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GENDER AND AGRICULTURE: POLICY TENSIONS BEHIND THE EU GENDER GAP

Summary report of a systematic literature
review of the gender responsiveness of
Europe's agriculture and rural policy

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**Supporting Women-led Innovation
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Supporting Women-Led Innovations in Farming Territories (SWIFT)

This report has been developed as part of the SWIFT project. SWIFT is a 4 year multi-actor, transdisciplinary and feminist EU-funded research project. The project aims to engage with, challenge and disrupt the underlying social, political, and economic structures and institutions in rural areas that generate and perpetuate gendered-forms of exclusion while demonstrating the ways in which women-led innovations can foster inclusive, transformative and sustainable agriculture and rural development. A focus on women-led innovations is key to addressing high levels of gender inequality across the European agricultural sector, as is understanding the policy landscape within which European women, in all their diversity, are engaging. It is this latter point that this report seeks to address.

More on SWIFT at: <https://mon.uvic.cat/swiftproject/>

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Executive Summary

In 1996, the European Commission committed to a 'dual approach' towards realizing gender equality. This approach involves mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies, while also implementing specific measures to eliminate, prevent or remedy gender inequalities.

But has it worked in the rural and agricultural contexts? In short, while progress is being made, the answer is **no**.

Just a decade ago, in 2013, the EU still referred to farmers exclusively using masculine pronouns, even within their official policy documents. Today, women continue to be excluded and negatively impacted by EU farming and rural policies. With respect to the European agricultural sector, recent data shows that on average, 29% of farms across the EU are managed by a woman,¹ though this data hides differences between EU countries. What's more is that the gender gap is at risk of increasing, not decreasing. Policies have an important role to play in addressing these challenges so as to achieve the EC's commitment to gender equality.

Towards this end, a systematic analysis of the academic literature on gender, agriculture and rural policies in Europe uncovered **four tensions that hinder progress towards gender equality in European agriculture**.

1.



EU policy approaches views agriculture as a sector, not an occupation and therefore the participation of women is not monitored or regulated in the same way as with other occupations.

2.



When goals of gender equality are put alongside the viability of the agricultural sector, capitalist growth is prioritized.

3.



EU agricultural policies fail to adequately recognize differences in the way women farm and experience farming.

4.



Women's spaces are key to supporting women, but can leave women out of the mainstream.

1. European Commission (2021). Females in the field. Retrieved from: https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/news/females-field-2021-03-08_en

The report concludes by first recognizing that agricultural exceptionalism, the idea the agricultural sector deserves special treatment, has restricted progress on gender equality. We argue that the fundamental importance of agriculture for the EU does not restrict the responsibility of policy makers to ensure gender equality.

Second, inconsistencies across policies and lack of integration or coordination across DGs has negative impacts for advancing gender equality in rural areas and agriculture. Adopting a more joined-up approach, and embracing the EU's commitment to gender equality through mainstreaming a gender perspective across all policies, while also implementing specific measures to eliminate, prevent or remedy gender inequalities, is required.

Third, the tendency to de-politicize agricultural policy has restricted difficult decisions and deliberation around advancing gender equality. Deep deliberation and political will is required to advance gender equality in these sectors, while also anticipating and addressing the different impacts this can have on the sector.

Finally, on the basis of the systematic review and the resulting tensions, this reports recommends that to more effectively address gender inequalities across rural areas and agriculture:

1.

The EU needs to challenge the view of agriculture as a sector to ensure that more attention is paid to inequalities on farm. Attention to gender mainstreaming and policy alignment across DGs (i.e. DG AGRI and DG EMPL) is fundamental.

2.

EU policies need to address tensions between gender equality and economic goals. A human-rights approach can be instructive here to ensure that gender equality, and the rights of all people, are prioritized.

3.

EU policy needs to recognize and take into account differences in gendered-approaches to farming. Further, more attention is needed to make visible the different contributions of people on farms. Key to this is addressing the standards against which the EC measures success and distributes agricultural payments.

4.

Specific spaces for women need to be created and recognized, while greater effort is required to make mainstream (and often white, male-dominated) spaces more inclusive, and to ensure equitable participation across these spaces. At the same time, policy making processes need to value different forms of knowledge and diverse experiences.

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(SWIFT) Supporting Women-led Innovation in Farming and Rural Territories



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Acronyms

CAP: Common Agriculture Policy

DG AGRI: DG for Agriculture and Rural Development

DG EMPL: DG for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

DG JUST DG for Justice and Consumers

DG: Directorate-General

EC: European Commission

EU: European Union

Glossary

CAP (Common Agriculture Policy)

The EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is a partnership between agriculture and society, and between Europe and its farmers.¹ The CAP is a set of laws adopted by the EU to provide a unified policy on agriculture in EU countries with the aim of providing affordable, safe and quality food, ensure a fair living standard for farmers and preserve the environment.² Created in 1962 by the six founding countries of the then European Communities, it is the oldest EU policy still in operation.³

Dual approach

Since 1996, the European Commission (EC) has committed to a 'dual approach' towards realizing gender equality. This approach involves mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies, while also implementing specific measures to eliminate, prevent or remedy gender inequalities. Both approaches go hand in hand, and one cannot replace the other.⁴

Gender

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people. It influences how people perceive themselves and each other, how they act and interact, and the distribution of power and resources in society. Gender identity is not confined to a binary (girl/woman, boy/man) nor is it static; it exists along a continuum and can change over time. There is considerable diversity in how individuals and groups understand, experience and express gender through the roles they take on, the expectations placed on them, relations with others and the complex ways that gender is institutionalized in society.⁵

Gender equality

Gender equality implies that the rights, responsibilities and opportunities of people do not depend on their gender. With gender equality, people of all genders have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development.⁶ States and other actors have duties under international and regional human rights law to promote substantive gender equality as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development.⁷

Gender equity

Gender equity refers to provisions of fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men. The concept recognises that women, men and people with diverse gender identities, have different needs and power and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalances. This may include equal treatment, or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.⁸

Gender mainstreaming

The EC notes that ‘gender mainstreaming requires both integrating a gender perspective to the content of the different policies, and addressing the issue of representation of women and men in the given policy area’. Further, ‘gender mainstreaming makes public interventions more effective and ensures that inequalities are not perpetuated. Gender mainstreaming does not only aim to avoid the creation or reinforcement of inequalities, which can have adverse effects on both women and men. It also implies analysing the existing situation, with the purpose of identifying inequalities, and developing policies which aim to redress these inequalities and undo the mechanisms that caused them.’⁹

The UN’s provides a more expansive definition of gender integration that extends to diverse gender identities: ‘Gender integration (or mainstreaming) is the process of assessing the implications for women, men and people with diverse gender identities of any planned action—including legislation, policies or programmes—in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women, men and people with diverse gender identities an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes. This is done so that all individuals may benefit equally—so that inequality is not perpetuated.’¹⁰

Gender responsive

Gender responsive refers ‘to a policy or program which fulfils two basic criteria: a) gender norms, roles, and relations are considered, and b) measures are taken to actively reduce the harmful effects of gender norms, roles, and relations—including gender inequality.’¹¹

Gender transformative

A gender transformative approach seeks to actively examine, challenge and transform the underlying causes of gender inequality rooted in inequitable social structures and institutions. As such the gender transformative approach aims at addressing imbalanced power dynamics and relations, rigid gender norms and roles, harmful practices, unequal formal and informal rules as well as gender-blind or discriminatory legislative and policy frameworks that create and perpetuate gender inequality. Such an approach seeks to eradicate the systemic forms of gender-based discrimination by creating or strengthening equitable gender norms, dynamics and systems that support gender equality.¹²

Intersectional

Intersectionality, a concept first coined in the frame of critical race theory, is a framework that identifies how interlocking systems of power affect those who are most marginalized by society. Discrimination can affect all aspects of social and political identities (gender, race, class, sexuality, disability, age, etc.) and these aspects overlap (or 'intersect'). Applying an intersectional approach means assessing how multiple forms of oppression come together.¹³

Non-binary

Non-binary refers to gender identities that cannot be defined within the margins of the gender binary. Non-binary recognizes gender in a way that goes beyond simply identifying as either a man or woman.¹⁴

Preface

This report presents a systematic review of academic literature on gender and rural and agricultural policies across Europe. Gender refers to socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and/or attributes. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Gender is non-binary. Yet, we are working with data and policies that overwhelmingly reinforce a binary understanding of gender. In so doing, the data not only exclude the experiences of persons who fall outside of this binary, but also limit their own potential to be gender-transformative.

We recognize that in writing this report, we are at risk of further reinforcing this binary position. This is not our intention. At the same time, the data clearly demonstrate the historical and ongoing disadvantages that women, in all of their diversity, face in relation to access to land, resources and decision-making power within rural and agricultural communities across Europe.

01



“What are we fighting for?”

Overview of gender and agriculture in Europe

In 2007, representatives of organizations of peasants, family farmers, artisanal fisher-folk, Indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers, environmental and urban movements from more than 80 countries came together in the village of Nyéléni in Sélingué, Mali to strengthen a global movement for food sovereignty.¹⁵ The resulting Declaration of Nyéléni asked: What are we fighting for? Part of the answer was ‘recognition and respect of women’s roles and rights in food production, and representation of women in all decision-making bodies’.¹⁶ As preparations advance on the next Nyéléni Gathering in 2025, the fight continues.

Across Europe, much work remains. The European agricultural sector is marked by high levels of inequality. The most recent data shows that, on average, 29% of farms across the EU are managed by a woman, though this data hides stark differences between EU countries.¹⁷ Countries such as the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark have some of the lowest percentages of female farm owners (below 10%),¹⁸ while Latvia and Lithuania have the highest level of female farm holders (45%).¹⁹ There is little research investigating these differences across Europe or the factors influencing them.

Research does show that men inherit land much more often than women do – and this is a trend that persists across Europe, despite the varied legal frameworks governing land inheritance.²⁰ Consider that in Norway, the Allodial law was introduced in 1974. This law made the eldest child, regardless of gender, the legal heir to the family farm. The ambition of the law, to dismantle gender inequalities in inheritance of land, was not achieved, as only 11% of farm owners in Norway are currently women.²¹ The failure of the law highlights the need for shifts in gender norms in parallel with progressive policy to achieve gender equality.

Addressing these concerns is urgent. The agricultural gender gap is at risk of increasing. 42% of women working in agriculture are above the age of 65 (compared to 29.2% for men) and only 4.2% of female farmers are under the age of 35. What's more, is that only 4.2% of female farmers are under the age of 35.²²

This trend is perhaps not surprising. It is often men who claim the identity of 'farmer', despite the significant role women play on farms.²³ Further, research shows that conventional farming is strongly identified with rural masculinities.²⁴ This perception has been accelerating rather than decreasing, since the start of mechanisation.²⁵ While mechanisation per se does not exclude women from farming, research shows it has pushed women out of the fields.²⁶ The cultural perception that agriculture is a male industry is difficult to break down.²⁷ One impact of this perception is that on farms, women often defer decision-making to men.²⁸ Such cultural perceptions also create strongly male-gendered spaces, further cementing agriculture as a masculine environment (see tension 4 below).²⁹

The status of women in EU's agricultural sector points to policy failures as well as to systemic forms of patriarchal inequalities, oppressions, racism, colonialism, violence and discrimination. Addressing the intersectional experiences of women farmers and farmers with diverse gender identities, is key to enhancing substantive gender equality. Our review illustrates that such approaches are missing from both relevant policies and academic literature.

Towards this end, this report first introduces the EU's dual approach to gender equality. Focus is given to the concept of gender-mainstreaming, being that it is at the core of the EU's approach to achieving gender equality and is the primary concept addressed in the academic literature. Here we also introduce relevant legal framework and changes to the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP 2023-2027) as the primary agricultural policy for Europe. Following this, four tensions identified during a systematic review of academic literature related to gender and European agriculture and rural policy are presented. These tensions are found between:

- 1.** General employment in EU policy and employment in agriculture;
- 2.** Gender equity and the viability of the agricultural sector;
- 3.** Gender equity and the institutionalised rejection of difference;
- 4.** Creating spaces for women and their inclusion into the mainstream.

In relation to the four tensions, the report provides three conclusions related to: the role that agricultural exceptionalism has played in restricting progress on gender equality; inconsistencies across policies and lack of integration or coordination across DGs; and, the tendency to avoid addressing contradictions between policy goals, such as gender equality and capitalist growth of the sector. Limitations of the study are discussed and recommendations are provided on the basis of the four identified policy tensions.

02

The EU 'Dual Approach: *dismantling current gender regimes in agriculture?*



The European Commission has, since 1996, been committed to a 'dual approach' toward the realisation of gender equality. This approach involves not only the implementation of specific measures to eliminate, prevent and remedy gender inequalities, but also the mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all policies.³⁰ Such an approach commits to first acknowledging women as a disadvantaged group in society who require special provisions, so as to rectify experiences of (institutionalized) discrimination.³¹ Second, the approach calls for actions that aim to transform the organization of society to a fairer distribution of human responsibilities, recognizing the differences between men and women.³² This latter part is delivered through gender-sensitive policy-making.

In 1999, the **Treaty of Amsterdam** strengthened the legal basis for gender-mainstreaming (Articles 2 and 3), making it the official goal of the European Union's gender equality policy.³³ Unlike past approaches, gender mainstreaming does not merely rely on the delegation of the work of gender equality to a specific government body (e.g. a Committee, Directorate General, or a Ministry). Instead, it involves the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, regulatory measures, and spending programs, producing policies that are gender-sensitive.³⁴

While the move towards gender mainstreaming is important, it must be noted that when applied to agriculture and rural areas, similar gender-mainstreaming efforts have been criticized for producing underwhelming outcomes, especially when weighed against their hefty promises of transformation.³⁵ Gender-mainstreaming has been criticized for its ‘add women and stir’ approach, and for its subsequent failure to sufficiently address structural factors shaping gender relations.³⁶ Moreover, gender-mainstreaming has also been criticized for its lack of specific goals.³⁷

Recognizing that gender mainstreaming is one part of the EU’s dual approach, we also recognize that it is one approach along a continuum of gender integration approaches. This implies differences between gender mainstreaming, gender responsive approaches and gender transformative approaches (see also the Glossary). Understanding these nuances offers a comprehensive lens through which to examine current EU policy and to locate its shortcomings.

Gender mainstreaming refers to the integration of a gender perspective into the preparation, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies.

Gender responsive refers to programming including specific actions to try and reduce gender inequalities within communities.

Gender transformative goes a step further in trying to design action around the fundamental aim of addressing the root causes of gender inequality within society.

Defined in this way, a gender responsive approach is perhaps most aligned with the EU’s dual approach, but as our review suggests, this has not yet been adequately translated to rural and agricultural policies. That said, over the last few years, important progress has been made.

In the context of rural areas, the **Gender Equality Strategy** (2020–2025) states explicitly that funding opportunities will be made available to increase rural women’s entrepreneurship, knowledge participation and decision-making as well as investment in the development of basic services in rural areas.³⁸ The **2021 EU Rural Vision** includes a Rural Pact and a Rural Action Plan. Women and marginalised groups are highlighted in relation to achieving rural resilience and increasing opportunities.³⁹ The vision also launched a **Rural Observatory** in December 2022 with the aim of supporting knowledge production and data collection related to EU rural areas and covering economic, social and environmental dimensions.⁴⁰

Turning more specifically to agriculture, the **Common Agricultural Policy** (CAP) has been the EU's most important common policy for over 50 years. This is also reflected in the fact that it absorbs just over a third of the EU budget – more than any other EU policy.⁴¹ The aim of the CAP is to ensure the social and environmental sustainability of the farming sector, as well as food security goals.⁴²

Despite the importance of the policy, the socioeconomic impacts of the CAP remain rarely evaluated, even though it is one of the most researched public policies of the EU.⁴³ This is also likely because socioeconomic issues did not become a prominent part of the CAP until the 2000 reform.⁴⁴

It is also relevant to highlight that the publications looking at the gendered impacts of the CAP were a minority within this minority and that the vast majority of the research was focused on economic impacts and growth.⁴⁵ This gap in research is problematic, given that it is hard to imagine what effective gender mainstreaming policies, let alone gender responsive or transformative policies, might look like when there is such a fundamental lack of research on the gendered impacts of the CAP and generally of sex-disaggregated and gender-disaggregated data in relation to rural development. These concerns were echoed in a 2021 Impact Assessment published by the European Commission published on the Impact of the CAP on the territorial development of rural areas. The report notes:

The CAP addresses rural needs related to economic growth and development, rather than social needs. [...] Due to the lack of targeting and a limited redistribution of support, they [basic payments] contribute less to reducing income disparities between farms and to addressing social issues.⁴⁶

Overall, the Commission's evaluation concluded that the CAP's relevance in furthering the economic inclusion of women farmers is low mainly due to a lack of explicit targeting of women's needs and a significant gender imbalance among farm managers (see also tension 2).⁴⁷

The most recent CAP (2023–2027) was reformed with the aim of:

- > providing more targeted support to smaller farms;
- > enhancing the contribution of agriculture to EU environmental and climate goals; and,
- > allowing for greater flexibility for member states in adapting measures to local condition.⁴⁸

This version of the CAP included, for the first time since the inception of the policy, a specific reference to the need to support women in farming and includes a requirement of EU countries to consider the situation for women in rural areas in rural development programmes (see Box 1).

While the EU has committed to a dual approach to ensuring gender equality, as outlined in the introduction to this report, deep inequity remains across EU rural areas and agriculture. That said, as we have just outlined (see also Appendix 2), in recent years, important policies have started to address gender inequalities in more explicit ways. Many of these developments are recent and thus their impact is yet to be fully understood or researched. The scientific literature does however point to a number of tensions in rural and agricultural policies that still need to be addressed to advance gender equality.

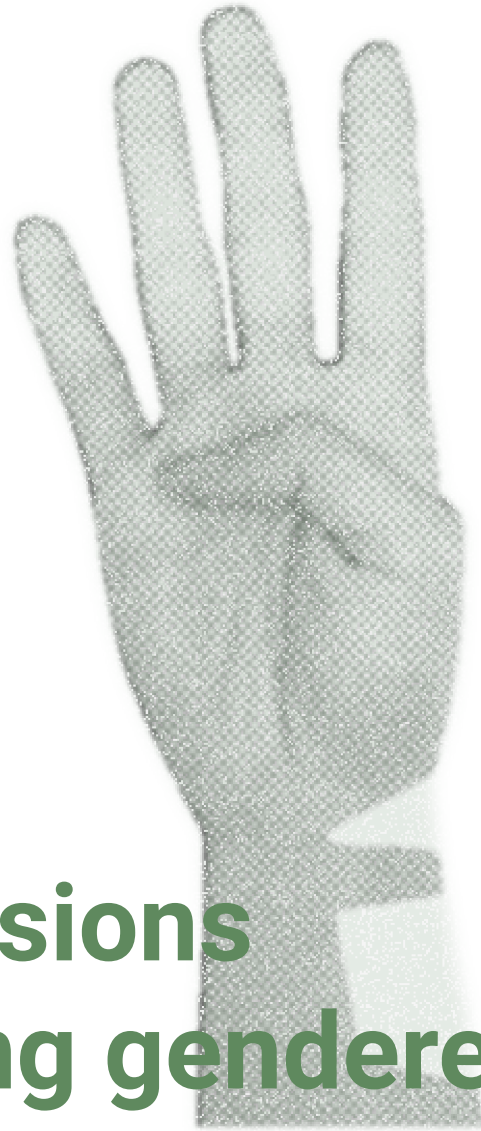
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In the process of the preparation of the CAP Strategic Plans, Member States were required to assess the situation of women in farming and in rural areas and address the related challenges in their strategic plans. By end 2022, the Commission approved all 28 CAP Strategic Plans, the majority of which include measures that aim at enhancing the position of female farmers or rural women. In addition, the majority of Member States committed to involve women’s rights organisations in the Monitoring Committees for CAP Strategic Plans. In the context of the EU Rural Action Plan, the EU CAP Network organised a workshop on advancing gender equality in rural areas in the EU to enhance the understanding of key challenges.⁴⁹

”

Box 1: European Commission: 2023 Report on Gender Equality in the EU

03



Four tensions impacting gendered relations in European agriculture

A systematic review of the academic literature uncovered four major tensions in EU agriculture and rural policy that point to challenges for gender equality. A summary of the methods used, and the articles reviewed, is provided in Appendix 1.



Tension 1: General EU legislation on employment versus employment in agriculture

The first tension identified is between general EU legislation on employment, and employment or labour in agriculture. At the core of this tension is the claim that agriculture is seen as a sector and not an occupation and is thus not scrutinized for gender inequality in the same way as other occupations. This relates to the roles and responsibilities of the different directorates. DG AGRI is responsible for European agricultural and rural development. DG EMPL is responsible for monitoring and addressing practices that reduce women's presence in occupations and lead to gender pay gaps. However, DG EMPL does not have oversight for the agricultural workforce in the way it does for other occupations.⁵⁰ In turn, agriculture lacks the kinds of measures that have been adopted for other occupations to address the under-representation of women.⁵¹ We also note that such inequalities could be addressed by DG JUST, though this has not been mapped or discussed in the reviewed literature.

Such an oversight is particularly concerning given the research shows that in rural areas, while women are far less likely be farm holders (in 2016, just under 30% of EU farm holders were women)⁵², their unpaid contribution to the family labour force (including unpaid care work), and income generated through off-farm work, has repeatedly been highlighted as essential to the viability of the family farm.⁵³

Further, alongside programmatic gaps to support women in agricultural, there are also financial implications to perceiving agriculture more as a sector than an occupation. For example, direct payments are made on the basis of land farmed by the land owner, with little attention given to who is doing the work, or to differences between people receiving direct payments.⁵⁴ As such, the literature notes that 'DG AGRI distributes income support in a gender-blind way and views the support as going to farmers without considering the gender composition of the workforce'.⁵⁵



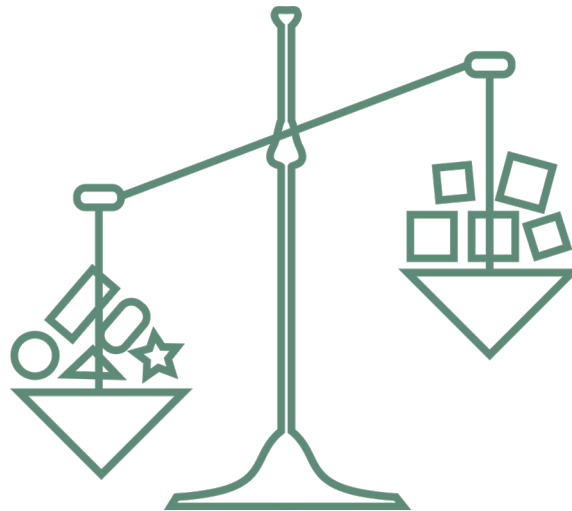
Tension 2: Gender equality versus viability of the agricultural sector

The second tension identified through the literature review relates to the EU's commitment to gender equality, on the one hand, and its goal of maintaining a viable agricultural industry on the other,⁵⁶ with a tendency towards favouring capitalist goals. The literature argues that gender goals are presented as ideological, while the business goals of agriculture are presented as economically rational – and both represent goals of rural policies and the CAP.⁵⁷ Yet, dismantling power regimes and establishing equality is not necessarily a harmonious issue.⁵⁸ Further, whether or not they can be realized simultaneously has been questioned,⁵⁹ particularly given the high dependence on the exploitation of family labour and particularly that of women (as noted above).

This tendency to present a shared goal of gender equality alongside a model of economic growth that is reliant on exploitative labour relations, confirms broader concerns around the de-politicization of agriculture (i.e., a tendency to overlook or dampen contradictions and conflicts in the domain of politics in favour of reinforcing the status-quo). Such approaches restrict critique and action that challenges the inequalities underlying dominant structures. When it comes to agriculture, such de-politicization presents a considerable stumbling block for gender mainstreaming by presenting two goals as bound together in harmony, rather than problematizing the relationship between 'gender' and the 'mainstream'.⁶⁰

Another example of the failure to problematize tensions between the objectives of gender equality and viability of the agricultural sector can be seen in the promotion of the family farm. While the CAP promotes the ‘family farm’ as the cornerstone of agricultural policy, the ways in which the concept obscures intra-familial differences in terms of income and status are also often hidden. Consider that alongside their unrecognized labour on farm, non-farm labour undertaken by women often provides an additional income stream for farms that can be vital at times when primary production does not pay enough to make a living. Not only that, but in so doing, it also diversifies income and renders the family business more resilient.⁶¹

It is important for policy to avoid instrumentalising gender equality goals in the service of productivity agendas (by for example viewing women’s labour as an underutilised form of capital with the potential to be more efficiently harnessed in the service of commercial agriculture). This demands a reassessment of the very qualifying parameters that govern agricultural subsidies, for example. It demands challenging what is meant by ‘productive’ agriculture and changing the narrative towards a definition which places more emphasis on social and sustainable development.



Tension 3: Institutionalized rejection of difference versus gender equality

The third tension identified from the literature review targets the institutionalized rejection of difference and gender equality. Agricultural policies at the EU level do not adequately consider differences in needs and preferences of their different target populations (such as for example, the increased need for childcare for female farmers).⁶²

An implication of this is that finances and administrative resources target efforts at treating and re-treating symptoms of a problem and not the structural causes. In practice, when women do not fit into a labour force system that was created without their inclusion in mind, or when they fail to succeed according to its standards, they are punished (for example, by being the recipient of fewer subsidies, or by being partially excluded from the labour force). In response to this, the literature shows that women farmers often set up their business in ways that allow them to meet both professional and private aspirations.⁶³ This conforms to a so-called ‘feminine’ approach to entrepreneurship – one that strives for balance rather than a growth- and profit-oriented, ‘masculine’ approach.⁶⁴ Although the aforementioned ‘feminine’ approach to farming has multiple benefits, this type of farm management is oftentimes discriminated against by policy. For example, the literature highlights that CAP payments primarily encourage a specific type of agriculture: it is the farms that are already large and highly mechanised that profit the most from EU benefits.⁶⁵ As noted above, this is because subsidies are awarded per hectare, ignoring economies of scale.⁶⁶ This serves to reinforce industrial and expansionist agriculture, while excluding many female farmers, who tend to manage smaller farms.⁶⁷



Tension 4: Creating spaces for women versus integration of women into the mainstream

In response to tension 3, a frequent practice has been to create spaces for women,⁶⁸ such as rural women's groups, and women's farmers' organizations. These spaces are important as it is frequently reported by women farmers that not only do they lack the time to attend meetings, but they also feel intimidated to enter and participate actively in such male-dominated spaces.⁶⁹ However, the tension is this practice also risks keeping women on the margins: it keeps them contained within women's organizations rather than including them in mainstream farmer's organizations.

This also has important implications for policy processes, which tends to consult with the mainstream farmers' organizations rather than the women's ones during the policy-making processes.⁷⁰ That being said, these women's spaces also present potential learning opportunities for policy. This is because they help women farmers form their own identity in farming, they provide spaces for socialization with other women farmers (something which outside of these spaces can be hard, particularly in rural and remote areas), and in doing so, ultimately help women better articulate their needs and desires as farmers. Moreover, they can act as a steppingstone toward the participation of women into the mainstream, by first strengthening women's confidence to occupy space as farmers. There is indeed a need to support such existing and newly emerging rural women's policy agencies and networks, as their contribution to furthering gender equality as well as raising awareness of these issues is significant.⁷¹ Including men in spaces originally designed for women can be a way of restructuring participation with a view towards enhanced gender equality (see Appendix 3).

04 Conclusion

Just a decade ago, in 2013, the EU still referred to farmers exclusively using masculine pronouns, even within their official policy documents.⁷² While such blatant gendered discourse of farming is absent from more recent documents, rural policy has not yet rid itself of gendered biases. Though steps forward have been made in the last decades, and particularly the last years, much work remains.

The four tensions identified from the systematic literature review point to areas where action can be taken to ensure agriculture is not left out of EU's efforts to achieve gender equality. On the basis of these tensions, three main conclusions are drawn.

First, the tensions point to a long-term trend of 'agricultural exceptionalism', a framework that has been used to legitimize the special treatment of the agricultural sector.⁷³ While we agree that agriculture has a unique and fundamental role to play within the European Union, this must not be used as an excuse to delay action on gender equality.

Second, the tensions reveal internal inconsistencies within rural and agricultural policy, and they pull at the seams of policy, unravelling the efforts toward gender equality, particularly in agriculture and rural areas. Addressing these contradictions in the policy landscape is key to moving beyond gender mainstreaming towards a gender responsive and even transformative approach. Addressing these tensions is also key to ensure that the EU's commitment to gender equality goes beyond the rhetorical. Political will is needed here.

Third, the tendency to de-politicize agricultural policy has restricted decision-making around the around advancing gender equality. Deep deliberation and political will is required to advance gender equality across rural areas and agriculture, while also anticipating and addressing the different impacts this can have on these sectors. Towards this end, it is important to not have gender mainstreaming in rural development resort merely to adding 'something for women' without resetting the agenda or reorganizing the policy-making process itself, as it has done in the past.⁷⁴ Doing so renders gender-related issues vulnerable to de-politicization and can serve to trivialize gender issues by placing feminist goals outside of the influence of politics.⁷⁵

Limitations

This report presents a summary of a systematic review of academic literature on gender, and rural and agricultural farming and policy (see Appendix 1). The analysis is thus limited to what is included in the articles that were identified through our search method. We note that the academic literature contains several gaps that impact our analysis. Related to this, we identify six specific limitations.

1. Across the literature, there is a lack of consistency in how concepts such as gender-mainstreaming are used. While we are not necessarily advocating for conceptual homogeneity, we recognize that a lack of consistency limits comparability. We also note that overall, the academic literature reinforces a binary understanding of gender and fails to be adequately intersectional. This impacts the analysis included in this report.
2. Within the literature there is a focus on gender mainstreaming which this is but one component in the EU's dual approach to achieving gender equality. Our hypothesis is that this reflects the focus on mainstreaming over specific measures to eliminate, prevent or remedy gender inequalities across the sector.
3. Our methodology demanded that we identify inclusion and exclusion criteria that align with the stated objectives of the research. While every effort was made to be expansive and inclusive, it is possible that not all relevant articles were included. Further, we have not included grey (non-academic) literature. To address this limitation, we have sought to be highly transparent in our methods (see Appendix 1).
4. The reviewed literature focusses on EU agricultural policies. This is coherent with our methods and search terms. However, a limitation of this is that we have overlooked relevant policies and research from outside agriculture (for example, as advanced by DG EMPL or DG JUST). We have sought to address these in Tension 1, but also note that this could explain our conclusion on a lack of policy integration and coordination. That said, the broader literature points to clear limits in the joined-up nature of EU policy.
5. As outlined in the report, a number of recent policies have sought to address gender in agriculture and rural areas. These changes were not captured in the literature that was reviewed for this report. It is imperative that these policy changes are researched and evaluated.
6. Finally, the SWIFT project has an explicit focus on agroecology and there is an emerging body of literature on gender and agroecology but it did not appear in our systematic review, despite the inclusion of agroecology in our search terms. This means our review does not take into account the specific role of women in agroecology, nor the feminist potential of agroecology.

Looking ahead

Overall, gender-mainstreaming in rural development, addresses some rural gender issues, assisting some women and prompting the development of new solutions when it comes to rural services like childcare or transport. However, many of the problems are still largely trivialised as ‘women’s problems’, with women’s inability to cope given as cause for intervention when in reality, as this report has also outlined, vulnerability is caused by the interplay of personal factors, structural and contextual circumstances. As such, while some projects have supported individual women to overcome their disadvantages, structural causes and wider consequences for rural development have in general not been addressed.⁷⁶

Addressing gender inequalities demands addressing structural forms of discrimination. This will not be easy and we can expect resistance as those with historic privilege are challenged. Aligned with this, for policy to be gender transformative, the focus needs to shift away from the mere numerical representation of women toward the examination of rural gender relations that lead to inequalities. A policy that treats the symptoms of the problem rather than the cause does not only fail to solve the root problem but is also inefficient in its use of administrative and financial resources.⁷⁷

At the same time, there is a need for the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data.⁷⁸ For example, inequality in land ownership and the differential in the size of farms and farm income are not monitored or addressed by the CAP, neither are EU-funded agriculture education and knowledge exchange disaggregated by gender (even though research commissioned by the EU has repeatedly highlighted women’s needs for education and training).⁷⁹ This makes it hard to recognise gendered inequalities within these programmes and to identify appropriate responses. Towards this end, we appreciate the launch of the Rural Observatory (see Appendix 2) in December 2022, in the context of the EU’s rural vision. However, it, remains to be seen how well its practice will align with its ambitions.

Further, when it comes to data, and as outlined above, both within academia and policy, ‘gender’ is used as a synonym for ‘women’ when it is actually a relational concept that tries to capture the distribution of power and resources. For this reason, efforts at advancing substantive gender equality need to remain vigilant of the potential to solidify gender binaries and reinforce the mainstream, rather than challenge systems of structural inequality. Gender data are more than data disaggregated by sex, as such data does not guarantee that concepts, definitions and methods used in data production are conceived to reflect gender roles, relations and inequalities in society.⁸⁰

Beyond data, there is an opportunity for the EU to work with and support bottom-up initiatives that are already doing important work on rural women’s empowerment, education, visibility and political participation. We showcase two of these examples in Appendix 3. There is potential to learn from these spaces, which are working in close connection with the women and trialling new and innovative approaches to gender mainstreaming. There is also potential to enhance the work

of these spaces; a common theme that arose from the interview series with various women's organisations, which were conducted in the context of this report, was the lack of funding and uncertainty about the future continuation of their work.

Looking ahead, it is clear that women and people with diverse gender identities need to be at the centre of decisions affecting them. It is also clear that a more rigorous and intersectional assessment of rural and agricultural policies are needed to support a shift toward gender-transformative policy, which empowers and allows women farmers agency over their own futures. Structural sexism, racism, ableism, patriarchy, colonialism and other forms of exploitation must also be addressed. Adopting a strong rights-based approach can be effective here.

For the EU to advance policy that is gender transformative, it needs to go beyond providing women with help 'coping' with rural realities and tackle structural barriers to equitable farming. This is imperative to ensure that progress is genuine and to ensure that old patterns are not simply rearranged to imitate progress and co-opt goals of gender equity.

Recommendations

On the basis of the systematic review and the resulting tensions, this reports recommends that to more effectively address gender inequalities across rural areas and agriculture:

1. The EU needs to challenge the view of agriculture as a sector to ensure that more attention is paid to inequalities on farm. Attention to gender mainstreaming and policy alignment across DGs (i.e. DG AGRI and DG EMPL) is fundamental.
2. EU policies need to address tensions and trade-offs between gender equality and capitalist goals. A human-rights approach can be instructive here to ensure that gender equality, and the rights of all people, are prioritized
3. EU policy needs to recognize and take into account differences in gendered-approaches to farming. Further, more attention is needed to making visible the different contributions of people on farms. Key to this is addressing the standards against which the EC measures success and distributes agricultural payments.
4. Specific spaces for women need to be created and recognized and greater effort is required to make mainstream (and often white, male-dominated) spaces more inclusive, and to ensure equitable participation across these spaces. At the same time, policy making processes need to value different forms of knowledge and diverse experiences.

Appendix 1: Methods

This report is the outcome of a systematic literature review of academic literature on gender, and rural and agricultural farming and policy. The review followed the guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). The final search terms were applied to titles, abstracts, and keywords of publications. and were as follows; ((gender OR women OR feminism) AND (agricult* OR “rural develop*” OR agroecolog* OR farming OR countryside) AND (((Europ* OR EU) W/4 (Policy OR Law OR Legislation OR Regulation OR Strategy OR mainstreaming)) OR CAP OR “Common Agricultural Policy”)). The above query was adjusted only slightly when searching through Web of Science; the proximity indicator W/4 was replaced by NEAR/4. Summaries and citations were excluded, and so were papers written before 2000. We note that despite a including agroecology in our search terms, few papers had a focus on agroecology. For this reason, the report does not focus on it.

Following this method, and including further sources derived from following up on citations in the selected academic articles (snowball method), the final number of papers included in the review was 36. Despite our efforts to include agroecology as a key word in our query search, none of the papers focused on the topic, and most did not even mention it. This points to a problematic lack of attention to agroecology at the EU level.

The papers were coded using the qualitative analysis program atlas.ti in order to determine common themes and structures between the data. The outcome of this analysis informs this report. More details about the methods are available upon request.

The 36 papers included in the systematic review include:

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Appendix 2: The EU path toward (rural) gender equality

This Appendix is meant to provide an overview of key developments regarding Gender Equality developments in the EU – starting more general and then narrowing down on gender equality in the rural context. It is important to highlight that the overview is not an exhaustive one. Beginning with the CEDAW, an international convention which was ratified by all EU Member States, a timeline for some of the main treaties and Directives pertaining to general gender equality goals is provided. The section concludes with an overview of relevant rural policies and related documents – alongside their specific mention of gender (or absence thereof).

- **The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):** an international legal instrument that requires countries to eliminate discrimination against women and girls, in force since 1981, in all areas and promotes women and girls' equal rights (United Nations, 2023). It is the only human rights treaty that targets, among others, culture and tradition as influential forces shaping gender roles and family relations. Article 5 of the CEDAW specifically highlights duties to identify and eliminate harmful gender stereotypes and in doing so, is particularly relevant, as it acknowledges the nuanced nature of obstacles to gender equality. This is important because it goes beyond the usual focus on the religion-culture nexus to also consider policy paradigms, the media and the duties of States to take targeted steps towards counteracting discriminatory narratives and practices. Gender inequality is sustained not merely by 'hard' obstacles (such as the particularities of various legislation), but by 'soft' ones too, such as culture and ideology and importantly, their reproduction via policy paradigms – all of which need to be targeted if change is to be implemented.

Relevant legal framework: EU policy path toward Gender Equality

- **The Treaty of Lisbon** amended the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community (in force since 2009).⁸¹ Article 2 makes clear the intent to promote social justice, protection, and equality between men and women.
- **The Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union** (in force since 2009).⁸² Article 8 specifies the goal of eliminating inequalities between men and women.
- **The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (in legal effect since 2009)** enshrines the political, social, and economic rights for European Union (EU), requires equality between men and women to be ensured in all areas, including employment, work and pay (Article 21).⁸³
- **Council Directive 2004/113/EC** of 13 December 2004 implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services. It includes provisions against both direct and indirect discrimination (whereby an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice would put persons of one sex at a particular disadvantage compared with persons of the other sex).⁸⁴

- **Directive 2006/54/EC** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation.⁸⁵ Access to employment, vocational training, as well as occupational social security schemes fall under the scope of this Directive. Article 29, makes explicit mention to the obligation of Member states to mainstream gender into their policies. In the Evaluation of the above Directive, conducted in 2020,⁸⁶ it was found that the application of the principle of equal pay is hindered by a lack of transparency in pay systems, a lack of legal certainty on the concept of work of equal value, and by procedural obstacles faced by victims of discrimination. Renewed commitment was made by the European Commission regarding a proposal for binding measures for pay transparency.⁸⁷
- **Directive 2010/41/EU** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 July 2010 on the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women engaged in an activity in a self-employed capacity and repealing Council Directive 86/613/EEC.⁸⁸ The directive mentions affirmative action as a legitimate practice to increase the participation of the under-represented gender. Furthermore, it is stated that designated national equality bodies shall research, monitor and finally exchange collected information with corresponding European Bodies such as the European Institute of Gender Equality (Article 11). Finally, brief reference is made to the obligation of member states to mainstream gender into their policies (Article 12).
- **Directive (EU) 2019/1158** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU.⁸⁹ It was established with the aim of facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life for workers who parents, or undertake care, in a gender equitable manner.

EU policy path toward Rural Gender Equality

- **Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund. It is interesting to note that gender is mentioned much more extensively in this Regulation than within its predecessor; Council Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006.

More specifically, it is stated that the Union should, at all stages of implementation of the European Structural Integration (ESI) Funds (which notably include one of the two CAP funds), aim at eliminating inequalities and at promoting equality between men and women and integrating the gender perspective, as well as at combating discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (Article 7). The European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) however, which is the largest fund supporting the CAP and which is also the corresponding fund from which the direct payments to farmers are drawn, is not included under the scope of this Regulation. The Regulation also references Member State partnerships with relevant public authorities, economic and social partners as well as bodies representing civil society in order to promote, among others, gender equality goals (Article 5). Finally, it calls for a system to record and store data on each operation necessary for monitoring, evaluation, financial management, verification and audit and to ensure that this data is broken down by gender where required (Article 125).

- **The European Green Deal (2019)**⁹⁰ is the EU's sustainable and inclusive growth strategy. It makes reference to socially inclusive transitions but lacks a specific mention to gender.
- **The Farm to Fork Strategy (2020)**⁹¹ is intended as part of the European Green Deal, and as a strategy to make food systems fairer, healthier and more environmentally friendly. While it makes one reference to gender goals, there are no concrete ways of addressing challenges faced by rural women in the strategy.
- **The European Commission's Communication 'A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025'** (2020) highlights the importance of quality care services for children and other dependents, especially for women in rural areas, through investments from the various ESIs. This is also echoed in the European Commission's Communication on the European Care strategy (2021).
- **Regulation (EU) 2021/2115** of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013.⁹² This regulation calls specifically for focus on promoting the participation of women in the socio-economic development of rural areas, with special attention to farming, supporting women's key role. It furthermore requests of states to strengthen their gender mainstreaming capacity, highlight its importance as a tool, and urges the collection of sex-disaggregated data by member states. The participation of women in farming is specifically stated as an objective (Article 6). Finally, toward this end, it is mentioned that the national managing authorities of Member States should bring the CAP strategic plans to the attention of (among others), bodies involved in promoting equality between men and women (Article 123).
- **The European Commission's Communication for an EU Rural Vision (2021)**⁹³ includes a **Rural Pact and a Rural Action Plan**, both of which aim to make rural Europe stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous. Among the key objectives regarding the goal of resilience, increasing opportunities for women and marginalised groups is highlighted. Moreover, as part of the Rural Vision, a Rural Observatory was launched in December of 2022. It aims to support knowledge production and data collection related to EU rural areas and covering economic, social and environmental dimensions.⁹⁴

Appendix 3: Instructive practices for advancing gender equality in rural places

MAIS – Women Farmer’s in the Inner Territories (Portugal)

One good example of a bottom-up initiative whose work departs from the very recognition of differences and the nuanced experiences and needs of women farmers, is the MAIS project.

MAIS, in effect since 2019, is an intervention project which utilizes participatory instruments, from the diagnosis phase, to intervention and evaluation. Among their primary aims is to increase the civic and associative participation of women farmers in the interior regions of Portugal, through their training, contributing to greater visibility of their social role and to increasing equality between men and women.⁹⁵

During our interview with the MAIS project, it was established that, among their biggest obstacles was getting the women farmers to articulate their desires and aspirations in the first place:

‘We had organized a week with them, working with them in the fields so that we can have more time to understand their lives, their families, their relations and trying to understand what were the dreams? And then they started appearing pieces by pieces. It was along the first year and a half that we were able to understand what the real dreams were [...] It took us a lot of time because it’s kind of a cultural thing.’

Such a quote reveals a glimpse of the value of these women’s spaces, and of the locally-oriented initiatives which invest the time to build relationships with women. It is within the context of such personal relationships of trust that a deeper understanding of the realities of the women farmers is gained: an understanding that an exclusively top-down approach, or male dominated spaces, would likely not have been able to capture. This experience was also highlighted in the literature.

(Source: Interview with representative from MAIS)

Farm Advisory Service – Supporting Women’s Spaces (Scotland)

A relevant example of a national initiative working to foster women’s spaces in agriculture is the Farm Advisory Service (FAS). The FAS, while not exclusively focused on female farmers, has been running Women in Agriculture events in Scotland since 2017, following the publication of the ‘Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector’ report by the Scottish Government (which highlighted, among others, the inequitable access to agricultural education for women).⁹⁶ FAS is open to all women working in Scottish agriculture, from those with daily involvement in a farm business to those who are just starting out and interested in finding out more about farming – with their main focus being the dissemination of knowledge and trainings.⁹⁷ The importance of fostering network building between women farmers was also highlighted as a key element of their work.

In line with the gender transformative philosophy and in not wishing to perpetuate the segregation of masculine and feminine spaces, in July of 2023 they plan to launch a new type of meeting. This meeting, planned in consultation and with the permission of the participating women, while still termed as ‘suitable for women’, will be open to all. Bringing the masculine into the feminine spaces, rather than the inverse (which many women have reported being intimidated by) while also valuing the feminine spaces themselves (shown by the fact that the meetings remain women’s meetings) is a good example of a bottom-up initiative attempting to overcome the obstacles that women in agriculture face – in direct cooperation and alignment with the needs of the women themselves.

(Source: Interview with representative from Farm Advisory Service)

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