

Advancing gender equality in agriculture and rural areas



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Print	ISBN 978-92-68-28157-4	doi:10.2762/0358353	KF-01-25-012-EN-C
PDF	ISBN 978-92-68-28156-7	doi:10.2762/9922927	KF-01-25-012-EN-N

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Policy brief

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Introduction

This document presents key findings and recommendations from five Horizon Europe projects that have been working on advancing gender equality in agriculture and rural areas. There is no single pathway to achieving gender equality; each project adopts a distinct approach to understanding and addressing the challenges faced by women and gender-diverse individuals working in agriculture or living in rural communities. Despite their differences, the projects have collaborated to offer a shared perspective on the issue and propose actionable solutions.

- **FLIARA** (female-led innovation in agriculture and rural areas) employs a combination of future foresight techniques, case studies, network-building through a community of practice (CoP) and a campaign of visibility to highlight the role of women as key innovation actors. This approach identifies rural and farm women-led innovation pathways and develops policy recommendations accordingly. Through the CoP and the broader campaign of visibility, innovation ambassadors are both spotlighted and connected, fostering collaboration and amplifying their impact.
- **GRASS CEILING** (gender equality in rural and agricultural innovation systems) identified gaps in existing data on women, benchmarked rural and agriculture policies to assess how effectively they address gender equality, conducted forecasts about what will make the future better and created an enabling environment where women lead socio-ecological transitions by developing innovative responses to social and environmental challenges, thereby strengthening the resilience of rural communities.
- **SWIFT** (supporting women-led innovations in farming and rural territories) uses feminist participatory action research methodologies to promote human-rights-based approaches in agri-food systems. Based on collective action and social innovation approaches to face structural inequalities, the project explores how women and other social groups in a situation of marginalisation can develop initiatives that have the potential to foster gender equality and transform the agricultural sector towards agroecology and food sovereignty.
- **CODECS** (maximising the co-benefits of agricultural digitalisation through conducive digital ecosystems) addresses the distribution of costs and benefits of digitalisation among different social groups. This includes the impact of digital transformation on women's position in the labour markets of agriculture, forestry and rural areas; their participation in decision-making processes regarding digital transformation; and their role as consumers and producers of digital technologies.
- **Quantifarm** promotes digital agriculture approaches that are holistic, inclusive and human-centred. Thus, a key theme in the project is to research the adoption of digital agricultural solutions from a gender perspective, ensuring forthcoming results reflect and respect gender differences.

Together, these projects provide a comprehensive analysis of gender-related challenges in rural and agricultural contexts and offer practical solutions to address them, contributing to a more inclusive and resilient future for all.





Chapter 1. Why gender equality matters in agriculture and rural areas

The Treaty of Rome, signed in 1957, established the principle of equal pay for men and women as a foundational element of the European Economic Community, now the European Union (EU). Since then, the European Commission has made steady progress in promoting gender equality, notably through the gender equality strategy 2020–2025 and the recent adoption of the roadmap for women’s rights in March 2025.

Gender equality in agriculture and rural areas is vital not only for advancing social justice and fulfilling political and international commitments – such as those outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants – but also for enhancing food security and promoting sustainable development.

However, agriculture and rural development policies remain areas where the EU has not achieved equality goals yet. For example, Grass ceiling and Swift find evident disparities in farm ownership, access to land and subsidies (e.g. direct payments under pillar 1 of the common agricultural policy (CAP) that are area-based), training opportunities and representation in decision-

making bodies (Shortall and Marangudakis 2022 ¹; Prendergast et al. 2023 ²; Diamanti et al. 2024) ³.

Moreover, Swift highlights that policies aimed at promoting gender equality and non-discrimination often fail to account for the unique challenges faced by women and gender-diverse people in rural areas. This oversight perpetuates structural inequalities and undermines the effective implementation of equality guarantees (Diamanti et al. 2024).

Fliara evidence points to a further example. Empowering women and promoting gender equality are therefore essential not only for achieving economic and social objectives but also for realising key European strategies, such as the long-term vision for rural areas and the vision for agriculture and food, as argued by Farrell et al. (2024).

- 1 Shortall, S. and Marangudakis, V. (2022), 'Is agriculture an occupation or a sector? Gender inequalities in a European context', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 62, No 4, pp. 673–781, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/soru.12400>.
- 2 Prendergast, M., Shortall, S., Bock, B., Matera V. C., Hopkins, K. et al. (2023), 'Policy brief on the available data on rural women and women farmers across Europe', Grass ceiling deliverable 1.1, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/15iiSY77fedVOnbeeSZwoASODMqpfoXCS/view>.
- 3 Diamanti, G., van Santen, M. and Duncan, J. (2024), 'Uncovering the effects of the Common Agricultural Policy (2023–2027) on women', Swift deliverable 5.3, <https://edepot.wur.nl/650817>.

Furthermore, women represent half of the population and 30 % of the agricultural workforce in Europe. Their contribution to agriculture is essential, yet often invisible. Thus, women are not a minority, but strong actors in sustaining the farming sector.

1.1. A key driver of rural sustainability and nature-inclusive production methods

Evidence gathered by the Grass ceiling, Fliara and Swift projects highlights the crucial role of women in shaping sustainable rural futures.

According to the Grass ceiling project, women play a key role in developing progressive agricultural practices through their innovative engagement in farming. While they may not be the owner of the farm, they are emerging as new and dynamic farmers who not only contribute to food security and quality but also support the regeneration of the environment.

Grass ceiling highlights the diverse ecological innovations women are undertaking on farms and in rural areas. These range from organic produce from the farm, using what would otherwise be seen as waste materials from the farm, to production for regional markets and to development of sustainable rural tourism initiatives. Women's activities advance biodiversity and shorten the food chain, minimising climate damage. In other words, they are at the forefront of agroecological innovations..

1.2. A source of farm and rural society attractivity

Gendered education teaches women the values of care: caring for people, animals and natural cycles. It also keeps them away from masculine social norms and from being considered as 'the head of the farm'. All these factors enable women to advocate for alternative agroecological agricultural systems, which are respectful of all living things. Unfortunately, it also gives them less access to formal agricultural education and training, preventing them from adopting some sustainable agricultural practices (Diamanti et al. 2024; Henrotte S. 2024) and in some countries, from getting CAP subsidies where formal agricultural training is a condition for eligibility (Swift deliverable from policy dialogues).

Complementing this, findings from Fliara highlight that women-led innovations often result in businesses that align with the scale and character of existing small family farms. Promoting gender equality and supporting women-led innovation in rural and agricultural settings is therefore crucial to sustain and adapt the family farm model to meet contemporary challenges.

Finally, the feminist and agroecological approach adopted by the Swift project demonstrated that inclusive socioeconomic and political life in rural areas depends on recognising, redistributing and valuing the caring and reproductive work carried out by all community members. This work is essential to sustaining human well-being and sustainability and reveals the potential for a more equitable and resilient rural societal model.

1.3. A catalyst for diverse rural innovations

Gender equality is key to unlocking the full potential of rural innovation. The Swift project demonstrates how women, gender-diverse people and migrant agricultural workers are already driving social innovations in response to the structural barriers they face, such as unequal access to land, limited participation in farmer organisations, inadequate social protection (Franić, R. & Kovačićek T. 2019), poor working conditions (especially for migrant women ⁴), and restricted access to training.

Fliara's future foresight research shows that while women have significant potential to lead environmental and social innovations, they continue to face substantial obstacles in contributing to economic, technological and political innovation (Kuhmonen and Tembo, 2024). Promoting gender equality is therefore essential not only to remove these barriers, but also to enable women to become central actors in rural and agricultural renewal, sustainability and resilience.

⁴ European Parliament: Policy Department for Citizens' Rights and Constitutional Affairs, Palumbo, L. and Sciarba, A. (2018), 'The vulnerability to exploitation of women migrant workers in agriculture in the EU: the need for a Human Rights and Gender based approach', PE 604.966, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604966/IPOL_STU\(2018\)604966_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2018/604966/IPOL_STU(2018)604966_EN.pdf).



Chapter 2. Innovations led by women and gender diverse persons in agriculture and rural areas

Innovations led by women and gender-diverse people in agriculture and rural areas can play a crucial role in social, economic, political, cultural and environmental transformation. Projects have explored innovations from a variety of perspectives, using both qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the breadth and depth of these innovations.

The Fliara project approached the study of women-led innovation through a dual lens, examining both the current landscape and future possibilities. While Fliara's contribution is based on qualitative research, including 20 case studies involving 200 women-led innovations from 10 countries, it also explores the role of women in the innovations required for sustainable rural and farm futures. Fliara's future foresight research found that many kinds of innovations are needed to overcome sustainability challenges, along with gender-sensitive design of policy measures to work towards overcoming these problems. The women featured in these case studies are leaders of innovations that span the four pillars of sustainability (economic, social, environmental and cultural) and are situated in diverse rural settings, from remote areas to villages near cities. The findings highlight the diversity and dynamism of women-led

rural and farm innovations, which vary in scale, longevity and focus. Fliara case studies also showed that women-led innovations often follow different development paths; some grow more gradually and may not pursue growth in the traditional economic sense. Instead, these innovations frequently prioritise social, environmental and cultural impacts rather than singular upward economic growth.

Among the innovations identified via the Fliara project there are multifunctional farming projects involving agritourism, food production or care-based services such as a farm-based kindergarten or animal-assisted therapy. The valorisation of local resources and cultural heritage is also a basis for innovation such as niche food or wool products.

The Grass ceiling project emphasises the central role of women in driving socio-ecological transitions. Women are diversifying traditional farming, adopting sustainable land use practices and creating niche and lifestyle products. These innovations are primarily documented through qualitative studies, as there is a lack of comprehensive gender-disaggregated quantitative data at the national level at present ((Kovačiček et al. 2023)



www.grassceiling.eu)⁵. The types of innovations women develop are strongly influenced by local context, access to resources and cultural traditions. For example, women in Ireland and Norway are innovating food production, while in Scotland, small-scale holdings are prevalent. Italian women often focus on agroecology and in Croatia, there is a strong emphasis on preserving traditional textile production. Women innovators frequently favour short supply chains and community-focused sales channels, such as the introduction of milk vending machines in Ireland and the Netherlands. These examples illustrate how women combine multifunctional farming with social innovation to create resilient business models.

The Swift project focuses on social innovation as a catalyst for structural change toward gender equality in agriculture and rural areas. It maps the various organisational forms these innovations can take, their political agendas and the networks they have developed. Swift engages with 21 innovations organised into 7 clusters: social security, access to means of production, participation in agricultural organisations, access to training, working and living conditions of migrant women farmworkers, mutual support (against isolation in highly masculinised sectors, by organising collective workdays, or by providing a safe space for LGBTIQ+ farmers). In

addition, Swift works with networks from Central and Eastern Europe connecting agroecological farmers and consumers in Member States. The cooperation of women farmers in these regions is not very strong, which is due to the still vivid experiences of communism and low social trust. Furthermore, Swift is working with innovations from outside the EU to share experiences.

Complementing these findings, the Quantifarm project provides qualitative insights into how women approach digital innovation in agriculture. The project's gender-focused deep dives reveal that women tend to adopt a more holistic and future-oriented view when evaluating digital farming technologies. This perspective aligns with the broader trend identified in Fliara, where women's innovations are often rooted in a desire to balance productivity with sustainability and community well-being.

Together, these projects demonstrate that women and gender-diverse people are not only innovating through on- and off-farm economic activities and technological advances, but are also shaping the social, cultural and political landscapes of rural Europe. Their work is characterised by adaptability, mutual support, a strong connection to local communities and traditions and a commitment to holistic sustainability.

5 Kovačiček T., Bokan, N. and Franić, R. (2023), 'Report on existing knowledge of rural women-led innovations', Grass ceiling deliverable 2.1, https://nicre.co.uk/media/hi2b1wsy/deliverable-d2-1_report-on-existing-knowledge-of-rural-women-led-innovation.pdf.

Chapter 3. Challenges to achieving gender equality

3.1. The EU's common agricultural policy and national legislation

One of the key challenges to advancing gender equality in agriculture and rural areas has been the absence of a strong policy commitment. The CAP, as the EU's main instrument for agricultural and rural development, historically overlooked gender inequality. It was only in the current programming period (2023–2027) that gender equality was explicitly addressed, through the specific objective 'to promote employment, growth, gender equality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry'. However, some challenges remain. As CAP funds are implemented under shared management, actions are defined and implemented by Member States in their CAP strategic plans.

Findings from Grass ceiling highlight that this approach presents challenges in practice, as addressing gender equality is not mandatory and there are no consequences or sanctions for Member States that choose to ignore it (Shortall et al. 2025). Previous research found that some managing authorities stated they would seriously address gender equality if the legislation made it mandatory to do so (Shortall & Marandugakis 2024) ⁶.

Despite the progress made by approving Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 on CAP strategic plans, little has been advanced yet and these projects collectively highlight the need for pushing the Member States to collect and provide more gender-disaggregated data ⁷, as a means for enabling social and economic policy frameworks and inclusive networks, agricultural organisations and governance institutions to take into account inequalities and hence move towards the equal rights of women and gender-diverse innovators in agriculture and rural development.

While some CAP strategic plans include specific targets for women, the overall content of these documents

often overlooks gender equality. In Ireland, for example, women farmers are theoretically eligible for a higher grant rate (60 %) under the targeted agriculture modernisation scheme, compared with the standard 40 %. However, access to this rate is conditional on the herd being registered in the woman's name, which is rarely the case in practice, rendering many women ineligible. This requirement could be revised: for example, funds could be made available to any member of the farm, allowing for a higher take-up by women. Another option is to encourage national governments to allow for partnerships in farm holding with equal access to funding. Targeted measures are needed to address the obstacles faced by women new entrants. In fact, this measure risks overlooking the fact that women face substantially more barriers to inheritance and succession than men, and policy interventions are needed at the European and national levels to remove these obstacles (Shortall et al. 2025).

FLIARA also advocates for increased measures to promote gender equality in the CAP (Farrell et al. 2025). Measures identified by FLIARA and Grass Ceiling projects include better recognition of and support for women-led innovative activities in areas where they are dominant, for example organic farming, smaller scale extensive farming, short supply chains and agritourism. It is, however, crucial not to limit the recognition of women's roles in diversification. To achieve gender equality in agriculture, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of women in primary production and support their access to all funding (Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies, Grass ceiling deliverable 4.2 (www.grassceiling.eu)). Given the current regulations of funds, this requires formalising women's positions in farm holdings as co-managers and co-holders if they are not the sole holder of the farm (Shortall et al. 2025).

Moreover, the Swift project highlights that area-based direct payments, which account for around 70 % of the total CAP budget, disadvantage smaller farms, which have the potential to contribute to agroecological and food sovereignty transitions. This disproportionately discriminates against women, who are more likely to manage smaller farms and therefore receive fewer subsidies. A different design of direct payments could reduce indirect discrimination.

⁶ Shortall, S. and Marandugakis, V. (2024), 'Power and culture: Understanding EU policies on agriculture and gender equality', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 64, Issue 2, pp. 307–324, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/soru.12475>; European Court of Auditors (2021), Gender mainstreaming in the EU budget: time to turn words into action – Special report 10/2021, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/eca/special-reports/gender-10-2021/en/>.

⁷ Diamanti, G., van Santen, M. and Duncan, J. (2024), 'Uncovering the effects of the Common Agricultural Policy (2023–2027) on women', Swift deliverable 5.3, <https://edepot.wur.nl/650817>.

Often, indirect discrimination happens against women and gender-diverse people, as interventions do not take into account structural inequalities that prevent women to be selected as beneficiaries. Furthermore, specific spaces for women need to be created and recognised without excluding them from the mainstream. The CAP and the resulting National Strategic Plans have the potential to support technical trainings for women while taking gender inequalities into account in all its interventions and requiring gender balance in all decision bodies linked to the CAP.

Suggestions include moving away from the logic of granting payments based solely on the surface area of farms (as is often the case in the first pillar) and supporting good practices within sustainable and fair agroecosystems – in progressive ways (i.e. whoever complies the most, receives more) within a view of transition. For example, introducing strong(er) degressivity and a strong(er) capping on all CAP payments per active farmer and per farm; strengthening support for the first hectares via strong redistributive payments; and providing second pillar supports for small investments and share of machinery.

Furthermore, fair prices should be provided. To achieve this, the Common Market Organisation (CMO) regulation would need to be revised, and public supply management and public stockholding enabled, in order to guarantee fair prices, agroecological transition and resilience to crisis that support the right to food in compliance with advances of gender perspective in policy.

Additionally, while the introduction of social conditionality in the CAP is a positive step, linking payments to compliance with EU labour standards, it does not include an explicit gender component yet and an assessment of the effectiveness of this potential development would require further investigation.

The social conditionality mechanism is a link between the respect by an individual farmer for rules under the labour legislation and the individual CAP payments they receive. In the fruit and vegetable sector, where many migrant women work, the support is largely granted collectively through operational programmes. The mechanism of social conditionality therefore cannot cover these collective payments.

3.2. Education and networks

The Swift project highlighted that educational offerings and curricula in agricultural training programmes can also perpetuate and reinforce gendered inequalities in farming. Gender stereotypes in agricultural training programmes are frequently reflected in the attitudes of parents and teachers that push girls towards activities relating to social reproduction and boys into more highly valued technical specialisations. This gender segregation in education and training has consequences for the professional recognition of women's qualifications in farm management.

Similarly, Codecs concludes that girls and women are underrepresented in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) education, limiting their participation in high-tech sectors.

Grass ceiling notes that women sometimes prefer women-only education. This can be an effective way to engage rural and farm women and equip them with the tools needed to advance their innovations or enterprises. However, when such initiatives persist, they are often perceived as marginal 'women's group' activities that exist on the fringes of mainstream farming and rural development. This perception can inadvertently sideline women rather than integrate them. Grass ceiling also found similar issues with women-only networks and micro-finance schemes, with countries like Norway and Sweden expressing reluctance to support women-only initiatives for fear of reinforcing segregation. Resolving this dilemma remains a complex challenge (Bock et al. 2023).

Fliara case studies show that the availability of and engagement with networks was a key aspect underpinning successful women-led innovation. Fliara foresight research also finds that networks are a place for peer learning and as such they are part of women's strength when it comes to contributing to sustainability innovations. Networks also emerged as key to supporting women's increased contribution to sustainability innovations. Further to this, the Fliara CoP Network that sits at the core of the Fliara project provides a key space shaping how Fliara develops policy proposals. The Fliara CoP Network provides a model for how we can work towards changing the existing norms around rural and farm innovation as well as improve women's influence in decision-making. The Swift project also finds the central role of community building and networks in supporting women-led innovations.

3.3. Social and cultural norms

Fliara underscores the importance of addressing the 'push' factors that discourage women from engaging in farming and rural life. Limited access to childcare, eldercare, public services and community facilities can significantly hinder women's participation in economic and social activities, as they often remain the primary caregivers due to prevailing social and cultural norms. These are among the issues highlighted in Fliara case studies (Sivini et al. 2024)

Grass ceiling also highlights that regulations on paternity/maternity leave vary across Europe, posing challenges for rural women in some countries as they may not be adequately safeguarded financially during this period. Sweden is an example of best practice where childcare is most equal due to their progressive parental leave. Further research is recommended on this topic.

Codecs highlights that social expectations and stereotypes can discourage women from engaging in male-dominated tech-related fields or using digital tools confidently and that rural women are underrepresented as users, designers, or decision-makers in digital agricultural platforms or smart farming systems.

Swift flags that the gender of a child already differentiates their access to various tools and opportunities. On family farms, boys tend to be seen more as potential successors while girls are pushed towards jobs linked to reproductive activities. In turn, women are less likely to inherit their family farms. Women also have less access to credit, land and training. They tend to manage smaller farms because of these barriers. Furthermore, the differentiated socialisation of boys and girls leads to a gendered allocation of tasks and often a double or triple day for women. Indeed, they perform (often unpaid) productive (working on the farm), reproductive (taking care of the household) and community (creating and sustaining communities) works⁸. There is a need to advocate for a better/less gendered repartition of tasks (e.g. through awareness-raising) while valuing those reproductive tasks, essential for the viability of the farms yet invisible and not recognised. Future CAP indicators should support some of those tasks in their evaluation and fostering of farm's viability.

⁸ Legein, L. (2025), 'How to get the CAP to rhyme with gender equity?', Swift deliverable 5.2, https://swiftproject.eu/files/2025/07/D5.2_GRB_How_to_Manual_SWIFT_Final_20250130_EN.pdf.



Chapter 4. The role of digitalisation in addressing challenges and seizing opportunities for women and gender-diverse entrepreneurs and innovators

Digital technologies are emerging as critical instruments to address gender-specific challenges in agriculture, particularly those faced by women in rural and agrifood sectors. A comparative analysis of digital tool typologies and European case studies by the Codecs project reveals how innovation is helping to overcome barriers relating to access to resources, market participation and information.

These challenges include time and labour constraints, limited access to timely and reliable information, difficulties with entering markets and accessing advisory services, and the impact of social norms that often translate into low digital confidence among women.

Digital tools, ranging from agronomic decision-making systems and data monitoring platforms to market access services and empowerment networks, are being deployed to address these issues. For instance, precision irrigation in Spain, AI-driven irrigation advice in Hungary and e-commerce innovations in Slovenia demonstrate how digital solutions that are women-centric in their development can enhance productivity, economic viability and community resilience. At the EU level, platforms like WEgate⁹ provide women entrepreneurs with access to training, funding and peer support, tackling multiple layers of disadvantage.

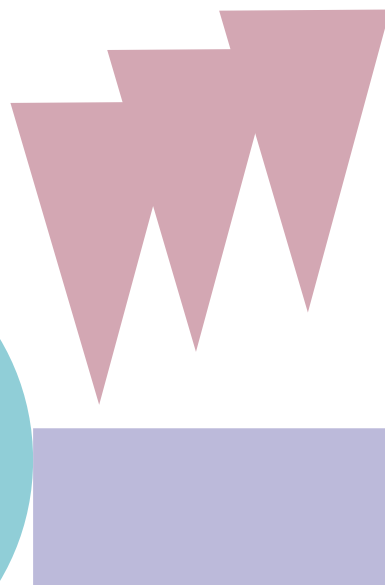
Moreover, the Fliara and Grass ceiling projects point out that issues for equitable innovation expand beyond skills. Investment in rural broadband is a crucial prerequisite and, where broadband has opened access, advanced technologies can also come with high costs. There is room for specialised, yet flexible funding that can be aligned to local needs, supporting women-leading rural and farm innovations to apply digital technology.

Insights from the Quantifarm project underscore the notion that the digital transformation of agriculture is not gender-neutral. In relation to the earlier-mentioned social norms, Quantifarm also found that a gendered confidence gap persists in the uptake of digital technologies, rooted in traditional role divisions and differing learning styles between men and women. This is even more remarkable given that, in both Quantifarm

and Grass ceiling, it was found that women comfortably work with digital farm administration, sometimes even finding in parallel that the men on the farm find digitalisation more challenging. These disparities risk reinforcing existing inequalities if not proactively addressed.

Quantifarm research also highlights that women often bring a more visionary, sustainability-focused perspective to farming – which can be explained by gendered education according to findings from Swift. This makes their inclusion in digitalisation efforts not only a matter of equity, but also a strategic advantage for the sector's long-term sustainability. Ensuring that digital tools and training are accessible, inclusive and responsive to diverse needs is thus essential. When paired with inclusive policies and capacity-building strategies, digital innovation can become a powerful lever for enhancing the agency, productivity and resilience of women in agriculture, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and sustainable farming future.

9 WEgate, <https://www.wegate.eu/>.





Chapter 5. Solutions and opportunities to advance gender equality

Policy fundamentals: addressing structural inequalities

The agricultural sector needs to be fundamentally transformed. It is an occupation where women rarely own land, and their work on the farm, if they marry into the enterprise, is not properly reported. To make the agricultural sector more inclusive, measures to support farmers should not be based only on the sole-holder of the farm.

5.1. Policy fundamentals: a dual approach – special measures and mainstreaming

The European gender equality strategy calls for the use of two tools to advance equality: special measures for women and ensuring that the needs of women are mainstreamed.

Grass ceiling points to the fact that implementing this dual approach in relation to support for rural

women's entrepreneurial activities would provide a real opportunity for women to develop. At present there are occasional special provisions for women, but these are not integrated into the mainstream and provisions for women are often seen as marginal or suggest that women have diminished capacity¹⁰. One special provision regards women-only training, which may, for instance, be offered to support women's development as entrepreneurs (Bock et al. 2023). The problem is that offering such trainings only to women presupposes that it is mainly women who lack such capacity, which reproduces discriminatory images of women farmers. At the same time, women value women-only training also because it offers a safe learning space for women.

The Swift project highlights how this is addressed in the CAP. Spain is the first country to proactively integrate CAP specific support for women farmers through an increase of direct payments: an additional 15 % is foreseen for female farm owners (or co-owners) applying for the Complementary Income Support for Young Farmers. However, there is still room for improvement, as Spanish

¹⁰ Shortall, S. and Marangudakis, V. (2024), 'Power and culture: Understanding EU policies on agriculture and gender equality', *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. 64, Issue 2, pp. 307–324, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/soru.12475>.

female farmers have warned that this top-up remains disadvantageous to them because it is area-based and they tend to manage smaller farms, so the extra amount received is very low.

Furthermore, specific spaces for women need to be created and recognised without excluding them from the mainstream. The CAP and the resulting national strategic plans have the potential to support technical training for women while taking gender inequalities into account in all its interventions, and requiring gender balance in all decision bodies linked to the CAP.

Fliara points to two wider areas where specific actions in favour of women appear to be key: access to finance and access to networks. Firstly, improving the support system for women-led innovation calls for innovative funding and access to finance measures that support business models of different sizes, goals and at different development stages, including and beyond the start-up phase. It is also key to addressing issues within current funding measures, such as restrictions caused by co-financing, eligibility criteria, complex application processes and funding timescales. In addition, the Swift project highlighted that small and second-hand investments for farmers should be supported.

Networks are important during women-led innovation start-up and more mature stages of development. The benefits of networks and networking include access to information, building skills and connecting with potential mentors. Being part of a diverse range of networks, along with opportunities to network at the local, regional, national and international levels, is important.

5.2. Target policy action towards areas of opportunity

To better support gender balance in rural and farm innovation, it appears important to support key areas of opportunity where women have strong potential, which could include the following.

Focus more strongly on the multifunctional potential within farming.

Fliara case studies illustrate how women-led rural and farm innovation capitalises on the multifunctional potential within farming and wider diversification of the rural economy. Developing multi-functionality and diversification provides an opportunity to link farming into other aspects and needs of the rural economy. Short

food supply chains, social farming, green care, ecotourism, farm-based childcare services, environmental education and heritage-based projects are opportunities, along with embracing more novel trends such as those provided by digitalisation and the circular economy.

However, a Swift study warns that presenting women as non-agricultural rural entrepreneurs marginalises them from agriculture, maintaining male privilege of authority over agricultural spaces.

Reward the social community-building work of women.

Grass ceiling found that women in remote rural areas often provide the community infrastructure needed for robust and integrated communities. They develop community cafes, community libraries, social housing, childcare and community shops. They do so as social enterprises, and these are not financially rewarded or recognised as 'work'. There is an opportunity to recognise and remunerate women for building this infrastructure in remote regions where the commercial sector does not operate. This echoes Swift's findings that women often work a 'triple day'.

5.3. Improve capacities: better skills and knowledge

Improve access to training on gender issues:

The Swift project shows that training on gender equality could be offered to civil servants working on the CAP, lawyers and public notaries involved in land inheritance cases, along with academics and teachers in charge of agriculture education programmes.

Fix the data problem of not knowing:

Grass ceiling notes that in Europe, we continue to have limited data on the number of farm businesses that are owned as partnerships that include women. There is limited data on the role of women in the business and their decision-making role. The system of having a sole holder provides a misleading understanding of who works on farms and has a career in agriculture (Predergast et al. 2025). Grass ceiling has found this to be the case for women. Eurostat and the national statistical offices need to consider how to address this persistent problem.



Furthermore, Swift highlighted that better access is needed for gender-disaggregated data on CAP beneficiaries ¹¹.

5.4. Introduce new obligations in EU and Member State budgets

Advocate to make gender-responsive budgeting (GRB) compulsory for all EU funds, including the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

The Swift project notes how inspiration could be drawn from Regulation (EU) 2021/1060, requiring Member States and the European Commission to apply gender mainstreaming to the programmes under eight EU funds (the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development are covered by Regulations (EU) 2021/2115 and broaden it to oblige Member States to apply it to their budgets. Efficient GRB processes must be implemented throughout the whole budget cycle (design, approval, implementation, monitoring) and go further than legal frameworks to actually integrate feedback into policies.

Apply GRB to Member State budgets:

Austria is a good example of how GRB can be implemented in Member States. In Austria, GRB has been enshrined in the constitution, and budget management has been reformed to become outcome-oriented. All Federal Ministries and the highest national bodies (Parliament, Constitutional Court, etc.) are obliged to define a maximum of five outcome objectives for the annual budget. One of these objectives must be related to gender equality. They must also define specific measures for achieving the objective related to gender equality and appropriate indicators to evaluate its results. In 2022, it focused on secondary agricultural and forestry schools, where the gender ratio of students is unbalanced when it comes to specialisations.

Furthermore, implementing GRB at the local level helps people become more familiar with the approach and tackle inequalities at every level.

Better collaboration across funds:

The diverse challenges identified in Fliara case studies call for policy innovation and to develop novel mechanisms to encourage collaboration across funds. The issues go beyond the remit of the CAP. There is a need for stronger mechanisms that enable and encourage addressing gender equality issues in rural areas and farming in the CAP but also in tandem with other European and national policies.

¹¹ Legein, L. (2025), 'How to get the CAP to rhyme with gender equity?', Swift deliverable 5.2, https://swiftproject.eu/files/2025/07/D5.2_GRB_How_to_Manual_SWIFT_Final_20250130_EN.pdf.

Chapter 6. Policy recommendations

A participatory and transformative policy framework is needed to address the multiple barriers faced by women and gender-diverse people in agriculture and rural areas, while also making these sectors more attractive, especially for young people. Drawing on the collective insights and recommendations from Fliara, Grass ceiling, Swift, Codecs and Quantifarm, the following policy recommendations are proposed.

6.1. Mainstream gender equality and targeted support

Implement a dual approach to gender equality.

Adopt both special measures (such as women-only training and entrepreneurship support) and mainstream gender equality in all rural and agricultural policies. This ensures that gender-specific interventions are valued and integrated, rather than marginalised, creating real opportunities for women's development and leadership.

Strengthen data collection and representation.

Revise data systems (such as Eurostat) to provide accurate, gender-disaggregated information on farm ownership, partnerships and women's roles in decision-making. Improved data will enable better policy targeting and recognition of women's contributions, particularly in business and innovation.

Recognize and reward community-building work.

Develop mechanisms to formally recognise and remunerate women's work in building community infrastructure, such as social enterprises, childcare and local services, which are essential for resilient rural communities but often go unrewarded.



6.2. Foster innovation and leadership

Promote multifunctional and locally-led innovation.

Support policies that recognise the multifunctional role of farming and rural entrepreneurship. Expand locally-led initiatives (such as LEADER and the EU CAP network EIP-AGRI) to enhance women's roles in driving competitiveness and resilience in rural economies. At the same time, develop a holistic approach to address the barriers that prevent women from leading farms in all types of contexts.

Enhance women's role in knowledge and innovation systems.

Strengthen women's participation in Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems (AKIS) and related platforms (e.g. women in farming platform), building capacity for women-led innovation and ensuring their contributions to environmental, social and economic sustainability are recognised and supported.

Promote role models tackling gender stereotypes.

Produce and disseminate practical guides and policy briefs, at the national and EU levels, highlighting good practices and successful interventions from women-led innovations to inspire and support current and future generations of women innovators. Also support initiatives questioning masculine social norms.

6.3. Reform policy and funding mechanisms

Conduct gender analysis and human rights impact assessments.

Systematically analyse structural inequalities in access to CAP subsidies and integrate these findings into all stages of CAP and rural development interventions (design, implementation and monitoring). Carry out human rights impact assessments and use rights-based indicators to ensure policies actively confront and redress direct and indirect forms of gender discrimination. Indeed, if structural inequalities are not identified and recognised, CAP interventions do not integrate them.

Expand the CAP social conditionality.

Strengthen the CAP social conditionality provisions to cover all sectors, including fruit and vegetables, and establish an independent observatory to monitor compliance and better protect the rights of agricultural workers, especially seasonal, migrant and gender-diverse people.

Support small and medium agroecological farms.

There is a need to move from an 'add-on gender and stir' approach towards one that fosters sustainable transition including gender. It is thus necessary to provide targeted, labour-based support that acknowledges care work, introduce payment caps and redistributive payments favouring smaller farms and revise market regulations to ensure fair prices.

6.4. Leverage digitalization and technologies for gender equality

Prioritise women in technology development.

Fund technology solutions designed with women as the primary users, ensuring that digital tools address their specific needs and enhance their roles in farm management and innovation.

Integrate digital skills in gender equality programs.

Systematically include digital literacy and technology access in gender equality initiatives, empowering women to adopt and benefit from digital agriculture.

Tailor training and promote female entrepreneurship in agritech.

Facilitate training that matches female's needs and highlight female entrepreneurship through dedicated events and storytelling, making digital agritech more accessible and appealing to women and young women.

6.5. Make agriculture and rural areas attractive for young women and gender-diverse people

To attract and retain young women and gender-diverse people in agriculture and rural areas, policies should combine targeted support for rural women's and peasant feminist organisations, specific educational programmes and inclusive forms of digital innovation. Policy measures at different level of governance should aim at addressing structural gender inequalities, in particular in relation to access to land, decent work, social security, technologies, fair market prices, direct payments and gender stereotypes. Moreover, policies should facilitate the creation of supportive political and educational networks, and increase access to social support and counselling services which provide gender-sensitive advice.



About the projects

The five projects that have contributed to developing this policy brief resulted from the Horizon Europe topics [HORIZON-CL6-2022-COMMUNITIES-01-01 – Boosting women-led innovation in farming and rural areas](#) and [HORIZON-CL6-2021-GOVERNANCE-01-22 – Assessing the impacts of digital technologies in agriculture – cost, benefits and potential for sustainability gains](#).



Start date: 1 January 2023

End date: 31 December 2025

EU Contribution: EUR 3 million

Links: [CORDIS](#), [FLIARA Website](#)

The **Fliara (female-led innovation in agriculture and rural areas)** project is dedicated to driving change by empowering women-led innovation in rural areas and on farms. Despite their vital contributions, women have historically been underrepresented and undervalued in these spaces. Fliara addresses this gap by increasing the visibility and recognition of women's roles in shaping innovation across European farming and rural communities. The project also works to deepen understanding of the specific challenges women face and to provide policy recommendations to better support their needs and contributions. Fliara combines futures and case study methods, alongside network building, as well as policy assessment to build benchmarking guidelines. Foresight research identifies visions for sustainable farm and rural futures and the sustainability innovations needed to realise these visions. The case-studies investigate women-led innovation pathways in the innovation ecosystem.



Start date: 1 January 2023

End date: 31 December 2025

EU contribution: EUR 3 million

Links: [CORDIS](#), [Grass ceiling website](#)

Grass ceiling (gender equality in rural and agricultural innovation systems) is creating a dynamic forum where women lead socio-ecological transitions to tackle pressing social and environmental challenges, while also strengthening the resilience of rural areas. The project has examined existing data, benchmarking European rural and agricultural documents at the EU and national levels, gender norms, legislation, policies and socio-political frameworks to understand the factors that support or hinder gender equality.

At the core of the project are nine living labs: collaborative spaces where women can learn, connect and thrive as innovators, and researchers and policy officials learn how to support their innovations. An unexpected but powerful outcome is that stakeholder organisations report enhanced effectiveness in advocating for women innovators at the national level, thanks to the collaborative nature of the project.



Start date: 1 January 2023

End date: 31 December 2026

EU contribution: EUR 3 million

Links: [CORDIS](#), [Swift website](#)

SWIFT (Supporting Women-Led Innovations in Farming and Rural Territories) emerged in response to the demands of peasant feminist social movements. Its aim is to address the needs of women and gender-diverse people in farming and to explore how agroecological practices can advance gender equality.

Swift collaborates with 21 women-led initiatives across 12 European countries and 5 initiatives in Brazil and the United States. The project employs feminist participatory action research and human-rights-based methodologies to co-construct and support the political demands of women and gender-diverse people in European farming.



Start date: 1 October 2022

End date: 30 September 2026

EU contribution: EUR 7 million

Links: [CORDIS](#), [Codecs website](#)

CODECS (maximising the co-benefits of agricultural digitalisation through conducive digital ecosystems) gathers 33 partners from all around Europe and is co-developing, together with farmers and AKIS actors, user-friendly approaches, methods and tools able to document the co-benefits and costs of technologies applied to real contexts. In this way, it improves the collective capacity to understand, assess and foresee the full range of benefits and costs of farm digitalisation and build digital ecosystems that maximise the net benefits of digitalisation. Ultimately, Codecs advances the vision of 'sustainable digitalisation', contributing to a multi-level transition that links social, economic and ecological aspects by adopting an innovative system-based / actor-centred approach involving the coordination of 21 Living Labs through interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary teams.



Start date: 1 July 2022

End date: 31 March 2026

EU contribution: EUR 7 million

Links: [CORDIS](#), [Quantifarm website](#)

Quantifarm supports the widespread adoption of digital agricultural technologies as crucial tools for improving both the sustainability and competitiveness of the agricultural sector. To this end, Quantifarm introduces a comprehensive assessment framework for independent qualitative and quantitative assessments of the multiple costs and benefits of digital agriculture technology solutions. The project aims at ensuring replicability and uptake of digital technology solutions by deploying innovative tools, services and recommendations, and making them relevant and of practical use to farmers, advisors and policymakers across Europe. Quantifarm is building the project activities around 30 test cases which span over 20 countries in 10 biogeographical regions across Europe.

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