

- The French Ministry of Agriculture has released a report, Agriculture Innovation 2025, which proposes 30 different innovative projects for competitive agriculture that respects the environment. The projects are organized along three broad priorities – making agriculture help in the fight against climate change, using new technologies to advance agriculture, and uniting the fields of research, experimentation and development to help increase competitiveness.

- France promotes the agro-ecological transition of its farms. Activities related to the energy and ecological transition demonstrate every day an increasing economic profitability on more and more markets.

- Every year, about 13,000 people enter farming in France, a figure that stood at over 20,000 per year 20 years ago. Agricultural institutions distinguish two main categories of new entrants: Continuers, who come from a farming family; new farmers (those not from a farming family and those who are from a farming family). A prospective study estimates that this group ("newcomers") could represent half of French farmers by 2050.

- New kind of professionals need to be more creative as there are various farming methods today, when compared to past. In the past, traditional farmers mostly implemented the same methods to increase their production. However, today technology gives them chance to try different methods. This means that farmers also become more creative and competitive in order to survive in the sector. Modern agriculture uses advanced technology, so that today farmers are seeking knowledge, they are interested in innovation to increase their profit and production.

- The sector is seeking new methods to compete with the new farming world. Also, there are different factors such as climate change, the lack of natural resources, degradation and etc. which have effects on agriculture and force farmers to find new methods to increase productivity. All these things bring the necessity of new skills and creativity.

- All farmers should have a minimum level of soft skills such as business management skills. There are a growing number of entrepreneurs and a large number of "good producers", but there are too few farmers with soft skills such as business management, communication, digital skills etc.

- Agricultural training is a key component in public agricultural policy in France and it is typified by a very high proportion of young trainees who find employment. That success is particularly due to close, constant dialogue with the socioeconomic world and the world of agricultural research as represented by several internationally renowned institutes. That link is notably the key to the development of agroecology in France.

- France Compétences is the only national governance body for vocational training and apprenticeship which was created by in 2018 for the freedom to choose one's professional future. Its strategic orientations are determined by a quadripartite governance composed of the State, the regions, trade union organizations of employees and employers representative at national and inter-professional level, and qualified individuals.

- CPF (Compte personnel de formation), Personal Training Account which allows the employee to be absent from his position in order to follow a certifying training intended to enable him to change trade or profession. It replaces the individual training leave, Cif (Congès individuel de formation). The employee benefits from a specific leave when he follows this training course in whole or in part during his working time.

- France competences allocates and disburses funds for apprenticeship and vocational training to different actors and institutions.

- The academic programmes in agribusiness are designed to provide students with solid basic skills, as well as strong non-cognitive skills. Moreover, the development of these skills is meant to be in line with the expectations and requirements of the agribusiness sector, and therefore needs to be responsive to the emergence of new needs.

5.2. Conclusions of the Common Report.

The agricultural sector is fundamental for each of the countries that are part of the project consortium. The economic contributions are unquestionable, which is why various national and European aids are directed towards this sector in order to strengthen the situation of workers and holdings. However, despite its importance, there are several problems that have been observed in general in each of the countries:

1. Low presence of women in the sector.
2. Depopulation.
3. Ageing of workers.
4. Lack of interest in studies related to the sector.
5. Lack of training in soft skills or human skills.

1. **Gender inequality** is even more pronounced within the agricultural sector. Women's participation in agricultural activities does not reach 35% in any of the partner countries, which is a very low percentage compared to women's presence in other occupations.

2. **Depopulation** is also a problem in all countries, although more pronounced in some, such as Poland and Spain. The lack of social, economic or cultural opportunities in many rural areas, as well as more backward living conditions, pushes a large part of the population to emigrate to more populated areas. Macedonia and Poland agree that women are more affected by this lack of opportunities and therefore play an even greater role in migratory movements. This phenomenon negatively affects the agricultural sector, as rural development and agricultural sector development go hand in hand

3. **Ageing** is another characteristic of rural areas, and this, coupled with the low interest of the youth in agriculture, leads to an ageing of the agricultural sector. It is therefore necessary to attract the interest of young people in order to ensure an effective generational change, as many of the workers will be of retirement age in a few years.

4. There is a certain **lack of interest** in studies related to the agricultural sector. However, the academic offer is increasing and this allows students to choose from a larger number of specialisations. Despite the fact that in countries such

as Spain, an individual can take over a farm without having a certified training, there is a growing awareness of the need to acquire training in order to work in this sector. In France, for example, all farmers should have a minimum level of soft skills such as business management skills. The needs and changes in the market are not the same as they were a few decades ago, so there is a need for professionals who possess new specific technical and technological skills, but also a series of other skills that, as in any other occupation, are important to adapt to changes in the labour world.

5. There are **no specific training programmes in soft skills**, so, as in other sectors or professional areas, employees lack soft skills, which leads to unemployment and difficulty in adjusting to a changing work environment.

In all countries the agricultural sector is seeking new methods to compete with the needs of the new farming world. Also, there are different factors such as climate change, the lack of natural resources or degradation, which have effects on agriculture and force farmers to find new methods to increase productivity. All these things bring the necessity of new skills and creativity.

Therefore, the **new generations** play a decisive role. Firstly, because they are indispensable to ensure an effective generational change in the sector. Secondly, because they are the most aware of new trends and changes in the labour market. Ecology and sustainability are becoming indispensable in the agricultural sector and young people are the most aware and interested in this. At the same time, they are increasingly aware that they need training to develop new skills and competences.

Therefore, it is necessary to increase the offer of studies and to include soft skills in order to adjust to the needs and interests of these new generations and to make the agricultural sector adapt to a continuously changing labour market.

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