



GRASS CEILING

D6.8

Practice abstracts
batch n.1
European Union





Women's position in EU agriculture and rural areas: unveiling persistent gender gaps

10.1. Introduction

This practice abstract examines a critical yet often overlooked aspect of agriculture and rural areas in Europe – the role of women. It presents available data collected at the European Union (EU) level and within the individual countries participating in the GRASS CEILING project.

10.2. Key Statistical Findings

10.2.1. Women's legal position and ownership of capital in agriculture

The 2020 agricultural census shows that, over the past decade, the proportion of farms managed by women increased by 3.6 percentage points, with women managing 31.6 % of farms across the EU. However, these data conceal important differences between EU countries. The lowest shares of women-managed farms were found in the Netherlands (5.6 %), Germany, Malta, Denmark, and Finland (less than 11 %). In countries with the highest shares of women-managed farms, such as Lithuania (44.9 %) and Latvia (44.8 %), men-managed farms still dominate.

These figures do not necessarily reflect the actual empowerment of women. In some countries, the registration of farms under women managers was incentivised as a priority criterion for investment support under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). For example, in the Netherlands, women are only counted as managers if they are the sole farm head or hold the largest share of management rights, rendering many female co-farm heads invisible.

Available statistics reveal a significant gender gap in resource distribution. In the EU, women manage only 17.4 % of the total utilised agricultural land, with this proportion falling below 10 % in eight countries (including Sweden, Ireland, and Slovakia). On average, women-managed farms are half the size of men's and generate only 37.8 % of the standard output.

Challenges to gender equality have persisted. Over the past ten years, the rural income gap has remained unchanged, with a disparity of around 3.6 %. Moreover, 40 % of women farmers are aged

over 65 (compared to 33 % for men), while only 5 % are under 35.

10.2.2. Women's involvement in innovative initiatives

Women's participation in agricultural innovation is difficult to assess due to a lack of statistical data. Improved data collection would enhance the effectiveness of policies promoting women-led innovation in agriculture and rural areas. Gaps also exist regarding women's representation in cooperatives, farmers' unions, and start-ups, as well as their involvement in decision-making at both farm and policy levels.

Eurostat reports that the number of women-managed organic farms has increased 2.4 times over the last decade. However, women manage 26.9 % of organic farms compared to 31.6 % of conventional farms. In thirteen EU countries, the share of farms managed by women is higher in organic farming than in conventional farming, showcasing women's potential to drive socio-ecological innovations.

10.2.3. Gender dimension in strategic documents

While the CAP (2023–2027) includes gender equality as an objective, most National Strategic Plans give it limited attention. Exceptions include Italy, Spain, and Ireland, which offer gender-specific incentives such as higher grant rates and funding for women-only groups. The Netherlands supports female farmer networks and incorporates gender considerations in LEADER projects.

Despite these measures, gender-disaggregated data gaps hinder tailored policies. For instance, in Scotland, women receive only 8 % of CAP payments. Maternity and childcare policies vary across countries, often failing to provide adequate financial support for rural women. Specific measures for female farmers remain absent in many regions.

10.3. Conclusion

There is a critical lack of accurate, gender-disaggregated, and publicly accessible data on gender equality in the agricultural sector. Available data in GRASS CEILING countries are often limited to sporadic initiatives. Improved data collection is essential to inform policies that recognise and support women's contributions at all levels of the agricultural sector.

While significant data gaps exist, women's resilience and innovation in EU agriculture remain noteworthy. Achieving gender equality in the sector, however, will require considerable effort and targeted actions.

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Location: EU

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