



# GRASS CEILING

D6.8

Practice abstracts  
batch n.1  
Scotland



# Scotland

## Scotland's rural women: what the data does not show, and why these matters

### 8.1. Introduction

Women make a vital socio-economic contribution to Scotland's rural economy, notably but not exclusively within agriculture, including in crofting, a traditional form of smallholder farming in the Scottish Highlands and Islands. Qualitative evidence highlights the importance of rural women's work, yet there is a significant gap in relevant statistical data.

### 8.2. Key Statistical Findings

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

There is a notable absence of statistics specifically categorising 'rural women'. Data sources often fail to differentiate by gender or urban/rural context. The Annual Scottish Agriculture Census indicated that in 2021, there were 11,800 women owner-occupiers working on farms, representing 40 % of the total. However, as 'owner-occupier' includes spouses, only 7 % of these women own farms independently.

The 'Women in Farming and the Agriculture Sector' (2017) report highlights gender-specific obstacles that limit women's access to land and training. Additionally, leadership roles are limited; although women made up around half of the National Farmers Union (Scotland) staff, there had never been a female president or female representation on its national boards or regional committees. In contrast, the Scottish Crofting Federation (SCF) has shown more balanced representation, with three out of nine board members being women. Since 1985, SCF has had five female chairs and appointed its first female CEO in 2023. The 2019 Women in Agriculture Taskforce report outlined recommendations to overcome these barriers.

#### 8.2.2. Women's involvement in innovative initiatives

The 2017 'Women in Farming' report found that 29 % of respondents expressed interest in diversifying their farm businesses in the future, with higher interest among women crofters (38 %) and those raised on farms. This interest is reflected in Scottish Agritourism, where women make up 7 board members, 3 of 15 Destination Leaders, and two-thirds of its 300 members.

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Crofting has a strong tradition of diversification. The Scottish Government's 'Economic Condition of Crofting: 2019-2022' report noted that between 2014 and 2022, the proportion of female crofters increased from 13 % to 30 %. However, the report did not break down gender-specific data on activities such as biodiversity projects or woodland creation, leaving the proportion of women involved unknown. It did, however, show that 16 % of women crofters, compared to 11 % of men, ran bed and breakfast or holiday-let facilities.

The Social Enterprise Census demonstrated a rise in women-led social enterprises in Scotland, from 60 % in 2015 to 71 % in 2021. However, in rural areas, the proportion only slightly increased from 32 % to 33 %, and the intersection of these categories with gender is not available in the data.

### 8.2.3. Gender dimension in strategic documents

Scotland is not subject to CAP 2023–2027 due to Brexit, and government documents relating to the Basic Payment Scheme make no mention of gender considerations.

The Citizens' Summary for the UK European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (2021) highlighted that women in the sector receive less funding than men, attributing this to under-representation and lack of awareness of their roles. The 2022 Scottish Government literature review on 'Women in Scottish fisheries' confirmed that while women play a key role, their contributions remain under-reported and supported by insufficient data.

Regarding parental leave, female employees can take up to 52 weeks of leave, while male employees are entitled to only two weeks or up to 50 weeks of shared leave, with up to 37 weeks of pay. Self-employed women may claim a maternity allowance based on recent National Insurance contributions.

## 8.3. Conclusion

The absence of gender-specific, quantitative data impedes the recognition and support necessary for rural women to realise their full potential in the economy. A crucial step forward would be to adopt data collection methodologies that ensure comprehensive, gender-disaggregated information specific to 'rural women'.

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**More info:**

- <https://www.grassceiling.eu/results-resources/deliverables/>
  - <https://www.grassceiling.eu/living-labs/scotland/>
  - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/women-farming-agriculture-sector/documents/>
  - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/final-report-women-agriculture-taskforce>
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