GRASS CEILING Practice abstracts

English

Highlighting and reinforcing inequalities: an assessment of available data on the position and activities of women in rural areas and agriculture in Ireland

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Ireland

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Introduction

This practice abstract summarises the publicly available data on the position and activities of women in agriculture and rural areas in Ireland. Data available reflect the traditional gender inequalities faced by women. Where statistics are unavailable, the vital contribution of women to farm sustainability and the local economy is unacknowledged. This has critical implications for women's income, access to funding, training, and networks.

Key Statistical Findings

Women's legal position and ownership of capital in agriculture

Longstanding gender inequalities in agriculture and rural areas in Ireland are reflected in the data available. Only 12% of Irish farms are women-owned while 4% are in joint male/female ownership (2020). Women perform around a third of farm labour without the status of farm or herd owner.

Women's access to income is therefore limited where farm bank accounts are in the names of male family members. While data is unavailable on women's participation in cooperatives, their engagement with unions and farm organisations, seen as male domains, is low.

Women's involvement in innovative initiatives

Although qualitative research reveals women's rich involvement in innovative initiatives, statistical data is not available to support this. No data exists on rural women's start-ups, farm diversification or social innovation activities. The 2020 Agricultural Census found that women hold 293 of the organic farms in the country, 17.4% of the total. These figures highlight that women traditionally excluded from farm ownership are developing socio-ecological innovations on smaller and rented holdings.

Gender dimension in the strategic documents

Ireland's CAP national strategy 2023-2027 addresses gender equality by treating women as a special category with three targeted measures: a higher farm modernisation grant rate of 60%, funding for women-only Knowledge Transfer groups, and EIP projects promoting gender balance. However, figures show that women receive only 8% of CAP (EAGF) payments and, of the country's 31 LCDCs tasked with the distribution of LEADER funds, only 18 have achieved the EU rate of 40% female representation.

Ireland has statutory provisions for Maternity, Paternity, Parental and Parent's Leave but its Maternity Leave is among the worst in Europe. While the entitlement is to 26 weeks plus an optional 16 weeks, employers are not required to pay women on Maternity Leave, this depends on individual contracts. A state Maternity Benefit is available for the initial 26 weeks but often this results in a significant drop in women's income. Self-employed women can claim this payment with sufficient tax contributions. Paternity Leave is only two weeks, reinforcing that childcare is the responsibility of women.

Conclusion

While some statistical data exists, it is mostly unavailable or fragmented and inadequate to reflect women's position and activities in rural areas and agriculture. Systematic gender-informed data collection frameworks are required to capture women's work on family farms, business initiatives and participation in funding programmes at a national level for all relevant policies to combat, not reinforce, women's longstanding invisibility in rural Ireland.