



GRASS CEILING

D4.2

Synthesis report gender
benchmarking European and
national agricultural and rural
policies





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Summary

This report benchmarks the level of gender inclusivity and equality within four key policies in agriculture and rural development of the EU (CAP, Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA), the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy, and the European Green Deal) across nine EU Member States. The overarching goal is to understand if and how these policies support gender equality for women in various rural and agricultural sectors. Through this benchmarking exercise, each country has interpreted the above-mentioned EU policies against their own national contexts', and in synergy with other domains such as sustainability, digital transitioning and economic development.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Context, Issues, Structure, and Methodology	4
3. EU Policies overview: CAP, LTVRA, F2F and Green Deal	12
Specific lens on women	15
Training and education and the lack of women-focused programmes	19
Young farmers and new entrants to agriculture and businesses	20
Women and digital innovation	21
Climate change and gender equality	22
Critical aspects and shared obstacles in achieving gender equality in EU policies	23
4. CAP - National Overview	24
Context and Objectives of CAP	24
Overview of the Gender Dimension in CAP-Related Policies at the National Level	28
Overview of gender implications of interactions with other identified policies at national level: LTVRA, digital policies, AI, climate change	31
Critique, best practices and suggested next steps for policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality	36
5. LTVRA - National Overview	37
Context and objectives	37
Overview of the Gender Dimension in LTVRA-Related Policies	40
Overview of gender implications of interactions with other identified policies at national level: CAP, digital policies, AI, climate change	42
Critique, best practices and suggested next steps for policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality	44
6. Farm to Fork- National Overview	46
Context and Objectives	46
Overview of the Gender Dimension in F2F-Related Policies at the National Level	48
Overview of gender implications of interactions with other identified policies at national level: CAP, LTVRA, digital policies, AI, climate change	49
Critique, best practices and suggested next steps for policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality	51
7. Green Deal - National Overview	55
National Overview, Context and Objectives	55
Overview of the Gender Dimension in Green Deal-Related Policies at the National Level	58
Overview of gender implications of interactions with other identified policies at national level: LTVRA, digital policies, AI, climate change	65



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Critique, best practices and suggested next steps for policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality 70

8. Conclusions 73

Annex 1. Summary tables per country 76

Croatia - Summary Table 76

Ireland - Summary Table 78

Italy - Summary Table 80

Lithuania - Summary Table 81

Netherlands - Summary Table 82

Norway - Summary Table 83

Scotland - Summary Table 84

Spain - Summary Table 86

Sweden - Summary Table 87

1. Introduction

This report, drafted within the framework of the GRASS CEILING project, benchmarks the level of gender inclusivity and equality within four key policies of the EU (CAP, Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA), the Farm to Fork (F2F) Strategy, and the European Green Deal) across nine EU Member States. The overarching goal is to understand how these policies address gender equality, support women in rural and agricultural sectors, and the socio-economic needs of rural communities. Through this benchmarking exercise, this report examines how each country has interpreted the above-mentioned policies within national contexts, alongside additional EU policies, and in synergy with other domains such as sustainability, digital transition and economic development.

Methodologically, this analysis draws on national policy documents, focus groups, and localized case studies across the participating countries, focusing on the core themes of gender equity, policy interactions, and best practices. Gender-related challenges in rural areas are benchmarked against the EU Gender Equality Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights. Through this comparative approach, the report presents key findings and offers recommendations for further policy refinement to meet gender and socio-economic equity targets against the EU's sustainability goals.

2. Context, Issues, Structure, and Methodology

- This report summarizes the research gathered in response to the benchmarking analysis conducted during the GRASS CEILING project Work Package 4, Task 4.2. It was based on an examination of nine countries participating in the consortium (Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, Spain, Sweden). The purpose of the study was to analyse and benchmark national equivalent policies to the *EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)*, *Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA)*, *Farm to Fork* and *Green Deal*, in order to: assess how effectively gender mainstreaming is undertaken, and how effectively the challenges of women in rural areas are addressed by the various strategic plans; and
- determine how effectively national rural development policies address women's needs for knowledge transfer and innovation in rural areas.

The policies were benchmarked against the new *European Gender Equality Strategy (GES)* and the *European Pillar of Social Rights*. This is the final benchmarking report covering both EU and national equivalent policies in nine EU Member States. In total, 36 discourse analyses were reviewed from 9 European countries, reflecting the 4 major policies. The Gender Equality Strategy (GES) aims to promote gender equality across Member States and demonstrate the EU's commitment to creating a more equitable society where gender equality is a fundamental principle. The Strategy focuses on several key areas such as:

- **Economic Empowerment**, emphasizing the need to close the gender pay gap and promote women's participation in the labour market. This includes measures to support women in leadership positions, encourage entrepreneurship, and ensure equal pay for equal work.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

- **Promoting Gender Equality in Decision-Making**, aiming to increase women's representation in decision-making processes at all levels, including politics, business, and public life. It involves setting targets and implementing policies to ensure that women have equal opportunities to participate in leadership roles.

The European Pillar of Social Rights provides a framework to ensure fairness, equality, and dignity for all citizens, while its focus in on social and economic rights, they are integral to the broader concept of human rights.

Four key EU policies documents shaping farming and rural policies in the EU were analysed at both the EU and national levels in 9 countries. A standard template was developed specifically for this project. The template was based on the EU Gender Equality Strategy and the European Pillar of Social Rights. A short training webinar was developed and posted online for all the participants in the benchmarking process to use as a guide to the benchmarking program. A roadmap and timeline were developed for tracking the benchmarking work. All participants were working on the same policy at the same time, which allowed for exchange of information and discussion of common problems. The work started in January 2024 and was completed in December 2025. Shortly after beginning research – and at the first mid-term meeting in February, it became very apparent that the EU policies do not readily translate into national documents. In some cases, 6 or 7 different documents were used to try to match the contents of the EU policy. These policies may have varying timelines, and need being renewed, or have overlapping content.

The gender dimension is:

- Fundamental to society, economy, and sustainability.
- Having women actively involved in rural areas and in farming is important if to solve the problems regarding rural. Young women will choose to live in places where they can earn a living, build up a pension, own their own home, and have the basic services needed to live, including childcare. If rural areas cannot fill these choices, women may will prefer to live in the city.
- Not fully integrated or perceived as a central element in countries when it comes to gender differences in digital inclusion or AI access or proficiency, at least in the nine countries that have been analysed.

Findings: Some of the key obstacles include:

- General lack of recognition about the depth of the problem of gender inequality, its severity, and the need to take coordinated actions to solve it
- Intentions or mentions may be present about equality for women but there is a lack of specific implementation plans to achieve change
- Lack of goals and objectives, lack of follow-up
- Lack of budgetary considerations targeted specifically at women farmers and rural women entrepreneurs
- Lack of detailed planning and coordination
- Women's issues are bundled into other issues, where they become nearly unrecognizable or forgotten, and no definition is made of how much priority is given to them regarding the budget or means to solve them.
- Gender issues are sometimes put into a separate chapter of the policy where they are



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

typically forgotten, sidelined, or deemed low priority, since they are not part of the ‘mainstream’ policy.

- Frequent lack of one equivalent document at the national level.

National equivalents for CAP

This analysis has demonstrated that the missed opportunity – some may call it a failure -- of the European Commission to provide clear guidance and targets for gender equality in the EU CAP has undermined its successful implementation across the Member States. Delegating gender responsibilities to the Member States, without any sanctions for non-compliance, is effectively abdicating responsibility for gender equality in agriculture. Society can witness the negative effects that rural women face – including perpetuation of gender disparities, underutilization of women’s skills and potential, reduced social cohesion, and much more –as a result of these measures. In addition, research has repeatedly shown that ‘soft’ measures with sanctions are far less effective in advancing gender equality than ‘hard laws’ (Shortall and Marangudakis, 2022). Nonetheless, within the CAP frameworks of the nine analysed countries, several best practices have emerged that exemplify effective strategies for supporting women in rural and agricultural roles. These practices include targeted funding for women-led enterprises; gender-responsive training programs; and policies that prioritize the representation of women in decision-making processes.

For instance, Ireland’s CAP policy incorporates mentorship programs that connect experienced female farmers with new female entrants, fostering community support and knowledge-sharing. This approach not only aids skill development but also creates a supportive network that can address the unique challenges faced by women in agriculture.

Spain demonstrates another best practice with its commitment to gender mainstreaming across CAP objectives. By embedding gender equality into all aspects of policy design, Spain ensures that women receive equitable access to resources, training, and leadership opportunities. This approach has proven effective in creating a culture of inclusivity at every level of agricultural policy.

While significant strides have been made in promoting gender equality within CAP policies, various gaps remain. Some countries, such as Lithuania, Sweden, and Norway, lack specific gender-focused initiatives, often addressing women’s needs indirectly within general social policies. This approach can lead to inconsistencies in how women are supported across rural communities. Identifying these gaps provides an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive framework that directly addresses gender equality as a policy priority.

Moreover, policies in countries like Croatia tend to lack the explicit goal and ambitions to improve existing (or establish new) infrastructure to retain women in long-term agricultural roles, as resources often focus on initial support for female entrants rather than sustained development. Addressing retention strategies is essential to fostering a stable and committed female workforce in rural areas.

Member States have stated that if the EU wants gender equality in the CAP to be taken seriously, then the EU must regulate for it (Shortall and Marangudakis, 2024). This is a straightforward solution that would address the differential and weak implementation across Member States.

National equivalents for LTVRA



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Based on the analysis and in response to the obstacles and challenges highlighted in the above section, several best practices emerge that could be adapted or replicated across Member States to improve gender equality outcomes in LTVRA policies. The examples of Ireland (mentorship networks) and Spain (gender mainstreaming) have already been mentioned and deserve also to be listed in the Best Practices.

To further enhance gender equality within LTVRA, expanding intersections with CAP, digital, and climate policies will be crucial. Encouraging knowledge-sharing among Member States will also support the adaptation of best practices, creating a more inclusive, resilient rural policy framework. To achieve the ambitious objectives set forth by LTVRA, Member States are attempting to implement timelines that try to align with EU's long-term programming cycles, even though this effort is proving to be quite challenging since all of the nine analysed countries do not have matching national documents but have to recur to a mosaic of equivalent national policy documents and strategic plans. The analysis found, for example, that the broad objectives such as sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience, focusing on economic, social, and environmental dimensions are not always reflected in the national policies, when individual countries may prioritize specific objectives based on their unique socio-economic contexts, leading to variations in focus areas (e.g., agriculture, tourism, digitalization).

In addition, implementation strategies differ between the EU and national policies. The EU vision frequently includes outlines for achieving its goals, including fostering innovation, enhancing connectivity, and promoting local governance. National policies, on the other hand, may adopt different strategies for implementation, influenced by their administrative structures, available resources, and local needs, focusing in some cases on technological innovation, while others may prioritize community engagement.

Another example is that of cultural and regional contexts, where the vision is designed to be adaptable to diverse rural contexts across Europe. Cultural, historical, and regional differences can influence how policies are interpreted and implemented. For instance, rural areas in Southern Europe may face different challenges compared to those in Northern Europe, leading to tailored approaches that may not align perfectly with the EU vision. The differences between the European LTVRA and national policies can stem from various factors, some of which have been cited above. These differences highlight the need for flexibility in the implementation of EU policies to accommodate the diverse realities of rural areas across Europe.

This alignment allows for mid-term assessments and potential adjustments based on observed outcomes and changing socio-economic conditions. Italy, for example, has adopted a phased approach, with initial focus on community development and local economic initiatives, gradually shifting towards broader environmental sustainability measures. In Norway, LTVRA emphasizes early investments in rural infrastructure, with scheduled milestones for evaluating the economic impacts on rural areas. Spain has implemented a multi-phase approach within its National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge, setting milestones to assess connectivity, economic inclusion, and gender equality outcomes in rural development. Similarly, Norway's LTVRA strategy emphasizes early investment in economic resilience through rural infrastructure projects, aiming to create an enabling environment for rural businesses, which indirectly supports gender inclusivity by increasing



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

economic opportunities for all community members. The emphasis on phased approaches and periodic assessments is a recurring aspect across Member States, highlighting a shared commitment to flexibility and responsiveness within LTVRA policies.

Another challenge is represented by the **limited access to financial and technical resources for women**, especially in regions where infrastructure for training and digital support is underdeveloped. As an example, the analysis has highlighted how Norway's LTVRA lacks dedicated funding for gender-specific programs, which may limit women's opportunities in rural development. In parallel, **budget constraints** are in some cases also affecting **national and regional administration**, causing delays in policy implementation or administrative challenges. This element can represent a significant obstacle for countries like Italy, where gender-related initiatives are often deprioritized due to limited resources.

Additionally, a common challenging element that has emerged from the analysed national context is related to **delays in digital infrastructure deployment**, which lead to a widening of the already existing digital divide and having a stronger repercussion on women in general and even more so on rural women, whose ability to access necessary technology and training is often more reduced than that of women who live and work in non-rural contexts. More specifically, the digital infrastructure gap remains a challenge in some regions, such as those remote areas of Norway and Croatia, where access to technology is generally limited for the entire population, but it might affect women more than man.

These obstacles emphasize the need for increased funding, clearer gender metrics, and expanded infrastructure to fully realize the gender equality goals within LTVRA policies. Addressing these barriers will be crucial for creating a rural environment where women can thrive and contribute to sustainable development.

Building on identified best practices, there are several actionable steps that Member States can consider improving gender inclusivity within LTVRA. One such recommendation is for Member States to establish formal gender-focused objectives within LTVRA policies. Italy's approach of setting representation targets within community organizations provides a model for formalizing gender inclusivity at the grassroots level.

Expanding financial support for women-led projects, as seen in Spain and Italy, would also be beneficial for other Member States seeking to enhance economic opportunities for women. CAP funding mechanisms can be adapted within LTVRA to prioritize women in agriculture, providing them with the necessary capital and resources for sustainable business development. Additionally, mentorship and community-building programs, like those in Ireland, could be adapted in other regions to foster networks of support and knowledge-sharing among rural women.

Lastly, digital literacy initiatives, particularly those focused on rural women, offer a pathway to bridging the digital divide. By integrating digital literacy programs within LTVRA, Member States can equip women with the skills needed to engage with technology and AI in agriculture, thereby promoting both gender equality and economic resilience. Rural childcare, which is advocated for by the GES, might facilitate women's access to these skills.

National equivalents for Farm to Fork



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

The journey toward achieving gender equality in Farm to Fork (F2F) policies across Europe reveals several promising practices and opportunities for adaptation. By drawing on specific examples from countries such as Ireland, Norway, and Scotland, policymakers can gain insights into effective strategies to replicate or adapt for their national contexts.

Ireland's policy demonstrates a positive approach by integrating educational access for women as a means of lowering barriers to entry into the rural workforce. To build on this, Ireland and other Member States could introduce specialized training programs in digital agriculture and sustainable practices tailored for rural women. Expanding this model to include partnerships with agricultural colleges and universities would create a pipeline for women entering the agricultural workforce. This approach could be particularly beneficial for **Croatia** and **Lithuania**, where rural women face significant barriers in accessing agricultural knowledge and skills. Developing scholarship programs and vocational training in these countries would help ensure that women have equal opportunities to acquire technical skills necessary for modern agriculture.

Norway's policy, though limited, includes at least one specific measure aimed at supporting women, highlighting the importance of gender-specific resources in F2F policies. This measure acknowledges the role of financial support as a critical lever for gender equality in agriculture, even if the current support structure remains underdeveloped. Norway and other countries could build on this by establishing a comprehensive funding framework that includes grants, microloans, and business development support specifically for women in agriculture. Such financial incentives could empower women to pursue innovative, sustainable agricultural projects and strengthen their economic standing in rural communities. Countries like **Sweden** and **Scotland**, which currently lack gender-specific funding, could replicate Norway's model by creating financial incentives that target women-led agricultural initiatives. Tailoring funding pools to women in agriculture would help address resource disparities, encouraging inclusive economic growth in the sector.

Sweden's F2F strategy mentions digital inclusion, highlighting the importance of technology in modern agriculture. Although it currently lacks gender-specific initiatives, Sweden's awareness of digital needs provides a foundation for implementing targeted technology training for women in rural areas. Sweden, alongside countries such as Italy and Norway, could introduce dedicated digital literacy programs for women in rural agriculture. These programs would ensure that women have the skills to engage with digital farming tools, AI, and precision agriculture technologies, closing the digital divide in agricultural communities. This approach would be valuable for **Italy** and **Lithuania**, where digital policies within F2F strategies currently do not address gender disparities. Establishing workshops, online courses, and subsidized access to digital tools for women in these countries would help boost their participation in technology-driven agriculture.

Climate resilience is a component of many F2F policies, with **Italy's** strategy placing a strong emphasis on environmental sustainability. However, this approach currently lacks specific gender-sensitive climate measures, which limits its ability to address the unique challenges faced by women in rural areas. Italy, along with countries like Norway and Croatia, could enhance F2F policies by incorporating gender-specific support for climate adaptation. This could include training, funding, and resources for sustainable practices that recognize the different ways men and women engage with agricultural production and climate adaptation. Providing climate adaptation support



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

specifically for women would also be valuable in **Scotland**, where the Good Food Nation Plan could further integrate gender into its sustainability objectives. This would empower women in rural areas to adopt climate-resilient practices and play an active role in achieving national sustainability goals.

Data collection is essential for understanding and addressing gender disparities in agriculture, yet many Member States lack structured mechanisms for gathering gender-disaggregated data. **Italy**, for instance, has recognized the importance of collecting gender-specific data but has not fully implemented this approach within its F2F strategy. Italy and other countries such as Croatia and Norway could benefit from establishing formalized data collection systems that track the gendered impacts of F2F policies. Collecting data on variables such as participation rates, income levels, and access to resources for women would enable policymakers to make evidence-based adjustments to support gender equality. Building standardized data collection frameworks across the EU would enable a comprehensive view of gender dynamics within F2F policies. This approach would provide valuable insights into how Member States can fine-tune their strategies to achieve equitable outcomes, supporting both national and EU-wide gender equality objectives.

Including women's perspectives in policy design is critical for ensuring that F2F strategies address the challenges women face in agriculture. However, stakeholder engagement remains limited in many countries, including Lithuania and Norway, where there is limited representation of women's organizations in policy development. In the specific case of Norway, the limited involvement of few women's organisations in policy development does not necessarily imply that women are underrepresented – at least not at the central level (also reflected in the Norwegian F2F analysis). However, at the local level, women's identified underrepresentation seems more closely linked to an age factor (people older than 40 years old tend to be less represented in local councils, while there are a good mix of women and men among the younger generations) than to the gender dimension itself. At the same time, Lithuania, Norway, and similar countries could strengthen stakeholder engagement by actively involving women-focused organizations and rural women in the policymaking process. By bringing women's voices to the table, these countries would ensure that F2F policies are inclusive, relevant, and responsive to the unique experiences of women in agriculture. This engagement model could be adapted across the EU, encouraging Member States to include diverse perspectives in F2F strategies, as enhanced collaboration with women's groups would lead to more effective policies, reinforcing community support and fostering a stronger sense of ownership among stakeholders. In this regard, it is worth stressing how these issues are likely the reflection of EU policies, as the EU Commission leaves Member States with little to no guidance on how to address gender issues at a national and local level.

National equivalents for Green Deal

While research has identified several weaknesses in the array of policy documents that have been taken into consideration at national level as to compose national reference frameworks that integrate the EU Green Deal, several of the analysed countries have also demonstrated a set of good practices. For example, although **Ireland** has a history of policies not challenging gender stereotypes, and socio-cultural factors and gender norms around land succession that are resulting in women being sidelined in land ownership, there appears to be some new recognition, in comparison with some other national policies, that women's needs should be on their radar screen.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

As a matter of fact, Ireland has declared that it is adopting a ‘Whole of Government – Whole of Society’ Approach in the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan. Under this approach, inclusive decision-making ensures that marginalized groups, such as rural communities and women, have a voice in biodiversity planning and in the decision-making processes. It supports grass-roots efforts and equity in the distribution of conservation benefits and responsibilities. It also supports citizen engagement and increases understanding of the importance of biodiversity across all segments of society. The policy asserts that it recognises “...their (women’s) equal rights and access to land and national resources and their full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership at all levels of action, engagement, policy and decision-making related to biodiversity.” In addition, Ireland’s *Climate Action Plan 2024* sets out that it follows a ‘gender sensitive approach’ informed by SDG Goal 13. The Plan can be said to raise awareness of women’s rights and promote equal opportunity where it mentions that it is in alignment with the gender sensitive focus of the SDGs. In general, the Aims & Objectives of the *Climate Action Plan 2024* specifically state that they will follow the principles of Ireland’s Just Transition Framework. This is a policy framework designed to ensure that the transition to a low-carbon, sustainable economy is fair, inclusive, and equitable, particularly for communities and workers who are most affected by the shift away from fossil fuels and high-carbon industries. It recognizes that transitioning to a green economy can have significant social and economic implications and seeks to manage these impacts effectively while maximizing opportunities for sustainable development. By focusing on retraining workers, restoring ecosystems, and supporting affected communities, it seeks to ensure that no one is left behind as the country moves towards its climate goals.

Spain continues to demonstrate its recognition of the need for, and interest in, supporting rural women. It’s important to point out that the integration of climate change adaptation objectives and Gender Perspective are two of the cross-cutting measures of the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan: Measure 6.1 - Gender Perspective and Measure 6.2 - Integration Of Climate Change Adaptation Objectives. Regarding the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan, the Women's Institute (InMujeres) - the National Institute for Women, which is a public institution under the Ministry of Equality - signed a general collaboration protocol in 2021 for the joint development of actions within the framework of the development of the Just Transition Agreements regarding the promotion of entrepreneurship and the improvement of the employability and working conditions of women in the territories affected by the energy transition. The agreement represents a pivotal step toward ensuring that women are not only included but also empowered in the transition to a low-carbon and sustainable economy. By addressing gender inequities, fostering women’s leadership, and creating economic opportunities, this collaboration strengthens the social pillar of sustainability while advancing broader environmental and economic goals. Its success will depend on effective implementation, adequate resources, and continuous stakeholder engagement. In addition, the Strategic Plan for the Effective Equality of Women and Men (PEIEMH) 2022-2025 includes measures along these same lines. This Plan only makes generic references to the consideration of different employment/income/social security needs, but it is noted that the weight of the social economy in green and/or rural entrepreneurship, cooperatives, is extremely low, both for women and men.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

The mere recognition that the **Norwegian** *Klimaplan for 2021-30* makes that refers to the fact that women and men are different in that climate change and climate policy affect them in different ways is a step forward. The document also draws attention to women's rights to participate in decision-making processes and emphasizes inclusion and equal opportunities to influence processes and decisions.

Although **Croatia's** *National Development Strategy (NDS)* does *de iure* recognise the income inequality between women and men, the rate of poverty risk and social exclusion among older women (much higher than EU average), and low labour force participation rate of young women, it is not clear what initiatives have been launched, how institutions can or will contribute to the “complete elimination of inequality between women and men”, or how women's entrepreneurship can or will be improved. It shows the lack of measurable goals and activities. A number of policy areas and initiatives have begun to be implemented to help protect women's rights and promote women in the labour market, as it is also recognized that a higher employment rate for women has a positive impact on the increase in the birth rate. It was pointed out that the work of the institutions in the future should lead to the complete elimination of inequality between women and men in terms of wages and leadership positions in the labour market. As part of the policy to improve human resources and demographic policy, measures are being designed and consistently implemented to facilitate the creation of a balance between work and family life: investing in infrastructure and services related to the care of children and other dependent family members, protecting the rights of mothers and women in the labour market and promoting the responsibility of the employer in solving the specific family needs of young workers, especially women and mothers. Measures to reduce and eliminate the loss of income of parents, especially women, during maternity and parental leave will be improved. The strategy envisages the creation of a society that demonstrates in every aspect of social and public affairs that it cares about the needs of mothers, families with children, children and young people.

3. EU Policies overview: CAP, LTVRA, F2F and Green Deal

The GRASS CEILING project analysed how the EU CAP, LTVRA, F2F and EGD address gender inclusion in policies linked to agriculture and climate change. More specifically, before looking at how Member States applied these policies at the national level, this report will investigate how gender inclusion is addressed at the European level.

This report will analyse the EU CAP regulation¹, the LVTRA², as well as the F2F strategy³, the Zero

¹ REGULATION (EU) 2021/2115 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL.

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions A long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas - Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040, COM/2021/345 final.

³ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system, COM/2020/381 final.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Pollution Action Plan⁴, the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP)⁵, the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030⁶, and the Just Transition Fund as part of the European Green Deal⁷.

The **CAP** is a cornerstone of European agricultural policy. The new CAP runs from 2023 to 2027. The main aim of the CAP is to build a bridge between agricultural workers and wider society, providing an overarching policy structure for European farmers. The CAP is aimed at supporting farmers, improving productivity in the agricultural sector, and ensuring food security in the EU by a stable supply of affordable food. In the CAP there are also provisions to safeguard European farmers, and to protect rural areas and landscapes in EU Member States. One of the new areas of the recent and updated CAP is the provision on climate change and the sustainable management of natural resources. Most importantly, the CAP aims to promote jobs in farming, agri-food and linked sectors, with the ultimate goal to support the rural economy.

For the first time, the current CAP allows for National Plans, giving Member States more autonomy over how they implement the policy within their national contexts. Member States have been specifically asked to take account of women's equality in how the plans are enacted: on the one hand this looks like a significant development for gender equality, while on the other hand, it simply remains a request with no implications if Member States decide not to take account of gender equality, and no means to enforce the effective inclusion of gender consideration in the formulation and implementation of policy documents.

In June 2021, a Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of Regions set up the **EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas** up to 2040, contributing to the 2030 Agenda and the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The LTVRA should help EU institutions address the importance of rural areas, providing better policies that can directly affect specific challenges and concerns of European rural landscape. In particular, the LTVRA looks at the erosion of social infrastructure and service access, like healthcare, social services, and education. As part of the LTVRA, the European Commission launched the Rural Pact and the EU Rural Action Plan. These two instruments will be fundamental to create new opportunities and attract investments in rural areas, fostering innovation and territorial cohesion, ultimately creating new jobs and infrastructure. The role of sustainable agriculture is mentioned as part of one of the diversified economic activities set for rural

⁴ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Document 52021DC0400, Pathway to a Healthy Planet for All EU Action Plan: 'Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil'.

⁵ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Document 52020DC0098, A new Circular Economy Action Plan - For a cleaner and more competitive Europe.

⁶ COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, Document 52020DC0380, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030.

⁷ Regulation (EU) 2021/1060 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund Plus, the Cohesion Fund, the Just Transition Fund and the European Maritime, Fisheries and Aquaculture Fund and financial rules for those and for the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Internal Security Fund and the Instrument for Financial Support for Border Management and Visa Policy; Regulation (EU) 2021/1056 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 June 2021 establishing the Just Transition Fund.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

areas. The LTVRA builds on other policies on green and digital transition, identifying new ways to significantly improve rural quality of life. The LTVRA aims to promote balanced territorial development and economic growth in rural areas, using the Atlas of Demography. It is interesting to highlight that the recommendations of the LTVRA are based on analysis, foresight activities, extensive consultations and contributions from communities and civil society. From a gender perspective, the LTVRA does not provide any specific mention to men and women. More specifically, the LTVRA does not address differences in men and women involvement to the proposed initiatives, in (child)care gap or in employment, income, and social security requirements, as referred to in the Gender Equality Strategy. Despite the lack of a wider gender dimension, the LTVRA specifically mentions young women as the social group that is most likely to leave rural areas. Furthermore, the flagship on Social Resilience and Women in rural areas identifies specific support for women-entrepreneurs, ensuring investments in work-life balance services, like childhood education and care, ultimately widening access to women in the labour market.

Announced in 2019, the **European Green Deal** is a series of policies and measures that relate to green transition in the EU. The F2F strategy is at the core of the European Green Deal and relies on the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. It is a comprehensive plan designed to ensure food production and food security in the EU. The F2F strategy aims to provide sustainable food production, creating a fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food system. Furthermore, the F2F strategy's key objectives are to facilitate the shift to healthy and sustainable diets, and to promote public health. The F2F strategy is mainly focused on the transition to more sustainable food systems, but fails to include employment issues, as well as differences in men and women's participation to food systems, and any gender or childcare gap as required by the Gender Equality Strategy.

The **Zero Pollution Action Plan** is dedicated to the reduction of air, water and soil pollution by 2050, ultimately creating a toxic-free environment for better and healthier natural ecosystems. The Zero Pollution Action Plan also contains targets to reach by 2030, like the improvement of air quality and the reduction of premature death by air pollution by 55%, the reduction of waste and plastic litter in water and sea by 50% and the cut of microplastics released into the environment by 30%. By 2030 the Action Plan is also committed to cut by half the use of chemical pesticides, to reduce by 25% the EU ecosystems where air pollution threatens biodiversity, and to reduce transport noise by 30%, as well as cutting waste generation. While the Zero Pollution Action Plan does not specifically refer to agriculture, its topics are strictly connected to agricultural and rural issues. This policy document is focused on the participation of civil society in health-related targets but does not specifically refer to women (or men). Indeed, the Zero Pollution Action Plan refers to vulnerable groups that are negatively affected by pollution, mentioning 'people with medical conditions, older persons, persons with disabilities, and those living in poorer socio-economic conditions', recognising how people from low- and middle-income countries are disproportionately affected by diseases caused by climate change. The action plan advocates for stronger public health, identifying children, the sick, and the elderly as the most vulnerable groups. Though, the action plan does not address women as a special category, nor it considers issues like gender and (child)care gap as set out in the Gender Equality Strategy.

The **CEAP** is another policy instrument part of the European Green Deal. With a timespan from 2020



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

to 2050, its main objectives are to reduce residual (non-recycled) municipal waste by 2030, as well as to establish a policy framework for sustainable products and services, maintaining clean recycling streams, improving the management of hazardous waste. Furthermore, the CEAP aims to promote international cooperation towards a more sustainable circular economy, ultimately achieving the wider objectives of the European Green Deal and the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals. While the issues of the CEAP are broadly linked to agriculture, there is only one explicit reference to agricultural issues, referring to the use of circular approaches to water reuse in agricultural contexts. The CEAP does not consider men and women as different categories in circular economy, nor it looks at different employment, social security, ageing, or income issues. Not surprisingly, the New Water Reuse Regulation lacks any reference to women or gender.

The **EU Biodiversity Strategy** is also part of the European Green Deal. The Biodiversity Strategy is focused on tackling the loss of biodiversity, looking at land- and sea-use changes, the overexploitation of biological resources, climate change, pollution, and invasive alien species. Most importantly, the Biodiversity Strategy ultimately aims to protect the wider society from negative impacts of climate change, forest fires, and food insecurity, as well as disease outbreaks. It is necessary to highlight that this strategy mentions women. Women are included as part of other groups, like indigenous people and local communities. The strategy advocates for a better inclusion of female stakeholders in biodiversity initiatives. However, it does not acknowledge a gender dimension, neglecting any consideration on how men and women participate differently. Furthermore, the Biodiversity Strategy explicitly refers to agricultural land, looking at those farmers affected by biodiversity loss, as well as food security and farmers' income. However, the strategy does not consider any issue linked to ageing, gender or (child)care gap. There is also no reference to gender or women in the Nature Restoration Law, which is one of the main legal instruments of the EU Biodiversity Strategy.

The **Just Transition Fund (JTF)** is one of the main pillars of the European Green Deal. Contributing to the Just Transition Mechanism, the JTF aims to mitigate the effects of climate change on affected lands and workers. More specifically, the JTF is set up to support those who have been negatively impacted by the green transition, with a focus on a more diverse and modern economy. The JTF is part of the wider Sustainable Europe Investment Plan and European Green Deal, financing joint actions between 2021 and 2027. The JTF advocates for a more inclusive role of women in the green transition. However, similarly to the other policies, it fails to address issues like gender gap and care gap, and to acknowledge differences between men and women.

Specific lens on women

Gender is often mentioned in EU policies, but gender issues are seldomly addressed. Almost all of the EU policies benchmarked in the GRASS CEILING project include gender equality as one of their main objectives. However, only few of them specifically address gender issues, allocating budget or resources to tackle them. When benchmarked against the Gender Equality Strategy, only the LTVRA addresses issues like gender and care gaps in rural areas.

The CAP emphasises equal opportunities for both genders. Although gender equality is acknowledged and present in different sections of the text, the responsibility to address gender



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

issues is passed on to the national level. Indeed, the policy document advocates for the promotion of women in agriculture, looking at how Member States need to offer their support to advance gender equality in the agricultural sector. Member States are required to address gender issues, but there is no sanction for a lack of inclusion of gender issues in their national policies.

It is interesting to highlight that the English version of the document uses the gender-neutral term of ‘farmer’. However, when looking at the French version of the document, only the masculine term ‘agriculteur’ is used. Deciding to exclude the feminine noun of ‘agricultrice’ highlights the gender bias present in farming. The EU CAP addresses gender inequality as one of its main priorities. Nonetheless, Member States are the ones responsible to address gender inequality.

The European CAP does not seem to directly refer to women, or to include a specific gender dimension. It is rather targeted at young farmers, focusing on rural development programmes. Articles 77, 81, and 99 of the CAP clearly leave to Member States the conditions for financial instruments, priority to investment interventions, or how they allocate their EAFRD to promote the inclusion of young farmers and new entrants’ entrepreneurship in agriculture. This is unlike the STEM Regulation which has clear targets. While the CAP acknowledges the importance of inclusion and promotion of women in agriculture, the document does not mention issues like gender pay gap, pension gap, or gender care gap to be addressed in rural areas. The policy document refers to Member States to collect data and provide further plans to promote women entrepreneurship in agriculture. Article 33 states that Member States can collect disaggregated data on gender in order to better understand how to promote the inclusion of women in farming and the agricultural sector.

Similarly to the CAP, the F2F strategy does not directly address challenges that affect women. Furthermore, the F2F strategy does not include specific measures that promote gender equality indirectly, or any reference to gender gaps or gender stereotypes in rural areas. The F2F strategy does not have any allocated budget for its measures, relying on other EU funds. For instance, the F2F refers to the CAP when advocating for targeted funding and support programs for female farmers, aimed at wider inclusion for women in agricultural enterprises.

While the F2F strategy advocates for wider inclusion of female farmers and women entrepreneurship in farming, the fact that it does not have an allocated budget for it makes it difficult to check if funds are used to promote women entrepreneurship. A major challenge is the lack of sex disaggregated data on these measures. This results on scattered inconsistent data on gender in CAP monitoring and evaluation reports.

The JTF also lacks a specific budget to support women in the green transition. The regulation establishing the JTF does not provide any specific measure targeted at women. Although the JTF provides a mechanism to ensure fairness and equal treatment of Member States in the implementation of climate-neutral goals, it does not include women. Similarly, the Zero Pollution Action Plan does not target women. The Zero Pollution Action Plan has an allocated budget of EUR 100-150 billion annually until 2030, combining private investments, public funding, green bonds, the Sustainable Taxonomy Regulation, the European Fund for Sustainable Development+, the multiannual financial framework, NextGenerationEU, Cohesion Policy, and the Recovery and Resilience Facility. The Zero Pollution Action Plan does not mention women in any special group and



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

does not require any sex-disaggregated data. In a similar way, the Biodiversity Strategy aims to invest at least EUR 20 billion per year, including investments for Natura 2000 and green infrastructure. The strategy receives funding from private and public entities at national and EU level. The Biodiversity Strategy is set to mobilise at least EUR 10 billion under the programme InvestEU between 2020 and 2030. However, women are not allocated any specific budget or any targeted measure. The fund does not require any sex-disaggregated data.

Gender equality is also one of the priorities of the JTF and the Biodiversity Strategy. The regulation that establishes the JTF specifically addresses gender equality and the participation of women in the labour market, looking at the role of women in the transition to a climate-neutral economy. According to Article 9 of the regulation (EU) 2021/1060, all Member States and the European Commission should ensure gender equality in the delivery of the programmes under the JTF, and a gender perspective should always be considered during all the stages of a programme, from its preparation to its evaluation. In the regulation (EU) 2021/1060, gender equality is explicitly mentioned as one of the main criteria to establish partnership agreements in programmes like the JTF. The JTF should also follow principles of non-discrimination, ensuring gender equality and accessibility in operations for persons with disabilities. Similarly, the Biodiversity Strategy explicitly mentions gender and women as special categories involved in the protection of biodiversity. What is interesting to highlight is that women are mainstreamed throughout the document. Women are mentioned together with other social groups like indigenous people, local communities, youth, civil society, local authorities, the private sector, academia and scientific institutions. This means that even though there is no reference to specific groups of women, the Biodiversity Strategy is supposed to always consider gender in its provisions.

Although it mentions women and gender, the Biodiversity Strategy does not tackle gender stereotypes. Its language is neutral, using terms like “human/s”, “people”, “individual/s” and “farmer/s”. The gendered term “women” is only mentioned in provisions that directly deal with the principle of inclusion of different categories. Indeed, the strategy advocates for equality among local communities and indigenous people, promoting active participation of women in tackling the loss of biodiversity.

The regulation 2021/1060 also provides common provisions for other funds like the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund Plus. It is interesting to note that one of the objectives of the European Regional Development Fund is to identify challenges to gender equality, and to address gender gaps in employment, pay, pensions, and to promote work-life balance for women and men, improving access to early childhood education and care. In a similar way, the regulation provides targeted measures for women under the European Social Fund Plus. The fund is set to promote a more gender balanced labour market, ensuring equal working condition. Furthermore, one of its objectives is to promote the inclusion of young Roma and Roma women, ensuring gender equality. Although not directly part of the JTF, the regulation 2021/1060 establishing common provisions for different European funds is the only EU policy that specifically refers to a social group together with women. Young Roma and Roma women are mentioned as a special category.

The JTF regulation also addresses pay gap issues, equal pay, and the role of green transition in



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

ensuring equal opportunities. The JTF is the only policy document that specifically looks at the role of women in the green economy. The other policies benchmarked by the GRASS CEILING project at EU level are not directly addressed at women.

Nonetheless, the JTF shares similar challenges with the other policy instruments. Gender stereotypes are not directly challenged. Similarly to the other policy documents, the JTF does not refer to men and women separately, using gender-neutral terms like ‘participants’, ‘beneficiaries’, ‘users’, and ‘people’. Most importantly, the JTF does not provide specific funding for women, nor it treats women as a special category. In other words, gender mainstreaming is not applied. However, Annex III of the JTF regulation indicates that personal data in the set of Common Immediate Output Indicators (EECO) and Common Immediate Result Indicators (EECR) should indicate gender (i.e. women, men, non-binary persons) according to national law. Indeed, according to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 13 April 2016 on Better Law-Making, funds like the JTF should always be monitored to support gender equality, even though Member States are the ones that should provide the data on gender equality.

Contrarily to other policy instruments that clearly state the commitment towards gender equality, gender considerations are not integrated either in the Zero Pollution Action Plan or in the CEAP. In its introduction, the Zero Pollution Action Plan mentions the harmful impact that pollution brings for vulnerable groups, but women are not included. The CEAP only focuses on environmental and economic goals, discussing sustainable practices and product policies, neglecting any social dimension. The CEAP does not have any gender dimension. Women are not mainstreamed in the CEAP, being absent from the entire document.

In addition, these action plans do not challenge gender stereotypes. Similarly to the other policies, the language of the Zero Pollution Action Plan and the CEAP is often gender neutral, mentioning terms like “individuals” and “people”, economic actors, consumers, and civil society organizations, not addressing men and women separately. The CEAP does not present any sex-disaggregated data on uptake or success of its measures.

Equality and social inclusion are at the core of the LTVRA. Divided in four main areas of action called “flagships”, the LTVRA aims to develop more resilient and prosperous rural areas. In particular, one of the main flagship initiatives of this policy is the ‘Social resilience and Women in rural areas’ programme. This programme focuses on the well-being of people living in rural areas, promoting gender equality. Additionally, the LTVRA explicitly tackles the issue of diversity in society, advocating for more opportunities for everyone, specifically for older persons, persons with disabilities, children, LGBTQI+ people, people with a migrant background and Roma communities. Most importantly, the LTVRA aims to address gender-based violence and gender stereotypes as part of its goals. This is the only time that the Commission directly addresses gender stereotypes and gender-based violence in the policies analysed in the benchmarking exercise.

In terms of language used in the LTVRA, the terms “woman” and “gender” are mentioned six times. The word “female” is mentioned twice, and the terms “male” and “individuals” only once. On the contrary, the term “people” is used 30 times. Men and women are compared once, only to mention the gender gap in male and female employment in rural areas is 13%. Indeed, the LTVRA is focused



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

on supporting women with precarious contracts, like seasonal workers, or those who play an “invisible role in rural societies”, being left out of any social protection or maternity benefit. The LTVRA recognises women and women-entrepreneurs as an important driving force for social inclusion in rural areas.

The LTVRA is the only policy document analysed that specifically refers to the Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. According to the LTVRA, the Commission will continue to help Member States provide wider access to education and care services in rural areas, using resources from the European Social Fund Plus, the European Regional Development Fund, the Invest EU programme and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. In particular, the Annex of the Communication of the LTVRA provides more details on which measure will be undertaken. The LTVRA will promote studies on the working conditions of agricultural seasonal workers, which will likely include a gender dimension, as well as further opportunities for women in agriculture, under the CAP or other schemes supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology. However, the LTVRA does not provide any specific budget for women.

The LTVRA also provides further actions under the EU Rural Action Plan and the Rural Observatory. The Rural Observatory is an initiative of the Commission, aimed at improving data collection and data analysis on rural areas. This will allow for a centralised data portal on rural data, using sex-disaggregated data when available. One example is the new 2024 report⁸ on the implementation of the rural vision. The report on the implementation of the LTVRA mentions young women in rural areas, stating that the rate of young women in NEET (neither in employment nor in education and training) in rural areas accounted for 14.9% compared to 10.5% of males in 2022. According to this report, rural areas have the highest rate of young women in NEET compared to urban areas.

Training and education and the lack of women-focused programmes

A recurrent theme that emerged from the benchmarking of the European policies is the attention to training. The Gender Equality Strategy addresses the importance to inclusive training and education for women, in order to widen women’s access to promote employment and entrepreneurial opportunities. Indeed, the EU CAP (Article 57) specifies that financial assistance and training needs to be put in place for young farmers and new entrants to the agricultural sector, in order to facilitate innovation and sustainable practices. New and innovative approaches to agriculture are encouraged, promoting the sector’s diversification and resilience. The main aim is to provide new entrants with the correct support when entering the agricultural sector. Each Member State can decide what kind of resources to provide. The CAP emphasises the importance of training, eliminating barriers on access to education for farmers. Member states are responsible to set up appropriate training for farmers according to Article 70.9. Article 81 states that members states should increase their support to young farmers and rural business startups to 100.000 EUR. Similarly, the F2F strategy advocates for more resources on education and training for sustainable

⁸ Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Region The long-term vision for the EU’s rural areas: key achievements and ways forward, COM (2024) 450 final, 27th March 2024.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

agriculture. However, neither the CAP nor the F2F strategy provide specific actions for women in agriculture.

In a similar way, the JTF identifies vulnerable groups that are directly affected from the adverse effects of the green transition like workers with disabilities, but it does not provide specific measures for women. The JTF refers to educational and social inclusion activities, supporting child- and elderly-care facilities and training centres, as long as these activities are justified in the territorial just transitional plans. Social and public services can be supported by a mix of investments, requiring appropriate justification in the territorial just transition plans, and following the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

The Zero Pollution Action Plan supports the development of core green skills for the labour market, as well as EU training modules for workers in healthcare and social care sectors, focusing on the mitigation of environmental risks. The action plan also refers to delivering more targeted training on green education in the Erasmus+ programme, particularly in fields like Urban Planning, Sustainability & Innovation, and STEM disciplines. Although this plan for training and education is not specifically referred to women entrepreneurs and rural women, or women' leadership in agricultural organisations, these categories can still indirectly benefit from it. Indeed, the investment in green skills and innovation is aimed at widening access to financial ventures in the green economy. In particular, the Zero Pollution Action Plan encourages the use of apps and digital tools to widen access to education, like the Air Quality Index App and consumer footprint calculator, or initiatives like the Education for Climate Coalition, which promotes green skills development among teachers and students. In a similar manner, the Biodiversity Strategy sets specific funding for innovation, promoting further investment in research, innovation and knowledge exchange. Indeed, under the Biodiversity Strategy, the Commission created the Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity in 2020, in close cooperation with the European Environment Agency. In addition, the Commission is also involved in the promotion of knowledge exchange practices in EU networks of teacher-training programmes. Women, though, are not directly addressed by these measures. However, women can indirectly benefit from these policy measures and funds, as they are set to widen participation and inclusion of different social categories in leadership positions in science and education sectors.

Similarly, the CEAP supports access to finance for businesses and entrepreneurs in circular economy, promoting employment opportunities for everyone. Women, then, are indirect beneficiaries of these measures, but they are not directly targeted and supported by the policy.

Young farmers and new entrants to agriculture and businesses

Another main area identified by the benchmarking exercise is the focus on young farmers and new entrants to agriculture. The EU CAP is mostly focused on the promotion of young farmers, rather than being targeted at achieving gender equality. As clearly stated in Article 80, the European agricultural sector should improve access 'to finance for priority groups, particularly young farmers and new farmers. Women are not targeted as priority groups when it comes to special investments in farming and the agricultural sector. The EU CAP does not provide any specific guideline on the inclusion of women in farming. Indeed, the EU CAP only mentions gender to devolve the issue to Member States, without providing any sanction if they fail to include gender in their national



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

policies.

As the F2F strategy is not supported by a dedicated budget, it relies on the CAP to provide financial assistance for new access to land, encouraging new entrants to farming and agricultural businesses.

The LTVRA aims to support women-entrepreneurs and young people, providing assistance in work-life balance services, as well as widening access in decision-making. Furthermore, the LTVRA advocates for the importance of research and innovation, particularly looking at the role of small and medium enterprises in rural areas. Small businesses provide essential services that are deemed vital for people that move to rural areas, delivering innovative practices and developing new sectors of the economy. According to the LTVRA, these businesses will attract young, new and female farmers, contrasting the abandonment of rural lands. The LTVRA does not provide further insight on how these initiatives can affect women entrepreneurs or rural women. It is also interesting to highlight that, while one of the main goals of the LTVRA is to support the diversification of business activities in rural areas, promoting the inclusion of young people and unemployed people, the term “new entrant” is never used.

The JTF is also interested in supporting new entrants to agriculture, dedicating part of its budget to the creation of new firms, ultimately leading to job creation in the sector. The regulation 2021/1060 is specifically focused on monitoring youth unemployment, and on the socio-economic integration of young people. Furthermore, it dedicates specific attention to rural areas and those areas that are impacted by industrial transition. However, similarly to the CAP and F2F, the JTF does not include a gender dimension to it, neglecting key areas like the gender pay gaps or the pension gaps.

The CEAP focuses instead on the support to new business models and innovative practices in the circular economy. In this sense, the action plan provides assistance to new entrants to circular economy, but it is not directly addressed at women or agricultural businesses. Equally, the Biodiversity Strategy estimates the creation of 500,000 new jobs under the EU Restoration Plan. More specifically, the strategy aims to create new jobs in the agricultural sector, focusing on organic farming, rural tourism, and research and innovation, attracting younger generations and new entrants to the sector. For instance, under the EU Forest Strategy, the EU aims to plant 3 billion trees by 2030, creating jobs connected to the cultivation and development of these new plantations. However, the Biodiversity Strategy does not provide any gender consideration related to the creation of new jobs or the access to funds. Also, it does not consider any pension gap.

Women and digital innovation

Although the Gender Equality Strategy specifically addresses women and AI as main themes to promote gender inclusion in the EU, it is important to highlight that women and gender are completely omitted from wider issues like digital policies and AI. The same applies to provisions on the digitalisation of farming. The EU CAP is interested in new technology in farming, and investments in innovative methods of farming (see Article 78 CAP). However, gender issues are not mentioned in any provision that refers to technological advancement, digital inclusion, or AI. The same applies to the F2F strategy, which does not focus on the promotion of digital inclusion or the use of AI. However, the F2F strategy does advocate for digital innovation in agriculture and food system, indirectly addressing these issues.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

The LTVRA supports rural areas in green and digital transition, looking at digital connectivity as one of the main drivers of the diversification of economic activities in rural areas, ultimately providing new job opportunities in all sectors. However, the LTVRA does not take into consideration gender when discussing digital inclusion or AI.

Similarly, the JTF supports investments in digitalisation, digital innovation and digital connectivity without considering gender differences or gender inequality.

The Zero Pollution Action Plan is explicitly devoted to provide wider access to digital inclusion through different initiatives like Local Digital Twins to contribute to zero pollution objectives, Living Labs for green digital solutions and smart zero pollution to develop local actions for green and digital transformation, the establishment of a European Green Deal Dataspace to improve data availability, and the creation of Destination Earth to develop a high-precision digital model of the Earth using Copernicus data. The action plan is also focused on investment in clean technologies to support sustainable digitalisation. The action plan will support the creation of a new “Zero Pollution Stakeholder Platform” by the European Commission and the Committee of the Regions. This platform will facilitate the exchange of good practices on financing for zero pollution innovation and jobs among different stakeholders. However, these initiatives not only lack a gender dimension, but they also do not mention agriculture.

The CEAP is particularly interested in digital technologies in circular economy. One of its main objectives is the creation of a European data space for smart circular applications. In addition, the CEAP focuses on the potential impact of AI in circular economy. However, the action plan does not refer to any ethical reflection on digital inclusion, nor it includes any mention to agriculture or women..

Climate change and gender equality

Another important aspect that was highlighted in the benchmarking exercise is the issue of climate change. Similarly to the issue of women and AI, climate change is part of the Gender Equality Strategy. However, the EU policies analysed contained little to no reference to how climate change impact men and women in a different way.

The EU CAP looks at the initiatives on climate change and the protection of the environment, like the issue of antimicrobial resistance in eco schemes (Article 63 CAP). However, it does not make any reference to how these wider issues can have a differential impact on women. The EU CAP does not consider different ageing issues for men and women, childcare, or any mitigating measures for different care responsibilities between men and women.

In the F2F strategy climate change is addressed from a food system perspective. This means that the F2F strategy is mainly focused on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in the promotion of sustainable food systems. The strategy aims to promote resilience-building measures that can contribute to the overall EU’s climate goals, enhancing food production and consumption in Europe. However, this strategy is not concerned about the different impact that climate change has on men and women. Nonetheless, the language used in the F2F strategy is inclusive, emphasising the importance of including men and women in the transition to more sustainable practices, but it does



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

not contain any specific measures to achieve this stated outcome.

One of the main goals of the LTVRA is to create rural areas that are resilient to climate change. In particular, rural areas should be able to promote carbon-neutral solutions, mitigating negative effects of climate change, as well as supporting circular economy. The LTVRA supports rural municipalities in the energy transition, addressing climate action in peatland through carbon farming. Although the LTVRA advocates for the inclusion of all individuals, it does not recognise the different impact of climate change on men and women.

The JTF looks at the effects that climate change has on workers and territories, focusing on supporting these affected categories in the green transition. The JTF is set to contribute to 30% of the EU budget expenditure, financing climate objectives, with a total allocation of 17,500 EUR million (10,000 EUR million from the European Union Recovery Instrument, and 7,500 EUR million from MFF resources). The main goal is to provide 7.5% of the annual spending under the multiannual financial framework to biodiversity objectives in 2024 and 10 % of annual spending under the multiannual financial framework to biodiversity objectives in 2026 and 2027. However, similarly to the other policies, the JTF does not explore how men and women are differently impacted by climate change. In the Zero Pollution Action, the CEAP, and the Biodiversity Strategy climate change is central. They advocate for a collective action and the importance of inclusivity in the green transition and circular economy. However, similarly to the other policies, these action plans does not refer to different impacts that climate change has on women and men.

Critical aspects and shared obstacles in achieving gender equality in EU policies

The analysis of the EU CAP regulation, the LVTRA, the F2F strategy, and the European Green Deal highlighted critical aspects on the integration of gender issues in EU agricultural and green policies. Women are often not included as a special category in these policies. When women are mentioned, the EU leaves the responsibility to address gender issues to Member States.

The most evident example is the EU CAP regulation. Although women are included in the text of the regulation, the EU does not specify how to address gender issues, devolving them to Member States. It is not surprising that Member States that fail to address gender issues in their national CAP policies do not face any sanction, as there is no enforcement mechanism for these provisions from the EU.

The Gender Equality Strategy advocates for the integration of gender issues in mainstream policy documents at EU level. However, none of the policy documents analysed addresses issues like the gender pay gap, the (child)care gap, or the different impacts on men and women. Examples of this are found in the lack of women-focused provisions on climate change or AI and digital innovation. Despite being explicitly mentioned in the Gender Equality Strategy, the EU policies do not address the different impacts that climate change and AI and digital innovation have on men and women, not addressing women as a special category.

Only the LTVRA looks at women and the Gender Equality Strategy. The LTVRA aims to address gender-based violence and gender stereotypes as part of its goals. This is the only time that the Commission directly addresses gender stereotypes and gender-based violence in the policies



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

analysed in the benchmarking exercise. The LTVRA aims to promote studies on the working conditions of agricultural seasonal workers, which will likely include a gender dimension, as well as further opportunities for women in agriculture, under the CAP or other schemes supported by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology. However, the LTVRA does not provide any specific budget for women.

Indeed, one of the main critical aspects highlighted in this report is the lack of a designated budget for gender issues. The policies analysed in this report do not provide a specific budget for projects on gender or that are specifically targeted at women. This makes the provisions contained in the policies aspirational. Member States can (but do not have to) address these issues and promote gender inclusive projects from other funds that are not specifically directed at financing projects on women. Furthermore, it is also difficult to understand and track whether the funds are used to promote women's inclusion as EU policies do not provide sex-disaggregated data for their funds.

4. CAP – National Overview

Context and Objectives of CAP

CAP, a foundational EU policy, guides agriculture-related practices with an aim to boost sustainable agricultural productivity, enhance environmental stewardship, and support rural development. The CAP's recent reform (2023–2027) sets out a framework through which each Member State is required to develop a National Strategic Plan (NSP) to advance CAP's objectives in their own territory, including tailored national priorities based on regional challenges and opportunities. The CAP framework provides each Member State with a degree of flexibility to design their own NSPs, aligning CAP's broad EU objectives with specific national goals. Countries participating in this analysis have adapted CAP NSPs to support diverse objectives, including environmental sustainability, rural economic stability, and social inclusion. Timelines across the analysed CAP strategies generally align with the EU's CAP programming period of 2023–2027. This period structure should allow for phased implementation of gender-focused initiatives, providing timeframes for assessing progress on inclusivity, and some of the analysed policies, such as those in **Ireland** and **Sweden**, incorporate mid-term evaluation points to reassess and adjust their gender equality strategies based on initial outcomes. A comparative analysis of national CAP policies reveals, however, a number of recurring themes and trends, underscoring the shared – yet unevenly implemented – commitment to gender equality across EU Member States. In most CAP strategies, gender equality and the role of women are increasingly recognized as pivotal elements in promoting sustainable rural development and equitable agricultural growth. In other national strategies, however, the focus placed on gender equality and/or on the role of women in agriculture is not sufficiently prominent, leaving space for a “two-speed Europe” in the gender equality domain.

For instance, **Spain's** CAP policy explicitly outlines gender mainstreaming as a key priority. Spain emphasizes the importance of integrating women into agricultural decision-making roles and targets gender parity in rural workforce participation. **Ireland's** CAP Strategic Plan (2023-2027) adopts a similar stance, with measures aimed at reducing gender disparities in the agricultural sector through tailored support for women entrepreneurs and training programs.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Digital inclusion is another recurring theme across national CAP policies which displays a strong interaction with the gender dimension, with countries like **Italy** highlighting the role of digital tools in bridging gender gaps. Italy's CAP strategy identifies digital literacy programs for women in rural areas as a pathway to economic empowerment, while **Sweden** incorporates digital agriculture as a means to support female farmers in optimizing productivity and resource management. The focus on digitalisation also reflects a broader trend of aligning CAP policies with the EU's digital transformation goals.

Notwithstanding the previously listed cases, the degree of emphasis on gender equality varies significantly across Member States. In some cases, like **Lithuania and Norway**, gender-specific measures are limited or not distinctly outlined and are rather embedded within broader social or economic policies. This variation highlights a challenge in achieving uniform gender inclusivity standards across Europe, despite the overarching CAP framework. Imposing quotas and/or sanctions might help.

Looking at the objectives outlined within national CAP policies analysed, most of them frequently revolve around fostering inclusive, sustainable, and resilient agricultural and rural environments. While gender equality is a relevant component in many policies, each country interprets this goal through a unique lens. Gender equality is a prominent theme in some of the analysed CAP strategies, with several countries outlining specific roles and supports for women in rural communities. **Spain's** strategy, for instance, not only underscores gender equality as a priority but also sets quantifiable targets to improve women's representation in rural governance structures. **Italy** follows a similar approach, focusing on economic empowerment initiatives that equip women with the skills and resources needed to thrive in agricultural enterprises.

Further analysis reveals, however, that the majority of other Member States are not taking gender considerations into account in their national CAP policies and strategic documents, focussing instead more on different target groups such as young people and new entrants to the sector, therefore endangering the achievements of objectives identified in the EU-level CAP. This is, for example, the case of **Sweden**, where the analysed Strategic Plan does not have any specific measures targeted at women.

In **Croatia**, gender considerations are barely integrated into the policy. The importance of gender equality is mentioned, however, the women's empowerment in the agricultural sector and in the rural areas is not emphasised as crucial. This is seen in lack of challenging gender stereotypes in lack of recognizing the valuable contributions of women in agriculture and rural areas and in lack of promoting their equal participation in decision-making processes. The mere mentioning of unequal number of women and men among farm managers does not make this policy dedicated to increasing gender equality. Croatian CAP fails to recognise the gender issues and thus fails to set the strategic goals and measures in that respect. Overall, the gender analysis or gender perspective in Croatian CAP Strategic Plan is absent.

Meanwhile, **Scotland's** CAP policy presents a unique case by emphasizing environmental sustainability alongside gender equality. In Scotland, gender considerations are embedded within a holistic approach to rural development, where female farmers are encouraged to adopt sustainable



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

farming practices. This approach is designed to leverage gender diversity as a means to enhance environmental resilience within rural communities.

In addition to general goals, several countries have outlined specific, measurable objectives within their CAP policies to enhance gender equality. The **Netherlands**, for example, has set objectives related to economic parity in agriculture, aiming to narrow the gender wage gap among rural labourers by 2027. Similarly, **Italy's** CAP plan incorporates objectives for increasing the number of women in agricultural leadership roles, with quotas aimed at achieving a minimum 30% representation in decision-making bodies. **Ireland's** CAP objectives underscore the importance of accessibility to targeted grants for women in rural enterprises, a goal shared by several other EU Member States. Financial inclusion initiatives are prevalent in many CAP strategies, indicating a broader EU-wide commitment to levelling economic opportunities for women in agriculture. These objectives demonstrate a concerted effort to not only encourage women's participation but also to provide them with equal tools for success within the rural economy.

Examining the timelines within the analysed CAP policies, it becomes clear that **a phased approach is commonly being employed across most Member States**. Spain, for example, has implemented a multi-phase CAP timeline that includes initial measures for gender parity, followed by mid-term assessments, and a final evaluation phase planned for 2027. This structured approach provides the flexibility needed to adapt strategies based on observed outcomes. In Norway, while gender-specific timelines are less defined, the CAP timeline incorporates checkpoints to assess rural development progress overall, with an emphasis on sustainable agriculture. Sweden's CAP policy similarly schedules mid-term reviews to adjust its gender equality initiatives, ensuring alignment with both national and EU gender targets. These checkpoints allow for periodic reviews of gender inclusivity measures within the broader framework of national CAP objectives.

The role of women in agriculture is a central theme within many CAP policies, with various countries taking innovative approaches to enhance female representation and empowerment. For instance, **Italy's** CAP strategy emphasizes skill development programs tailored to women in rural areas, aiming to increase their employability in both traditional farming and modern agricultural technologies. **Ireland** has incorporated a mentorship program within its CAP policy, pairing experienced female farmers with new entrants to foster knowledge transfer and community support. This initiative reflects a broader EU trend of utilizing mentorship as a tool to support women in male-dominated sectors. Additionally, **Lithuania's** policy includes family-friendly measures that support rural mothers in balancing agricultural work with family responsibilities, a unique aspect not commonly seen in other CAP strategies.

The analysis of national CAP strategies demonstrates a variety of approaches to incorporate gender equality within the EU, including some analyses which have shown that while women are mentioned in the national plans, they are in effect sidelined. Each Member State brings a unique perspective to addressing gender disparities in agriculture, with a somewhat shared commitment to fostering inclusive and sustainable rural development, but a lacking practical integration of gender consideration in the design and implementation phase of national policy documents and strategies. While some countries exhibit comprehensive gender-focused policies, others integrate gender considerations more subtly, often as part of broader socio-economic goals. This analysis

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

underscores the need for cross-national collaboration and knowledge-sharing to elevate gender inclusivity within the CAP framework and ensure equitable progress across Europe. This diversity of approaches further highlights the need for the EU to play its role as a unifying body, encouraging Member States to learn from each other's experiences and promote cross-border collaboration. From a more critical perspective however, it could be viewed as the European Commission passing responsibility to Member States and not introducing any recourse for inconsistencies in implementation. Moving forward, periodic evaluations and inter-country exchanges will be essential to advancing the objectives of the CAP framework and ensuring that gender equality is upheld as a cornerstone of rural policy across Europe. More specifically, a few of the insights emerged from the analysis deserve to be highlighted, as to showcase evidence of national flexibility of CAP, and its suitability to support Member States in moving forward along the same development lines, while responding to national needs and contexts:

- **Italy's** CAP NSP emphasizes a holistic approach, integrating sustainability, generational renewal, food quality, rural entrepreneurship, and environmental conservation. A key aspect of Italy's CAP is its substantial focus on combating rural depopulation and promoting social inclusion, especially targeting younger generations and women by offering support through access to land, credit, and entrepreneurial training.
- **Ireland's** CAP framework highlights sustainability in agriculture while incorporating measures for income support, rural resilience, and environmental protection. While the analysis is generally critical of the CAP NSP, a core feature of Ireland's NSP is its commitment to enhancing farm viability, encouraging environmentally friendly practices, and promoting female participation in agriculture through leadership and ownership support.
- **Spain's** CAP plan is unique in its explicit integration of gender inclusivity, aimed at closing the gender gap within rural communities. It also addresses rural depopulation and seeks to promote generational renewal by providing targeted support to female and young farmers. Water resource management is especially significant in Spain, where climate adaptation is crucial due to frequent droughts.
- **Sweden's** objectives under CAP focus on productivity, sustainability, and food security, with limited attention to gender issues. The Swedish NSP places a strong emphasis on the economic sustainability of agriculture without directly addressing gender equity within its CAP objectives. Perhaps this is because Sweden feels that it adequately addresses gender equality at the national level, it does not need to incorporate it into the CAP NSP. An alternative perspective on the Swedish approach, however, highlights how the Strategy "twists 'gender mainstreaming' by claiming that it promotes gender equality, while it in fact takes no action, thereby co-opting feminism, in line with a 'neoliberal postfeminist discourse', which is harmful to the feminist project." Alternative approaches to gender inequalities suggest that there may be broader, and different, ways of discussing them in relation to rural development, making for a broader spectrum of problematisations and subject positions, which may, in turn, allow a transformation towards gender equality (Pettersson, K., Ahl, H., Berglund, K., & Tillmar, M. (2024).
- **Norway's** CAP strategy, though outside the EU framework, aligns closely with CAP principles, promoting food security, climate-smart agriculture, and sustainability. The Norwegian policy emphasizes support for female entrepreneurship and rural business development as a means of fostering diversity and resilience within the agricultural sector.
- **Scotland's equivalent CAP strategy, also outside the EU framework, also has some alignment with the EU CAP, in particular regarding shared goals.** However, there are also



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

differences which reflect Scotland’s post-Brexit priorities, which in some cases reflect more locally driven approaches.

As the following sections highlight, NSPs in analysed countries have confirmed how the CAP EU framework is not only instrumental to the achievement of the ambitious objectives set out at European level, but also to achieve collateral objectives by allowing Member States to couple agricultural advances and prosperity, with a more environmentally sustainable, just and inclusive approach to the agricultural industry.

Overview of the Gender Dimension in CAP-Related Policies at the National Level

The EU Gender Equality Strategy (GES) can significantly influence the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) by promoting gender-sensitive approaches that aim to eliminate disparities and empower women in agriculture. By aligning the CAP objectives with gender equality goals, the EU can create a more inclusive agricultural sector that benefits all stakeholders, ultimately contributing to sustainable rural development and economic growth. The following are examples where the two policies are interconnected and overlap: policy alignment and objectives (decision-making, policy frameworks); access to resources (land, credit, training, and equal opportunities for support); rural development programs; data collection and monitoring; encouraging women’s leadership, awareness-raising, and training; and sustainability and resilience. Implementing the GES at the national level within the framework of the CAP can lead to significant advancements in promoting gender equality in agriculture. However, several challenges and problems may arise during this process which may hinder the policy development and implementation at the national level: Cultural differences, norms and values regarding gender roles, which can affect the acceptance and implementation of gender equality measures in agriculture; levels of commitment where priorities in one country may differ from the EU strategy; countries lack data and research to measure progress; resource allocation and competing priorities; implementation, integration, and monitoring of the policy implementation; and engaging stakeholders to ensure that active participation of women and combat social resistance. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from national governments, agricultural organizations, and civil society to create an inclusive environment that supports gender equality initiatives.

The CAP policies of the nine analysed Member States reflect both shared values and distinctive national approaches to the role of women in rural development. It would appear that most of the analysed Member States have attempted to address some aspects of gender equality in varying degrees, and within the framework of CAP, in ways that align with their own socio-economic contexts. It must also be noted that, despite the declared efforts and intentions, a relevant integration of gender considerations within national equivalents for CAP are still a long way from the expectations that were established by the EU-level policy and have failed to translate in specific measures and actions in support of women. Looking at positive examples, **Spain** emphasizes gender mainstreaming across all agricultural policy areas, aiming to ensure that women are not only included but prioritized in areas such as resource allocation, training, and leadership opportunities. This approach is echoed by **Ireland**, where CAP policy incorporates initiatives to support female



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

entrepreneurs and encourage women's leadership in agriculture. In contrast, **Lithuania's** approach to gender inclusivity in CAP is more reserved, with fewer dedicated programs targeting women. The Lithuanian policy focuses on supporting rural communities in general, with indirect benefits for women rather than targeted gender initiatives. Similarly, **Sweden's** policy includes women's empowerment within a broader strategy for rural development but lacks specific quotas or gender-based funding.

The policy objectives regarding women's empowerment in CAP strategies across the nine countries underscore a common intent to enhance women's access to economic opportunities. However, the methods and specificity of these objectives vary. **Italy's** CAP strategy, for instance, explicitly aims to increase women's representation in rural governance structures and has set a minimum representation target of 30% in local agricultural committees. This objective demonstrates Italy's commitment to ensuring that women have a voice in decision-making processes. Other countries, such as the Netherlands, Lithuania, and Sweden, exhibit minimal attention to gender inclusivity. The **Netherlands'** NSP lacks significant gender-focused language and tends to reinforce traditional gender-roles. Similarly, **Lithuania** and **Sweden** provide sparse mentions of gender equality, with limited support for women's economic and social participation in rural areas. In contrast, countries like **Ireland** and **Norway** take moderate steps, providing specific measures to engage women but lacking comprehensive gender-focused goals within CAP. Norway, while not a member of the EU, aligns its CAP objectives with a commitment to inclusivity by supporting economic resilience in rural areas. The Norwegian policy, however, lacks gender-specific objectives, focusing instead on rural development as a whole. This approach may benefit women indirectly, although it lacks the targeted focus seen in countries like Spain and Ireland, due to the advanced degree of gender equality in terms of salaries and opportunities that the national context offers.

National CAP strategies showcase diverse approaches to supporting women's roles, ranging from economic empowerment initiatives to skill-building programs. Despite this shared commitment, the depth and scope of these initiatives vary significantly.

Ireland and Spain emphasize gender equality as a strategic pillar within their CAP policies, setting concrete goals for women's representation in rural decision-making. **Ireland's** policy includes targeted supports for women to introduce new farm buildings and equipment on their farms. **Spain's** CAP policy, meanwhile, incorporates gender mainstreaming as a core objective, ensuring that women are prioritized in agricultural training and resource allocation programs. Spain is also supporting the implementation of specific policies to increase women's participation in agriculture through targeted measures such as dedicated funding, legal ownership support, and promoting women in leadership roles. The policy framework in Spain also includes financial incentives for women, providing increased aid rates to support female farmers and combat traditional gender barriers.

In Northern Europe, in some Member States such as **Norway and Sweden**, gender inclusivity is less emphasized, with women's roles addressed as part of general social policy rather than through targeted CAP measures.

Policy objectives focused on women's empowerment within CAP frameworks often highlight goals



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

of increasing female participation in agriculture, enhancing economic opportunities, and fostering leadership roles. Countries like Italy and the Netherlands have set objectives aimed at narrowing the gender gap in rural employment and promoting women's leadership within the agricultural sector. **Italy's** CAP objectives are particularly ambitious, aiming for a minimum representation of women in all rural development initiatives, with an additional focus on upskilling programs. Furthermore, **Scotland's** three CAP-related national policies which were consulted for this analysis suggest varying approaches and measures. While measures are often not referring specifically to women but tend to identify specific target groups as “young and new entrants”, the Government's commitment to encourage a greater consideration of the gender dimension is currently being increased. As suggested by the ongoing consultation “Delivering our vision for Scottish agriculture - proposals for a new Agriculture Bill”, integrating women into environmentally sustainable farming practices and addressing gender diversity could act as a catalyst for broader ecological goal: “We believe that agriculture can play a leading role in delivering a net zero and nature-positive Scotland and we remain committed to supporting active farming and food production. These elements are key to delivering on the commitment to being a Good Food Nation, supporting local food strategy, promoting strong local food supply chains and increasing gender equality and opportunities for women and new entrants.” The future Bill could therefore eventually enable a wider range of support. By promoting both gender equality and environmental responsibility, it is hoped that Scotland will be able to demonstrate in the future how CAP policies can be aligned with multiple EU priorities simultaneously.

The nine analysed countries implement various specific measures to support women in rural and agricultural sectors, tailored to their unique national contexts, and including specific measures designed to support women in rural and agricultural sectors. These measures can vary from training programs to financial incentives.

Ireland's CAP policy is noteworthy for its mentorship programs aimed at connecting female newcomers to agriculture with established women in the field. This initiative supports both skill development and community building among women farmers. In **Spain**, targeted training programs provide women with skills to navigate and succeed in the agricultural sector, addressing a key barrier to women's participation. **Italy's** CAP strategy also features funding for women-led agricultural enterprises, promoting economic independence for women through direct financial support. Additionally, **Lithuania's** CAP includes measures to accommodate the dual responsibilities often held by women in balancing family and work, and to provide flexible work arrangements for women, acknowledging the dual responsibilities many women face in managing both family and agricultural duties, by offering flexible agricultural work opportunities. The **Netherlands** provides access to technology and training for female farmers, aiming to reduce gender disparities in technological adoption. This measure aligns with the Dutch CAP objective to modernize agriculture while ensuring women are equally represented in tech-driven advancements. All of the above-listed targeted initiatives demonstrate a growing recognition of the diverse roles that women can play within rural economies.

Beyond training and mentorship, specific measures in countries like Italy and Norway demonstrate the range of strategies employed to support women in agriculture. **Italy's** CAP strategy includes



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

micro-grants that specifically target young women entrepreneurs, helping them overcome initial financial barriers to entering the agricultural industry. These grants are complemented by a network of support services that offer technical guidance, enabling women to navigate the complex regulatory landscape of agriculture. **Norway**, although less specific in gender-targeted initiatives, includes family-oriented support within its CAP strategy, recognizing that family obligations often impact women's capacity to engage in full-time agricultural roles. Norway's approach reflects a broader Nordic model of gender inclusivity, providing childcare subsidies to rural families, which indirectly supports participation in the sector by alleviating caregiving responsibilities for all caregivers. In **Spain**, CAP policies emphasize financial support for women-led sustainable farming projects, linking gender equality with environmental sustainability. Through this approach, Spain not only aims at empowering women economically, but it also wishes to encourage their involvement in eco-friendly agricultural practices, aligning gender policy with Spain's environmental objectives.

The analysis of CAP policies across these nine countries underscores both the diversity of attempts at gender inclusivity within the framework, as well as significant disparities in some of their approaches. While each nation brings its own unique lens to integrating women into rural and agricultural development, sometimes with targeted objectives, measures, and programs that reflect their specific socio-economic contexts, the results are not entirely successful, and the effectiveness of these efforts may be questionable. Although shared themes of empowerment and inclusion emerge, the variations highlight opportunities for further alignment and collaboration across Member States to enhance gender equality within the CAP framework. This situation underscores the urgent need for greater alignment and collaboration among Member States to genuinely enhance gender equality within the CAP framework, rather than allowing superficial measures to persist.

Overview of gender implications of interactions with other identified policies at national level: LTVRA, digital policies, AI, climate change

CAP implementation intersects with various policy domains, reinforcing rural economic and social resilience through synergies with digital policies, AI, climate initiatives, and the LTVRA. The *corpus* of plans, strategies and regulations that have been – and are being – developed at national and EU level across the above-mentioned domains should also be benchmarked and assessed on the basis of to what extent it include gender considerations within each of these frameworks, and how each individual framework can actually have an impact on how gender-related issues, measures and incentives are perceived, framed and implemented in the other areas.

One of the most significant intersections between CAP and other policy domains is with environmental and climate policies. As agriculture plays a major role in both greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity, **CAP aligns closely with the EU's environmental goals**. CAP policies encourage sustainable farming practices, such as crop rotation, reduced pesticide use, and conservation of natural habitats. For example, **Ireland's** CAP policy includes specific initiatives for carbon sequestration through soil management, aiming to reduce the agricultural sector's carbon footprint. In **Spain**, CAP measures promote the use of renewable energy in farming operations,



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

directly supporting the EU’s Renewable Energy Directive. This integration helps align agricultural practices with the EU’s broader climate targets, aiming for carbon neutrality by 2050. However, despite these efforts, certain challenges persist, such as balancing economic agricultural needs with conservation efforts, especially in countries heavily reliant on agricultural exports. The intersection of CAP and climate change policies holds significant potential for advancing gender equality in rural areas. Women in agriculture often face unique challenges in adapting to climate impacts due to limited access to resources and decision-making roles. CAP policies aligned with national climate strategies can address this by promoting women’s involvement in sustainable farming and climate-adaptive practices. In the case of **Norway** and **Sweden**, the lack of specific reference to women within the policy document might push both countries to face challenges in ensuring that climate policies within CAP frameworks adequately represent women’s voices in decision-making, limiting the potential impact on gender equality. To address these disparities, all Member States are encouraged to enhance women’s participation in climate resilience planning, supported by CAP as a vehicle for inclusive climate adaptation in rural areas.

The **Netherlands**, **Ireland**, and **Scotland** exhibit robust interactions with all the policies listed in the beginning of the paragraph, focusing on digital inclusion, climate-smart agriculture, and resource management. **Ireland’s** integration of CAP with its national Climate Action Plan and digitalization initiatives is notable, fostering innovation in agricultural practices to meet EU Green Deal standards. **Lithuania** and **Sweden** pursue similar interactions, embedding climate resilience within CAP to support sustainable food systems and local food security. **Scotland**, amid its policy transition post-Brexit, is exploring ways to integrate CAP with digital and climate-focused measures, establishing groundwork for future strategies that include climate-smart objectives and sustainable agricultural support.

These national examples highlight the interactions between agricultural policies and broader initiatives such as digital inclusion, climate-smart agriculture, and resource management. These themes are closely related to gender equality in several ways, including:

- **Access** to resources, opportunities, and digital inclusion, where women often face barrier to accessing technology and digital resources.
- Climate-Smart Agriculture can create opportunities for women to **participate** in sustainable practices that are often overlooked. Women play a crucial role in food production and resource management, and integrating gender perspectives into climate initiatives can empower them to adopt and lead sustainable agricultural practices, thereby enhancing their roles in food security and environmental stewardship. For example, by integrating CAP with its Climate Action Plan and digitalization initiatives, this holistic approach to policymaking can be an opportunity to ensure that gender considerations are included in all aspects of agricultural and environmental policies, promoting inclusivity and addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by women in rural areas.
- The emphasis on **sustainable food systems** and local food security can benefit women, who are often key players in local agriculture and food production. By supporting these systems, policies can enhance women’s **inclusivity** and economic opportunities and decision-making power within their communities.

All of these themes are inherently linked to gender equality, and by addressing issues of access,



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

participation, and inclusivity, a more equitable agricultural sector that empowers women and promotes gender equality alongside sustainable development goals can be ensured.

Digital and technological advancement is also increasingly prioritized within CAP, especially as the EU seeks to modernize agriculture through the use of precision farming, digital monitoring, and AI-driven data analysis. CAP policies increasingly intersect with national digital agendas and AI strategies, with its own digital initiatives being closely aligned with the EU's Digital Agenda, aiming to modernise agricultural practices (both in terms of infrastructures and processes/procedures) and to improve efficiency through technology. However, gender disparities in digital access present a significant barrier for women in rural areas. Countries like **Spain** and **Italy** have introduced CAP-supported digital literacy programs to reduce the gendered digital divide, equipping women farmers with the skills needed to engage emerging technologies to improve their resilience and proficiency. Digital policies are also integrated with CAP objectives to support women in adopting technology for sustainable farming, thereby contributing to both productivity and gender equality goals. By promoting digital inclusion, these policies seek to close the digital divide, empowering rural communities to benefit from modern technologies. In **Norway**, CAP supports the development of digital tools for monitoring crop health, optimizing irrigation, and managing resources more efficiently. These tools contribute to both productivity and environmental sustainability, demonstrating how digitalization under CAP policies has dual benefits. However, challenges include ensuring equitable access to technology, as some rural areas still face digital infrastructure limitations. More specifically, women farmers end up being less proficient and ready when it comes to implementation of new technology in agriculture (such as digital tools for monitoring crop health, for optimizing irrigation, and for more efficient management of resources), but this might depend also on the relatively small size of their farms/businesses. Nonetheless, gender-specific measures could be helpful to redress such unbalance and provide fair and better access to technology to them as well. Addressing this requires CAP policies to not only promote digital literacy but also work in tandem with national digital infrastructure policies to provide equitable access to resources. The same issue has been also reported by **Croatia**.

Finally, while the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) has been criticised for its lack of clear goals around women, it has the potential to provide a strategic framework that aligns with CAP's goals of fostering sustainable rural development. A notable aspect of LTVRA is its emphasis on inclusivity, recognizing the need for equal opportunities and socio-economic support for all rural residents, including women. CAP policies support LTVRA by implementing measures that encourage women's participation in rural economies, particularly through funding for women-led businesses and targeted training programs. The research has revealed a shortfall in positive impacts, with some national policies demonstrating examples where advancement has been made, but more highlighting areas where improvements are needed.

In **Italy**, for example, CAP and LTVRA alignment has resulted in programs that provide rural women with access to entrepreneurship grants and resources, aiming to reduce gender disparities in economic participation. However, in countries like **Lithuania**, CAP initiatives focus more broadly on community support rather than direct gender-specific objectives, creating a gap in how women benefit from LTVRA's inclusivity vision. To address this, Member States should consider adopting



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

gender-focused LTVRA initiatives within CAP to ensure women's unique contributions and challenges in rural areas are fully recognized. These examples illustrate the need to focus more specifically on the distinct obstacles that are hindering the advancement of gender equality in each country's rural areas, and the importance of taking explicit actions to ensure that they are corrected.

Challenges to CAP's implementation, especially regarding gender equality, vary by country but reveal common obstacles across Member States. A **lack of clear objectives, measurable targets, and dedicated budget allocations** for gender equality frequently undermine gender-inclusive policy intentions. Without clear gender-related benchmarks, progress in achieving gender parity is difficult to measure, and policy efforts may remain largely symbolic rather than transformative. Furthermore, a lack of clear reporting mechanisms hinders transparency in tracking gender equality progress. Many countries do not have well-defined metrics or frameworks for reporting on gender-specific outcomes within CAP programs, leading to challenges in accountability. This can result in gender initiatives being deprioritized, as their impacts are difficult to measure effectively.

Additionally, **limited financial support** for women-specific initiatives is a common obstacle. While countries like **Spain, Italy** and **Norway** provide targeted funding for women-led projects (with overall amounts and percentages of the total budget dedicated to specific investment priorities and targeting women vary considerably across these countries), other nations, such as **Lithuania** and **Sweden**, tend to allocate resources to general rural development without a targeted focus on gender. This lack of targeted financial support means that women may struggle to access resources equitably.

Another recurring issue is the **shortage of mentorship and skill-building programs** tailored specifically for women. Ireland's mentorship initiative demonstrates the potential of such programs, but similar efforts are largely absent in other countries. This lack of mentorship can lead to a skills gap, limiting women's opportunities to advance in agricultural careers and reducing retention rates among female farmers.

Each country faces unique challenges in promoting gender equality within CAP policies, shaped by national socio-economic contexts and policy priorities. In **Lithuania**, for example, CAP policies lack direct gender-specific objectives, with rural development strategies often framed around broader community support. This approach may inadvertently overlook the unique needs of women in agriculture, creating an environment where women are not prioritized for resource allocation. **Norway** faces delays in implementing gender-focused initiatives, as CAP policies are structured around both rural economic and social resilience, but do not have a clear integration of the gender dimension. In the specific case of Norway, it is worth highlighting how the lack of focus on gender aspects might also be seen as an intended "strategy": by using more general terms (pointing to social concerns) could support the recognition of the multitude of both men and masculinities, and women and femininities – where all of these may have different needs/need to be approached in different ways. Additionally, previous publications have also considered how "one of the main dilemmas is that by founding a women's organization, **gender is made visible and put into focus**, while its ultimate aim is to make gender irrelevant and the organization redundant in the future" (Farstad, Brandth, Follo and Haugen (2004). Notwithstanding the variety of different possible approaches to the lack of gender focus, it must be noted how this aspect can delay efforts to address



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

specific challenges that women encounter, such as limited access to agricultural resources or leadership roles. In **Croatia**, for example, the initial support for young entrants (including women, but women are not specifically targeted by policy) into agriculture is substantial but lacks continuity. This results in high turnover rates, as women often struggle to maintain long-term agricultural roles without sustained support. Addressing these retention issues will be essential for creating a stable female workforce in rural areas. At the same time the policy does not raise awareness of women's rights, challenge stereotypes or promote equal opportunities as it does not actively promote gender mainstreaming in all aspects of agricultural policy and programming. It also fails to address the lack of access to funding, training, information, mentoring and networks, which is particularly important for women. In addition, it does not relate the need for social infrastructure (e.g. for childcare or eldercare) with women's invisible work.

Another widespread obstacle is the scarcity of networking opportunities for women in agriculture. While countries like **Ireland** and **Spain** have started to foster community-building and mentorship opportunities, these remain isolated examples. Without access to networks that offer guidance, support, and shared resources, women in rural areas may find it difficult to overcome the isolation often experienced in agricultural work.

In **Sweden**, the limited reference to gender equality in the analysed strategy and overall national CAP policy has led to a noted gap in leadership representation, as the country lacks a comprehensive framework for tackling rural gender disparities: women are somewhat underrepresented in decision-making roles, with limited opportunities to contribute to policy direction or rural governance. This issue is echoed in other Northern European countries, where CAP policies lack structured pathways to increase women's participation in leadership.

Italy, despite its strong emphasis on women's representation, encounters logistical delays in implementing specific gender-targeted programs. Budget constraints and administrative bottlenecks have slowed the rollout of several initiatives intended to support women in rural areas. As a result, women in certain regions still face delays in accessing the financial and training resources that have been legislated.

In the **Netherlands**, digital literacy programs are included in CAP but are not fully tailored to address the specific challenges rural women face. While these programs aim to modernize agricultural practices, they are often structured as general training modules, limiting their accessibility for women who may need a more supportive learning environment due to prior digital exclusion. The Netherlands also faces challenges due to minimal gender integration, with policy language and structural support favouring traditional roles, which restricts women's engagement in formal agricultural processes.

The barriers identified across the nine countries reveal recurring challenges in achieving gender equality in CAP policies. Addressing these challenges requires a combination of clear policy objectives, targeted funding, and community-driven support mechanisms. Member States are encouraged to adopt the following recommendations to overcome these obstacles.

For instance, the Netherlands faces barriers due to limited gender focus, which constrains female farmers' access to resources and recognition within the agricultural sector. In Sweden and Lithuania,



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

gender considerations are sidelined, resulting in policies that lack actionable plans to reduce gender disparities. Ireland and Spain also confront structural hurdles in integrating gender objectives comprehensively into CAP due to limited policy cohesion and insufficient funding. These challenges underscore a broader issue within CAP-related policies, where gender equity objectives often compete with other priorities, limiting their effectiveness in transforming gender norms and increasing female participation in rural economies.

Italy, despite its gender-inclusive policies, confronts challenges in bridging the gap between policy intentions and on-the-ground implementation, with social programs often constrained by budget limitations. Ireland's CAP NSP faces structural barriers in promoting gender inclusivity comprehensively, due to limited cohesion between gender goals and the broader CAP framework.

Spain, although a frontrunner in gender-sensitive CAP integration, continues to experience implementation challenges, especially in extending support uniformly across its diverse regions. Financial constraints and regional disparities are recurring issues that affect policy effectiveness.

Critique, best practices and suggested next steps for policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality

This analysis has demonstrated that the missed opportunity –some may call it a failure -- of the European Commission to provide clear guidance and targets for gender equality in the EU CAP has undermined its successful implementation across the Member States. Delegating gender responsibilities to the Member States, without any sanctions for non-compliance, is effectively abdicating responsibility for gender equality in agriculture. Society can witness the negative effects that rural women face – including perpetuation of gender disparities, underutilization of women's skills and potential, reduced social cohesion, and much more –as a result of these measures. In addition, research has repeatedly shown that 'soft' measures with sanctions are far less effective in advancing gender equality than 'hard laws' (Shortall and Marangudakis, 2022).

Nonetheless, within the CAP frameworks of the nine analysed countries, several best practices have emerged that exemplify effective strategies for supporting women in rural and agricultural roles. These practices include targeted funding for women-led enterprises; gender-responsive training programs; and policies that prioritize the representation of women in decision-making processes.

For instance, **Ireland's** CAP policy incorporates mentorship programs that connect experienced female farmers with new female entrants, fostering community support and knowledge-sharing. This approach not only aids skill development but also creates a supportive network that can address the unique challenges faced by women in agriculture.

Spain demonstrates another best practice with its commitment to gender mainstreaming across CAP objectives. By embedding gender equality into all aspects of policy design, Spain ensures that women receive equitable access to resources, training, and leadership opportunities. This approach has proven effective in creating a culture of inclusivity at every level of agricultural policy.

Italy includes digital training programs tailored for women, aimed at enhancing digital literacy and ensuring that female farmers can leverage modern agricultural technologies through AKIS (Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation Systems) interventions, which are increasingly becoming a



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

tool and concept of social, besides technological, innovation. This practice is essential in bridging the digital divide and providing women with the tools needed to thrive in an increasingly tech-driven sector.

While significant strides have been made in promoting gender equality within CAP policies, various gaps remain. Some countries, such as **Lithuania** and **Norway**, lack specific gender-focused initiatives, often addressing women's needs indirectly within general social policies. While different interpretations have been offered in the previous paragraphs as to why there might be a willingness to positively blur the harsh gender divide, and in fact turn the concept of gender into a more comprehensive concept (specifically in the case of Norway), this approach can still lead to inconsistencies in how women are supported across rural communities. Identifying these gaps provides an opportunity to develop a more comprehensive framework that directly addresses gender equality as a policy priority.

The **Netherlands**, for example, is among those countries which face challenges due to minimal gender integration, with policy language and structural support favouring traditional roles, which restricts women's engagement in formal agricultural processes.

Moreover, policies in countries like **Croatia** tend to lack the infrastructure to retain women in long-term agricultural roles, as resources often focus on initial support for entrants rather than sustained development. Addressing retention strategies is essential to fostering a stable and committed female workforce in rural areas.

Member States have stated that if the EU wants gender equality in the CAP to be taken seriously, then the EU must regulate for it (Shortall and Marangudakis, 2024). This is a straightforward solution that would address the differential and weak implementation across Member States.

5. LTVRA – National Overview

Context and objectives

The Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) policies across the analysed Member States present a variety of trends, recurring themes, and objectives. These policies are generally shaped by national socio-economic priorities, aiming to achieve a balance between rural development, economic resilience, and social inclusivity. All of the nine analysed policy timelines generally align with the EU's LTVRA framework, allowing for periodic assessments to adapt policies in response to socio-economic and environmental changes. Such structured timelines should facilitate progress monitoring and allow for prompt identification (and addressing) of emerging issues in achieving long-term rural sustainability, allowing Member States to implement gradual, phased approaches that can be adapted based on mid-term evaluations.

The national equivalent documents studied, however, do not entirely match EU policy. For example, the EU LTVRA emphasizes broad objectives such as sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience, focusing on economic, social, and environmental dimensions. However, when implemented at the national



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

level, the individual countries may prioritize more specific local objectives based on their unique socio-economic contexts, leading to variations in focus areas (e.g., agriculture, tourism, digitalization). Furthermore, when examining implementation and funding mechanisms, national policies may adopt different strategies depending on available resources, local needs, and community interests. Cultural, historical, and regional differences can also influence how policies are interpreted and implemented. For instance, rural areas in Southern Europe may face different challenges compared to those in Northern Europe, leading to tailored approaches that may not align perfectly with the EU vision. These differences highlight the need for flexibility in the implementation of EU policies to accommodate the diverse realities of rural areas across Europe.

One key theme raised that is in alignment with the LTVRA's EU-wide sustainability goals, and for which countries have adopted measures, is that of the promotion of environmental stewardship, digital modernization, and community support. Another important element which is emphasized in the EU Gender Equality Strategy (GES) is the importance of addressing various aspects of gender equality, including the need for support systems that facilitate work-life balance, particularly in rural areas. The GES recognises that a lack of childcare particularly impacts women in rural areas. While the GES itself does not advocate exclusively for rural childcare, it recognizes the critical role that accessible childcare plays in promoting gender equality, especially for women in rural communities. It also states it will work with the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development to enhance the childcare provisions in rural areas, but there is no evidence of that in the documents analysed.

A deeper look at each Member State's approach to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas reveals some **common priorities and unique strategies aligned with LTVRA goals**. For example, the **Italian** LTVRA policy is framed around a long-term timeline, underscoring the importance of sustainable rural development, focusing on green practices and resource management, while also prioritizing economic opportunities for rural residents, therefore focusing heavily on sustainability and community-led rural development. **Italy** emphasizes the role of rural areas in national economic resilience and environmental sustainability, setting ambitious targets for reducing rural-urban disparities. **Ireland's** LTVRA objectives aim to address demographic challenges, including rural depopulation, with policy analysis highlighting incentives for young people and newcomers to establish agricultural enterprises, which aligns with both LTVRA and CAP goals of promoting economic renewal in rural regions. **Spain**, on the other hand, adopts a multifaceted approach with a 'National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge,' focusing on rural population retention through connectivity, education, and gender inclusivity. **Norway's** LTVRA framework emphasizes again rural economic resilience, with a specific focus on creating opportunities for new entrants and promoting rural innovation. In all, when considering the national analyses, the subject of women is not frequently discussed in depth, or it is sidelined into a separate chapter (not mainstreamed). For example, the **Netherlands** reports that '...it is desirable to make greater use of women's strengths and talents both in the organising and dynamization capacity a Local Action Group, and in concrete projects.' However, for the remaining 40 pages, there is no further mention of women. The Lithuanian plan does place some emphasis on gender equality by stating that the 'Plan's implementation must take into account the needs of people with disabilities, women and men, different age groups, and national minorities', It also recognizes that **Lithuania** has progress to make



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

with regard to its place on the Gender Equality Index. The **Irish** equivalent policy presents women in a separate category and does not address the important fact that women can face barriers in accessing key financial supports. There are many reasons why integrating women's issues into policy rather than relegating them to a separate section is crucial for several reasons. Integrating women's issues into the core of policy documents promotes a holistic and comprehensive approach to gender equality to ensure that gender considerations are embedded in all aspects of policymaking, rather than being treated as an afterthought or separate concern, leading to tokenism. When women's issues are integrated, it also normalizes the conversation around gender equality, making it a fundamental aspect of all policies rather than a peripheral issue, and helping to ensure sustainable resource allocation and longer-term funding.

In summary, integrating women's issues into policy rather than placing them in a separate section is vital for fostering genuine gender equality. It promotes a comprehensive, sustainable approach that recognizes the interconnectedness of social issues, ensures adequate resource allocation, and empowers women by amplifying their voices in decision-making processes. This integration is essential for creating effective policies that lead to meaningful change and progress toward gender equality.

Economic resilience is a cornerstone of the LTVRA framework across multiple Member States, reflecting a shared recognition of the need to bolster **rural economies**. Italy's LTVRA policy emphasizes the role of sustainable economic development, particularly through resource management and local enterprise support. For example, Italy's policy aims to reduce disparities between rural and urban communities by promoting locally driven business initiatives that support economic autonomy and resilience. Similarly, Ireland's LTVRA policies focus on rural population retention, with objectives tied to attracting younger generations to agricultural and rural enterprises. Ireland has introduced incentives targeting young people and newcomers, providing access to capital and resources to establish rural enterprises. Spain adopts a comparable approach, using its 'National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge' to retain rural populations by improving job opportunities and access to essential services. These policies highlight the importance of addressing economic vulnerabilities in rural areas, fostering resilience and economic stability across Member States, but the direct focus is not per se on women

Environmental sustainability is a critical component of LTVRA, with several countries embedding climate resilience and green practices in their rural development frameworks and gender considerations are addressed in a number of different ways across Member States, with some countries incorporating gender-specific measures within their LTVRA policies. For instance, **Spain's** approach includes targeted funding and initiatives to improve rural women's access to leadership roles in community development. Gender mainstreaming is embedded in Spain's LTVRA policies, recognizing the critical role of women in rural sustainability. However, countries like **Norway** and **Lithuania** take a more general approach, with policies supporting community development as a whole, but lacking direct references to gender-specific initiatives. This differentiation highlights the need for a more standardised approach to gender inclusion, as women's roles and full inclusion in economic and social developments are vital for achieving balanced and sustainable rural development across Member States.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Italy's long-term vision promotes sustainable resource management, encouraging renewable energy use, and reducing environmental impact across rural regions. This aligns with Italy's broader LTVRA objectives to support green practices within rural communities. **Spain** also incorporates environmental sustainability into its LTVRA, with specific measures aimed at resource efficiency, promoting the use of sustainable technologies, and reducing the rural carbon footprint. Spain's policy framework emphasizes connectivity and resource conservation, supporting the EU's climate goals by fostering environmentally friendly practices in agriculture and local enterprises. **Sweden's** LTVRA approach focuses on sustainable land use, advocating for eco-friendly agricultural practices and conservation efforts to protect rural landscapes. Such policies underline a collective commitment across Member States to incorporate environmental stewardship within the LTVRA framework, ensuring long-term viability for rural communities and ecosystems.

Community-driven development is another prevalent theme in the LTVRA policies, reflecting the importance of local engagement in shaping effective rural policies. **Norway's** LTVRA emphasizes community-led initiatives, prioritizing local stakeholder involvement in decision-making processes. This approach not only strengthens local commitment to policy goals but also promotes rural innovation by leveraging the knowledge and resources of local actors. In **Croatia**, the National Development Strategy integrates local voices through Local Action Groups (LAGs), fostering a participatory approach that empowers rural communities to contribute actively to policy development. By incorporating LAGs, Croatia seeks to enhance local ownership and ensure that policies are tailored to community-specific needs. Ireland's policy also reflects this community-driven focus, with rural residents participating in the planning and implementation of initiatives aimed at economic revitalization. These examples demonstrate a shared recognition among Member States of the value in embedding community-driven principles within the LTVRA framework, allowing for policies that resonate with and effectively support rural communities.

Overview of the Gender Dimension in LTVRA-Related Policies

Several Member States explicitly acknowledge the importance of supporting women in rural areas within their LTVRA policies. Looking at the gender dimension of national LTVRA-related policies, however, the analysis reveals a widely diverse approach to gender inclusivity, with some countries implementing dedicated measures to support women in rural areas, while others integrating gender equality indirectly within broader rural development frameworks. Looking at specific countries, gender mainstreaming is a foundational component of LTVRA in **Spain**, with explicit objectives to increase women's representation in leadership roles and improve access to resources for female entrepreneurs in rural settings. Spain's strategy outlines specific funding streams dedicated to women-led enterprises, ensuring that female entrepreneurs in rural regions have access to capital and business resources. This targeted support for women reflects Spain's commitment to reducing gender disparities in rural economic participation. **Italy** similarly focuses on women's economic empowerment, offering grants to support female-led agricultural projects as part of its LTVRA goals, which align with gender equality and sustainable development, which align with both gender equality and environmental objectives. These programs are also suited to connect newcomers with experienced women in agriculture, fostering a supportive environment that encourages economic



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

participation and retention in rural careers. Mentorship initiatives are designed to provide guidance, networking, and community support, helping women overcome the unique challenges associated with rural entrepreneurship.

Some elements of gender mainstreaming are evident in the LTVRA policies of several Member States. Many countries are implementing measures that prioritize women's access to economic resources, training, and leadership opportunities in rural areas. For example, **Spain's** policy framework further underscores this trend with a dedicated focus on enhancing women's participation in rural governance, a crucial step toward achieving gender parity in decision-making. By integrating gender considerations at every level, Spain seeks to foster a comprehensive culture of inclusivity within its rural communities, providing a model for other Member States. These recurring elements highlight a growing recognition of the value of gender parity in rural development and the importance of supporting women as key drivers of economic and social resilience in rural areas.

Despite these advances, notable gaps in gender-focused initiatives persist across certain Member States, demonstrating a more selective (laid back?) approach to gender equality, and avoiding a more robust Gender Mainstreaming approach. True Gender Mainstreamed national documents must consider the development and integration of their policies and strategies, and their implementation and evaluation processes. They should include a thorough gender analysis to understand the specific needs, challenges, and opportunities of rural women and men; ensure that women and marginalized groups are actively engaged; and establish clear gender-specific targets within the LTVRA framework. There are many more concepts to include, but none of the policies examined to date have evidenced a complete gender mainstreaming process. As an example, the **Swedish** LTVRA equivalent analysis found that the document does have a focus on women entrepreneurs, but merely for the sake of increased competitiveness and economic growth. As a piece of supporting evidence to the lack of a complete gender mainstreaming approach, in fact, the Swedish plan introduces no specific measures targeting women.

For the LTVRA to be completely gender mainstreamed, it is essential to integrate these elements into its policies and practices. This comprehensive approach will help ensure that the unique needs and contributions of women and men in rural areas are recognized and addressed, ultimately leading to more equitable and sustainable rural development.

In countries such as **Lithuania and Norway**, gender inclusivity is approached more generally. The policies may support community-wide benefits without specific mechanisms for addressing gender disparities. This broader focus can lead to unintentional gaps, as women may face unique challenges in accessing resources, training, or leadership opportunities. As such, the role of women in LTVRA policies varies, often reflecting each country's distinct approach to gender equality within rural development. In **Lithuania**, for example, LTVRA policies do not explicitly prioritise gender equality, with support programs aimed more generally at community development rather than addressing specific barriers that women face in rural settings. Norway's policy approach does not include specific measures to promote gender inclusivity because difference in gender roles and salaries in the country becoming more closely aligned. In addition, the absence of detailed data on gender may result in a situation where women's needs are not adequately addressed within the larger rural



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

economic support programs.

Budget constraints and limited administrative resources also present challenges for countries like Croatia, where initial gender-focused efforts are often scaled back due to funding limitations. These gaps underscore the importance of dedicated gender-focused objectives and highlight areas where additional support may be needed to address the unique challenges faced by women in rural areas. As more Member States recognize the necessity of gender-specific policies within LTVRA, such gaps may be bridged to create a more equitable foundation for rural development. In this perspective, several effective gender-inclusive strategies have emerged within the LTVRA framework. **Ireland's** mentorship program is an example of a successful model that provides both economic and community support, encouraging women's active participation in rural enterprises. This initiative, which pairs new female entrants with experienced women in agriculture, has been instrumental in building networks of support for women in rural areas. **Spain's** approach to gender mainstreaming within rural governance structures could also serve as a best practice that could inspire other Member States. By ensuring that women are represented in decision-making roles, Spain enhances the inclusivity of its policy framework and promotes gender-sensitive planning across rural initiatives. **Italy's** financial grants for women-led sustainable projects also reflect a promising model, providing rural women with the capital needed to establish and expand environmentally conscious businesses, thereby contributing to both economic and environmental goals. These examples highlight a significant gap in the current approach to the LTVRA, revealing the urgent need for targeted gender policies to drive meaningful change in rural communities. Without formalizing gender-specific objectives and adequately supporting women's participation, Member States risk perpetuating existing gender disparities, such as the lack of childcare in rural areas, which may undermine the effectiveness of LTVRA policies and jeopardize the socio-economic stability of rural areas. It is crucial that the EU and Member States take decisive actions to prioritize gender inclusivity, to create lasting, positive impacts in rural communities. By formalizing gender-specific objectives and increasing support for women's participation, Member States can ensure that LTVRA policies effectively address gender disparities that will enhance the socio-economic stability of rural areas.

Overview of gender implications of interactions with other identified policies at national level: CAP, digital policies, AI, climate change

The analysed LTVRA policies also interact with other key policy areas, such as CAP, digital transformation, AI, and climate change, each of which has unique implications for gender equality. Examining the interactions between LTVRA and other policy areas provides insights into how gender equality is both supported and hindered by intersecting policy frameworks.

CAP is the closest policy area to LTVRA, with a number of Member States displaying synergies among the two frameworks at national level. CAP indeed provides funding opportunities that can be harnessed through LTVRA policies to promote women's participation in agriculture. As an example, Spain has indeed put in place a framework to leverage funding within its LTVRA initiatives, with the aim of encouraging female farmers' access to training and resources, therefore helping bridge gender gaps in agricultural participation. The Spanish Government, through the Ministry for



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, has invested 10,000M€ to achieve the proposals contained in the Demographic Challenge Action Plan, which represents 10% of the Recovery, Transformation and Resilience Plan. Although it is not possible to access the exact amount allocated to equality in the document analysed, it should be recalled that gender equality appears among its main axes, with priority transversal actions. In the context of CAP, for example, LTVRA policies can also support women by aligning rural development efforts with CAP's funding mechanisms, which provide financial incentives for women-led projects in agriculture. The intersection of LTVRA with CAP policies offers important opportunities for gender equality in rural areas. CAP's funding mechanisms, when aligned with LTVRA's objectives, can help close gender gaps by providing women farmers with the financial resources needed to thrive. In Italy and Spain, CAP-supported projects targeting women-led agricultural businesses can be integrated within the LTVRA framework, ensuring women have equitable access to capital and training resources. More specifically, Spain's LTVRA approach works in tandem with CAP to prioritize women's inclusion in agricultural training, thereby addressing gender disparities.

Digital and AI policies also intersect with LTVRA, particularly in the areas of digital literacy and access to technology. The EU GES 2020-2025 specifically addresses the digital divide as a significant barrier to achieving gender equality, particularly in the context of the increasing importance of digital technologies in various aspects of life, including education, employment, and social participation. It recognizes that women and girls are often at a disadvantage in accessing and benefiting from digital technologies, and that this weakness can exacerbate existing gender inequalities, limiting women's opportunities in education, employment, and entrepreneurship. The GES further highlights the digital divide as a critical issue that must be addressed to achieve gender equality. By promoting digital skills, encouraging women's participation in the digital economy, and ensuring equal access to digital services, the strategy aims to empower women and girls in the digital age.

Italy has adopted a CAP-supported digital training program, aligned with LTVRA goals, that equips women with digital skills essential for modern agriculture. This overlap demonstrates how integrated digital policies can reduce the digital divide and promote gender inclusivity. More specifically, the Netherlands has implemented CAP-supported digital literacy programs that specifically cater to rural women, aiming to bridge the gendered digital divide in agriculture. These programs provide women with essential skills for navigating AI-driven tools and data management systems, allowing them to engage more actively in modern farming practices. Notwithstanding the remarkable initiative, the digital divide remains a challenge in more remote areas, suggesting the need for expanded digital infrastructure investment to ensure equitable access.

Similarly, the intersection of LTVRA with climate change policies has gendered implications. In Italy, LTVRA policies support sustainable farming initiatives that encourage women's participation in climate-resilient agricultural practices. Ensuring women's access to resources for climate adaptation is critical, as it promotes both environmental sustainability and gender equality. Italy's policy, for example, encourages women-led initiatives in climate-resilient farming, recognizing the unique perspectives women bring to environmental stewardship. All of the above examples underscore the potential for LTVRA to foster gender equality by integrating complementary policy objectives from CAP, digital, AI, and climate frameworks

Critique, best practices and suggested next steps for policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality

While significant efforts are being made to integrate gender equality into LTVRA policies, various obstacles persist that hinder these goals. One common obstacle is the **lack of gender-specific objectives** within several national LTVRA frameworks. As in the case of CAP (see section above), without clear benchmarks it is difficult to assess impact of implemented measures and policies and promote gender equality outcomes effectively. In countries like Lithuania, Norway, and Croatia, assessing the impact of gender initiatives becomes difficult, and gender objectives may remain under-prioritized. In the case of Norway, however, gender considerations are more indirectly addressed, but this approach could still lead to unintended gaps in how resources and support are allocated to women in rural areas, and persistence of stark differences between men and women in accessing and benefitting from national policy frameworks and opportunities. This is another case of mis-matched EU documents and attempts to implement policies at the national level without the means to ensure equality in application, and without gender disaggregated data.

Another challenge is represented by the **limited access to financial and technical resources for women**, especially in regions where infrastructure for training and digital support is underdeveloped. As an example, the analysis has highlighted how Norway's LTVRA lacks dedicated funding for gender-specific programs, which may limit women's opportunities in rural development. In parallel, **budget constraints** are in some cases also affecting **national and regional administration**, causing delays in policy implementation or administrative challenges. This element can represent a significant obstacle for countries like Italy, where gender-related initiatives are often deprioritized due to limited resources.

Additionally, a common challenging element that has emerged from the analysed national context is related to **delays in digital infrastructure development**, which lead to a widening of the already existing digital divide and having a stronger repercussion on women in general and even more so on rural women, whose ability to access necessary technology and training is often more reduced than that of women who live and work in non-rural contexts. More specifically, the digital infrastructure gap remains a challenge in some regions, such as those remote areas of Norway and Croatia, where access to technology is limited for the entire population, but might affect women more deeply than men, as highlighted also in the previous sections of this report.

These obstacles emphasize the need for increased funding, clearer gender metrics, and expanded infrastructure to fully realize the gender equality goals within LTVRA policies. Addressing these barriers will be crucial for creating a rural environment where women can thrive and contribute to sustainable development.

Based on the analysis and in response to the obstacles and challenges highlighted in the above section, several best practices emerge that could be adapted or replicated across Member States to improve gender equality outcomes in LTVRA policies. The examples of **Ireland** (mentorship networks), **Spain** (gender mainstreaming), and the **Netherlands** (digital literacy) have already been mentioned and deserve also to be listed in this specific section.

To further enhance gender equality within LTVRA, expanding intersections with CAP, digital, and



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

climate policies will be crucial. Encouraging knowledge-sharing among Member States will also support the adaptation of best practices, creating a more inclusive, resilient rural policy framework.

To achieve the ambitious objectives set forth by LTVRA, Member States are attempting to implement timelines that align with EU's long-term programming cycles, even though they do not have matching national documents. The analysis found, for example, that the broad objectives such as sustainability, inclusivity, and resilience, focusing on economic, social, and environmental dimensions are not always reflected in the national policies, when individual countries may prioritize specific objectives based on their unique socio-economic contexts, leading to variations in focus areas (e.g., agriculture, tourism, digitalization).

In addition, implementation strategies differ between the EU and national policies. The EU vision frequently includes outlines for achieving its goals, including fostering innovation, enhancing connectivity, and promoting local governance. National Policies, on the other hand, may adopt different strategies for implementation, influenced by their administrative structures, available resources, and local needs, focusing in some cases on technological innovation, while others may prioritize community engagement.

Another example is that of cultural and regional contexts, where the vision is designed to be adaptable to diverse rural contexts across Europe. Cultural, historical, and regional differences can influence how policies are interpreted and implemented. For instance, rural areas in Southern Europe may face different challenges compared to those in Northern Europe, leading to tailored approaches that may not align perfectly with the EU vision. The differences between the European LTVRA and national policies can stem from various factors, some of which have been cited above. These differences highlight the need for flexibility in the implementation of EU policies to accommodate the diverse realities of rural areas across Europe.

This alignment allows for mid-term assessments and potential adjustments based on observed outcomes and changing socio-economic conditions. Italy, for example, has adopted a phased approach, with initial focus on community development and local economic initiatives, gradually shifting towards broader environmental sustainability measures. In Norway, LTVRA emphasizes early investments in rural infrastructure, with scheduled milestones for evaluating the economic impacts on rural areas. Spain has implemented a multi-phase approach within its National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge, setting milestones to assess connectivity, economic inclusion, and gender equality outcomes in rural development. Similarly, Norway's LTVRA strategy emphasizes early investment in economic resilience through rural infrastructure projects, aiming to create an enabling environment for rural businesses, which indirectly supports gender inclusivity by increasing economic opportunities for all community members. The emphasis on phased approaches and periodic assessments is a recurring aspect across Member States, highlighting a shared commitment to flexibility and responsiveness within LTVRA policies.

Building on identified best practices, there are several actionable steps that Member States can consider to improve gender inclusivity within LTVRA. One such recommendation is for Member States to establish formal gender-focused objectives within LTVRA policies. Italy's approach of setting representation targets within community organizations provides a model for formalizing



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

gender inclusivity at the grassroots level.

Expanding financial support for women-led projects, as seen in Spain and Italy, would also be beneficial for other Member States seeking to enhance economic opportunities for women. CAP funding mechanisms can be adapted within LTVRA to prioritize women in agriculture, providing them with the necessary capital and resources for sustainable business development. Additionally, mentorship and community-building programs, like those in Ireland, could be adapted in other regions to foster networks of support and knowledge-sharing among rural women. Lastly, digital literacy initiatives, particularly those focused on rural women, offer a pathway to bridging the digital divide. By integrating digital literacy programs within LTVRA, Member States can equip women with the skills needed to engage with technology and AI in agriculture, thereby promoting both gender equality and economic resilience. Rural childcare, which is advocated for by the GES, will enable women to access these skills.

6. Farm to Fork– National Overview

Context and Objectives

The Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy aims to create sustainable and health-oriented food systems across the EU, focusing on minimizing environmental impacts, promoting organic farming, and encouraging biodiversity. Most Member States are working to align their agricultural and food policies with the EU F2F strategy's targets, although the analysis in the present report has highlighted a strong misalignment between EU F2F and the analysed national contexts, in which there is no direct correspondence between policy documents, with a mosaic of different policies, strategies, and plans that are combined in order to address F2F objectives as best as possible. In this perspective, it is worth highlighting the specific case of **Norway**: as Norway has not developed a separate national food systems policy, the information and documents analysed to provide information regarding the national F2F equivalent have been retrieved by analysing the same documents that have been analysed for the analysis of the national CAP.

Looking beyond the difficulties posed by the fragmentation and mismatch of policy documents between the EU and national levels, the analysis has identified how national strategies developed alongside the EU-F2F present a certain degree of alignment between objectives, which may include policies to reduce emission levels, promote organic farming, and preserve biodiversity. Some countries have a long history of sustainable agriculture and are more advanced in this regard. Other countries with intensive farming industries, may find it harder to meet EU pesticide and fertilizer reduction requirements. National policies inspired by F2F objectives vary, such as the Netherlands' Farm-to-Fork indicators and Ireland's "Food Vision 2030," which aspires to position Ireland as a leader in sustainable food systems. Spain's National Plan for Food Chain Control emphasizes food safety and environmental protection, aiming to reduce risks associated with agricultural practices and ensure food quality standards. While the EU objectives may be clear, their application is more difficult. In order to concerns for income and competitiveness, these objectives are, each Member State is adjusting its strategy to fit national priorities.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

The Farm-to-Fork (F2F) strategy, integral to the European Green Deal, is designed to transform food systems across Europe into sustainable, resilient, and inclusive frameworks. National policies implementing F2F principles across Member States exhibit both unique and shared approaches, aligning with overarching EU goals while addressing specific national needs. This section delves into these contexts, examining trends in sustainability, and the temporal alignment of national policies with broader EU sustainability targets.

Each Member State's F2F policy reflects a commitment to environmentally sustainable food production, which aims to balance productivity with ecological conservation. For example, policies in the Netherlands emphasize transitioning to sustainable practices within agriculture. Such initiatives reduce environmental impact by limiting greenhouse gas emissions, minimizing resource use, and enhancing biodiversity. The Netherlands serves as a representative example of how Member States integrate both local agricultural practices and EU environmental mandates within their policies.

Italy's policy, by contrast, reflects a broader concern for food security, which it addresses through measures designed to protect rural agricultural production while ensuring food accessibility for urban populations. Italy's focus on food security highlights how the F2F strategy can be adapted to meet different socio-economic priorities while still contributing to EU sustainability objectives. Ireland's F2F policy similarly aligns with its strong export-oriented agricultural sector, focusing on market-driven growth within a sustainable framework. The country's policy efforts emphasize balancing domestic and international agricultural needs, contributing to its economic resilience and sustainability objectives. Research in Scotland demonstrates that the only measures targeted at women in their policy are in terms of their role as breastfeeding mothers.

The timeline of policy implementation varies considerably across Member States, reflecting different levels of readiness and resource availability. In some countries, policy milestones are closely aligned with the EU's 2030 and 2050 targets, while others require more time. Countries with more mature policy structures, such as France and Germany, have been able to establish frameworks that promote early-stage implementation of sustainable practices and eco-innovation in agriculture. Other countries, such as Lithuania, which is heavily reliant on imported oil and gas, may need more time. The various plans used for Scotland's analysis frequently seem to overlap, and sometimes only partially intersect with each other, making it difficult to determine the exact timeline. The fact that one of the documents is a Bill (not yet passed) means that the exact timeline is not available.

Recurring themes across national F2F policies highlight a shared commitment to reducing environmental impacts through sustainable resource use, which is central to addressing both national and EU-wide concerns about climate resilience. The concept of a circular economy, which involves reducing waste and repurposing agricultural by-products, is increasingly emphasized within these strategies. Adopting circular economy principles strengthens the environmental sustainability of food systems by creating closed-loop systems that minimize waste and reduce reliance on non-renewable resources. As the EU moves forward with F2F initiatives, the success of national policies will largely depend on the integration of local, regional, and global environmental objectives. This alignment ensures that national efforts contribute to the broader European Green Deal while



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

addressing the unique needs of each Member State. By fostering a shared commitment to sustainability and inclusivity, F2F policies provide a blueprint for other global regions pursuing sustainable food systems.

Overview of the Gender Dimension in F2F-Related Policies at the National Level

Research has shown that women play a key role in local food chains and promote a farm to fork approach (Franic, 2016; Shortall and Marangudakis, 2024). Given that, it is to be expected that there will be a gender dimension in F2F related policies. Gender inclusion within Farm-to-Fork (F2F) policies varies widely among EU Member States, and while some progress has been made, many policies still lack comprehensive frameworks for addressing gender equality. This section explores the existing gender dimensions in F2F-related policies, presenting an aggregated overview of how Member States consider the role of women in agriculture. The findings highlight the strengths and limitations of these policies in promoting gender inclusivity.

Among the countries examined, Ireland provides an example of partial gender inclusion, with initiatives aimed at encouraging new entrants, including women, into agriculture. However, the depth of these initiatives is often limited, and they lack detailed mechanisms for addressing structural barriers that women face in agriculture. The policy mentions general support for women but does not allocate specific resources or provide targeted training programs that could directly benefit female farmers. In contrast, several countries, such as Italy and the Netherlands, make minimal references to gender within their F2F strategies. The absence of explicit gender considerations in these policies reflects a missed opportunity to support women's roles in agriculture and rural development. In rural areas, where women frequently play a central role in family farms, such exclusions can exacerbate existing inequalities and limit women's ability to access resources, training, or leadership opportunities. Countries that have incorporated gender dimensions often emphasize increasing women's participation in agricultural training programs. However, without dedicated funding or institutional support, these efforts may fall short of achieving substantial impact. Additionally, the lack of gender-disaggregated data within many F2F policies presents a significant barrier to understanding and addressing the policy's effectiveness for women. Without data, it is challenging to gauge whether these policies genuinely enhance women's participation in agriculture or if disparities remain.

Positive examples of gender inclusion demonstrate the potential for broader adoption of gender-focused initiatives across the EU: by fostering an inclusive environment for women in agriculture, Member States can create sustainable, gender-sensitive food systems that reflect the EU's commitment to equality and social justice. Scotland states that gender disaggregated data is required for measuring the contribution of rural women to realise their potential. The point is made that it is hard to see how it could expand gender equality initiatives given the lack of quantitative data, since the lack of "...data inhibits the recognition and support required (*to measure*) the contribution of rural women to realise their potential."

To further support gender equality in F2F policies, Member States could adopt a more data-driven approach, tracking gendered impacts over time. This would allow for regular assessments and



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

adjustments to ensure that women’s needs are effectively addressed. Additionally, allocating dedicated resources to gender-focused initiatives would bolster the impact of these policies, paving the way for a more equitable agricultural sector across the EU.

Overview of gender implications of interactions with other identified policies at national level: CAP, LTVRA, digital policies, AI, climate change

The Farm-to-Fork (F2F) strategy is a core component of the EU’s agenda to create a sustainable, resilient, and fair food system. As part of the European Green Deal, F2F policies emphasize environmental sustainability, food security, and public health. At the national level, these policies intersect with various established policy frameworks, each of which influences and shapes the implementation of F2F strategies. An aggregated overview of these interactions is presented below, highlighting how F2F policies support, complement, and sometimes challenge other major policy domains such as the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), the Long-term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA), digital policies, AI, and climate change.

The **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** is one of the most significant EU frameworks supporting agriculture, providing subsidies, incentives, and regulatory guidelines to ensure food security, economic viability, and environmental sustainability. CAP’s goals align closely with the objectives of F2F, particularly around reducing environmental impact and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. National F2F policies often leverage CAP’s funding mechanisms to implement sustainability initiatives, reduce pesticide usage, and support organic farming. In terms of gender considerations, CAP funding offers a potential avenue for enhancing female participation in agriculture; however, the alignment with F2F does not always make this explicit. For example, CAP and F2F interactions in Member States like the **Netherlands** and **Italy** primarily focus on broader sustainability objectives without specifically addressing the gender gap in agricultural support. This general approach limits the effectiveness of F2F policies in fostering inclusive agriculture. In **Ireland**, some CAP-related initiatives are oriented towards encouraging new entrants to agriculture, which includes women. This synergy with F2F objectives could serve to indirectly enhance gender inclusion, though there remains a lack of targeted support mechanisms for women under both CAP and F2F frameworks. A more integrated approach, where F2F policies explicitly promote gender equality through CAP funding, could significantly improve access to resources for women, supporting a more balanced agricultural sector. Although **Sweden** tends to apply a gender-sensitive lens across its policies, its F2F initiatives do not integrate gender into the policy. The policy instead states: “The food strategy is not considered to have any direct consequences for gender equality.” **Norwegian** agricultural subsidies generally emphasize sustainability and community resilience, and there is a strong national commitment to gender equality. Norway might use subsidy mechanisms to support women-led agricultural initiatives and align with F2F sustainability objectives, even if it does not participate in CAP directly. F2F policies in **Croatia** focus on enhancing food production while supporting sustainability, but the integration of gender considerations could be limited. Croatia’s F2F-related policy includes some measures aimed at improving rural resilience, which indirectly benefits female farmers in rural areas. However, the absence of explicit gender-focused



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

interventions limits the support available for women in rural communities. The **Swedish** food strategy also interacts with rural development initiatives that aim to support sustainable food production but does not include specific gender provisions for women in rural agriculture. Finally, **Scotland's** rural policies focus on strengthening local communities, which could indirectly benefit women. However, the Good Food Nation Plan does not include specific gender-sensitive measures within rural development, reducing the potential for tailored support to women in agriculture.

The Long-term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) complements F2F by focusing on building resilient, connected, and vibrant rural communities. LTVRA is particularly relevant to F2F policies that emphasize local food systems, rural sustainability, and the economic viability of rural areas. Many Member States have embedded F2F objectives within broader rural development strategies, which helps to align efforts for sustainable food systems with rural resilience. In countries with substantial rural populations, like **Italy** and **Lithuania**, LTVRA objectives align with F2F strategies to promote local food production, sustainable practices, and rural employment opportunities. However, the synergy between LTVRA and F2F does not consistently incorporate gender-sensitive measures. National F2F policies often miss opportunities to leverage LTVRA frameworks to improve women's access to resources and leadership roles in rural areas. In many rural contexts, women play a key role in family farming and community-based agricultural practices; therefore, an integrated approach that aligns F2F with LTVRA and includes gender-sensitive considerations could strengthen the social and economic fabric of rural areas. **Ireland's** F2F policy emphasizes access to education as part of its broader rural development goals. While this aspect aligns well with LTVRA, it is not specifically tailored to address the unique challenges faced by women in rural areas. Enhancing the interaction between F2F and LTVRA through targeted training and resource allocation for women would create more inclusive rural communities and further both LTVRA and F2F goals.

Digital transformation and the application of AI in agriculture are rapidly advancing, with F2F policies encouraging their adoption to improve efficiency, reduce waste, and enhance productivity. However, the gender dimension is often absent from the intersection between F2F and digital policies. For example, many national F2F policies do not provide specific provisions or programs that address the unique barriers women may face in accessing digital tools or training in AI technologies. Countries like **Italy** report limited data on gendered impacts within digital policies related to F2F. This gap restricts the potential for F2F strategies to promote equitable digital inclusion. Addressing the digital divide is crucial, as women in rural areas may have limited access to digital tools and literacy programs. Integrating gender-specific digital training programs within F2F could enhance women's engagement in technologically driven agricultural practices. Furthermore, without a clear alignment between F2F and national digital policies, there is a risk of widening the digital gender gap. For example, while the **Netherlands** has robust digital infrastructure, its F2F policy does not explicitly promote digital inclusion for women. This oversight could represent a missed opportunity to support women's roles in a modernized agricultural sector, particularly through digital literacy initiatives that can empower them to participate in precision agriculture and other innovative farming practices.

Climate change policies are also deeply connected to F2F's sustainability goals, as both focus on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting sustainable resource use, and adapting agricultural



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

practices to meet environmental challenges. In most Member States, F2F and climate policies reinforce each other's objectives, with F2F serving as a means to implement climate-focused agricultural practices at the national level.

Italy's F2F policy, for instance, has a strong emphasis on environmental protection and climate goals, aligning with its climate strategy. However, the policy does not address the specific ways in which climate-related measures affect women in agriculture. Women, especially in rural areas, are often on the front lines of managing natural resources and adapting to climate shifts, yet the lack of gender-sensitive measures in F2F climate interactions can limit the effectiveness of these policies.

Lithuania's F2F policies include climate adaptation measures, particularly for rural areas. However, these initiatives are not explicitly designed to support women, who may have unique adaptation needs. Incorporating gender-sensitive approaches into F2F-linked climate policies could improve the resilience of women in rural communities, allowing them to better manage the impacts of climate change and contribute to sustainable farming practices.

The interaction between F2F policies and other major policy domains reveals a strong alignment in goals related to sustainability, rural resilience, technological advancement, and climate adaptation. However, the data suggests that gender inclusivity is frequently overlooked in these intersecting policy areas, resulting in a lack of targeted support for women within F2F-related frameworks. Out of the nine analysed, four Member States treat farmers as a uniform group without addressing the specific challenges women face (Sweden, Norway, Croatia, Scotland). For example, while CAP provides broad-based agricultural support, F2F interactions with CAP rarely include gender-specific measures to ensure equitable access. Similarly, climate policies often focus on environmental impacts without considering the gendered effects of climate adaptation and mitigation.

Critique, best practices and suggested next steps for policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality

A recurring obstacle across the F2F strategies of multiple Member States is the absence of explicit gender-specific provisions. Many countries' F2F policies address the agricultural sector as a whole, failing to differentiate the specific needs of men and women, or the distinctive contributions women and men make. For instance, **Netherlands** and Italy explicitly state that their F2F policies do not address gender differences within agricultural roles. The Dutch policy mentions no specific actions to support women or target gender-related disparities, reflecting a common trend across EU Member States where F2F strategies are implemented with a gender-neutral perspective. Similarly, **Italy's** policy approach does not incorporate gender-based objectives, which limits its capacity to support women in agriculture uniquely. This approach treats the agricultural workforce uniformly, ignoring the structural barriers that women face, such as limited access to land and funding. Without acknowledging these differences, F2F policies risk reinforcing existing gender inequalities rather than dismantling them. Scotland's policies state that in preparing the Plan, 'Ministers must have regard to ...human rights instruments' (relating to adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. This section also cites Scotland's Fair Work Policy's aim to reduce the gender pay gap. This policy does not, however, explicitly consider differences between men and women in



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

occupation/enterprises related to the policy.

Another significant obstacle is the lack of targeted support measures for women within F2F policies, which restricts their access to the same opportunities as men. Across the nine countries, there are few provisions specifically designed to support women in agriculture. For example, **Sweden** does not include targeted funding, training programs, or resources aimed at women. Sweden's F2F strategy does not feature gender-specific funding or resources, which might limit women's ability to access training or financial assistance. In **Lithuania**, the policy does not set out any specific support mechanisms for women, despite the fact that women play a significant role in rural communities. Without dedicated programs, such as grants or agricultural training specifically for women, F2F policies in these countries fail to address the unique needs of women in agriculture, hindering progress toward gender equality.

Additionally, digital inclusion and access to technology are critical for modern agriculture, but F2F policies in several countries do not consider these issues from a gender perspective. On the other hand, the GES strongly supports digital inclusion. It points out that women are underrepresented in digital fields, and that women's participation in STEM and digital education can be achieved through targeted programs. Through the GES, the EU aims to harness the potential of digitalisation to reduce gender inequalities, ensuring that women are equally represented, protected and empowered in the digital economy, thereby creating a more digital future. Women, especially in rural areas, often face additional barriers in accessing digital tools, which are essential for participating in contemporary, technology-driven agricultural practices. For instance, **Italy** and **Lithuania** report no available data on digital inclusion initiatives specifically aimed at women. Italy's policy mentions that there is no information on the impact of digital policies from a gender perspective, which highlights a gap in understanding how women's access to technology could be improved. In **Norway**, digital inclusion is mentioned only briefly, and there is no targeted effort to ensure women's participation in technology-enhanced agriculture. In **Sweden**, although the policy briefly discusses digital inclusion, it does not contain gender-specific initiatives to support women's engagement with digital agricultural tools. The lack of gender-sensitive digital inclusion programs limits the potential of women in these countries to engage in modern agriculture, exacerbating the digital divide and restricting their full participation in F2F initiatives.

Climate change adaptation is a crucial aspect of F2F policies, but the integration of gender-sensitive measures within climate policies is often lacking. Women in rural areas are affected by climate change due to their roles in managing household resources and food production, yet this dynamic is frequently overlooked. For example, **Italy's** F2F policy has a strong focus on climate change and environmental sustainability but does not consider the gendered impacts of these climate policies. Similarly, **Norway's** F2F policy includes provisions for climate resilience but does not incorporate any gender-specific support for women, who may face unique challenges in adapting to environmental shifts in agriculture. **Croatia's** policy mentions climate resilience, but without gender-sensitive support, women may be less equipped to adapt to climate-related risks in agriculture. In **Scotland**, the Good Food Nation Plan includes sustainability and climate resilience as core objectives, yet it lacks any mention of gender-specific measures within its climate goals. Without tailored support for women in climate adaptation, F2F policies may fail to foster an inclusive



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

approach to environmental sustainability, ultimately weakening their impact on vulnerable groups.

Another pervasive challenge across Member States is the lack of gender-disaggregated data within F2F policies. This absence makes it difficult to assess the unique needs and challenges that women face in the agricultural sector. Many countries do not collect or analyse gender-specific data, which creates a significant barrier to developing targeted interventions. In **Croatia**, there is limited data on how F2F policies impact men and women differently. Similarly, **Norway** has not gathered comprehensive gender-specific data within its F2F policies, limiting policymakers' ability to tailor policies effectively. Without gender-disaggregated data, it is challenging to measure the success of F2F initiatives or adjust them to better support women. **Scotland** also lacks extensive gender-specific reporting within the Good Food Nation Plan. The absence of data prevents a clear understanding of how F2F policies affect women and impedes efforts to create more inclusive agricultural policies. Collecting and analysing gender-disaggregated data would provide valuable insights, helping Member States create more effective, equitable F2F strategies.

While many F2F policies align with long-term sustainability goals, they rarely embed gender equity as a core objective. The absence of a gender-focused vision prevents F2F policies from addressing structural inequalities in the long run. For example, **Sweden** and **Scotland** emphasize sustainability and environmental goals in their national food strategies, but neither has articulated long-term gender equity objectives. By not prioritizing gender equality as a long-term goal, these policies miss the opportunity to create foundational changes that address gender disparities in agriculture over time. Integrating gender equity into the broader vision of F2F policies would help to establish an inclusive framework for future agricultural initiatives.

Another common obstacle is the lack of engagement with women's organizations and stakeholders in the agricultural sector. Without input from women-focused groups, F2F policies may overlook the lived experiences of women and fail to address the specific issues they face. In **Lithuania**, the F2F policy does not indicate significant stakeholder engagement with women's groups, which limits the relevance and effectiveness of the policy for female agricultural stakeholders. **Croatia** similarly has a lack of extensive stakeholder engagement that includes women's perspectives, reducing the potential for F2F policies to be inclusive and responsive to diverse needs. Incorporating the voices of women's organizations and rural women stakeholders in the policy development process would ensure that F2F policies reflect a broader range of experiences. This approach would lead to more relevant, impactful policies that foster gender equality and strengthen community support for F2F initiatives.

The journey toward achieving gender equality in F2F policies across Europe reveals several promising practices and opportunities for adaptation. By drawing on specific examples from countries such as Ireland, Norway, and Scotland, policymakers can gain insights into effective strategies to replicate or adapt for their national contexts.

Ireland's policy demonstrates a positive approach by integrating educational access for women as a means of lowering barriers to entry in the agrifood sector. Ireland's F2F policy highlights access to education as a core component for encouraging new entrants, including women, into agriculture. To build on this, Ireland and other Member States could introduce specialized training programs in



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

digital agriculture and sustainable practices tailored for rural women. Expanding this model to include partnerships with agricultural colleges and universities would create a pipeline for women entering the agricultural workforce. This approach could be particularly beneficial for **Croatia** and **Lithuania**, where rural women face significant barriers in accessing agricultural knowledge and skills. Developing scholarship programs and vocational training in these countries would help ensure that women have equal opportunities to acquire technical skills necessary for modern agriculture.

Norway's policy, includes two targeted measures aimed at supporting women, highlighting the importance of gender-specific resources in F2F policies. Specifically, one of the equivalent documents analysed reports that “young people under the age of 35 and women are given special priority in parts of the regulations in that they can be awarded more grants than other applicants”, with subsidies provided within a varied scope of projects of various sizes. Additionally, within the section covering how the State budget contributes to meet UN SDGs, it is pointed out that the total increase for investment funds so far in this government's period (since 2021) has been formidable (80 percent increase), and that according to public reporting on the use of business-oriented funding, women received a major part of the subsidies that was distributed for the development of additional industries in agriculture, with close to 77 percent of this subsidy. These measures acknowledge the role of financial support as a critical lever for gender equality in agriculture, even if the current support structure remains underdeveloped. Norway could serve as a reference country and best practice to encourage other countries to build on its approach by establishing a comprehensive funding framework that includes grants, microloans, and business development support specifically for women in agriculture. Such financial incentives could empower women to pursue innovative, sustainable agricultural projects and strengthen their economic standing in rural communities. Countries like **Sweden** and **Scotland**, which currently lack gender-specific funding, could replicate Norway's model by creating financial incentives that target women-led agricultural initiatives. Tailoring funding pools to women in agriculture would help address resource disparities, encouraging inclusive economic growth in the sector.

Sweden's F2F strategy mentions digital inclusion, highlighting the importance of technology in modern agriculture. Although it currently lacks gender-specific initiatives, Sweden's awareness of digital needs provides a foundation for implementing targeted technology training for women in rural areas. Sweden, alongside countries such as Italy and Norway, could introduce dedicated digital literacy programs for women in rural agriculture. These programs would ensure that women have the skills to engage with digital farming tools, AI, and precision agriculture technologies, closing the digital divide in agricultural communities. This approach would be valuable for **Italy** and **Lithuania**, where digital policies within F2F strategies currently do not address gender disparities. Establishing workshops, online courses, and subsidized access to digital tools for women in these countries would help boost their participation in technology-driven agriculture.

Climate resilience is a component of many F2F policies, with **Italy's** strategy placing a strong emphasis on environmental sustainability. However, this approach currently lacks specific gender-sensitive climate measures, which limits its ability to address the unique challenges faced by women in rural areas. Italy, along with countries like Norway and Croatia, could enhance F2F policies by incorporating gender-specific support for climate adaptation. This could include training, funding,



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

and resources for sustainable practices that recognize the different ways men and women engage with agricultural production and climate adaptation. Providing climate adaptation support specifically for women would also be valuable in **Scotland**, where the Good Food Nation Plan could further integrate gender into its sustainability objectives. This would empower women in rural areas to adopt climate-resilient practices and play an active role in achieving national sustainability goals.

Data collection is essential for understanding and addressing gender disparities in agriculture, yet many Member States lack structured mechanisms for gathering gender-disaggregated data. **Italy**, for instance, has recognized the importance of collecting gender-specific data but has not fully implemented this approach within its F2F strategy. Italy and other countries such as Croatia and Norway could benefit from establishing formalized data collection systems that track the gendered impacts of F2F policies. Collecting data on variables such as participation rates, income levels, and access to resources for women would enable policymakers to make evidence-based adjustments to support gender equality. Building standardized data collection frameworks across the EU would enable a comprehensive view of gender dynamics within F2F policies. This approach would provide valuable insights into how Member States can fine-tune their strategies to achieve equitable outcomes, supporting both national and EU-wide gender equality objectives.

Including women's perspectives in policy design is critical for ensuring that F2F strategies address the challenges women face in agriculture. However, stakeholder engagement remains limited in many countries, including Lithuania, where there is minimal representation of women's organizations in policy development. Lithuania and other similar countries could strengthen stakeholder engagement by actively involving women-focused organizations and rural women in the policymaking process. As an example, Norway's approach to the integration of few women organisations in the policy development process could be a first step for those countries which have so far not managed to create the right conditions for an effective gender inclusive stakeholders' engagement, as it demonstrated that by bringing women's voices to the table, these countries could ensure that F2F policies are inclusive, relevant, and responsive to the unique experiences of women in agriculture. This engagement model could be adapted across the EU, encouraging Member States to include diverse perspectives in F2F strategies. Enhanced collaboration with women's groups would lead to more effective policies, reinforcing community support and fostering a stronger sense of ownership among stakeholders.

7. Green Deal – National Overview

National Overview, Context and Objectives

In July 2021, EU Commission President Ursula van der Leyen announced her vision for the first climate-neutral continent in the world, and under the Green Deal, made it a binding commitment under the EU Climate Law. All member states and sectors of the EU economy agreed to participate, starting with the reduction of CO₂ emissions by at least 55% by 2030. The EU is now on a path to reach its climate targets by 2030 in a fair, cost effective and competitive way. By doing so, the EU is demonstrating its promises made to citizens and international partners to lead the way on climate



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

action and shape the green transition for the benefit of citizens and industries. The main goals of the Green Deal include Climate Neutrality by 2050; Transforming the Energy Sector; the Circular Economy; Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems; Preserving Biodiversity and Ecosystems; Clean and Sustainable Transport; Promote zero-emission vehicles and expand infrastructure for alternative fuels; Pollution Reduction; Building a Climate-Resilient Economy; Just Transition; Global Leadership; Research and Innovation; and Energy-Intensive Industries. Each member state must work out how to meet these inspiring targets in their own way.

While there is no explicit requirement for Member States to produce an equivalent “national Green Deal,” they must align their **national strategies, plans, and projects** with the goals of the European Green Deal in order to access funding and to fulfil EU regulations and commitments. For example, Member States are required to submit certain documents, such as their National Energy and Climate Plans, which outline how each country will meet the EU’s energy and climate targets for 2030. And while not specifically a national ‘Green Deal’, the plans serve to demonstrate that their country is trying to be aligned with the EU climate objectives. Other mechanisms, such as the Territorial Just Transition Plans (TJTP) and the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRPP), are further examples of the need for national policies to access important funding and to ensure their eligibility for funding and participation in EU programs. Developing national frameworks or strategies that echo Green Deal goals can strengthen a country’s position and maximize their access to resource

It may be surprising to learn that, of the nine countries studied in this project, the majority used more than one policy document in order to find a national equivalency to the EU Green Deal. Only one out of the nine countries present a single national equivalent policy document: **Lithuania** (*Lithuanian Climate Change Management Agenda 2021*). In the remaining cases, a set of policy documents had to be combined to fully grasp the extent and coverage of Green Deal equivalent at national level. In the specific case of **Croatia**, for example, the following reports have been included in their discourse analysis, which cover not only national, but also regional policies, including in a number of related sectors:

- The Nature Restoration Regulation
- The National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia until 2030
- The Scenario for achieving climate neutrality in the Republic of Croatia by 2050
- The National Draft Strategy for Bioeconomy 2035
- The Plan for industrial Transition of Northern Croatia 2022
- The Plan for industrial Transition of Pannonian Croatia, 2022
- The Plan for Industrial Transition of Adriatic Croatia, 2022

Similarly, multiple documents were also studied in **Italy** (7), **Scotland** (6), **Spain** (4), **Ireland**(2), **Netherlands** (2), and **Norway** (2). And since one policy alone did not cover all of the topics presented in **Sweden’s National Plan for Energy and Climate 2021 -2030**, various Government agencies in different sectors were also mentioned, because together with the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, they bring forward recommendations on strategies for each sector that would enable them to reach the climate and environmental goals in Sweden, as set by the EU. The reports selected cover topics such as: the green transition of the industry and agriculture; increasing carbon sinks in the forestry and agricultural sectors; climate transition of larger machinery used e.g. in



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

forestry, agriculture and fisheries; and, providing capital for the climate transition within the business sector. The downside of having to read, study, and actually work with multiple documents is that it can create challenges for those who are trying to understand or implement the policy. For example, there may be problems with lack of clarity, overlapping information, and inefficiency. Sometimes also because the reports may have been created in ‘silos’, they do not always match what other reports have stated. The timeliness of the information can also be a problem, for example, if one policy has a longer timeline than the other or is not updated accordingly.

It is useful to compare and contrast the variety of objectives that are given in the Green Deal equivalent policies of some selected countries. Some are focused more on **sustainability** first and foremost, others on **technology** and **energy**, and still others on the **economy**. For example, the circular economy, water management, and biodiversity are priorities in **Spain**, while at the same time, managing rural development issues. **Sweden** emphasises leadership in clean technologies and sustainable energy systems. **Lithuania** has set priorities on renewable energy expansion (i.e. offshore wind) and energy independence due to its reliance on energy imports. **Scotland** has focused on ensuring that ‘...Scotland realises the maximum possible economic benefit from the opportunities created by the global transition to net zero.’ The Scottish strategy prioritises 5 key areas where Scotland’s existing strengths show most potential to ‘develop internationally competitive economic clusters’ and grow exports and include: (i) wind economy; (ii) carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS); (iii) green economy professional and financial services; (iv) hydrogen products and related skills and services for domestic de-carbonisation and export; (v) establishing Scotland as a competitive centre for Clean Energy Intensive Industries (EIIIs). Finally, **Croatia’s** approach seeks up front to create a synergy between environmental protection, biodiversity and economic development, thus contributing to sustainable development and resilience of communities to climate change.

While all countries studied appear to support the EU goals of climate neutrality by 2050, reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50% by 2030, and transitioning to sustainable agriculture, there are differences. Some are aiming high – **Sweden** and **Scotland**, for example – intend to meet the goals well before 2050. Some are more moderate, for example **Spain**, which aligns closely with EU targets. **Italy** is targeting 55% Greenhouse Gas (GHG) reduction by 2030. **Norway** plans to achieve the climate target of 50-55 per cent cuts by 2030, as well as the long-term target of 90-95 per cent cuts by 2050. The government will pursue an ambitious policy that ensures that Norway meets the climate targets and contains policies to reduce emissions subject to some quotas to increase the uptake of CO₂ and reduce emissions from forests and other land use. Not least, the plan states how consideration will be given to adjusting the policy along the way, if necessary, to reach the climate targets.

Some countries that are reliant on specific industries, such as agriculture in **Spain**, or tourism in **Croatia**, have special priorities to address as they focus on meeting the climate objectives. Countries such as **Scotland**, with abundant renewable wind energy, are more ambitious regarding their renewable energy targets and are focussed on reducing the GHG five years earlier. And whereas Spain is aiming for a 23% greenhouse gas reduction by 2030 (compared to 1990), **Lithuania** is aiming for 45% of final energy consumption from renewables by 2030 and 90% by 2050. Lithuania has



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

greater reliance on imported energy and needs to also consider energy security in the equation. On the other hand, coastal countries such as the **Netherlands**, have prioritized addressing rising sea levels.

Given the wide variety of policy sources used to analyse the status of the national equivalent of the Green Deal in each country, the results vary greatly. For example, regarding climate goals, all of the countries mentioned that they want to be climate neutral by 2050. The **Netherlands** and **Ireland** have set more ambitious goals for 2030 (49% and 51% respectively by 2030). Five out of the nine countries are focused on developing their renewable energy, including offshore wind energy.

Regarding agriculture, differences also are evident. For example, **Croatia** is looking to promote eco-friendly agriculture and small-scale farming; **Italy** is focusing on sustainable agriculture and reducing pesticides and fertilizer use; and Ireland is looking at promoting low-carbon farming practices. The **Netherlands** emphasizes technical solutions, while **Croatia** and **Italy** are more focused on smaller-scale farming. Climate and sustainability receive a lot of attention in both the political and social debate. Despite the positive attitude towards sustainability, there is also resistance in some areas of the **Netherlands** to, for example, the arrival of wind farms. In addition to the climate ambition, the earthquake problem in Groningen is also a major determining factor for climate and energy policy.

Biodiversity is an important factor in sustainability, and each country supports the protection of biodiversity in different ways. For example, **Norway** prioritizes the protection of landscapes. **Croatia's** plan is aligned with the European Green Deal to promote the resilience of natural systems. They would like to ensure that by 2030, the loss of key biodiversity areas is reduced with a focus on restoring ecosystems degraded by human activity. Ireland is supporting a 'Whole of Government, Whole of Society Approach to Biodiversity. This type of approach involves getting all sectors of government and society working together to address biodiversity conservation, restoration and sustainable use. It also promotes the active involvement of marginalized groups in the decision-making process.

Overview of the Gender Dimension in Green Deal-Related Policies at the National Level

The EU Gender Equality Strategy is a comprehensive framework to achieve gender equality across the EU. Its goals include Ending Gender-Based Violence; Tackling Gender Pay and Pension Gap; Promoting Gender Balance in Leadership and Decision-making; Addressing Gender Stereotypes; Advancing women in Digital and Green Transitions; Integrating a Gender perspective Across EU Policies; and Global Gender Equality. In order to achieve gender equality, it is necessary to elaborate measures that will ensure equal opportunities for the participation of men and women in the entire decision-making process. The results of this discourse analysis indicate, however, that in general, few countries have developed robust gender dimension aspects of their Green Deal equivalent policies. For example, there are no gender considerations at all integrated in the **Netherlands'** policy. What is particularly surprising about the Dutch policy is that there is generally very little referral to **any** individuals in the policy, with no mentioning of either men or women! There is also no acknowledgement or intention to address gender inequalities regarding climate change and



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

mitigation and adaptation strategies. Moreover, the document lacks any attention to diversity among different social groups within society. It does not challenge gender stereotypes, nor raise awareness about women's rights, nor promote equal opportunities in any way. The only seeming acknowledgement of unevenly distributed consequences of climate change is the referral to low- and high household income groups, and the financial relief the policy integrated for lower household incomes. There is a large dependency on external parties and sector stakeholders finding solutions themselves. Furthermore, the policy does not have specific measures targeted at women and does not identify any other social groups as specific targets. The policy does indicate a population surplus to 18 million by 2029 and after 2037 this increase will only grow as a result of (climate change-related) immigration. There is a clear desire to invest in research & development with the ambition to spend 2.5% of GDP in R&D which "is partly aimed at increasing prosperity and maintaining a competitive position". This could be considered as excluding women who tend to have smaller-scale initiatives and less financial capital to invest with. It is also reinforcing the concept of innovation as being something to upscale and have a large financial return with. The policy does not take any areas related to advancing women entrepreneurs into account. It does not specifically support or promote women's leadership and participation in agricultural organisations and networks, or decision-making at all levels. In relation to the energy transition in general, it is recognised that more people are needed to work, and thus this work needs to be made attractive with good working conditions and development opportunities. The plans also include that current and future workers need to be offered education and training to stay relevant in the changing economy. Productivity will be increased through (unspecified) targeted technological and social innovation. And for the longer term, pupils of all ages will be given the right knowledge and skills needed to deal with major social transitions, such as the energy transition. Again, no further details or targets are given.

Italy also reported that no specific measures were found that targeted at women in the Italian strategy, nor does it specifically address women's leadership and participation in agricultural organizations, networks, and decision-making processes. But it does recognize that the ecological transition must be fair and inclusive. While the plan promotes entrepreneurship and innovation in general, it lacks targeted measures or initiatives designed to address the unique challenges and barriers faced by women in starting and growing businesses. The PTE emphasizes the importance of education and training to equip individuals with the skills needed for the green transition and highlights the need for financial instruments and incentives to support investments in sustainable projects and businesses and promotes innovation and research in sustainability. While not explicitly addressing gender, there is consideration given to the possibility that these initiatives could create opportunities for women entrepreneurs and rural women to develop and implement innovative solutions for the green transition. Due to the fact that there are no specific measures targeted at women, it is not possible to identify the aims of such measures, or the budget allocation specifically dedicated to them within the PTE. The document outlines a series of measures to achieve the goals of the ecological transition. Some of these measures, such as promoting energy efficiency and developing renewable energy, can have a positive impact on women. With regards to other social groups, besides mentioning the gender dimension, the "Leaving No One Behind" section of the *Piano per la Transizione Ecologica* (PTE) explicitly mentions the empowerment of young people as cross-cutting objectives. The PTE does not outline detailed and targeted actions exclusively for this



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

age group, but the importance of young people is recognized in several points of the document, including involving young people in the ecological transition process; providing training and skills; and creation of new opportunities. No concrete actions have been identified within the strategy or Italian plans for direct support to women's entrepreneurship or young people in the agri-food sector. While it mentions the importance of considering vulnerable groups in adaptation strategies, it does not single out women as a specific target group. Similarly, the plans lack specific measures aimed solely at young people. However, it recognizes the importance of education and awareness-raising, which could indirectly benefit younger generations by increasing their understanding of climate change and adaptation strategies. Overall, the documents acknowledge the importance of considering vulnerable groups in adaptation planning. This broader category of vulnerability could encompass various social groups, including women, but the document does not provide a detailed analysis of intersecting identities or specific vulnerabilities.

The **Lithuanian** policy emphasizes inclusivity and social equity broadly, but there is no direct mention of gender-specific strategies for equal opportunities within climate action sectors, nor of gender pay gaps or pension disparities, nor of supporting women in green jobs or training. The agenda discusses economic benefits from climate action, such as GDP growth and reduced energy poverty, but without addressing gendered financial inequities specifically. The importance of retraining and encouraging new entrants to support green technologies and sustainable industries is mentioned, however, it does not specify strategies to encourage women or address any gender-specific entry barriers. The policy language is gender-neutral, addressing broad social equity and inclusivity goals without explicit mention of gender-specific actions or support. The policy instead focuses on reducing environmental impacts across various sectors, ensuring a just transition, and protecting vulnerable communities broadly, but it does not outline initiatives specifically aimed at women or gender-specific concerns. The document does not include specific support measures aimed at advancing women entrepreneurs or rural women. The policy focuses on economic transitions, social equity, and environmental goals across sectors such as energy, transportation, and agriculture. While it emphasizes inclusivity and aims to prevent economic and social disparities due to climate transition, it does not outline targeted initiatives for women entrepreneurs or rural women specifically. The Lithuanian research mentions the importance of retraining and encouraging new entrants to support green technologies and sustainable industries. However, it does not specify strategies to encourage women or address any gender-specific entry barriers. And while the document emphasizes inclusivity and social equity broadly, there is no direct mention of gender-specific strategies for equal opportunities within climate action sectors or a focus on supporting women in green jobs or training. The Gender Equality Strategy's request to address gender care gaps in rural regions is not reflected in the document. Although it does target rural areas for climate resilience, these measures are not designed to address gender-specific care burdens.

The positive news is that some aspects of gender-related measures can be found in the **Irish, Spanish, Croatian, Norwegian, and Scottish** policies.

Gender dimensions and considerations are sometimes tentatively addressed in **Ireland's *Climate Action Plan 2024***. For example, women are mentioned along with young people as a marginalised group whose participation in current and future climate actions will be promoted. However, it is not



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

clear if/what targeted measures are involved here. Regarding new entrants, the Plan mentions initiatives that promote youth engagement with issues and debates on climate change. The *Climate Action Plan 2024* also refers to Ireland’s International Climate Finance Roadmap 2022 which, it sets out, informs its “gender-sensitive” approach to climate action. This policy notes that “Ireland is also enhancing its tracking and reporting of international climate finance that contributes to gender equality in our Climate Finance Reports”. No further specific details are given. The *Plan* also sets out that its “gender sensitive approach” follows the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNHCC) and UNICEF’s Gender Action Plan (2022-2025), but it does not assert where/what funding is available to support this.

There are some references in both the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the Climate Action Plan to policy measures specifically targeted at women. For example, in a specific section of the Climate Action Plan 2024 called, “Human rights, Gender and Climate Action”, it is noted that through work with grassroots and non-governmental organisations, such as with the Women’s Environment and Development Organisation, training, capacity building, and the provision of travel funds are available to women to contribute to national and international climate discussions. However, no further specific details are given on the exact funding available or on the types of training involved. Other references in the policy document to training and education available in relation to climate change are presented in gender neutral language. The only reference in the National Biodiversity Action Plan to measures targeted at women is in terms of government funding available to promote positive action for gender equality under the National Strategy for Women and Girls. The EU Gender Equality Strategy specifically asks for gender care gaps to be addressed in rural areas; however, these policy documents do not address this request. Neither are gender topics specifically addressed in the National Biodiversity Action Plan but there are some considerations in the Climate Action Plan 2024. Regarding gender pay- and pension gaps, these are not mentioned. There is no reference to sex-disaggregated data on uptake or success in the National Biodiversity Action Plan, but the Climate Action Plan 2024 notes that Ireland is working towards improving its collection of gender-disaggregated data in relation to monitoring and reporting of climate finance. Regarding gender mainstreaming measures for women, while the *Climate Action Plan 2024* claims to follow a “gender-sensitive approach” and the *National Biodiversity Action Plan* claim to follow a “a gender-responsive approach”, women are treated as a special category in both policy documents. No specific groups of women are described e.g., age, migration, religion. In the *Climate Action Plan 2024*, women are identified and mentioned in connection with “vulnerable communities” and “marginalised groups “that are set out as including young people and LGBTQ+ people. In the *National Biodiversity Action Plan*, women are referred to in combination with “women and girls” and along with other marginalised groups i.e. indigenous people and other communities, children and youth and persons with disabilities. Some key measures have been identified that are important in advancing women entrepreneurs and may also apply to rural women. These include areas such as: Access to education and training; access to finance; access to innovation and other relevant policies. The only reference to training in the *Climate Action Plan 2024* is in terms of Zero Energy Building (NZEB)/ Retrofit training where it is mentioned that record numbers of women participated in the scheme in 2023 (+2% since 2022). However, at no point in the document is this linked to women’s (or specifically rural women’s) entrepreneurship activities, nor is there mention of women’s leadership and



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

participation in agricultural organisations and networks, and decision-making at all levels.

Spain's gender perspective is one of the cross-cutting measures of the *National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan*. This Plan promotes women's participation and leadership in the new green jobs resulting from the energy transition. Women's participation in energy transition employment will be analysed, and measures to reduce participation gaps, wages and vocational training initiatives will be proposed and implemented. The *Plan* will launch two new funds to foster the development of business innovation and entrepreneurship and promote collaborative crowdfunding to boost eco-entrepreneurs for the climate. The *Plan* wants to ensure compliance, Fostering Equality Commitment to and Diversity in all areas, and makes generic references to gender pay gaps, but no references to pensions gap. The *Plan* will pay special attention to small businesses, disadvantaged groups and opportunities for rural women, in collaboration with municipalities, associations and promoters. Regarding the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan, some measures have been identified that are important for the advancement of women entrepreneurs and that can also be applied to rural women. These include access to education and training; access to finance; access to innovation and other relevant policies. Besides, there are commitments by the Spanish Government aimed at closing gaps in training and in the different areas of employment, entrepreneurship, innovation and leadership, as well as improving the generation and use of data and promoting collaboration with entities and forums at different levels. A review of Law 7/2021 on Climate Change and Energy Transition, Biodiversity and Science Strategy and the Spanish Circular Economy Strategy 2030 shows that there are no differences considered between men's and women's occupations. There are also no specific measures targeted at women, nor specific support to advance women entrepreneurs and rural women.

When examining **Croatia's** multiple policy documents, the *National Development Strategy (NDS)* does recognize the income inequality between women and men, as the rate of poverty risk and social exclusion among older women is much higher than the EU average, and the low labour force participation rate of young women has exacerbated the problem of the decline in the number of people of working age and the active population. A number of initiatives have also begun to be implemented to help protect women's rights and promote women in the labour market, as a higher employment rate for women has a positive impact on the increase in the birth rate. It was pointed out that the work of the institutions in the future should lead to the complete elimination of inequality between women and men in terms of wages and leadership positions in the labour market. As part of the policy to improve human resources and demographic policy, measures are being designed and consistently implemented to facilitate the creation of a balance between work and family life: investing in infrastructures and services related to the care of children and other dependent family members, protecting the rights of mothers and women in the labour market and promoting the responsibility of the employer in solving the specific family needs of young workers, especially women and mothers. Measures to reduce and completely eliminate the loss of income of parents, especially women, during maternity and parental leave will be improved. The strategy envisages the creation of a society that demonstrates in every aspect of social and public affairs that it cares about the needs of mothers, families with children, children and young people. It is not clear from the NDS what initiatives have been launched, how the institutions can contribute to the



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

complete elimination of inequality between women and men or how women's entrepreneurship can be improved. Furthermore, everything that is mentioned refers to the general national level and not specifically to the European Green Plan (EGP). It is interesting to note that in the strategic objective 1 "Competitive and innovative economy" of the National Development Strategy Republic of Croatia", support for women's entrepreneurship is listed as one of the priorities. Once again, it refers to the general national level and not specifically to the European Green Plan (EGP). In addition to national resources and the activation of private capital, revenues from European funds based on the allocations in the 2014-2020 financial perspective and the resources set out in the new European Union financial perspective 2021-2027 are an essential part of the budgetary potential to finance the priorities of this strategy. Furthermore, Strategic objective 9 "Food self-sufficiency and development of the bioeconomy" focuses on women to promote the improvement of agricultural and aquaculture producers. Important measures to promote female entrepreneurship include investing in infrastructures and services related to the care of children and other dependent family members, protecting the rights of mothers and women in the labour market and promoting the responsibility of the employer in solving the specific family needs of young workers, especially women and mothers, as well as reducing and completely eliminating the loss of income of parents, especially women, during maternity and parental leave. All this refers to the general national level and not specifically to the European Green Plan (EGP).

The only gender considerations per se in the **Norwegian** policy the *Klimaplan for 2021-30* refer to the fact that women and men are different, in that climate change and climate policy affect them in different ways. The document also draws attention to women's rights to participate in decision-making processes and emphasizes inclusion and equal opportunities to influence processes and decisions. The second policy analysed – *Proposal for the next year's state budget* - reports on the Norwegian Ministry of Climate and Environment own required work on the subjects of equality and against discrimination within its own institution. Thus, the document shows the proportion of women in the Ministry of Climate and Environment, in total and at different job levels, a comparison of the average monthly salary for women and men at different job levels, statistics for sickness absence for men and women, the share of men and women in part-time and mid-career positions for 2022. This document also shows how Norway works to promote equality and diversity and emphasizes that this work will continue both nationally and internationally. In one case, women and girls are mentioned together. This is about the fact that men and women are affected differently by climate change and climate policy and that girls and women must therefore be ensured participation in decision-making processes about climate. Once in the document, women are mentioned with another group that is indigenous. This is linked to strengthening the involvement and participation of women and indigenous peoples in climate work, especially linked to climate adaptation and forests. In the theme of cultural heritage and cultural environment, minorities are mentioned with men and women, in one sentence "the intention is to tell about the life and history of both women, men and minorities".

Sweden's policy does not consider how to encourage new entrants, nor does it address gender pay gaps. However, it does recognize that regarding the energy transition, "Skewed gender structure with few women makes skills supply difficult." It also mentions that there are many occupations



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

within the energy transition having labour shortages, and that: “Several of the in-demand occupations are characterized by a high average age and large gender differences with a majority of men already working in the profession.”

Scotland’s *Green Industrial Strategy* includes only one reference to gender, where it states that it will encourage ‘equitable distribution of financial support [for businesses to grow] through investment [...] focused on diversity and inclusion priorities, such as female and minority founders’). The accompanying *Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Summary* necessarily takes account of gender. The Strategy will encourage ‘equitable distribution of financial support [for businesses to grow] through investment [...] focused on diversity and inclusion priorities, such as female and minority founders. The wording is otherwise gender neutral. This strategy acknowledges that women business founders face inequalities in accessing funding and states the intention to ‘...work with entrepreneurs and start-ups in the energy transition sector through our Tech Scaler network and ensure that where possible, we encourage equitable distribution of financial support through investment [...] focused on diversity and inclusion priorities, such as female and minority founders’. While it is not expected that this document to go into finely grained detail, the statement is unhelpfully vague, and indicative of an arm’s length approach that risks making this provision hard to implement or evaluate. *The Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Summary* highlights that ‘women and ethnic minorities tend to be under-represented in most sectors expected to grow under the net zero transition’. It also highlights gender pay gaps with specific numbers, including in Low Carbon Transition sectors, as follows: Women account for only 22% of those employed in energy, transport, construction, agriculture and manufacturing. Disabled and racialised minority women are particularly under-represented in these sectors. Evidence published by the Scottish Government suggests that average wages in Low Carbon Transition sectors are higher than the Scottish average for both men and women. The gender pay gap is 26.6%, which is higher than the overall Scottish gender pay gap (15.6%), but averages [sic] wages for women in this area are higher than the Scottish average wage for women.

The *Assessment* highlights barriers to women participating in the Green Industrial sector, citing specific employment gaps as follows:

- In the construction sector, for many traditional trade roles and roles predominantly site-based there is often limited access to part-time and flexible working arrangements.
- Only 12% of jobs in manufacturing and 11% in construction were advertised with flexible working options in 2024, compared to 28% of roles advertised across the Scottish labour market as a whole.
- Energy & Utility Skills estimate that more than 75% of women in the UK who leave engineering after maternity leave or career breaks want to return to the engineering profession but are put off due to inflexible working hours and practices.
- The recruitment and retention of women in STEM roles is hindered by male dominated workplace cultures, such as essential equipment that is unsuitable for the body size and shape of women and lack of female toilets, as well as limited action to address inequalities.

Scotland’s Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Summary concludes by noting that additional action will be needed to avoid perpetuating inequalities that exist in the 5 ‘opportunity areas’ targeted for growth and investment and anticipates ‘that further impact assessments will be completed for

specific projects as required’.

Overview of gender implications of interactions with other identified policies at national level: LTVRA, digital policies, AI, climate change

Generally speaking, there is little consideration for gender aspects and interactions with other identified policies in the national reports, and where some breakthroughs have been found, it is because each country is taking some steps in their own way.

For example, a country that has not addressed gender issues is **The Netherlands**. The policy is also not concerned with the long-term vision for rural areas and is written for a top-down transition. There is no standardisation between provinces so each region can focus on the most relevant issue at hand, but it doesn't ensure all topics are addressed everywhere. Accessibility is discussed in terms of public transport and cycling being more attractive, with an assumption that shared mobility and flex working from home will increase. At no point do factors such as age or mobility issues appear. The policy does acknowledge the importance of citizen participation in the design of policy(instruments). While the policy concerns climate change mitigation and adaptation as its main topic, it does not acknowledge how women and men, or other social groups, are impacted by climate change differently. It fully neglects the topic of climate justice. The policy does not consider digital inclusion nor the use of AI. A conclusion from the citizen consultations around the Climate Plan was the acknowledgement that there is currently insufficient insight into what is going on among citizens. This is addressed by a research program from the Social and Cultural Planning Office that should periodically map the citizen perspective. Municipalities get to decide on the appropriate form of participation based on the social-cultural profile of each neighbourhood, but the decision of what this actually entails has the potential to be an entirely top-down perspective. The policy does not acknowledge or intend to address the further uneven distribution of climate change among social groups in society.

Italy, on the other hand, appears to make some albeit indirect recognition in recognizing gender considerations in its PTE. By highlighting the benefits of a just and inclusive transition, and the importance of a collective effort, it is believed that the PTE indirectly encourages the full participation of both men and women in the green economy, recognizing their potential contributions to a sustainable future. The PTE does demonstrate a clear concern for the long-term vision of rural areas and recognizes the unique challenges and opportunities of the ecological transition, though it does not explicitly address the impact of climate change on women, and the issues of gender differences in participation. Nor does it specifically address associated issues, such as the potential impact on employment, income, aging, care responsibilities and childcare gap, digital inclusion, and other relevant topics. It is believed that while these issues are not specifically acknowledged, that there is still a suggestion that the PTE is committed to ‘leaving no one behind’ because there is an emphasis on social equity and inclusivity which can be interpreted as implicit recognition. The plan emphasizes the need for a "just transition" that protects workers and creates new job opportunities in sustainable sectors, and focuses on social equity and inclusivity, suggesting an awareness of the potential for differentiated impacts on employment and income based on



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

various factors, including gender, while not explicitly mentioning it. The PTE indirectly addresses the importance of a collective effort, a social dialogue, collaboration, and widespread participation involving everyone, including men and women, in the green transition. While not explicitly mentioning gender, this emphasis on inclusivity and participation can be interpreted as an acknowledgment that the success of the ecological transition depends on the engagement and commitment of all individuals, regardless of gender.

Ireland moved one step further toward recognizing and enunciating the gender issues. Of the two policy documents analysed, only the *Climate Action Plan 2024* touches on some elements in relation to the long-term vision for rural areas e.g. the improvement of transport infrastructure and the development of renewable energy in rural areas. It also mentions the importance of engaging women (and young people) in current and future actions on climate change (without detailing specifically where/how). The *Climate Action Plan 2024* also references women’s participation in initiatives in relation to Zero Energy Building Retrofit training, where it is mentioned that record numbers of women participated in the scheme in 2023 (+2% since 2022). However, no context is provided for this figure and the potential positive consequences of increased female participation in this scheme is not explored. It does not consider different needs in terms of employment/income/social security needs, nor on issues regarding ageing, child and elderly care. It refers to “the digital inclusion agenda” but does not go into the detail of gender differences associated with it nor regarding engagement with the gender dimension of digital inclusion. The *Climate Action Plan 2024* does highlight the fact that men and women experience climate change differently. It notes that “vulnerable communities” (in which it includes “women and girls”), “face devastating impacts to their livelihoods and greater challenges in adapting to the long-term effects of climate breakdown”. The *Climate Action Plan 2024* also refers to Ireland’s International Climate Finance Roadmap 2022 which, it sets out, informs its “human rights” and “gender-sensitive” approach to climate action. It goes on to address the importance of having everyone – men and women - fully involved, committed, and supported in the green transition, and touches on this topic using mostly gender-neutral language, where it uses terms such as “people” and “citizens” in relation to the importance of being able to access appropriate education and training so that everyone can live sustainably and contribute to the sustainable development of rural communities. Gender is explored in a specific section of this policy document called: “Human rights, Gender and Climate Action”, and here, it is noted that women, like LGBT+ people and other marginalised groups, are a vulnerable group “disproportionately affected by climate change and more vulnerable to the shocks and stresses associated with current and future climate change.” It notes that through work with the Women’s Environment and Development Organisation, training, capacity building, and the provision of travel funds are available to women to contribute to national and international climate discussions, but no further details are given.

Spain is continuing to take steps toward gender equality in a number of areas. Of the four plans studied, the *National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan* indicates that the Women's Institute (InMujeres) signed a general collaboration protocol in 2021 for the joint development of actions within the framework of the development of the Just Transition Agreements in support of the promotion of entrepreneurship and the improvement of the employability and working conditions



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

of women in the territories affected by the energy transition. In addition, the *Strategic Plan for the Effective Equality of Women and Men* (PEIEMH) 2022-2025 includes measures along these lines. Spain's *Law 7/2021 on Climate Change and Energy Transition* is concerned with the long-term vision for rural areas because rural development is key to achieving the objective of climate neutrality. The transition to a decarbonized economy also requires measures to facilitate a fair transition for the most vulnerable groups and geographical areas but does not consider any differences between women and men in rural areas. Concerning the *Spanish Circular Economy Strategy 2030*, the commitment to innovation and digitalization of the rural environment by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAPA) forms part of the Action Plans of this Circular Economy Strategy, the Strategy does not consider the different participation of women and men, different employment/income/social security needs, different ageing issues or gender and the (child)care gap and responsibilities. The main aim of *Law 7/2021 on Climate Change and Energy* is to promote ways to adapt to the impact of climate change and implement a sustainable development model that generates decent jobs and contributes to the reduction of inequalities. The Government will strengthen existing participation mechanisms and ensure structured citizen participation in the climate change decision-making process through the establishment of a National Citizen's Climate Change at the national level and will recommend the establishment of regional and municipal assemblies. Their composition will take into the principle of balanced representation of women and men and include the participation of young people. This policy document also provides actions to boost the digitization of the economy to contribute to achieving decarbonization objectives, employing the potential of new technologies, such as AI, to move towards a green economy, but none of the four strategies studied make differential gender considerations regarding IA. The *National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan*, within the framework of the new training, a gender perspective will also be applied, with the aim of closing the existing gap in the technical professions, and therefore the necessary positive actions will be applied for the effective equality of women and men (LOIEMH). The Plan make provisions to address gender inequality on employment, training, leadership development and entrepreneurship. Activation of awareness-raising campaigns, targeting both women and men in the general public and specific social and economic sectors, on decarbonisation, and in particular renewables, as a fundamental tool in the fight against climate change, the associated socio-economic opportunities, as well as the health and quality of life benefits of climate action.

Lithuania's policy includes a long-term vision for rural areas, with several objectives aimed at enhancing rural resilience to climate change. However, the policy does not specifically target women entrepreneurs or rural women, nor does it provide gender-specific measures for rural economic development. The policy also includes references to digitalization and the use of technology to support the transition to a low-emission economy but does not explicitly promote digital inclusion or the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The policy promotes investment in green research and development, potentially integrating digital technologies, but there's no specific mention of AI as a tool within climate policies. The Lithuanian *Climate Change Management Agenda 2021* is entirely focused on addressing climate change. However, this policy does not explicitly address differences in how climate change impacts women and men. The policy is formulated to promote social inclusivity in general terms, aiming to prevent economic disparities and support vulnerable



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

communities but lacks specific gender-based analyses or considerations regarding differentiated climate impacts on women and men. Additionally, the policy emphasizes the importance of collective action and broad social engagement in the transition to a green economy but does not explicitly present a rationale for why it is critical to have both men and women fully involved, committed, and supported in this transition. The policy encourages stakeholder cooperation and public awareness but does so with gender-neutral language and does not specify targeted support for gender inclusivity.

Croatia's multiple policies present some emphasis on the importance of a long-term vision of rural areas through the goals of ecosystem restoration and biodiversity conservation, which may include the development of sustainable monitoring and measures in rural communities. The regulation does not directly mention the gender gap, nor does it present concrete measures for the care of children and the elderly. Aspects of employment and income are covered under the topics of sustainable development of communities and providing social security. In the *Nature Restoration Regulation* policy, Croatia's regulation related to the restoration of the ecosystem does not directly mention the promotion of digital inclusion or the use of artificial intelligence. There is no direct consideration of gender differences related to digital inclusion or AI. The regulation primarily focuses on ecological aspects of ecosystem restoration, not on issues of gender equality or gender inequality. This policy does recognize the importance of climate change as a key problem and highlights the need for action. However, there is no direct mention of how climate change affects women and men differently. The National Development Strategy (NDS) recognises the income inequality between women and men, as the rate of poverty risk and social exclusion among older women is much higher than the EU average and the low labour force participation rate of young women has exacerbated the problem of the decline in the number of people of working age and the active population. The Strategy also recognises the importance of digital technology as the strongest driver of productivity and competitiveness in the 21st century. It also recognises that digital technology and AI are making traditional jobs more difficult, changing labour market relationships and opening up space for new forms of security threats. The National Development Strategy recognises climate change as the greatest global challenge of the 21st century. One of the strategic objectives is both the green and the digital transition, which includes the ecological and energy transition to climate neutrality, food self-sufficiency and the development of the bioeconomy. The ecological and energy transition to climate neutrality has been set as strategic objective 8, as Croatia is exposed to high risks from climate change. Therefore, work is underway to implement public policies aimed at preserving biodiversity and strengthening natural capital, spatial resources, low-carbon growth and effective resource management in order to reduce risks to the environment and increase resilience to climate change, as well as decarbonising the energy system and renovating buildings to increase energy efficiency. In the *Scenario for achieving climate neutrality in the Republic Croatia by 2030*, rural areas are mentioned in the context of a vision of the future of agriculture that will lead to almost energy-neutral development of rural areas. Although Croatia's *Draft of Strategy for Bioeconomy 2035* is not specifically aimed at rural areas, it does mention that the bioeconomy is particularly important for rural areas. By 2035, the bioeconomy will rapidly develop as a dynamic and diversified economic sector that will make a significant contribution to the overall economic activities in the Republic of Croatia and their sustainability, which, in addition



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

to reducing their dependence on raw materials from non-renewable sources, is particularly important for rural areas. The largest segment of the Croatian bioeconomy consists of the primary sectors (agriculture, forestry, fisheries and aquaculture) while agriculture is related to rural areas. It is emphasized that it is necessary to consolidate the sources of information related to the bioeconomy and make them accessible to all interested parties. In this context, a digital platform will be set up containing up-to-date information on the relevant legal framework of the bioeconomy, the actors in the sector, the funding opportunities for projects and the results of projects already carried out.

Norway's *Klimaplan for 2021-2030* sets out that it will reduce emissions according to agreements. It shows how the government's climate policy will ensure that Norway meets the climate targets at the same time as they facilitate work for more people and strengthen welfare and sustainable growth in the Norwegian economy. The policy is concerned with the long-term vision for rural areas, such as emphasizing that people should still be able to live in vibrant towns and villages and work in a vibrant business community throughout the country, but at the same time contribute to reduction of emissions in a range of ways. The document highlights that women and men are affected differently by climate change and climate policy, and that it therefore is important that girls and women also participate effectively in decision-making processes about climate. It is formulated as an assumption that women participate to a lesser extent in such processes than men. It does not consider different employment/income/social security needs, different ageing issues or gender and the care gap. The *Klimaplan* promotes digital inclusion as part of the green transition and circular economy, but the document does not consider gender differences or inequality as part of this. The document is concerned with climate change and propose a plan to reduce emissions in line with targets. Nothing is mentioned about gender.

The Proposal for the next year's state budget considers digitalization as a strategy both in businesses and society as a whole to support the green transition in different ways. The document also refers to the Digitalization strategy for the climate and environment area 2020-2024. The document does not consider gender differences or inequality as part of this. The document is concerned with climate change and that men and women are impacted differently. But the document does not explain how they are impacted differently. The document states that it is important to include both men and women because they are impacted differently, and that it therefore is important to implement a gender perspective in the development of climate policy and to ensure that girls and women are included and have real influence in decision-making processes about climate

Sweden's policy does have a long-term development plan for rural areas. However, it does not consider gender, socio-economical aspects, or different care responsibilities. The policy states that people living in more sparsely populated areas experience a greater decline in welfare compared to households in metropolitan areas, but it does not consider this more deeply. One objective in the policy is increased digitalization and internet connection. It does not promote AI or consider gender differences in digital inclusion. The policy focuses on technical solutions to climate change and climate adaptation but does not acknowledge how women and men are impacted differently, nor the importance in involving everyone in the green transition.

Scotland's Green Industrial Strategy does not refer to a specific policy for a Long-Term Vision for



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Rural Areas, nor does it make any specific reference to women in a rural context. Where the Strategy includes rural areas, it focuses on their geographical advantages and, apart from the questions of education/training and housing, gives little insight into how the necessary infrastructure for growth will be resourced. Scotland's Green Industrial Strategy is driven by the imperative to become carbon neutral in response to climate change. It frames this as an economic opportunity and challenge, notably in terms of developing facilities for Carbon Capture, Utilisation and Storage (CCUS) (p.24), but the document makes no reference to gender in relation to climate change.

Critique, best practices and suggested next steps for policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality

Plans may emphasize inclusivity and social equity broadly, but frequently there is no direct mention of gender-specific strategies for equal opportunities within climate action sectors or a focus on supporting women in green jobs or training. Other measures are not addressed at all, despite it being required. This is the case, for example, of the Gender Equality Strategy's request to address gender care gaps in rural regions which have not been reflected in certain national policy documents. Although the policies target rural areas for climate resilience, the measures are not designed to address gender-specific care burdens.

There is a fine line between recognizing an issue and following it with suggested measures to solve the problem, or not. For example, gender dimensions and considerations are addressed in some plans, such as where women are mentioned along with young people as a marginalised group whose participation in current and future climate actions will be promoted. However, it is not clear if/what targeted measures are involved here. In another case, the strategy recognises the income inequality between women and men, as the rate of poverty risk and social exclusion among older women is much higher than the EU average and the low labour force participation rate of young women has exacerbated the problem of the decline in the number of people of working age and the active population. While no specific actions are mentioned, this recognition of an inequality in a major national policy can serve as the first step toward resolving the problem.

Gender pay and pension gaps are frequently ignored. Statements are often included in the analysed policy documents, such as 'We encourage equitable distribution of financial support through investment focused on diversity and inclusion priorities, such as female and minority founders', and while it is not expected that the document should go into finely grained detail, the statement is unhelpfully vague, and indicative of an arm's length approach that risks making this provision hard to implement or evaluate. There are some references in policy measures specifically targeted at women, which may include training, capacity building, provision of travel funds, etc., however, no further specific details are given on the exact funding available or on the types of training involved. Of the few references to measures targeted at women in terms of government funding available to promote positive action for gender equality possible, one policy maintains that 'we encourage equitable distribution of financial support through investment [...] focused on diversity and inclusion priorities, such as female and minority founders. While it is not expected that this document should go into finely grained detail, the statement is vague, and indicative of an arm's length approach that risks making this provision hard to implement or evaluate.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Regarding gender mainstreaming measures, a “gender-sensitive” approach to climate action may be stated in a policy, including the enhanced ability to track and report on international climate finance and how it contributes to gender equality, but it does not assert where/what funding is available to support it. No further specific details are given. Women are treated as a uniform “special category” in documents, but no specific groups of women are described e.g., age, migration, religion. Finally, there is no reference to sex-disaggregated data, although some countries note that they are working towards improving their collection of gender-disaggregated data in relation to monitoring and reporting of climate finance.

While the research has identified a number of weaknesses in the policies, several countries also have demonstrated some good practices that are worth noting. Although **Ireland** has a history of policies not challenging gender stereotypes, and socio-cultural factors and gender norms around land succession resulting in women being sidelined in land ownership, there appears to be some new recognition, in comparison with some other national policies, that women’s needs should be on their radar screen. For example, Ireland has declared that it is adopting a ‘Whole of Government – Whole of Society’ Approach in the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan. Under this approach, inclusive decision-making ensures that marginalized groups, such as rural communities and women, have a voice in biodiversity planning and in the decision-making processes. It supports grass-roots efforts and equity in the distribution of conservation benefits and responsibilities. It also supports citizen engagement and increases understanding of the importance of biodiversity across all segments of society. The policy asserts that it recognises “...their (women’s) equal rights and access to land and national resources and their full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership at all levels of action, engagement, policy and decision-making related to biodiversity.”

In addition, **Ireland’s** *Climate Action Plan 2024* sets out that it follows a ‘gender sensitive approach’ informed by SDG Goal 13. The Plan can be said to raise awareness of women’s rights and promote equal opportunity where it mentions that it is in alignment with the gender sensitive focus of the SDGs. In general, the Aims & Objectives of the *Climate Action Plan 2024* specifically state that they will follow the principles of Ireland’s Just Transition Framework. This is a policy framework designed to ensure that the transition to a low-carbon, sustainable economy is fair, inclusive, and equitable, particularly for communities and workers who are most affected by the shift away from fossil fuels and high-carbon industries. It recognizes that transitioning to a green economy can have significant social and economic implications and seeks to manage these impacts effectively while maximizing opportunities for sustainable development. By focusing on retraining workers, restoring ecosystems, and supporting affected communities, it seeks to ensure that no one is left behind as the country moves towards its climate goals.

Spain continues to demonstrate its recognition of the need for, and interest in, supporting rural women. It’s important to point out that the integration of climate change adaptation objectives and Gender Perspective are two of the cross-cutting measures of the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan: Measure 6.1 - Gender Perspective and Measure 6.2 - Integration Of Climate Change Adaptation Objectives. Regarding the National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan, the Women's Institute (InMujeres) -- the National Institute for Women, which is a public institution under the Ministry of Equality -- signed a general collaboration protocol in 2021 for the joint development of



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

actions within the framework of the development of the Just Transition Agreements regarding the promotion of entrepreneurship and the improvement of the employability and working conditions of women in the territories affected by the energy transition. The agreement represents a pivotal step toward ensuring that women are not only included but also empowered in the transition to a low-carbon and sustainable economy. By addressing gender inequities, fostering women's leadership, and creating economic opportunities, this collaboration strengthens the social pillar of sustainability while advancing broader environmental and economic goals. Its success will depend on effective implementation, adequate resources, and continuous stakeholder engagement. In addition, the Strategic Plan for the Effective Equality of Women and Men (PEIEMH) 2022-2025 includes measures along these same lines. This Plan only makes generic references to the consideration of different employment/income/social security needs, but it is noted that the weight of the social economy in green and/or rural entrepreneurship, cooperatives, is extremely low, both for women and men.

The mere recognition that the **Norwegian** *Klimaplan for 2021-30* makes that refers to the fact that women and men are different in that climate change and climate policy affect them in different ways is a step forward. The document also draws attention to women's rights to participate in decision-making processes and emphasizes inclusion and equal opportunities to influence processes and decisions.

Although it is not clear from **Croatia's** *National Development Strategy (NDS)* what initiatives have been launched, how institutions can contribute to the complete elimination of inequality between women and men, or how women's entrepreneurship can be improved, it does recognise the income inequality between women and men, the rate of poverty risk and social exclusion among older women (much higher than EU average), and low labour force participation rate of young women. A number of policy areas and initiatives have begun to be implemented to help protect women's rights and promote women in the labour market, as it is also recognized that a higher employment rate for women has a positive impact on the increase in the birth rate. It was pointed out that the work of the institutions in the future should lead to the complete elimination of inequality between women and men in terms of wages and leadership positions in the labour market. As part of the policy to improve human resources and demographic policy, measures are being designed and consistently implemented to facilitate the creation of a balance between work and family life: investing in infrastructure and services related to the care of children and other dependent family members, protecting the rights of mothers and women in the labour market and promoting the responsibility of the employer in solving the specific family needs of young workers, especially women and mothers. Measures to reduce and completely eliminate the loss of income of parents, especially women, during maternity and parental leave will be improved. The strategy envisages the creation of a society that demonstrates in every aspect of social and public affairs that it cares about the needs of mothers, families with children, children and young people.

8. Conclusions

The pursuit of gender equality in rural areas of Europe is an essential priority that cannot be taken for granted. Despite the European Union's commitment to promoting women's rights and equality, the reality is that, as demonstrated in this report, these goals often face significant challenges in rural contexts. The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) highlights that during times of financial crisis and austerity, the focus on equality for women tends to diminish, leading to setbacks in progress that have been hard-won over the years. This trend underscores the need for a sustained commitment to gender equality, especially in rural areas where women often face unique barriers.

Rural and farm women are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of economic downturns, as they frequently rely on agriculture and related sectors for their livelihoods. To address their specific needs, it is crucial that policies designed to promote gender equality are not only well-intentioned, but also robust and actionable, and include policies that have the necessary "teeth" to effect real change. This means implementing measures that are specifically designed for rural women, and providing tangible support, such as access to resources, training, and financial assistance, which are tailored to the realities of their needs and way of life. Without such measures, women who stay in these communities may continue to be marginalized, lacking the opportunities and support needed to thrive. Furthermore, rural areas will not be able to fully contribute to the circular economy and risk the knock-on effects of continued downturn.

Addressing intersectional issues is also critical. Rural women often face compounded challenges due to factors such as age, socio-economic status, and geographic isolation. A comprehensive approach to gender equality must consider these intersecting identities to create inclusive policies that benefit all women in rural settings.

The Gender Equality Strategy (GES) provides a foundation and start in the right direction, but it must also evolve beyond being merely aspirational. While setting ambitious goals is important, it is equally vital that the strategy include concrete frameworks and commitments that ensure measurable progress. This involves establishing clear benchmarks and accountability mechanisms to track advancements in gender equality in rural areas. Policymakers must engage with rural women to understand their experiences and challenges, ensuring that their voices are heard in the development of policies that affect their lives. The GRASS CEILING benchmarking study can serve as the base mark for further regular and targeted actions.

This EU and national benchmarking exercise should not be considered to be a one-time event, but part of an on-going and regular process. This study provides a very important baseline that can and should be regularly revisited.

Some key obstacles have also been uncovered that need to be addressed, and include:

- General lack of recognition about the depth of the problem of gender inequality, its severity, and the need to take coordinated actions to solve it;
- Intentions or mentions may be present in policies about equality for women, but there is a lack of specific implementation plans to achieve change;
- Lack of goals and objectives, lack of follow-up;



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

- Lack of consideration in the fundamental policy language used that women are active participants in the rural economy and deserve to be given equal recognition in all policies to begin to right the wrong;
- Lack of budgetary considerations targeted specifically at women farmers and rural women entrepreneurs;
- Lack of detailed planning and coordination;
- Multiple documents at the National level make it more difficult to identify and follow through with policies;
- Women's issues are bundled into other issues, where they become nearly unrecognizable or forgotten, and no definition is made of how much priority is given to them regarding the budget or means to solve them;
- Gender issues are sometimes put into a separate chapter of the policy where they are typically forgotten, sidelined, or deemed low priority, since they are not part of the 'mainstream' policy;
- Frequent lack of one equivalent document at the national level.

These are just some of the issues that were revealed.

During the policy-oriented session at the Showcase Event in Vilnius in November 2024, attendees shared knowledge and information to examine the issues and recommendations that emerged from the findings presented in this report. The next step is to compile the various issues at the national level and bring them to the attention of the relevant authorities in each country. Additionally, action plans will be developed to initiate the necessary remedial work. By doing this, it is hoped that the next benchmarking exercise will lead to visible improvements based on these parameters. A detailed breakdown of the issues and national tables with more information for each country can be found in Annex 1. Summary tables per country.

This report has identified the underrepresentation of rural women in a host of EU and national policies in the field of agriculture and rural development. At the same time, there has been progress in recognizing the essential role of women in entrepreneurship, particularly the underrepresentation of rural women as entrepreneurs. The innovative ideas and creativity on offer offers a fertile ground for introducing new products and services in rural areas and regions. A shift towards a localized, "bottom-up" approach empowers communities and lessens dependence on government and large corporations. Rural women are crucial in the circular economy, managing food supply and addressing climate change, which allows them to drive meaningful solutions. Promoting equal rights for these women can significantly advance the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This analysis shares best practices in gender equality derived from various publications, seminars, and workshops, aimed at fostering workforce participation and safeguarding women's rights. Future efforts should focus on closing the wage and leadership gaps between men and women in the labour market. Achieving gender equality in rural Europe requires a committed collective effort and strong leadership from the European Union to maintain momentum. By implementing robust policies and setting clear goals, an empowering environment can be created for rural women to engage in all aspects of life. To fully unlock the potential of rural women, both national and EU-level policies must offer strong support. A more equitable future relies on recognizing and utilizing the talents and insights of women, particularly in rural areas, for everyone's



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

benefit.

Annex 1. Summary tables per country

Best practices and suggest next steps for policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality-Inspires and spurs further discussion among stakeholders and policymakers about potential replication/adaptation in other national contexts

Croatia - Summary Table

Issue	Recommendation Bullet points / operational action
Disregard of gender specific terminology.	As Croatian language have gender sensitive nouns and verbs, therefore it is recommended to use it as much as possible in the documents, specifically those considering women.
Lack of gender specific data and rural specific data.	Actions to start systematic conducting gender-specific data, analysing it and taking action upon conducted analyses. Including data on ownership of land property, entrepreneurship... in gender- and rural- specific manner.
Policy blindness for gender (and other socio-demographic) considerations in the strategic policy documents	Agricultural policy overlooks the heterogeneity of people engaged in agriculture (men and women, young and old, singles and families) thus not taking into account the human factor of farms or entrepreneurs. The sector consists of people with diverse roles which need to drive the transition to a more sustainable agriculture. Actions to include a socio-demographic sensitivity, especially gender one. Also, actions to recognise women’s contribution in agriculture, statistically, economically.
Not recognising the gender stereotypes and thus not challenging it.	Actions to recognise gender stereotypes and to address and challenge it through measurable goals.
Failing to actively advocate for gender mainstreaming in all aspects of agricultural policy and programming.	Actions to take into account that women in rural areas and agriculture sector are more likely to be unemployed, to have part-time employment, to participate in the labour force through unpaid and invisible work. In the infrastructural objectives, such as the increasing of kindergartens, it should be related to women’s position as caregivers and focused to enabling rural women to (self)employ.
Lack of recognising other possible economic activity beside agriculture, relevant to vital rural economy, as well as other services needed in rural areas.	Actions to support integrated approach through the policy, where rural development (and farmers’, women’s, entrepreneurs’, youth and others’ position) is at the same time related to agriculture, education and health service, childcare, transport, housing...

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

	Even though gender equality is sporadically mentioned in the policy, it has not been translated into specific challenges nor measurable goals. It is recommended to do so.
Lack of allocation of adequate budget for programs/actions	In order to overcome gender specific barriers in agriculture there should be budget for training and support of women and for awareness raising at the level of agricultural organisations and the ministry.
Complete lack of access to funding opportunities, training, information, mentorship and networking which is specific or more salient for women and lack of recognising it as a problem.	Smaller, easier to access start-up loans are needed, with means to ensure a sustainable business without always having to upscale to reach requirements.
Absence of specific measures to promote gender equality nor there are specific measures to empower women. Challenges which women face in the agricultural sector are not mentioned or tackled by this document.	Actions to promote gender equality including specific measures to empower women.
Lack of women's meaningful participation in relevant decision-making bodies	Have a target of % of women to be included in panel groups and boards of organisations as well as commissions and working groups installed by the government

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Ireland - Summary Table

Issue	Recommendation Bullet points / operational action
Treatment of women as a special category and not mainstreaming their needs throughout the policy document	The needs of women should be incorporated into the main body of policy documents and addressed throughout. Where targeted measures are highlighted to boost women-led initiatives, these should be mentioned as part of this and not always as a separate category of support.
Women are depicted as vulnerable groups and are mentioned in association with other groups considered minority/vulnerable in agriculture and rural areas i.e. young people, migrant populations, members of the LGBTQ+ community	While women face gender-based inequalities in a range of areas, from farm ownership to a series of gender gaps in care, pay and pension, depicting women consistently as a vulnerable group overlooks their important contribution to family farms and the innovation eco-system in agriculture and rural areas. Secondly, depicting women constantly in conjunction with other vulnerable categories overlooks the fact that these groups face diverse and specific challenges that require different interventions and supports.
Gender equality is often mentioned as important in the Introduction of policy documents without being developed in the main body	Where gender equality is mentioned in specific parts of policy documents as a core value – for example in the Introduction and Appendices – it gives the impression that this is merely a “box-ticking” exercise. How and where gender equality is being promoted needs to be signposted throughout policy documents.
Some funding supports mentioned for rural female entrepreneurs (i.e. from Local Enterprise Offices) require plans for expansion, export and growing staff numbers, which does not generally suit the business model favoured by and suitable for rural women	Funding supports that meet the requirements of rural women innovators need to be developed and highlighted in policy documents, for example, easier to access micro finance loans, to enable rural women to pursue their innovation activities without having to follow an expansion and/or export model where this is unsuitable for them.
More supports required for training, networking, and the promotion of women to leadership roles	While there are some proposals for the support of these areas in policy documents, for example the development of women-only knowledge transfer (KT) groups, these could be developed further, beyond agriculture into forestry, fishing and rural communities more broadly.
The critical role played by women in sustainable and organic farming practices and the valuable impact of female-led initiatives on achieving national climate targets are not acknowledged	The important role played by women at both their community and national level in sustainable and organic farming need to be acknowledged in policy documents along with supports to incentivise this further.
No acknowledgement of gender pay, pension and care gaps and the implications of these for rural women generally or rural women innovators	Gender pay, pension and care gaps need to be highlighted in policy documents along with targets and proposals to reduce these.



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

No sex-disaggregated data provided in relation to programs e.g. numbers of applications received, breakdown of successful applications on a gender basis	A range of sex-disaggregated data should be included in policy documents for programs so that applications received and successful can be monitored and where gender imbalances are identified these can be addressed.
No gender budgeting included for programs/actions	Gender budgeting needs to be made a feature of all programs/actions highlighted in policy documents as a critical tool for reducing inequalities.

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Italy - Summary Table

Issue	Recommendation Bullet points / operational action
Italy does not adequately address the gender pay gap and working conditions in agriculture	The plan should include measures to track and monitor the gender pay gap and pension gap in the agricultural sector. This data can inform targeted interventions to close these gaps, such as promoting equal pay for equal work, supporting women's access to leadership positions, and ensuring equal access to social protection schemes.
Inadequate consideration about gender gap in digital inclusion and access to technology in rural areas	Develop and implement targeted measures to bridge the digital divide for women in rural areas. This could involve providing affordable access to broadband internet, digital literacy training programs, and support for women's participation in the digital economy.
Lack of Gender-Disaggregated Data and Monitoring	Enhance gender data collection to analyse the impact of agricultural policies on women and monitor progress in gender equality measures. Such data would allow for more targeted interventions and continuous improvement of inclusion policies
Lack of Consideration for Gendered Impacts of Climate Change and Environmental Degradation	Integrate a gender analysis into climate change adaptation and mitigation measures within the strategies. This could involve assessing how climate change impacts women and men in the agri-food sector differently and developing gender-responsive strategies to build resilience and support sustainable livelihoods.
Lacks specific measures to support women's leadership and participation in environmental decision-making processes	Promote women's leadership and participation in environmental governance and decision-making at all levels. Gender inequality is only addressed in general terms, with no specific plans to reduce barriers preventing women from benefiting from the ecological transition. This could involve setting targets for women's representation in environmental institutions, supporting women's participation in community-based environmental initiatives, and promoting gender equality in environmental leadership programs.
Inadequate consideration about the impact of care responsibilities on women's participation in the rural economy.	Develop and implement measures to address the care burden on women in rural areas, such as providing access to affordable childcare and eldercare services, promoting flexible working arrangements, and supporting men's involvement in caregiving
Positive commitment to inclusivity and social equity not supported by concrete actions	Strengthen this commitment by implementing targeted programs and resources that actively support women's leadership and entrepreneurship in agriculture, ensuring these principles of inclusivity translate into concrete, measurable outcomes.

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Lithuania - Summary Table

Issue	Recommendation Bullet points / operational action
1. Limited gender-specific measures across all policies	Develop dedicated programs within each policy that address the unique needs and challenges of women, particularly in rural and agricultural sectors.
2. High household and childcare burden on women with no supportive measures	Implement supportive policies, such as childcare services and flexible work arrangements, to reduce women's disproportionate household and care responsibilities.
3. Absence of concrete goals to close gender pay and pension gaps	Set measurable targets for reducing gender pay and pension gaps, with regular tracking and public reporting on progress.
4. Lack of support for women entrepreneurs, especially in rural areas	Establish funding opportunities, training, and mentorship programs to advance women entrepreneurs and support their access to innovation and financial resources.
5. Limited digital inclusion and AI training for women	Provide targeted digital literacy and AI training programs for women, ensuring they can participate in and benefit from digital transformation in agriculture and climate action.
6. Climate change policies do not address gender-specific impacts	Integrate gender analysis into climate adaptation and resilience strategies, recognizing and addressing how climate impacts men and women differently.
7. Rural economic development lacks a gender perspective	Tailor rural development strategies to address gender disparities, supporting women's economic empowerment and access to resources in rural areas.
8. No specific policies promoting women's leadership in agriculture and rural sectors	Introduce leadership development initiatives for women in agriculture and rural communities, encouraging active participation in decision-making and policy development.
9. Lack of targeted measures for gender equity in green job training	Establish pathways for women in green job sectors through reskilling, targeted training, and mentorship, supporting gender equity in emerging climate-related employment.
10. Overall absence of a cross-cutting gender equality framework in policy design	Adopt a comprehensive gender equality framework across all policies, with clear goals, gender-disaggregated data collection, and periodic reviews to monitor gender impact.

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Netherlands - Summary Table

Issue	Recommendation Bullet points / operational action
Disregard for gender neutral terminology	Add into policies the acknowledgment that ‘boeren’ refers to both genders.
Systematic disregard for gender considerations in policy section	Agricultural policy often overlooks the people engaged in agriculture which include men and women, young and old and families; by either thinking in terms of farms or entrepreneurs this human factor is not considered whereas it is those humans which need to drive the transition to a more sustainable agriculture. Action to include a demographic breakdown of the relevant population.
Missing gender dimension in SWOT analysis	Include gender (and age) dimension in SWOT analysis and take account of the social infrastructure needed in rural areas to render the profession more attractive for successors and newcomers and their partners & families (including childcare, holiday support, schools.)
Lack of allocation of adequate budget for programs/actions	In order to overcome gender specific barriers in agriculture there should be budget for training and support of women and for awareness raising at the level of agricultural organisations and the ministry
Lack of recognition /actions in support of +40-year-old women	By focusing on young farmers, it seems as if 40+ women are disregarded whereas they are innovative entrepreneurs too
Lack of access to financial support for women farmers and the need to focus on this inequality	Smaller, easier to access start-up loans are needed, with means to ensure a sustainable business without always having to upscale to reach requirements.
Lack of gender segregated data on gender of farm managers	Gender segregated information needs to be collected, for what regards work but also entitlement and property such as land; more information on partnerships should be included too
Poor communication recognising gender inequality	Formal communication often represents only men farmers reproducing gender inequality; Training to be given in communication skills
Lack of women’s meaningful participation in relevant decision-making bodies	Have a target of % of women to be included in panel groups and boards of organisations as well as commissions and working groups installed by the government

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Norway - Summary Table

Issue	Recommendation Bullet points / operational action
<p>Poor gender segregated data on gender of farm managers. Norway has not gathered comprehensive gender-specific data within its agricultural policies, limiting policymakers' ability to tailor policies effectively. Without gender-disaggregated data, it is challenging to measure the success of agricultural initiatives or adjust them to better support women.</p>	<p>Norwegian statistics do not reflect women's involvement in agriculture in an accurate way (this is due to only one person per farm being registered as the applicant for production subsidy). As further mentioned, there are many women participating in running farms which are registered as sole proprietorships, and for such firms, it is unknown if it is men or women who contribute to the farming. Thus, more accurate registration of cases of farm co-management is needed to better reflect the gender of farm managers.</p>
<p>There is no targeted effort to ensure women's participation in technology-enhanced agriculture.</p>	<p>Norway could introduce dedicated digital literacy programs for women in agriculture. These programs would ensure that women have the skills to engage with digital farming tools, AI, and precision agriculture technologies, closing a potential digital divide in agricultural communities.</p>

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Scotland - Summary Table

Issue	Recommendation Bullet points / operational action
<p>(CAP) i) Agriculture Reform Route Map; ii) Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill (passed into law 18.06.24) plus Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)</p> <p>The first two documents make no reference to ‘men’ or to ‘women’ or to gender in any respect. In this package as a whole, therefore, women are either invisible or framed in terms of being potentially disadvantaged, and the consequences of their non-participation are assessed in terms of detriment to women themselves.</p>	<p>Reconsider the gender-neutral approach to the writing of policy documents. Recognise and highlight how increasing women’s participation will benefit the sector as a whole.</p> <p>Set out and apply a clear mechanism to ensure that the intended further assessment is applied to future policy.</p> <p>Reconvene the/a Task Force to review the current context and refresh the government’s commitments for the future.</p> <p>Ensure provision for women at all stages of the life course</p>
<p>(LTVRA) Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill (passed into law 18.06.24) plus Equality Impact Assessment</p> <p>“Scotland has no coherent rural policy or vision” (Atterton et al, 2023)</p>	<p>That the working party/task force proposed in Section 1(above) contributes to the delivery plan</p>
<p>(Farm to Fork) Good Food Nation Plan This Plan includes few specific references to women. The <i>People and Communities</i> section refers to ‘parents’ rather than ‘mother’ or ‘father’, except when distinguishing women in terms of the role of breastfeeding mother. It goes on to mention ‘women and girls’ as a group ‘disproportionately’ affected by conditions that can be managed via diet.</p> <p>Other than in the instances cited above, women are not explicitly mentioned in relation to achieving the ambitions of this Plan.</p> <p>The policy does not, however, explicitly consider differences between men and women in occupations/enterprises in the sector it concerns.</p>	<p>The lack of quantitative data inhibits the recognition and support necessary for the contribution of rural women to realise its potential. A fundamental step: adopt collection methods that provide data specific to the category of ‘rural women’.</p>
<p>(Green Deal) Green Industrial Strategy plus Green Industrial Strategy: Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Summary The Green Industrial Strategy includes only one reference to gender, where it states that it will encourage ‘equitable distribution of financial support [for businesses to grow] through investment [...] focused on diversity and inclusion priorities, such as female and minority founders’.</p> <p>This statement is unhelpfully vague and indicates an arm’s length approach that is likely to make this provision hard either to implement or to evaluate. Additionally, if financial support is conditional on the potential, or ambition, of businesses to scale up (as the wording throughout indicates), it will exclude women-led businesses that, for whatever reasons, may make a sustainable contribution to the green economy while, or perhaps by, not aiming to grow.</p> <p>The accompanying Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Summary necessarily takes</p>	<p>The Assessment Summary acknowledges that, by focusing on the 5 particular ‘opportunity areas’, the Strategy risks perpetuating inequalities, but concludes that the Strategy has no alternative. But how closely have the opportunity areas themselves been scrutinised? Rather than looking to how women do or (more pertinently) don’t readily fit within these male-dominated sectors where success is dependent on scaling up, why not also look to sectors, and enterprise models, where women’s strengths can be seen to flourish and contribute to the green economy? In the first instance:</p> <p>Look to how other countries in the Grass Ceiling Consortium are approaching questions of scale and gender in relation to Net Zero targets.</p> <p>Review the Strategy through the lens of women-led rural enterprises, e.g. via a task force as mentioned in sections 1 & 2 above.</p>



D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

account of gender, but the Assessment Summary makes no specific reference to rural women or to entrepreneurs.

5 opportunity areas are identified, but they are all dependent on STEM skills and training. It would be a positive outcome if more women who wish to work in these areas are enabled to do so. If funding is primarily directed to globally competitive areas (e.g. oil and gas) where men currently predominate, this is likely to be at the expense of supporting smaller-scale women-led enterprises that contribute to sustainable local economies.

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Spain - Summary Table

Issue	Recommendation
1. Lack of employment opportunities for women in rural areas	Promote female entrepreneurship programs in agricultural sectors, offering financial support, tax incentives and training in digitalization.
2. Under-representation in local action groups and regulatory councils	Implement quotas for female participation in the boards of directors of cooperatives and agricultural organizations. More information and transparency in the electoral processes
3. Masculinization of rural areas	Promote measures that encourage the incorporation of young women into the rural work market. Improve social services and infrastructures, mainly digital and connectivity ones.
4. Difficulties for women in accessing land	Create specific programs for land access and agricultural credit for female entrepreneurs, emphasizing shared ownership.
5. Wage gap between men and women in the agrarian sector	Introduce additional economic incentives for women in CAP: subsidies to ensure greater income equity in agriculture, positive action measures in rural development programs... Promote gender segregated information in indexes and context and evaluation reports related to rural areas and agrarian sector. Promote the real image of the countryside and the agrarian sector: professional activities, generating employment and rents with work conditions much better related to the past.
6. Lack of digital training among rural women	Implement digital training programs specifically aimed at rural women to improve their competitiveness and job opportunities. And improve the Internet connectivity in all rural areas
7. Unequal caregiving burden in rural areas	Develop public services for childcare and dependent care in rural areas to facilitate work-life balance for women. Promote domestic co-responsibility at schools and other spheres of the society
8. Reconciliation issues Inequality in ownership and management of agricultural holdings	Strengthen the Shared Ownership Law in agricultural holdings to ensure equality in the management and representation of women in the sector.
9. Lack of incentives for women's participation in agricultural innovation	Prioritize innovative projects led by women for access to financing and agricultural sector grants. Visibility of the successful projects led by women. Promote networks and support networks between women and other stakeholders, led by cooperatives, agrarian associations or the administration, to facilitate participative processes
10. Lack of specific actions measures targeted at women in environmental and ecological transition policies	Integrate a gender analysis into this type of policies to consider the gender impacts and to develop different strategies regarding the gender gaps and the women's needs

D4.2 – Synthesis report gender benchmarking European and national agricultural and rural policies

Sweden - Summary Table

Issue	Recommendation
Gender is not integrated into any policy analysed	Integrate gender e.g. using established gender mainstreaming methods. Discuss and define what gender (in-)equality is. Make use of existing knowledge and research on gender equality and gender inequalities. Analyse – and challenge – gender stereotypes. Raise awareness about women’s rights. Do gender budgeting.
Missing gender divided analysis and statistics	Include analyses of gender divisions of farm work, house- and care work etc. Include analyses of gender divided statistics of e.g. farmers, land ownership, farm and rural business ownership, unpaid house- and care work, parental leave etc.