# GRASS CEILING

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## Synthesis Report on Gender Benchmarking European and National Agricultural and Rural Policies

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# Summary

Ensuring gender equality is one of the key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights of the European Union (EU). At the European Union (EU) level and in EU Member States, the EU calls for measures that go beyond the minimum standard for achieving the objectives of the EU's Gender Equality Strategy and requires policies and strategies that will ensure that gender equality is achieved. Work Package 4 of the GRASS CEILING Project is committed to assessing how well gender equality is integrated into agricultural and rural policies at the EU level and in Member States, in this case, the nine participating countries in the consortium (Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, Spain and Sweden). The report presents findings from the benchmarking analysis of the EU policies; Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Long Term Vision Rural Areas (LTVRAs), Farm to Fork (F2F), Zero Pollution, Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the Just Transition Fund (JTF) of the European Green Deal (EGD) and national policies equivalent to the European Union Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP), Farm to Fork (F2F), Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) and European Green Deal (EGD) in the nine countries. The benchmarking analysis was done using a framework developed from the EU's Gender Equality Strategy.

The key findings from the analysis are that despite the considerations for women and gender equality in policies, gender is still not adequately mainstreamed across all the policies. For CAP equivalent policies, most countries are interested in ensuring that people are included and involved in decision-making, leadership and entrepreneurship, but inclusion does not guarantee equality or better outcomes for women. How the criteria for inclusion will lead to specific outcomes for supporting women and achieving gender equality is not clear. For F2F, most countries do not have policies that are equivalent to the F2F, and policies closely related to the F2F that were benchmarked show limited or no considerations for gender or gender equality. For LTVRAs equivalent policies, pathways for achieving gender equality in rural areas in the long run remains unclear in almost all the countries involved. For EGD equivalent policies, differences in the way climate change impacts men and women are not integrated into strategies that will promote green transition, and this could impact the extent to which climate change and emission goals are achieved. Also, the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) does not have any gender dimension. While the Biodiversity Strategy, the Zero Pollution Action Plan and the Just Transition Fund are concerned with impact of climate change and advocate for women inclusion in some cases, they do not consider that men and women are impacted by climate change differently. Overall, women are mostly treated as a special category or grouped with young and vulnerable people. Also, gender gaps in the policies persist in data, care, digital inclusion, climate change impacts and among entrepreneurship support and for new entrants. Finally, there is a recurring theme on clarity. Most of the policies do not necessarily state clearly how gender will be integrated in them despite stating that they ensure gender equality. This raises a question on whether the practice of achieving gender equality is hindered by the limited clarity on how country policies can meet gender equality needs. Policies will benefit from setting-up assessment criteria or frameworks that aligns with the European Union Gender Equality Strategy (EU GES) that will ensure that gender is mainstreamed both in policy

and practice.

# Table of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| AACC | Autonomous Communities (Comunidades Autónomas) Spain |
| ACORNS | Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Start-Ups |
| ACRES | Agric-Climate Rural Environment Schemes |
| AI | Artificial Intelligence |
| AKIS | Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System |
| CCUS | Carbon Capture, Utilization and Storage |
| CEAP | Circular Economy Action Plan |
| CFP | Common Fisheries Policy |
| $CO_2$ | Carbon Dioxide |
| CRISS | Complementary Redistributive Income Support for Sustainability |
| CSO | Central Statistics Office (Ireland) |
| CSP | Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan |
| CSW66 | Commission on the Status of Women |
| DAFM | Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine |
| EAFRD | European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development |
| EAGF | European Agricultural Guarantee Fund |
| EECO | Common Immediate Output Indicators |
| EECR | Common Immediate Result Indicators |
| EECTI | Spanish Strategy for Science and Technology and Innovation |
| EGD | European Green Deal |
| EIGE | European Institute for Gender Equality |
| EIPs | European Innovation Partnership Schemes |
| EQIA | Equality Impact Assessment |
| EU | European Union |
| EU CAP | European Union Common Agricultural Policy |
| EU GES | European Union Gender Equality Strategy |
| F2F | Farm to Fork |
| FGLS | Future Growth Loan Scheme |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GHG | Greenhouse Gas |
| HIE | Highlands and Islands Enterprise |
| IBU | Investment and Business Development Scheme |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| JTF | Just Transition Fund |
| KT | Knowledge Transfer |
| LAG | Local Action Groups |
| LDS | Local Development Strategy |
| LEADER | Liaison Entre Actions De Développement De l'Économie Rurale (Links Between Activities (or Actions) for the Development of Rural Economy) |
| LEO | Local Enterprise Offices |
| LGBTQI+ | Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex People |

| | |
|---|---|
| LULUCF | Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry |
| LVTRA | Long Term Vision for Rural Areas |
| MFF | Multiannual Financial Framework |
| NBAP | National Biodiversity Action Plan |
| NDS | National Development Strategy |
| NEET | Neither in Employment nor in Education and Training |
| NSP | National Strategic Policy |
| NZEB | Nearly Zero Energy Building |
| PEICTI | State Plan for Scientific and Technical Research and Innovation |
| PEIEMH | Plan for the Effective Equality of Women and Men |
| PIT | Plan for Industrial Transition |
| PNIEC | National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan for Spain (2021 - 2030) |
| PTE | Piano Per La Transizione Ecologica |
| RDP | Rural Development Programme |
| SDG | Sustainable Development Goals |
| SEK | Swedish Krona |
| SETU | South East Technological University |
| SFS | Sustainable Food Systems |
| SMEs | Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises |
| SO | Specific Objective |
| STEM | Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics |
| SWOT | Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats |
| TAMS | Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNDFF | United Nations Decade of Family Farming |
| UNFCCC | United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change |
| WEP | Women Entrepreneurship Platform |
| WP2 | GRASS CEILING Work Package 2 |
| WP4 | GRASS CEILING Work Package 4 |

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# 1. Context

Ensuring gender equality is one of the fundamental values and key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights of the European Union. The European Union Gender Equality Strategy (EU GES) 2020-2025 presented by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen frames the EU's work on gender equality. The EU GES is structured around six themes: being free from violence and stereotypes; thriving in a gender-equal economy; leading equally throughout society, gender mainstreaming and an intersectional perspective on EU policies; funding actions to make progress in gender equality in the EU and addressing gender equality and women's empowerment across the world. The implementation of the EU GES takes a dual approach combining gender mainstreaming and targeted intersectional measures aimed at achieving gender equality. Despite the noteworthy progress made by EU member states - with 14 out of the top 20 countries globally that have high gender equality index being EU member states - gender equality gaps persist. Gender gaps still exist in employment, pay, care, power, decision-making, access, care responsibilities and pensions across different sectors including agriculture and in rural areas. Women tend to be disproportionately affected. At the EU Level, the expectation is that gender is mainstreamed in policies and strategies to help achieve gender equality. For EU Member States, the EU calls for measures that go beyond the minimum standard for achieving the objectives of the EU's GES and requires national policies and strategies that will ensure that gender equality is achieved across all sectors of the economy. "The continued implementation of policies at both EU and national levels is essential to advancing measures that collectively contribute to achieving gender equality across the European Union."

Against this background, the GRASS CEILING Projects set out two objectives as part of Work Package 4 (WP4). The first objective is to determine how gender inclusion is addressed in policies at the European level. These EU policies include European Union Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP) regulation, the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LVTRA), as well as the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the Just Transition Fund (JTF) as part of the European Green Deal (EGD). These policies are expected to provide guiding principles for the implementation of strategies and programmes in rural areas, agriculture and for climate change at the EU and national levels.

The second objective is to assess how well the national equivalents of EU CAP, F2F, LTVRA and EGD linked to agriculture, climate change and rural areas in EU Member States promote or hinder gender equality outcomes for women in agriculture and rural areas. As presented in the EU GES, "the inclusion of gender perspective in all EU policies and processes is essential to reach the goal of gender equality", implying that the extent to which policies both at EU and national levels mainstream gender is pivotal for achieving gender equality and supporting women in agriculture and rural areas. So, how do EU policies on EU CAP, LTVRA, F2F, Zero Pollution, CEAP, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the JTF of the EGD and national policies equivalent to the EU CAP, F2F, LTVRA and EGD policies support women to achieve gender equality?

For this report, these EU level policies and the national equivalence of these four EU policies were benchmarked against the key assessment components of the Gender Equality Strategy. The national equivalents of these four policies were analysed for nine participating countries in the Consortium

(Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, Spain and Sweden). The benchmarking involved analysing their contents for addressing gender considerations, women's involvement and representation in policy formation. It also assessed how and whether gender stereotypes are challenged or addressed and how gender gaps in occupation are addressed using specific measures and support for innovation. It also examined the provisions made for women in digital inclusion and Artificial Intelligence (AI), whether considerations are made for new entrants/entrepreneurs in agriculture and rural sectors and other measures targeted at women, including long terms plans for rural areas and concerns about climate change impact on women as well as data on gender and other gender differences.

The EU level policies were analysed across five themes – gender dimension in EU policies, training and education and the lack of women-focused programmes, young farmers and new entrants to agriculture and businesses, women and digital innovation and climate change and gender equality. The assessment of the national policy documents produced five overarching themes. These include clarity on gender mainstreaming in policy, gender data and gaps, gender and intersectional bundles, gender implementation Vs. inclusivity, gender Vs. technical needs. Key findings from the analysis are that despite the considerations for women and gender equality in policies, gender is still not adequately mainstreamed across all the policies. For EU CAP equivalent policies, most countries are interested in ensuring that women are included and involved in decision-making, leadership and entrepreneurship, but inclusion does not guarantee equality or better outcomes for women. For F2F, most countries do not have policies that are equivalent to the F2F, and policies closely related to the F2F that were benchmarked show limited or no consideration for gender. For LTVRAs equivalent policies, pathways for gender equality in rural areas in the long run remains unclear in almost all of the countries involved. For EGD equivalent policies, differences in the way climate change impacts men and women are not integrated into strategies that will promote green transition, and this could impact the extent to which climate change and emission goals are achieved.

Generally, the cultural and stereotypical issues around gender remain largely undiscussed, unacknowledged or not properly understood especially in rural areas. Data gaps on gender persist and countries could continue to under-estimate what needs to be done to achieve gender equality without quality gender data. Across almost all of the countries, climate change and the impact on gender and women remains largely conceptual and not contextualised in policies and subsequent implementation strategies. The question of whether policies or strategies alone can provide enough information on gender equality outcomes or overall policy outcomes without linkage to accompanying budgets, implementation or assessment reports also arises. Finally, all the policies fall short on how digital inclusion or exclusion impacts women as well as the impact of AI.

# 2. Introduction

This report presents synthesis of the benchmarking analysis to ascertain how effectively EU policies and national equivalent policies in the nine countries participating in the Consortium mainstream gender in their policies. Ensuring gender equality is one of the fundamental values and key principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights of the European Union. The EU Gender Equality Strategy (GES) 2020-2025[1] presented by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen frames the EU's work on gender equality. The EU GES is structured around six themes: being free from violence and stereotypes; thriving in a gender-equal economy; leading equally throughout society, gender mainstreaming and an intersectional perspective on EU policies; funding actions to make progress in gender equality in the EU and addressing gender equality and women's empowerment across the world. The implementation of the GES takes a dual approach combining gender mainstreaming and targeted intersectional measures aimed at achieving gender equality. Despite the noteworthy progress made by EU member states, with 14 out of the top 20 countries globally that have high gender equality index being EU member states, gender equality gaps persist. Gender gaps still exist in employment, pay, care, power, decision-making, access, care responsibilities and pensions across different sectors including agriculture and in rural areas. Women tend to be disproportionately affected. At the EU Level, the expectation is that gender is mainstreamed in policies and strategies to help achieve gender equality. For EU Member States, the EU calls for measures that go beyond the minimum standard for achieving the objectives of the EU's GES and requires national policies and strategies that will ensure that gender equality is achieved across all sectors of the economy. How policies at the EU and national levels perpetuate measures to improve gender equality remains crucial to the cumulative effort towards achieving gender equality in the EU.

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. Against this background, the GRASS CEILING Projects set out two objectives as part of Work Package 4 (WP4). The first objective is to determine how gender inclusion is addressed in policies at the European level. These EU policies include European Union Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP) regulation[2], the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LVTRA)[3], as well as the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy[4], the Zero

[1] COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025. COM/2020/152 final. Available at EUR-Lex - 52020DC0152 - EN - EUR-Lex

[2] REGULATION (EU) 2021/2115 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL.

[3] 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.

[4] 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.

Pollution Action Plan[5], the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP)[6], the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030[7], and the Just Transition Fund (JTF) as part of the European Green Deal[8] (EGD). These policies are expected to provide guiding principles for the implementation of strategies and programmes in rural areas, agriculture and for climate change at the EU and national levels.

The second objective is to assess how well the national equivalents of EU CAP, F2F, LTVRA EGD, linked to agriculture, climate change and rural areas in EU Member States promote or hinder gender equality outcomes for women in agriculture and rural areas. As presented in the EU GES, "*the inclusion of gender perspective in all EU policies and processes is essential to reach the goal of gender equality*", implying that the extent to which policies both at EU and national levels mainstream gender is pivotal for achieving gender equality and supporting women in agriculture and rural areas. So, how do EU policies on CAP, LTVRA, F2F, Zero Pollution, CEAP, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the JTF of the EGD and national policies equivalent to the EU CAP, F2F, LTVRA and EGD policies support women to achieve gender equality?

For this report, these EU level policies and the national equivalence of these four EU policies were benchmarked against the key assessment components of the Gender Equality Strategy. The national equivalents of these four policies were analysed for nine participating countries in the consortium (Croatia, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Scotland, Spain and Sweden). The benchmarking involved analysing their contents for addressing gender considerations, women's involvement and representation in policy formation. It also assessed how and whether gender stereotypes are challenged or addressed and how gender gaps in occupation are addressed using specific measures and support for innovation. It also examined the provisions made for women in digital inclusion and Artificial Intelligence (AI), whether considerations are made for new entrants/entrepreneurs in agriculture and rural sectors and other measures targeted at women, including long term plans for rural areas and concerns about climate change impact on women as well as data on gender and other gender differences. Brief discussion of the EU policies, methods

[5] 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'.

[6] 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.

[7] 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.

[8] 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.

used in the report as well as findings from the benchmarking analysis are presented in the next sections.

# 3. Background on EU Policies

This section provides background information about the EU level policies that was benchmarked using the Gender Equality Strategy (GES). The policies include the European Union Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP) regulation, the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LVTRA), as well as the Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, the Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the Just Transition Fund (JTF) as part of the European Green Deal (EGD).

The EU CAP is a cornerstone of European agricultural policy. The new EU CAP runs from 2023 to 2027. The main aim of the EU CAP is to build a bridge between agricultural workers and wider society, providing an overarching policy structure for European farmers. The EU 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 EU 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 EU CAP is the provision on climate change and the sustainable management of natural resources. Most importantly, the EU CAP aims to promote jobs in farming, agri-food and linked sectors, with the ultimate goal to support the rural economy.

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 areas. The LTVRA builds on other policies on green and digital transition, identifying new ways to significantly improve quality of rural 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 of men and women. More specifically, the LVTRA does not address differences in men and women's 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, create 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 in 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. However, the action plan does not address women as a special category, nor does it consider issues like gender and (child)care gap as set out in the Gender Equality Strategy.

The Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP) is another policy instrument part of the European Green Deal. With a timespan from 2020 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 United Nations (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 the circular economy, nor does it look 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 over-exploitation 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 the gender gap and care gap, and to acknowledge differences between men and women.

# 4. Method

The report utilised a methodology that involved benchmarking the policies discussed in the previous section at the EU level and the national policies equivalents of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP), Farm to Fork (F2F), European Green Deal (EGD) and the LTVRA Long Term Vision for Rural Areas) in the nine countries against parameters in the European Union Gender Equality Strategy (EU GES). To achieve this, a gender benchmarking template with eight specific metrics on the EU GES was developed and used as a guide for the benchmarking exercise. This includes questions on the overall objectives, representation of target sector of the population, gender considerations, presence of specific measures targeted at women, women entrepreneurial advancement, concern with long term vision of rural areas, digital inclusion and AI and concern with climate change all within the gender perspective. This framework was used to analyse the specific EU level policies. Also, at the national level, nine benchmarking teams were selected. A training webinar was developed and posted online for benchmarking teams for each country. 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 2024. Shortly after beginning the 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, more than one document was used to represent national equivalents to the policies. In total, 36[9] discourse analyses were produced from the 9 European countries reflecting the 4 major policies.

# 5. Findings from the EU Level Policies: Key Themes

This section presents key findings from the benchmarking exercise on the EU level policies – European Union Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP), Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LVTRA), Farm to Fork (F2F) strategy, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, Circular Economy Action Plan (CEAP), the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, and the Just Transition Fund as part of the European Green Deal. The analysis produced five overarching themes for the EU level policies.

1. **Gender dimension in EU policies**

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 a 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 EU CAP emphasises equal opportunities for both genders. Gender equality is acknowledged and present in different sections of the text. 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. 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 EU CAP does not seem to be directly targeted at 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 EU CAP clearly leave to member states the conditions for financial instruments, priority to investment interventions, or how they allocate their European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) to promote the inclusion of young farmers and new entrants' entrepreneurship in agriculture. While the EU CAP acknowledges the importance of inclusion and promotion of women in agriculture, the document does not mention issues like gender pay gap,

[9] Please note that the same policy documents were used for analysis for Scotland for the CAP and LTVRA.

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 EU 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, however, provides specific measures for women. However, the F2F strategy does not have any allocated budget for its measures, relying on other EU funds. For instance, the F2F refers to the EU CAP when advocating for targeted funding and support programmes for female farmers, aimed at wider inclusion for women in agricultural enterprises.

Although 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 in scattered inconsistent data on gender in EU CAP monitoring and evaluation reports.

The Just Transition Fund (JTF) also lacks a specific budget to support women in the green transition. The regulation establishing the JTF does not provide any specific measures 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 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 to operations to 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 highlight how 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 conditions. Furthermore, one of its objectives is to promote the inclusion of young Roma men 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 ensuring equal opportunities. It is interesting to highlight that 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 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 does it treat women as a special category. 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 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 primary 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, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex People (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 our 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 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 EU 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 report[10] 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 neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET) 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.

### 2. 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. Indeed, the EU CAP (Article 57) specifies that financial assistance and training need to be put in place for young farmers and new entrants to the agricultural sector, 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 EU 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 member states should increase their support to young farmers and rural business startups to EUR 100,000. Similarly, the F2F strategy advocates for more resources on education and training for sustainable agriculture. However, neither the EU 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.

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

[10] 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.

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, however, are not directly addressed by these measures. 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.

### 3. Young farmers and new entrants to agriculture and businesses

Another main area that has been 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. Unlike STEM fields, which actively encourage young women to pursue careers through incentives and initiatives, agricultural policy does not integrate gender considerations into its new entrant strategy.

As the F2F strategy is not supported by a dedicated budget, it relies on the EU 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, assisting 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 EU 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, instead, focuses on the support to new business models and innovative practices in circular economy. In this sense, the action plan aids new entrants to the circular economy, but it is not directly addressed to 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 access to funds. Also, it does not consider any pension gap.

### 4. Women and digital innovation

It is interesting to highlight how women and gender are completely omitted from wider issues like digital policies or 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 EU 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 advocates for digital innovation in agriculture and food system, indirectly addressing these issues.

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 does it include any mention of agriculture or women.

### 5. Climate change and gender equality

Another important aspect that was highlighted in the benchmarking exercise is the issue of climate change. 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 EU CAP). However, it does not make any reference to how these wider issues can affect women differently. At the same time, 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 EU's overall climate goals, enhancing food production and consumption in Europe. However, this strategy is not concerned with the different impact that climate change has on men and women. Nonetheless, the language used in the F2F strategy is inclusive, emphasising the importance to include men and women in the transition to more sustainable practices.

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 a 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 EUR 17,500 million (EUR 10,000 million from the European Union Recovery Instrument, and EUR 7,500 million from Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) resources). The main goal is to provide 7.5% of the annual spending under the multi-annual financial framework to biodiversity objectives in 2024 and 10 % of annual spending under the multi-annual financial framework to biodiversity objectives in 2026 and 2027. However, similar 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 do not refer to different impacts that climate change has on women and men.

# 6. Findings from National Policy Equivalents

## 6.1 Common Agricultural Policy

Findings from the benchmarking exercise in all nine countries for the Common Agricultural Policy are presented in this section. See table 1. for titles of the policy documents used for each country.

**Croatia:**

The Strategic Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy of the Republic of Croatia 2023 – 2027 was used for the benchmarking exercise for the European Union Common Agricultural Policy (EU CAP). The strategy aims to ensure sustainable development of agriculture, forestry, and rural areas, while making the sector competitive; ensuring sustainable management of natural resources, green transition; and a fair standard of living for farmers. The importance of gender equality is acknowledged, but it does not emphasise the need to empower women in agriculture or rural areas to achieve equality. It does not mention the challenges facing women in the agricultural sector, nor does it state how much of its budget is allocated to women. No reference is made to the contributions made by women in agriculture and rural areas and there is no clarity on how it will promote women's equal participation in decision-making. It does not raise awareness about women's rights or challenge stereotypes. The male version of nouns is used throughout the document. The policy includes no specific measures to promote gender equality or empower women. The only provision relating to women appears in the evaluation process for leasing state-owned agricultural land, which awards extra points to young farmers (i.e. up to 41 years of age) and women applicants. This groups women and young farmers together and it is unclear how the points will be distributed between men and women. However, the maximum possible number of 8 points (out of 100) remains too low to make a significant difference to the position of women in agriculture. Additionally, the policy states that, to meet the requirements of the reformed EU CAP, "*it is necessary or desirable to introduce "new" selection criteria for certain interventions in terms of social inclusion and gender equality, which in practice means an additional assessment of projects where the beneficiaries of grants and the holders of investments are women or young people" (p. 256)*. However, there is no clarity on how the additional assessment will be carried out.

The policy mentions new entrants to agriculture and the opportunity to gain from "*Payment for young farmers*" (30.01) but there is no gender-specific measures for women who are new entrants. The policy document does not outline specific support for women entrepreneurs and rural women. While it mentions women farmers, it refers to women entrepreneurs just once, as potential beneficiaries of Liaison Entre Actions De Développement De l'Économie Rurale (LEADER) funding (Intervention 77.06 (Support of LEADER approach), Development Need 16 (p. 16) and includes no specific objectives. This Intervention (77.06) is intended to support rural development. It is notable that the policy classes it as a medium (rather than high or low) priority. Otherwise, the policy does not mention any support for women's leadership and participation in agricultural organisations and networks or decision-making at any level. In the section titled 'Development Vision', which states

that "*Croatia in terms of the representation of women in management positions in agriculture is in the upper half of the ranking list of member states and that it achieves significantly more favourable indicators than most of the so-called old member states*" (p. 16) it fails to qualify this by explaining that most women farm managers in Croatia are older than 65 and probably inherited the farm from their deceased spouse.

Similarly, the policy states that women should make up at least 40% of the management of Local Action Groups (LAGs) constituted under the LEADER funding scheme. However, it does not say how women's participation will be encouraged or monitored, or what the outcomes will be if this target is not reached. There is no reference to gender-disaggregated data on uptake or success, other than in the case of reporting on newly established farms, for which gender-specific data will be recorded (p. 160). Although the document includes data for the overall gender structure of farms in Croatia, it is not the most recent. However, this data is recorded annually by the Payments Agency for Agriculture, Fisheries and Rural Development. Additionally, the gender balance of young farmers is only mentioned vaguely in terms of differences in agricultural holdings. "*The share of young women managing agricultural holdings follows the same trend compared to young male holdings of agricultural holdings, looking in relation to regional data, while the economic size of the agricultural holding for young female holdings of agricultural holdings is lower than that of men*" (p. 154). This is not followed by any objective to increase the number of women farm managers. In fact, the official percentage of women farm managers in Croatia is around the EU average. Their numbers have increased between 2005 and 2020, with a high proportion being from older (45-65+) age groups, suggesting that these women may have inherited the farm from their spouse. The number of women farm managers aged 35-44 years has also increased, but only since 2013, when Croatia joined the EU. Findings from the field suggest that some women are only managers-in-name appointed by their family to gain extra points when tendering for support. Specific groups of women, such as different age groups, migrants, or women of different religious backgrounds, are not explicitly mentioned in the document.

The Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) is mentioned a few times (in pp. 45, 286), and in very general terms, stating that a) synergies between finance and investment from 'multiple sources' will halt demographic trends and produce a 'comprehensive revitalisation of rural areas'; and b) that members of the National Rural Network participated in '*defining the Vision for the development of rural areas until 2040'*, and that implementation of its Action Plan will be '*strongly encouraged*' (p. 45). Croatia's strategic plan puts a strong emphasis on addressing climate change and promoting sustainable practices. It recognizes the importance of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, improving soil health, and promoting biodiversity conservation to mitigate the effects of climate change. The policy emphasizes the need to support the green transition towards more sustainable agriculture practices. However, it does not specifically recognize that gender equality is essential for achieving sustainable development goals, nor that promoting the active participation of both men and women in agriculture can lead to more resilient and sustainable food systems. The policy shows no awareness that women have less access than men to finance, property ownership, training or networking, nor does it recognize that they bear a greater weight than men in terms of domestic work and caring for family; nor does it acknowledge the scale of discrimination and abuse that they

face. In this respect, the policy makes no advance on Rural Development Programme 2014-2020. In fact, it takes a step backwards because while the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 included a plan to run training on gender equality law and policy for staff responsible for implementing the programme, the Strategic Plan CAP 2023-2027 includes nothing similar. Where the policy links proposed implementation mechanisms for women and gender equality, it does so in vague and general statements that are unlikely to result in any effective action to address gender inequalities.

In providing equal opportunities and access to digital technologies and resources to farmers regardless of gender, it has the potential to reduce gender inequality. However, the most likely result of such gender-neutrality is gender-blindness to barriers that women specifically face in relation to digital inclusion and use of AI. Finally, in acknowledging that policy interventions will be needed in future to meet EU criteria related to '*social inclusion and gender equality'* (p. 256), it could be argued that it frames gender equality measures as being imposed by the EU. From the perspective of the GRASS CEILING project, two other gaps were observed in the policy. First, non-farmers and their roles in rural development are not considered as well as how this impacts agriculture and gender issues in the wider rural population. Second, gender issues are addressed almost as an appendix item and could imply limited understanding of the position of women by making no reference to how gender inequalities affect women's employment opportunities, access to finance, training or networks and their roles within agriculture.

**Ireland:**

The core aim of Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027 (p. 21) is to promote the sustainable development of agriculture in Ireland and meet the objectives of the EU-level CAP 2023-2027 along with the aims of the European Green Deal, the Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies. It also aims to respond to the critical current and future challenges faced in agriculture and environmental sustainability in Ireland. It mentions specific financial measures like increase in national co-financing compared with earlier Programmes and more targeted measures for funding (e.g. Organic farming scheme). Gender considerations are not integrated into the policy. Instead, they are highlighted within Specific Objective 8, Number 6 with its own targeted solutions. The document mostly uses the gender-neutral term "farmer/s". No reference is made to 'men' or 'boys' but 'women' and 'females' are referred to in connection with Specific Objective 8, where they are treated as a special category with specific measures. When referring to measures that specifically encourage women to engage with agriculture, the document refers to '*women farmers*' (e.g. pp. 23, 61) and '*female farmers*' (p. 63). Reference is also made to "*female entrepreneurs*" (p. 44), "*rural female entrepreneurs*" (p. 34) and "*early-stage female entrepreneurs*" (p. 44) in connection with Objective 8 (no. 6) which seeks to increase opportunities for women in agriculture and business. The term "*female relative*" (p. 538) is used in connection with initiatives to encourage farm succession by women (p. 538).

Three measures are introduced to promote equal opportunities and some targeted measures for women are set out in Objective 8, Number 6. These include: a higher grant rate for women for investment in farm modernisation (60% as opposed to 40% for men over 40 years old); funding for women-only Knowledge Transfer (KT) Groups; and European Innovation Partnership schemes (EIPs)

supporting gender equality initiatives. The policy sets out the overall budget for Targeted Agricultural Modernisation Schemes (TAMS), EIPs and the establishment of KT groups. However, it does not say what percentage is specifically allocated to promoting gender balance. It also mentions two initiatives that pre-dates the Ireland's Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027 that are valuable for women in agriculture and rural areas. The Accelerating the Creation of Rural Nascent Startups (ACORNS) programme for women entrepreneurs at the start-up and early stage of business. This programme has been running since 2015. And the Local Enterprise Offices (LEO) which, the policy document suggests, offers information and supports for female entrepreneurs through 31 regional offices around the country. No sex-disaggregated data is presented on the uptake of previous schemes. However, it is noted that several CSP programmes proposed in the current policy document are required to collect gender data and capture female participation in schemes. It is notable that while targets are set for supporting generational renewal on farms (i.e. 7,000 young farmers over the 2023-2027 period) (p. 51), no specific target is set for what percentage of these young farmers should be female. However, the policy does establish a requirement to collect data on the gender breakdown of these supports received.

The policy also includes three objectives designed to encourage new entrants to agriculture including women by addressing income disparities, barriers to accessing finance purchasing land and developing businesses[11]. This text acknowledges that the comparatively low number of women in agriculture and the rural economy, and specifically in leadership/management roles, "*creates a perception that farming is a male occupation*" (p. 34). It specifically aims to increase the currently low levels of women in leadership roles relative to men (Objective 8). Beyond this there is no evidence that it challenges gender stereotypes. The policy directs readers to Food Vision 2023, which includes complementary measures promoting gender equality (p. 538). It is noted that only 13.4% of Irish farmers/farm holdings are owned by women in contrast with Central Statistics Office (Ireland) (CSO) figures showing that over 71,000 women are working on Irish farms (p. 538). Targeted measures to improve the status of women on farms include a higher grant rate to women, to prompt land transfers to female family members. However, it does not address gender gaps in pay or pensions. In addition, while a key objective of this Policy is to support the incomes of family farms, the gender dimension of this is not explored. The Gender Equality Strategy specifically asks for gender care gaps to be addressed in rural areas. The policy does not address this. Women are identified and mentioned together with young farmers and there are some overlapping measures set out for these two groups separately e.g. a higher rate of TAMS grant aid and EIPs that address their specific needs. However, even with the TAMS, a requirement to access TAMS support is to be the owner of a herd, but the herd is generally registered in the name of male farmers. This has excluded women from accessing TAMS and has been raised with Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) by the Women in Agriculture group. This issue is not acknowledged in any of the policy documents analysed here. Women are also mentioned together with "people in disadvantaged situations" (p. 648).

[11] The document acknowledges that this policy cannot address this fully and notes the national-level Future Growth Loan scheme as a potential funding source (p. 33).

The policy does not consider the different employment/income/social security needs of men and women. It also does not consider different ageing issues facing men and women. It does not consider gender and the (child)care gap, nor does it propose mitigating measures for different care responsibilities (children, sick, and elderly). This policy notes that Irish farmers overall have been slow to adopt digital technologies and highlights the need to promote them, but digital inclusion is set out as the importance of the National Broadband plan to increase internet access in rural communities. It also asserts that Artificial Intelligence (AI) can improve competitiveness and mentions the funding that is available for European Digital Innovation Hubs with the potential to support agri-digitalisation in Ireland (p. 674). However, these considerations do not have a gender dimension. It also includes the development and adoption of mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change as a specific objective (S04), but this does not have a gender dimension. Overall, the document treats gender separately from climate change and does not acknowledge how men and women are impacted differently by this issue. While the policy does mention the importance of educating farmers on the impact of climate change, i.e. extreme weather events (p. 527), it does not explore why it is important to have everyone, men and women, fully committed and supported in the green transition. The three specific objectives of this policy related to agriculture and rural areas – "*Promoting the viability of farm incomes and increasing competitiveness*", "*Reaching national and EU-level environmental and climate objectives*" and the "*Strengthening the "socio-economic fabric" of rural areas*" are not considered from the gender perspective.

**Italy:**

Italy CAP Strategic Plan (IT - Piano Strategico Nazionale PAC) aims to improve competitiveness, environmental sustainability, territorial balance and food quality. One of the specific objectives is to promote jobs, growth, gender equality, including women's participation in agriculture, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bioeconomy and sustainable forestry. The policy makes 69 references to gender, frequently highlighting the need to address gender gaps in access to opportunities. It identifies a need for interventions that encourage young people to live in rural areas and for economic incentives to improve working conditions, including for women. The policy does not consider gender stereotypes. It focuses on how to address issues of gender inequalities. The policy uses the terms "*donne*" (women) and "*uomini*" (men). The policy promotes equal opportunities with the aim of addressing the comparatively low employment rate for women, especially in rural areas (p. 195). It aims to: "*create new business opportunities, particularly for younger people and women; improve access to land and credit, and to a network providing technical assistance and Knowledge Transfer* (p. 277)". It provides incentives for young people and women (with no age limit) to run and develop new farms (p. 279). This policy does not adequately consider differences between men and women. It mainly refers to '*enterprises*' rather than '*workers*', and '*women*' are most often '*young women*'. A key priority is generational renewal, which it addresses by measures to attract young people, including women, to work and remain in the sector. These include favourable access to land and credit; complementary income support for young farmers; access to technical support and Knowledge Transfer networks; and training placements for aspiring entrepreneurs. A '*young farmer*' is defined as a new entrant under the age of 41, who is assuming control of the business and has responsibility for long-term planning and

financial decision-making. A number of national initiatives have synergies with the objectives of the CAP, including one that aims to increase entrepreneurship among young people (i.e. under the age of 41) and women (with no age limit) by offering zero-interest mortgages and non-repayable grants. However, the grouping of '*women*' together with '*young people*' could prevent actions that address problems specifically facing women in the agriculture sector. The policy does not address gender pay or pension gaps. The plan does not specify any particular category of women, whether by age, religion or migration status. The plan groups women together with young people and migrant workers. Italy's National Strategic Policy (NSP) focuses on inclusion, gender balance, and addressing the problem of rural depopulation. It allocates EUR 735 million for the creation of over 4,280 new entrepreneurial opportunities in agriculture, targeting young people, women and the long-term unemployed. In terms of budget, it assigns EUR 36.6 billion to the 2nd pillar of the CAP (rural development), divided as follows: 48.1% as direct payments; 43.1 % for rural development; and 8.8% for sectorial aid. The policy offers support for professional skills training in the agri-food and forestry sectors, with a particular focus on youth and female entrepreneurship. The national strategy resumes the process of progressive equalisation of the level of support for rural areas income, taking the entire national territory as a reference. In terms of small and medium-sized companies: again, there is no differentiation at territorial level, with spillovers to the benefit of intermediate rural areas and those with development problems. The policy recognises that an ageing rural population makes it important to incentivise young people. The policy does not consider gender and/or the (child) care gap, nor does it propose measures to mitigate caring responsibilities in respect of children, the sick or the elderly. The plan mentions AI and also refers to the need for digital skills. It does not include any reference to gender or to gender-based inequalities. This policy recognises the need for stronger risk-management tools in order to increase the resilience of agricultural businesses. However, it does not acknowledge that women and men are impacted differently by climate change, nor does it explain why it is important for everyone – men and women – to be fully involved, engaged and supported in the green transition.

**Lithuania**

The Strategic Plan for Agricultural and Rural Development of Lithuania 2023-2027 (hereafter referred to as the plan) aims at the sustainable development of Lithuania's agriculture and food sector by increasing the sector's added value and competitiveness, by supporting the incomes of viable farms (especially small and medium-sized farms), by promoting a change of generations, and by creating a vibrant countryside that is attractive to farming, business and environment, as well as by contributing to the realisation of the environmental and climate objectives. Specific references to the words '*women/woman*' are rare (13 in 1,088 pages) and these are specifically in relation to SO8: '*to promote employment, growth, gender equality, including women's participation in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry*'. Nor are women accorded a significant role in achieving this; the only provision made for them to participate in decision-making is via Local Action Groups (LAGs), which must include at least one representative from an organisation advocating equal opportunities for women and men, persons with disabilities, or any other human rights organisation working in the field of rights and well-being of vulnerable and/or excluded groups. The same can be said of the term

"*gender equality*", or even the word "*gender*", which is mentioned 14 times throughout the document. Overall, gender aspects are barely included in the policy, nor does it challenge gender stereotypes, raise awareness about women's rights, challenge stereotypes, or promote equal opportunity. This plan includes no measures specifically targeted at women and does not set out specific supports to advance women entrepreneurs or rural women. The plan does not consider differences affecting men and women in farming and/or rural enterprises. It includes measures to increase the number of young farmers and new farms and grow them as businesses. It also mentions obstacles to this. However, it does not mention gender. Nor does it address gender gaps in pay and/or pensions.

This plan is not concerned with the long-term vision for rural areas in respect of gender participation in initiatives and does not consider different employment/income/social security needs or ageing issues and childcare gaps. The plan does not consider gender difference in digital inclusion, and it does not suggest any provisions to address gender inequality. The plan does not mention Artificial Intelligence (AI) in any context at all. The plan includes a considerable amount about the problems and challenges posed by climate change and envisages measures to mitigate its impacts. However, it does not acknowledge how women and men are impacted differently by climate change, nor does it explain why it is important to have everyone – men and women - fully involved, committed, and supported in the green transition. Finally, in Lithuania, there is still a clear gender gap in the readiness of men and women to farm. A significantly lower proportion of female farm managers have achieved basic or full agricultural training. In 2013 and 2016, almost half as many women as men achieved basic and full agricultural training, but a higher proportion of women had practical experience in farming. Despite suggestions that consideration should be given to formulating policies to remedy the situation, an analysis of Lithuania's CAP shows that no specific measures have been proposed to reduce the exclusion of women and ensure gender equality. This should, therefore, be given full attention in the next update of the Lithuanian CAP implementation plan.

**Netherlands:**

The main objective of the Dutch National Strategic Policy (NSP) is to: "*reward future farming more strongly by implementing subsidies targeting farmers who make efforts to enable a transition towards more sustainable business practices*." (Ministerie van LNV, 2022, p. 20)[12]. The plan states that there will be more emphasis on rewarding sustainability and supporting a so-called area-oriented approach. This is necessary because, for many years, agricultural production in the Netherlands was aimed at reducing costs and increasing production, resulting in a myriad of environmental and biodiversity challenges. The policy therefore acknowledges the need for a (sustainability) transition. The plan makes little reference to female farmers. It does not raise awareness about women's rights or promote equal opportunity, nor does it challenge gender stereotypes; on the contrary, it reproduces them. The language is predominantly male-centric and assumes men and women are binary. The word for '*women*' or '*woman*'' is used 32 times, while the word for '*men*' or '*man*' appears 463 times. The female form of '*farmer*' ('*boerin*') is used just twice,

[12] Ministerie van LNV. (2002). *The Netherlands National Strategic Plan CAP 2023 – 2027*. http://www.toekomstglb.nl/documenten/publicates/2022/10/03/definitieve-nsp

while the male form ('*boer*') appears 294 times and without the easy-to-make caveat that it is meant to include women. Elsewhere, the policy refers to farmers in gender-neutral terms ('*agrariërs*' and '*landbouwers*').

The policy mentions twice how change in the agricultural sector ultimately depends on "*decisions taken around the kitchen table*" (Ministerie van LNV., 2002, p. 554). We might safely assume that women are involved in these but the metaphor of domesticity risks reinforcing gender stereotypes unless it is clear how women in agriculture might participate in decision-making in the public sphere rather than exerting influence behind the scenes. The plan does not consider gender care or pay gaps in rural areas, nor gender pension gaps.

However, it includes a long section addressing the need to attract new entrants, particularly young farmers, to future-proof the agriculture industry and improve the life of rural areas (Chapter 2.1.S07 (Ministerie van LNV., 2002, p. 107). While this includes a gender dimension, it groups women with '*young farmers*' under the category of '*new entrants*', thereby disregarding the part they play, and what they specifically need. The policy states that: only 16% of farm heirs are female; only 7% of young farm managers are female (the EU average is 30%); and that young female farmers make fewer applications than men for financial support to buy a farm. However, it does not show concern about the reasons for these striking disparities. The plan does include an aim to increase the percentage of women farmers who apply for the farm-purchase subsidy to 16%. However, the measures it sets out are inadequate, consisting solely of collecting gender-disaggregated data (currently missing) on young farmers, and comparative data for different sectors, business types and regions; and '*better*' communication about gender equality. The measures include no budget or benchmark and make no attempt to address the structural and systemic nature of the gender inequality. Nor does the policy explain why it is important to increase the number of women running farms.

However, the policy does consider the problem of the decreasing numbers of young (i.e. up to 40 years old) farm owners, down from 10% in 2010 to 8% in 2020. This drop is expected to lead to farm sizes being scaled up as those without successors either close or are amalgamated into larger enterprises. The policy recognises that acquisition costs represent the biggest deterrent to young farmers, especially those whose lack of family connections mean they have to buy at market price. This problem was identified in consultations with young farmers. The policy does not say whether young women farmers were consulted. The resulting intervention provides three streams of extra income support for young farmers: support to establish the business (for 5 years); complementary income support (for 5 years); and support for investment in production (long-term). The funding criteria indirectly exclude young female farmers in a number of ways. For example: the applicant must be registered as the (primary) farm holder. This is despite the policy itself recognising the existence of many male-female partnerships. Additionally, small-scale farms (classed as '*hobbies*') are ineligible because they are not considered economically viable. This is a narrow, and outdated, definition of farming. Two criteria represent particular barriers to women: First, a '*young farmer*' is defined in the Netherlands as the primary farm holder and, hence, '*head of the holding*'. Farm-holding partnerships are not recognised in the Netherlands, and if their partner is formally registered as head of the holding, he is the only one who can apply for grants; even if women are

responsible for managing the farm on a daily basis. Women can find themselves ineligible for grants, if their partner is formally registered as the primary holder. The same is true for any other person in the partnership (e.g. a brother or father) who is not the '*head of the holding*'. Second, a '*young farmer*' must also have a degree in agriculture. Only 28% of women in farming meet this requirement, against 82% of men. Alternatively, the '*young farmer*' must have two years relevant experience plus a related qualification, e.g. in farm management. However, the training available is unsuitable for aspiring women farmers and there are no plans to involve them in improving it. Another funding stream for Rural Development requires recipients to conform to the specifications of '*young farmer*' (above) and to have either inherited or (partially) bought a farm (Ministerie van LNV, 2022, p. 474)[13]. This excludes renters and can reinforce inequalities for women. Importantly, the issue of gender in agricultural and rural enterprise is, above all, a social one, and yet the policy does not consider social interventions, for example: incentivising older farmers to pass the farm on earlier; promoting succession by daughters; supporting alternatives to land ownership, such as renting. Additionally, the minimum farm size eligible for subsidies is due to increase in the Netherlands from 1.46ha in 2022 to 2.19ha in 2027, potentially disadvantaging women with smaller farms[14]. Income from extra multifunctional activities (often women-led) is considered irrelevant. An eco-scheme within the Dutch NSP requires that activities be only reimbursed at the end of each season (Ministerie van LNV, 2022, p. 236). This means that farmers need access to financial capital to invest in their eco-schemes before being paid back. It is clear that women face more obstacles accessing finance, so this is yet another challenge to overcome. There is however funding available for cooperation for generational renewal in the Dutch NSP. This may be a source of support to young farmers who do not meet the criteria specified above because it can be used to access land. Interestingly, if the '*young farmer*' is a woman, this is an advantage in terms of selection (Ministerie van LNV, 2022, p. 503). However, it is not clear how this will be enforced or evaluated.

The plan provides no clear guidelines for the support of gender equality. Section 2.1.S08 includes a consideration of gender (Ministerie van LNV., 2022, p. 112) but bundles it together with five other items ('*Promote employment, growth, gender quality, including the participation of women in farming, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including the circular bio-economy and sustainable forestry*'), thereby considerably weakening it. There is no specific objective for gender equality, nor is there a gender dimension in the accompanying Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The section aims to improve equality among men and women, and to improve the position of women in agriculture and in rural areas. While this recognises the existence of gender-related issues, the policy does not explain how these will be addressed and puts the onus on local action. For example, in respect of social inclusion, it states that, "*it is desirable to make greater use of the strength and talents of women, both in strengthening the organising and dynamic capacity of a local action group, and in concrete projects. This argues for an area-orientated and bottom-up approach. These needs will therefore be addressed via*

[13] Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek (2018). Vrouw stabiele factor op boerderij [Women a stable factor on the farm]. http://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2018/10/vrouw-stabiele-factor-op-boerderij

[14] Diamanti, G., van Santen, M. and Duncan, J. 2024. Uncovering the effects of the Common Agricultural Policy (2023-2027) on women. Wangeningen University and research.

*LEADER*." (Ministerie van LNV., 2022, p. 114). It should also be noted that LEADER does not solely support agricultural projects and has relatively small funds – yet this is the only intervention strategy proposed. The plan does not state how much of the budget is allocated to support gender equality, nor does it set out targets by which the intervention can be evaluated. These omissions could effectively make the intervention meaningless.

The policy mentions the need to strengthen women's entrepreneurship but does not explain why, nor does it include a plan to do so. Its idea of entrepreneurship is apparently based on a conventionally '*profitable*' business model. It does not consider what enables women's entrepreneurship, nor does it seek to support women's leadership and participation in agricultural organisations and networks. Also, it briefly mentions that the share of female students in agricultural studies is increasing but, again, provides no evidence, nor does it say why it is significant. It is also unclear how government policies played a role in any of these developments. Section 2.1.XCO of NSP (relating to Modernising Knowledge and Innovation), reports the '*intention*' for AKIS to promote networks aimed at (prospective) female farmers and that through knowledge dissemination and information "*subsidies can be accessed to strengthen female agricultural entrepreneurship*" (Ministerie van LNV, 2002, p. 129). But this is concerningly vague and again lacks any explanation or concrete plan. Nowhere in the relevant Objectives do women appear as independent stakeholders, nor does the policy include any gender-specific targets for the beneficiaries of advice, training, and Knowledge Exchange schemes. Education is also not addressed. The policy does highlight that LEADER will be focusing on "*gender and women's participation in project selection in the local development strategies*", but again without any targets, budget or clear goals. This seems to shift the responsibility away from the NSP itself. It also states that the budget for LEADER will be allocated when the Local Development Strategies are ready, which seems to avoid making any financial commitment.

However, it is notable that a Local Development Strategy will score lower if the LAG comprises less than 50% women (Ministerie van LNV, 2022, p. 514). Even so, Diamenti et. al (2023, p. 34)[15] question whether this is enough incentive for LAGs to include more women and they argue that it does not ensure that the LAGs automatically represent women's views and interests. Access to finance is unequal between men and women farmers: the latter run an average of 6.4 hectares, whereas men farmers run an average of 14.4 hectares, and finance can only be accessed by farms larger than 2 hectares. The policy does not acknowledge or address this inequality but rather reproduces it by implementing the same funding requirements regarding farm size. This promotes the idea that larger farms are preferable.

In general, the policy redirects much of the responsibility for achieving a shift to more sustainable agricultural practices towards entrepreneurs. In doing so, it assumes that innovative entrepreneurship is always profitable and will achieve the changes aimed for by this policy. These assumptions are unlikely to hold. For farmers to be eligible for LEADER funding, they are obliged to regularly reflect on their innovation potential by renewing and adapting. This could push farmers

[15] Diamanti, G., van Santen, M. and Duncan, J. 2024. Uncovering the effects of the Common Agricultural Policy (2023-2027) on women. Wageningen University and research

into a certain innovation trajectory to meet the demand to innovate, whether they need to or not. Not only does this policy omit any details of how it will advance women entrepreneurs and rural women, but it also fails to provide much real support for entrepreneurs in general, nor does it provide any direct support to promote women's leadership in decision-making at any level. This policy is not concerned with the long-term vision for rural areas in respect of the points to consider.

It relies heavily on top-down knowledge, with advisors being key stakeholders in the long-term vision for rural areas. However, there is currently no regulation or recognised qualification for advisors, who are predominately male and lack diversity. There also seems to be a disregard for knowledge exchange between entrepreneurs. There is no reference to child-care or to other potentially gender-related barriers or needs. The policy's approach to innovation ignores the reality that innovation entails risks and is not always successful. It also assumes that (large-scale) innovation is the solution to most problems, an assumption that perpetuates the productivism paradigm. The policy states how digital technology can contribute to the aims of the NSP through knowledge dissemination, data usage, smart agriculture (precision agriculture, robotisation), and monitoring and controlling.

It states that the Netherlands will mainly focus on improving smart agriculture practices. More importantly, it states that the current level of infrastructure for digitalisation in the Netherlands is above the EU average, which it uses as justification for making no further investment in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure. This reflects a very narrow understanding of (high-tech) digitalisation and completely neglects the need for direction to shape the ethical and social considerations of technological and digital developments. Again, the policy does not consider gender differences in digital inclusion or AI, nor does it make provisions to address gender inequality in this area.

Although climate change is one of the main drivers for the policy, the plan does not acknowledge how women and men are impacted by climate change differently, nor why it is important to have everyone fully involved, committed, and supported in the green transition. There is a focus on collaboration between stakeholders throughout the policy, but with no mention of what funding is available for this, or how women will be involved and the value of their contribution. Moreover, the policy contradicts itself in several ways. For example, the need to shift from intensive towards extensive agriculture is mentioned as a key aim. Yet the policy contains measures that seemingly encourage large-scale farming, for example the size of farms eligible for young farmer subsidies will increase. It is clearly stated that direct payments are not intended to support '*unviable*' farms and that keeping Complementary Redistributive Income Support for Sustainability (CRISS) funds (and criteria) minimal means that the trend of growth in farm size will continue (Ministerie van LNV, 2022, p. 268). It is assumed that scaling up and intensification cannot be reversed, and this is used to justify funding large-scale development innovations.

More specifically, each intervention strategy contains a SWOT analysis. These are insightful and address relevant issues and opportunities. Unfortunately, not only was gender missing in the SWOT analysis from the relevant chapter, but most of the points identified are barely addressed by the proposed instruments and interventions. There is little attention given to the socio-economic fabric of rural areas in general, or, more specifically, to questions of land inheritance or the position of

women over the 40-year age limit for young farmers. Some targets are set incredibly low. For example, the policy aims for 10% of farmers having risk insurance, and for 6% of farmers to operate organically. However, benchmarking data is missing from the policy. It is also not mentioned why the targets are not more ambitious. Overall, this policy seems to have set the bar low in its aims and has yet again ignored the role of women, only adding them as an afterthought after the European Commission insisted that gender considerations were included.

**Norway**

Two documents – Document A: A white paper/policy on agriculture[16] and document B: Proposal for the next year's state budget were used for the benchmarking exercise for Norway. The two plans aim to adjust and equip Norwegian agriculture/the agricultural value chain for the future. In the white paper, gender considerations are only mentioned twice. First, in relation to specific measures targeted at women. Second in a statement which recognises that the current system for registering farm ownership (which only allows one person to be listed) obscures the actual number of women involved in running farms. The policy states the importance of both men and women establishing themselves as active business practitioners but does not indicate how this might be achieved.

In the budget proposal, Part III affirms that, as per the Equality and Discrimination Act, everyone regardless of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, etc. must have equal opportunities to run businesses within agriculture and associated industries. It recognises that education, counselling, financial tools and effective welfare measures are key to this. It also recognises that the sustainability, circular economy and bio-economy necessary for the future of agriculture, will demand new, non-traditional competencies, and aims to create supportive conditions for '*everyone*' who can contribute. It is also stated that the agricultural sector in the longer run has worked in a targeted manner to get more women to establish themselves in the industry, but there is limited clarity to this.

Several tools in the Agricultural Agreement (for example, income settlement for farmers, negotiated yearly between the Government and the two national farmer organizations) are designed to stimulate recruitment, business development, more new establishments and training companies. '*In recent years'*, an average of half the subsidies for investment and business development scheme (Investment and Business Development Scheme (IBU) scheme) in agriculture have been allowed for women, as have 75 % of subsidies for investment in other agriculture-based professions.

The document also highlights the importance of good welfare measures for recruitment and to maintain a lively agricultural sector by increasing the rate of support for relief workers to improve provision for illness, childbirth and sick children, and more opportunities for holidays and leisure. The white paper was informed by the report of a working group with representatives from the industry and government administration set up to assess how to motivate young people to enter the agriculture industry. Although it mentions the need to ensure that recruitment leads to

[16] See list of documents used for benchmarking in table 5.2. A brand-new white paper was also published on March 8th, 2024 (dated 2023-2024) – this one came too late to be included in this benchmarking task. The new-one is also more targeted/narrow; specifically focusing on 1) how to increase national self-sufficiency, and 2) how to increase farmers' incomes.

'*diversity*' in the sector, but this seems to be about diversity in farm types and production types rather than diversity among the farmers. The white paper emphasises the importance of strong welfare provision for farmers in general, specifically via increasing the subsidy for relief workers. While it recognises that more women than men work in alternative agriculture-based businesses, and that women, on average run farms with less land than those run by men, the policy does not address gender pay gaps, pension gaps or gender care gaps. However, it should be mentioned that "*social conditions, equality and family life*" are highlighted as one of four important areas that were focused on in the working group report. In general, good income opportunities and good and predictable framework conditions are emphasised as essential to obtain recruitment into the industry. Other than when highlighting that women remain a minority '*among farm owners and managers, sex-aggregated data shows that only 16-17% of farmers in Norway are women. This figure has remained steady for decades, resisting long-running attempts to raise it*'. The white paper includes one measure targeted at women. This enables women and people under the age of 35 to be awarded more subsidies than others for specific items like production facilities, new schemes for fruit and berry cultivation, setting up new business; business development; investment associated with generational change. Also, the white paper states that funds have been allocated to support sole women reindeer producers and Kvinner i skogbruket (Women in Forestry). It includes no further measures targeted at women in agriculture.

The budget proposal on the other hand points out that in line with the country's commitments to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, Norway's investment in Sustainable Development has increased by 80% since 2021, with women receiving nearly 77% of the funding allocated to support additional agricultural businesses. The Ministry of Agriculture and Food has also developed their own equality policy, which explicitly supports women's leadership and participation in agricultural organisations and networks, and in decision-making. This ethos is reflected in the staffing of the Ministry itself, where, despite agriculture traditionally being a male-dominated sector, women constitute around 60 per cent of employees and 71 per cent of the top executive team. However, how this will be achieved in the agricultural and rural sectors remain unclear. Norway's agriculture policy regards men and women as being equally able and having equal access to opportunities. Gender equality has been an important objective for Norway for decades (Its Gender Equality Act was first adopted in 1978) and conditions have steadily improved. However, it is not clear how it treats the differences between men and women.

The white paper also highlights the wider social benefits of a flourishing agriculture sector in terms that go beyond food production and food security to biodiversity, cultural heritage and tourism. In general, however, the policy is not concerned with the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, nor does it consider issues related to gender and childcare gap or different employment/income/social security needs. The white paper makes no significant reference to digital inclusion or AI, while it frequently refers to digital solutions, e.g. to problems of physical distance and in information management. It refers to AI only once, to recognise its potential to strengthen the agriculture sector by providing more technological opportunities and solutions. It makes no assessment of either digital technologies or AI in relation to questions of gender equalities. The white paper addresses climate change with a chapter devoted to it. However, it does not consider whether climate change

impacts women and men differently, nor does it explain why it is important to have both men and women fully involved, committed and supported in the green transition. In the budget proposal, climate change is given as a reason for building a reserve of food grains and protecting farmland and mentioned in relation to the future of reindeer husbandry, the management of genetic resources; the need to adapt food production, to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to increase sequestration of carbon and does not mention gender.

**Scotland:**

Identifying an individual document appropriate for this analysis was challenging because the Scottish Government is currently in the process of developing a new agricultural policy following the United Kingdom withdrawal from the EU. Three documents[17] that can give insight into the most up-to-date indications of future policy were used.

The first document – the Route map aims to explain the process for changing to a new agricultural framework from 2026, and the changes that those receiving farm payments will be expected to make after 2025. Neither the Route Map nor the Memorandum refer to gender in any respect. The former refers to generic roles: '*tenant farmers, smallholders, crofters, new entrants and land managers'*. The latter addresses sectors: '*agriculture, forestry, rural communities and the rural economy and the environment*'. The Route Map does not consider gender differences and has no measures targeting women. This document does not set out specific supports to advance women entrepreneurs or rural women and makes no reference to gender in any respect. No reference is made to digital inclusion or the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the Route Map. It states that '*Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, and Nature and Biodiversity Protection and Restoration*' are key foci of the framework Bill, and indicates measures to support farmers and crofters to achieve related outcomes (i.e. a productive and economically sustainable food sector; a green transition that supports the rural economy and efforts to reduce rural poverty and inequality, with support for those who need it most; reduced greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture), but does not refer to men or women or gender in any respect.

The second document – Policy[18] Memorandum Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill (thereafter Memorandum) aims to set out the Government's policy behind the [framework] Bill. The Memorandum extends to providing support to enable '*more local employment in the rural sector and more new and young entrants into farming*' (p. 6); *enhancing the public's access to land (by linking 'the core paths network' to other path networks) (p. 12); and the food and drink industry (via new powers 'to provide financial support […] specifically to food producers and processors to support*

[17] These are necessarily broad-brush, provisional documents, so to take them as a basis for conclusive benchmarking would be to misinterpret their aims. They do, however, offer significant food for thought.

[18] This Memorandum is a provisional interim document that does not provide details of policy. All the documents were also used for the benchmarking for LTVRAs and as the findings from the CAP benchmarking is the same as for the LTVRA and thus excluded in the section on LTVRA to avoid repetition.

*the use of organic practices and certification requirements)*' (p. 16). The feedback highlighted that the consultation[19] document lacked focus on '*the impacts or inclusion of women'* and included insufficient detail on the impact of protected characteristics. However, subsequent '*substantial stakeholder engagement through public consultation*' did not identify any potential negative impacts from either the Bill or its initiatives and policies. The Memorandum has no measures targeting women, but states that provision will be made to support '*new and young entrants into farming*'. This makes no distinction for women and does not refer to gender in any respect. However, the accompanying Briefing Paper (24 November 2023) states that the 2023-24 Programme for Government is committed to '*develop a gender strategy for agriculture and fund practical training opportunities for women, new entrants, and young farmers*' (p. 22)[20]. This document does not set out specific supports to advance women entrepreneurs or rural women and makes no reference to gender in any respect. The Memorandum makes no specific reference to digital inclusion or the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) but it does refer to an objective '*to establish powers allowing the Scottish Ministers to support delivery of knowledge, innovation, education and training*' in order to support, among other things, '*the development of resources, digital tools or databases*' [which] '*will contribute towards provision of support in relation to knowledge, innovation, education and training*.' (p. 26). The Memorandum notes that, 'As set out in the Environment Strategy for Scotland, the Scottish Government is committed to addressing the twin crises of climate change and biodiversity loss: to create a fairer and greener Scotland. Scottish agriculture and associated land use will play a key role in tackling the twin crises. The future framework, therefore, will allow actions to address these key priorities. However, it is not clear the extent to which this will consider gender differences in climate change.

The third document – Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Report published 21.02.24) reports on a consultation to evaluate the likely effects of implementing the proposals deemed necessary to realise the Government's Vision for Agriculture (2 March 2022). The obligatory Equality Impact Assessment report deems that assessment is sufficient for what is currently a '*framework*' bill but adds: '*The Scottish Government will ensure that the teams working on future policy change in secondary legislation are aware of the need to consult/further assess where appropriate*' (p. 2). This statement is too vague to represent a commitment to ensure either that further assessment will be conducted or that it will subsequently inform policy. In terms of decision-making and monitoring, the EQIA acknowledges that new powers to support Continuing Professional Development could increase opportunities for '*women, young people and others with protected characteristics'*. Here again we find women subsumed into a common category with other groups. The EQIA makes no reference to digital inclusion or the use of Artificial Intelligence. The EQIA similarly refers to policies that aim to address climate change. In addition (and within the same paragraph) it also states the Government's commitment to '*increasing gender equality and opportunities for women and new entrants'*. Here '*women*' are grouped here with '*new entrants*'. Is there a risk that the two categories

[19] Proposals for the draft Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill (23 September 2023) went out to public consultation (Vision for Scottish Agriculture; Proposals for a new Agriculture Bill (29 August 2022).

[20] https://bprcdn.parliament.scot/published/2023/11/24/39b120ec-5b30-4af2-8633-3665d5902cbf/SB%2023-44.pdf

might become conflated, notably for funding purposes?

Overall, all three benchmarked documents (i.e. Route map; Policy Memorandum (Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill; Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) Report) relate to the (framework) Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill, and, as such, are concerned with the long-term vision for rural areas. They include few references to '*women*' or to gender in any respect. Neither do they mention specific needs linked to ageing, to childcare or to other care responsibilities.

*Some historical evidence on women in agriculture in Scotland*

The Women in Agriculture Task Force was set up by the Scottish government in 2017 to tackle inequality in Scottish Agriculture. The Task Force published its final report in 2019[21]. In response to one of the Task Force's key recommendations, The Scottish Government funded the Women in Agriculture Development Programme[22]. The report also recommended the establishment and mainstreaming of an Equality Charter into all Scottish agriculture and related policies. In response, the Government commissioned research to gather evidence on the effectiveness of gender equality initiatives within business of different sizes in male-dominated industries. The findings were published in 'Women in agriculture - implementing equality commitments: research report' (19 October 2022)[23]:

Current evidence (i).

The Scottish Government's current policy on gender equality[24] states that the Government is '*considering the recommendations from the Women in Agriculture Taskforce which it set up in 2017 to tackle inequality in Scottish agriculture*'. This indicates that the Task Force Report continues to be a useful reference point within the Government's public discourse on gender equality. But the wording is vague and non-committal. The extent to which the recommendations will actually be implemented remains to be seen.

Current evidence (ii).

The 2023-24 Programme[25] for Government (5 September 2023) makes a commitment to '*develop a gender strategy for agriculture and fund practical training opportunities for women, new entrants, and young farmers*', and in November 2023 it was announced that funding of over £500,000 had been made available in the form of grants of £500 per individual to help women and young people develop new agricultural skills and further their careers within the farming sector[26]'. However, the total funding is made up of the Next Generation Practical Training Fund (£400,000) and the Women in Agriculture Practical Training Fund (£1,700). The disparity between them is stark. This raises

[21] https://www.gov.scot/publications/final-report-women-agriculture-taskforce/

[22] Women in Agriculture Development Programme: equality impact assessment - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

[23] 1 Introduction - Women in agriculture - implementing equality commitments: research report - gov.scot

[24] Gender equality - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

[25] https://www.gov.scot/publications/programme-government-2023-24/pages/10/

[26] https://www.gov.scot/news/farming-skills-for-the-next-generation/

concerns about the risk that provision for '*women*' will be subsumed into a category that includes '*new and/or young entrants'*, risking the exclusion of older women who may need or wish to acquire new skills in order to develop existing businesses. This concern is reinforced by a similar emphasis in the announcement by Rural Affairs Secretary Mairi Gougeon (in a speech at AgriScot 2023) that: '*Supporting the next generation of farmers is imperative if we want our agriculture sector to continue to innovate and thrive. […] We are committed to helping women and young people stay in rural communities by equipping them with the necessary skills to pursue careers in farming and crofting*[27]'.Finally, evidence from GRASS CEILING WP2 D2:2 (Interviews with stakeholders) shows that the Scottish Government's Rural Payments and Inspections Division operates a gender-neutral points scheme when assessing applications by aspiring crofters (small-holders) to the Croft House Grant Scheme.

**Spain:**

Spanish Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 identifies areas where there are greater disparities between men and women in rural areas and proposes specific measures to promote equal opportunities. Spain's policy challenges gender stereotypes. In addition, the text uses gender-inclusive language, employing (Spanish versions of) "*male farmer*" and "*female farmer*" or gender-neutral language. With that, it recognises the important part women play in creating thriving rural communities. Objective number 8 focuses on '*Promoting employment, growth, gender equality, including women's participation in agriculture, social inclusion, and local development in rural areas, including circular bioeconomy and sustainable forestry*' and sets out several measures to support this including supplementary income support for young farmers, Investments in tangible and intangible assets in the wine sector. Grants for investments in transformation, marketing, and/or development of agri-food products; and for agricultural diversification among other measures. 39 of the 45 interventions of the Spanish CAP Strategic Plan include some form of differentiation in favour of women. These include specific eligibility conditions for women; higher rates of aid or unit amounts in certain subsidies; and prioritizing women for grants. Additionally, the Evaluation Plan includes a quantitative evaluation of impact indicators designed to measure how effectively the Plan meets its objective of closing the gender gap in the agriculture sector and rural areas. A key objective of the Spanish CAP Strategic Plan is to ensure generational renewal in the agricultural sector. Objective no. 7 ('*Attracting and supporting young farmers and new farmers and facilitating sustainable business development in rural areas*') aims to: attract young people into the sector; improve the structure of farms owned by young farmers and women; facilitate access to land; improve professional training; promote entrepreneurship and support entrepreneurial talent in rural areas; promote generational renewal to combat depopulation in rural areas. The main supporting action is a five-year supplement to basic income support, for individuals[28] up to forty years old who are new heads of a farm business and have the required level of agricultural training and/or qualifications. The assistance is calculated according to size of farm, to a maximum of 100

[27] Farming skills for the next generation - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

[28] If the beneficiary is a woman – whether owner or co-owner of the farm – the assistance is increased by 15%.

hectares. The Plan also includes Rural Development interventions to encourage young people into the sector. These include grants to support investments in agricultural diversification; both new farmers and young farmers; new rural enterprises linked to agriculture and forestry or farm diversification; new non-agricultural business activities; co-operation for territorial integration, and for farm succession. Rural Development interventions in Spain are designed by the Autonomous Communities (AACC) in response to the specific needs of their regions. A number of these Communities apply positive discrimination criteria for women in measures such as grants for investments and modernization of farms, grants for the implementation or modernization of irrigation systems, or grants for investments in agricultural diversification.

The policy does not address gender gaps in pay or pensions. A key obstacle to doing so is the paucity of gender-differentiated statistics available in Spain. The interventions that address, more or less explicitly, the identified needs in Specific Objective 8, aim to mitigate the inequality between men and women both in the agricultural sector (lower degree of remuneration for women as farm owners) and in rural areas (low presence of women, gender gap in leadership positions, or lower employment rate for women, lower salaries, etc.).The interventions identified in the CAP Strategic Plan, articulated based on the fund financing them. This includes the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) aimed at financing direct aid to agricultural holdings, resulting in a payment per hectare. This fund is budgeted at €4.8 billion annually, representing 73% of the total budget allocated to the CAP Strategic Plan. There are no criteria linked to the owner or the structure of the farm that differentiate the amount. Considering that in Spain, women mostly own smaller farms, it could be argued that this aid indirectly takes into account farms where female ownership is more prevalent. The budget allocated to this aid is €413 million. A subsidy is also allocated to investments in tangible and intangible assets in the wine sector. This aid is co-financed for the financing of tangible and intangible assets, both in wineries and in vineyard holdings. Joint titling and shared ownership are prioritised (not solely female ownership). It also includes the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) funds the so-called second pillar aids with an annual budget of €2.762 billion and is almost entirely co-financed by the applicant and the member state. The CAP Strategic Plan establishes a general framework for the implementation of interventions in three blocks: investments, rural development, and support. These aids are co-financed by the applicant. Each region or AACC in Spain has room to establish eligibility criteria that prioritize female applicants (with the same funding), although more advanced regions increase the percentage of funding if certain predefined criteria in the aid calls are met. Also, LEADER is the first initiative of the CAP with a bottom-up approach, which maintains the obligation to allocate more than 10% of the EAFRD budget. In Spain, €816 million has been allocated. The gender focus of these measures is manifested in two ways: on one hand, by establishing a minimum representation in local action groups (LAGs), and on the other hand, in the project eligibility criteria. Regarding the first aspect, regions such as Castilla-La Mancha have established that more than 40% of the members of the LAG must be women, and in Catalonia, a range of 40-60% has been established.

The CAP Strategic Plan supports the creation of businesses in rural areas through the Rural Development intervention ("Start-up of new rural businesses linked to agriculture and forestry or diversification of income for farm households, new non-agricultural business activities") and

through the "LEADER" intervention. These aim to encourage people, including young people and women, to settle in rural areas and to improve employment opportunities for young people and women. Assistance is in the form of a grant to cover the cost of setting up a new rural business related to agriculture or forestry, for farm business diversification, or for new non-agricultural enterprise. Projects led by women and young people qualify for prioritisation, as do other criteria such as the applicant's training and/or the needs of the local area. Rural Development interventions in Spain are designed by the Autonomous Communities (AACC), responding to the identified needs in the national territory. As evidence of their commitment to support female participation and leadership (as specified by the CAP), most require Local Action Groups (LAGs) and other organisations to have a quota of women in decision-making roles. Another example of Spain's support for women's participation is the National Network of the CAP, whose composition must include organizations dedicated to promoting equality between men and women. The Rural Development intervention on "Non-productive investments in basic services in rural areas" aims to encourage new people, young people and women to settle permanently in rural areas via measures that include improving access to education, health, emergency services, cultural facilities and transport; better management of energy and water resources; developing rural industries (agri-food, tourism, forestry, etc); and use of digital technologies. According to the CAP Strategic Plan, one of the objectives of this intervention is to improve conditions, including work-life balance, for women in agriculture, as their greater burden of caring for children and older people means they will benefit from improvements to rural services.

Digitalization is seen as important to enabling the economic, social, and environmental sustainability of the agri-food sector and rural areas. The CAP Strategic Plan therefore proposes to enhance investment in the use of new technologies and digital skills training and emphasises the need to make this training attractive to 'young people and women'. Once more women are grouped together with young people. The CAP Strategic Plan tangentially mentions the need for women and young people especially to be trained in digitalization in rural areas, but it does not consider possible gender differences regarding digital inclusion, nor does it include any gender-based actions to address potential inequalities. Also, no reference is made to AI.

The CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027 was conceived in parallel with the approval of the European Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy and aims to achieve the same objectives. On paper, almost all the interventions contained within the CAP Strategic Plan incorporate the principles of the Green Deal (e.g. combating climate change and preserving natural spaces and biodiversity). In line with the Farm to Fork strategy, the Plan involves reducing the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and promoting organic farming. Furthermore, the policy of the second pillar continues to support agri-environmental measures and organic farming, although with considerably lower budgets than those of the first pillar. Women farmers tend to run small farms that are less financially profitable but (this hypothesis has yet to be assessed) may be more socially and environmentally sustainable than large-scale agricultural enterprises. We recommend that the next CAP takes this into account by this into account and focuses on specific production systems rather than production outputs.

In addition to the various interventions outlined in the CAP Strategic Plan, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food of Spain and the Autonomous Communities (AACCs), have together

implemented a series of measures to support equal opportunities for women in rural areas to promote entrepreneurship, generation and compilation of gender-disaggregated statistical data to support decision-making and actions to raise the visibility of women in rural areas amongst other strategies. Spain deserves a special mention for its Law on Shared Ownership of Agricultural Holdings (Law 35/2011). Shared ownership is a legal arrangement that allows each member of a couple to have equal administrative, representation, and management responsibilities for a holding. Its objectives are to professionalize women's agricultural activities, improve female participation in agricultural organizations, highlight the work of women in agricultural holdings, promote equality, improve the quality of life in rural areas, and help settle rural populations. Although low take-up (due to administrative and/or financial reasons) means this law has not yet achieved its potential success, it represents a significant move to facilitate gender equality in agriculture. In addition, various ministries collaborate on support measures. An example is a joint initiative by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Equality to establish a cooperation agreement with Agri-Food Cooperatives of Spain to support greater representation of women on the boards of co-operatives. At the regional level, Rural Women's Statutes play an important part in recognising women's rights promoting actions to reduce gender gaps and inequalities. In some regions (Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha, the Basque Country and Aragón) these statutes have the status of regional laws. In Extremadura, the Cooperative Societies Law ensures a representative presence of women on boards of directors.

**Sweden**

The key aims of Sweden's CAP Strategic Plan 2023-27 are to increase the productivity, viability and competitiveness of the agricultural sector while protecting animal welfare and improving standards in respect of the environment and climate. Increasing food production is another priority. The strategy also aims to contribute to the development of Sweden's rural areas, to help ensure that these are attractive places to live and work in. This is in line with the CAP key objective, which is to "*support viable farm income and the resilience of the agricultural sector across the EU, in order to enhance long-term food security and agricultural diversity, as well as to ensure the economic sustainability of agricultural production*[29]".

Sweden's CAP Strategic Plan primarily targets male farmers. It does not raise awareness about women's rights, nor does it challenge stereotypes or promote equal opportunities. Gender is not integrated in the policy. The Swedish equivalent of either '*woman*' (*kvinna*) or '*women*' (*kvinnor*) are mentioned only 15 times in 619 pages. It occurs specifically in Objective 8, which states [our translation:] '*Promote employment, growth, gender equality, including women's participation in agricultural activities, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including circular economy and sustainable forestry*" (pp. 109, 445, 491, 506, 517). However, the mentions of gender equality and women's participation is not integrated in the operationalizing of this objective (the summary of the SWOT, the identification of needs or the intervention logic). There is only one

[29] https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-2023-27/key-policy-objectives-cap-2023-27_en#briefs

mention of these concepts which could be interpreted as an effort for the promotion of gender equality in Sweden's CAP Strategic Plan.

The only apparent attempt to promote gender equality is in reference to the principles that local development strategies are required to follow when operating within LEADER. These include '*sustainable development, equal treatment, non-discrimination and equality between women and men*' (p. 492). The policy does not consider gender differences in the relevant occupations/enterprises. Sweden's Strategic Plan does not have any specific measures targeted at women. Sweden's strategic plan also does not set out specific supports to advance women entrepreneurs and rural women or concern with the long-term vision for rural areas. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is only mentioned once (p. 190) in Sweden's Strategic Plan.

However, the plan includes a considerable amount on digitalization, particularly with regard to Specific Objective 2 (To increase market orientation and the competitiveness of agricultural enterprises, both in the short and long term, with a greater focus on research, technology and digitization). However, it states that as Sweden is one of the countries that has made most progress with it, digitalization is not classed as a priority in Sweden's Strategic Plan. As such, the plan does not consider gender differences and/or gender equality in relation to digitalization.

The plan includes a significant amount of material about climate change mitigation and adaptation in Sweden's Strategic Plan, particularly in relation to Specific Objective 4: *Contribute to limiting and adapting to climate change, including by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving carbon dioxide sequestration and promoting sustainable energy*. However, it does not consider gender differences in relation to the impacts of climate change, nor does it explain why it is important that everyone – men and women – is involved, committed, and supported in the green transition.

Based on previous research[30], that employed the 'What's the problem represented to be' approach to analyse the implementation of the European Union's Rural Development Programme (2014-2020) in one Swedish region, Jönköping County, it could be concluded that gender inequality is usually not seen as a problem in relation to rural development, and that this perception positions women as being uninterested in rural development policy and unable to contribute. The focus on farmers and ICT broadband positioned adult, Swedish-born men as the norm, reflecting a neoliberal emphasis on economic growth through competitive businesses. It could also be inferred that the policy twists 'gender mainstreaming' by claiming that it promotes gender equality, while in fact it takes no action. Rural policy that only pays lip service to gender equality thereby co-opts feminism, in line with a neoliberal postfeminist discourse which could be 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, and that these may help bring about the changes required.

***Table 1. National Policy Documents use for Benchmarking (Common Agricultural Policy)***

| Country | Policies Benchmarked |
|---|---|
| Croatia | Strategic Plan of the Common Agricultural Policy of the Republic of Croatia 2023 |

[30] Pettersson, K., Ahl, H., Berglund, K., & Tillmar, M. (2024). Paying lip service to gender inequality–EU rural development policy in Sweden. *Gender, Place & Culture*, 1-23.

| | |
|---|---|
| | – 2027 *[HR - Strateški plan Zajedničke poljoprivredne politike Republike Hrvatske 2023. - 2027.]* |
| Ireland | Ireland's CAP Strategic Plan (CSP) 2023-2027 |
| Italy | Italy CAP Strategic Plan (- *IT - Piano Strategico Nazionale PAC*) |
| Lithuania | Lithuania's CAP Strategic Plan 2023–27 *(Lietuvos žemės ūkio ir kaimo plėtros 2023–2027 m. strateginis planas)* |
| Netherlands | The Netherlands National Strategic Plan CAP 2023-2027 *(Nederlands Nationaal Strategisch Plan GLB 2023-2027)* |
| Norway | Document A (THE MAIN DOCUMENT): *Meld. St. 11 (2016-2017) Endring og utvikling. En fremtidsrettet jordbruksproduksjon. Landbruks- og matdepartementet*. (white paper)<br>Document B: *Prop. 1 s (2023-2024) For budsjettåret 2024. Landbruks- og matdepartementet* (Proposal for the next year's state budget) |
| Scotland | 1. Agriculture Reform Route map (22 June 2023)<br>2. Policy Memorandum (Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill (28 September 2023)<br>3. Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) (21 February 2024) |
| Spain | Spanish Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan 2023-2027 |
| Sweden | Strategic plan for the implementation of the common agricultural policy in Sweden 2023-2027 |

## 6.2 Farm to Fork

Findings from the benchmarking exercise in all nine countries for the Farm to Fork Strategy are presented below for each country. See table 2. for titles of the policy documents used for each country.

**Croatia:**

The National action plan for the development of ecological agriculture 2023-2030 was used in the benchmarking exercise for Croatia since Croatia has no specific document that sets out its Farm to Fork[31] policy. It aims to enable development of sustainable agriculture, forestry and food production via measures that include reducing social inequalities in these sectors and improving workers' rights. The plan does not explicitly mention women or men. It focuses on general terms such as "*agricultural practices*", "*forest management*", "*biodiversity*" and "*climate change*". It does not deal with gender-specific issues or challenges facing women or men. It does not raise awareness of women's rights. The document does not consider gender differences in occupations/enterprises related to agriculture, nor does it consider gender gaps in wages or pensions. Several initiatives to promote youth employment and entrepreneurship, including vocational training, mentoring programmes and financial support for start-ups are mentioned. The plan does not specify age, migration status or religion as factors that impact women's participation in either agriculture or rural development. It does not mainstream women but places them in the same category as social

[31] Because of this, it is difficult to do like for like comparison for benchmarking.

groups classed as vulnerable, including Roma, people with disabilities, and refugees. This plan does not include specific supports to advance women entrepreneurs or rural women. The plan contains measures aimed at increasing support for the health, well-being, education and social integration of children, the sick and the elderly. It does not mention AI or digital inclusion and highlights the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, restore the environment and promote sustainable development. It emphasizes the importance of including all citizens, regardless of gender, in developing and implementing environmental programmes. It refers to measures to facilitate adaptation to climate change (e.g. support for research activities and for ecological production methods, including the use of renewable energy sources). However, it gives no consideration in this to distinctions related to gender.

**Ireland:**

The Food Vision 2030: A World Leader in Sustainable Food Systems is used for the benchmarking exercise and it aims to make Ireland an international leader in Sustainable Food Systems (SFS) by 2030. Gender considerations are not integrated into Food Vision 2030 but are placed separately in two of the policy's four Missions. First, Mission 2, Goal 4 (Improve the Social Sustainability of Primary Producers) highlights that the proportion of female workers in agriculture, forestry and fishing increased only slightly (from an average of 12% to 14%) between 2010 and 2019. Second, Mission 4, Goal 6 (Attract and Nurture Diverse and Inclusive Talent) emphasises the need to achieve gender balance throughout the agri-food sector, particularly at management level and in leadership roles. To address these gender issues several Actions are promoted ['as set out in Section 4 [i.e. Q4] of this report']. Food Vision 2030 cannot be said to challenge gender stereotypes. In setting out how its actions align with the nine objectives of the CAP; no gender considerations are included. Citing a case study, "The UN Decade of Family Farming 2019-2028 (UNDFF)" which - acknowledges that "*women hold only 15% of farmland yet provide almost 50% of farm labour*", the policy proposes actions to promote gender equity. However, these actions are not detailed. The policy highlights generational renewal as a critical issue to be addressed but does not mention the longstanding inequalities the women face due to traditionally patriarchal land inheritance practices. Research has shown that women play a leading role in sustainable agriculture practices that are critical to Ireland achieving its climate targets. The policy does not acknowledge this. While it mentions the role of off-farm work by farmers and/or spouses in maintaining the sustainability of farms, the policy does not recognise the critical contribution women make to this, nor the fact that they play a leading role in farm diversification initiatives and the circular bioeconomy.

The policy focuses on encouraging new entrants to agriculture and promoting generational renewal via support such as the Future Growth Loan Scheme (FGLS) which offers up to €500,000 in unsecured loans. It also mentions the importance of maintaining the support that the EU CAP and Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) have established for generational renewal. The issue of gender balance is bundled together with that of generational renewal as a "*social factor…. to be considered and improved*" (p. 11). Moreover, in the section on the Future Growth Loan Scheme, where it notes that the conditions of loans are favourable to food companies and to "*smaller-scale farmers, who often do not have the leverage to negotiate for more favourable terms with their banking institution*", it

fails to acknowledge that women's enterprises are feature prominently in both categories (p. 163). The policy recognises that women have traditionally contributed significantly to the labour on family farms in Ireland despite their low levels of farm ownership overall relative to men. However, it does not explore the implications for gender pay gaps. This policy does not consider gender pension gaps. This policy does not address gender care gaps in rural areas (this is explored further under Q6).

This policy targets women in two areas with the aim of promoting gender balance, increasing participation and leadership in agri-related businesses, agriculture, forestry and fishing. The policy does not provide information about how these schemes are financed or how expenditure is tracked in terms of gender-equality goals. The policy does not provide sex-disaggregated data on uptake or success, but it highlights that such data (e.g. on participation by women in schemes and measures) will be captured and published in the future. The policy does not mainstream women but treats them separately, often in the same category as new entrants to farming. Specific groups of women are not described. Gender balance in farming is presented as one problem among others to be solved in the sector, such as: high rates of accidental deaths and injuries; rural isolation; lack of high-speed broadband; need to make the sector more inclusive of the LGBTI+ community; mental health and well-being issues; and generational renewal. In Mission 3, actions to promote gender balance are mentioned in tandem with those to improve diversity and inclusion. Goal 6, Action 4 (part c) highlights the importance of access to education for rural women, focusing specifically on return-to-work programmes. The policy includes no specific measures to improve access to finance for women entrepreneurs in rural areas. The policy notes the importance of improving the gender balance in stakeholder organisations, state and company boards (p. 167). Goal 6, Action 4 aims to promote gender balance at all stages of the agri-food sector, particularly in leadership roles, at senior management and board levels. The policy encourages the development of female farmers' networks (p. 21) and Knowledge Transfer (KT) groups facilitated by women (Goal 4, Action 8). It also highlights the importance of supporting existing women's networking groups, specifically the women in agriculture business network (CERES), and the mentoring programme for rural women entrepreneurs (ACORNS).

The question of differences in how men and women participate in initiatives is noted in two actions (Action 8: Mission 2, Goal 4, on the development of women-led and women-only Knowledge Transfer Groups; and Action 9 on Holding a National Dialogue on Women in Agriculture). However, the approach is still at an exploratory stage, emphasising the need for bottom-up initiatives to understand and meet women's different needs and challenges (p. 119). The policy acknowledges that women have traditionally contributed significantly to the labour on family farms in Ireland despite their low levels of farm ownership overall relative to men: "*90% of farms are run by an individual or a family who rely primarily on family labour; and women hold only 15% of farmland yet provide almost 50% of farm labour"* (p. 33). However, much of this work is unpaid and the policy does not consider what this means for women's incomes and social security needs. The policy includes an age profile of primary producers as a key indicator of the '*economic and social sustainability*' of family farms (Mission 2, page 27). However, it does not consider the specific needs of older people in rural areas to any significant extent. The policy includes age alongside race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, as a factor to be considered to ensure visibility and

inclusion and combat isolation in rural areas (Mission 2, Goal 4) but does not set out concrete measures to achieve this. The policy identifies age and the challenges of generational renewal as issues that must be properly addressed to ensure the viability of farms and the well-being of the broader rural community. It notes that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) include measures to encourage generational renewal. This policy does not consider gender and the (child)care gap. Its comments on childcare are limited to the high cost of services in Ireland and the negative impact this has on the country's Competitiveness Scorecard (Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment). The policy proposes no measures to mitigate the impact of caring for children, the sick or the elderly. Its only reference to caring responsibilities of any kind is in relation to the high cost of childcare in Ireland, as noted above. Older people are only mentioned briefly, in the context of generational renewal (Mission 2, Goal 4, p. 119).

This policy does not consider gender in relation to digital inclusion. Instead, it focuses on the opportunities that digital tools and platforms offer to the agri-food sector and rural areas (Mission 4). Where it does mention Artificial Intelligence (AI), this is to highlight its benefits for producers (e.g. in developing new sales and distribution channels) and consumers (e.g. smart tools showing nutritional content of food) (Mission 3, Goal 3, Action 3). However, it does not recognise the masculine bias of AI-based algorithms and how this perpetuates gender inequalities. Although this policy mentions the "*digital divide*" (p. 157) in Irish society, it does not explore how rural women can be particularly affected by this for many reasons, including limited access to training /or broadband, and extra caring responsibilities due to limited local provision.

Notably, where this policy mentions the importance of supporting the '*digital transition*' in line with the CAP Strategic Plan and the National Digital Strategy (Mission 4, Goal 4, p. 158), it does not acknowledge or address the gender inequalities involved. This policy was informed by the 2021 Climate Action Bill. Strategies to mitigate the effects of climate change are central to this policy (specifically Mission 1 (Goal 1, Actions 9 and 10). However, nowhere does it acknowledge how women and men are differently impacted by climate change, nor does it show why it is important for everyone, regardless of gender, to be fully involved, committed, and supported in the green transition.

**Italy:**

Italy does not have a national equivalent of the Fork to Farm Strategy, however *Strategia "Dal produttore al consumatore*" was used in the benchmarking exercise. It aims to create an environmentally respectful, healthy, fair and sustainable food system. It also does not consider questions related to gender nor does it consider differences between men and women in the occupations/enterprises that it addresses. This policy does not include strategies targeting women. The F2F strategy primarily focuses on environmental and health aspects of the food system. It does not properly address the social and economic dimensions, particularly those impacting rural communities. There is no evidence that the policy promotes digital inclusion or use of AI. Overall, an extensive literature search (covering approximately 250 articles) found no specific measures or explanatory government documents that make connections between the national Farm to Fork

policy and support for women and young people in Italy. Italy has no single comprehensive national policy that equates to the EU's Farm to Fork strategy. Italy's policy focuses on broad objectives such as sustainability, health, combating food waste, and pesticide reduction. It includes no specific actions to support women entrepreneurs or young people in the agri-food sector. Similarly, the document that sets out the regional programme for rural development policies ("*Complemento sviluppo rurale*") describes how it aligns with the objectives and strategies of the EU's CAP and acknowledges the importance of young farmers and generational succession in agriculture but lacks specific data and concrete measures to support women and young people in the sector.

**Lithuania:**

Despite an extensive search, no equivalent national policy could be found. The Farm to Fork section of the website of the Lithuanian Ministry of Agriculture consists exclusively of links to the European Commission's strategies. The analysis therefore examined the most closely related national document – "*Managers of the 2022-2030 Development Program Ministry of Agriculture of the Republic of Lithuania Land and Food Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries*". It aims to increase value and competitiveness of agriculture, food and fisheries sectors; supply of local foods and a system of short supply chains for them; synergy between all branches of agriculture. The Programme provides measures to help rural economies adapt to climate change but entirely lacks a gender perspective.

**Netherlands:**

The only stand-alone F2F policy found in Dutch is in the National Strategic Plan (NSP). It focuses solely on the use of chemicals in crop production. Its objective is to monitor the two indicators of active substance use in agriculture, as identified in the Green Deal. This stand-alone policy is titled *Van Boer-tot-Bord strategie indicatoren in Nederland* (Farm to Fork strategy indicators in the Netherlands). This strategy is concerned with environmental improvements and mitigating climate change. However, it does not consider any human actors involved in food production. It focuses exclusively on reducing chemicals in the soil and those in plant-based products. Other Dutch policies relating to the EU's F2F strategy are benchmarked in the Green Deal section. The Netherlands CAP policy makes only eight references to Farm to Fork. Most relate to the need for circular agriculture and to the need for innovation and knowledge to sustain this economically. None specifically mentions or considers women.

**Norway**

Two documents were benchmarked for Norway – Meld. St. 11 (2016-2017) Endring og utvikling. En *fremtidsrettet jordbruksproduksjon*. *Landbruks- og matdepartementet*. (white paper) and Prop. 1 s (2023-2024) For *budsjettåret* 2024. *Landbruks- og matdepartementet* (Proposal for the next year's state budget) as proxies for the Fork to Farm strategy since Norway has not developed a separate national food systems related policy. As such the result from the benchmarking are the same as the

one reported for Norway for the CAP section above.

**Scotland:**

In the absence of a specific F2F policy for Scotland, the Good Food Nation Plan has been taken as indicative of policy and benchmarked accordingly. The Plan aims for a sustainable food system that provides healthy food for all. Good Food Nation presents policies and Actions in four sections based on key groups in the food system. Just two of these mention women. First, *People and Communities* highlights the importance of supporting children and young people '*to have the best possible experience of the Scottish food system throughout their lives'*. Here, women are distinguished from men only in terms of '*breast-feeding mothers*' (the policy aims to promote breast feeding for reasons of health and economy). The Plan also mentions '*women and girls*' as a group '*disproportionately*' affected by conditions that can be managed via diet, i.e. at puberty, pregnancy, menopause, and post menopause. It refers to the Women's Health Plan[32] which aims to address women's health inequalities by raising awareness around women's health; improving access to health care for women across their lives; and reducing inequalities in health outcomes for women and girls'. Policymakers refer to women twice but only tangentially: first in highlighting that the Plan is underpinned by human rights instruments, including Article 12(2) (as it concerns adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation) of the UN's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). Second, stating its vision for Scotland to be '*a leading Fair Work Nation by 2025'*, the Plan cites Scotland's refreshed Fair Work Action Plan (2022)[33], including its aim to 'continue to reduce the gender pay gap and disability employment gap and labour market inequalities for racialised minorities and reduce intersectional barriers.

Given that women are often stereotyped as, and expected to be, food providers, it is noteworthy that, other than in the instances cited above, they are not explicitly mentioned in relation to achieving the outcomes of this plan. That could be read as ignoring the key contribution that women have made, and will continue to make, in this realm. Alternatively, it could be read as not allocating responsibility for Scotland's food-related health outcomes disproportionately to women.

The Good Food Nation Plan states that, in preparing the Plan, Ministers '*must have regard to several international human rights instruments*', which include 'Article 12(2) (so far as it as concerns adequate nutrition during pregnancy and lactation) of 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 occupations/enterprises related to the policy. It is hard to see how it could do so without the availability of gender-disaggregated data. This policy does not include specific supports to advance women entrepreneurs or rural women. This plan is not in itself concerned with the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas but includes a significant amount of related content in the section headed '*Farmers, Food Producers and Processors*' (pp. 45-56). As the plan makes clear, this

[32] Women's health plan - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)
[33] Fair Work action plan: becoming a leading Fair Work nation by 2025 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

component intersects with the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill[34] introduced to Parliament in 2023. The policy does not mention digital inclusion or AI.

The Good Food Nation Plan does not necessarily intersect with policies related to climate change. It refers to climate change specifically in the Section titled '*Farmers, Food Producers and Processors*' (pp. 45-56), where it recognises its likely impact on food production and notes the importance of farming-related actions in order for Scotland to meet emissions reduction targets and capture the economic and social benefits of a net zero economy (p. 46). The Plan expresses its commitment to work with '*rural partners to co-produce and co-develop our future support structures and their delivery*' (p. 46). However, the plan does not specifically mention women in this regard.

**Spain:**

Spain has no single corresponding Farm to Fork strategy. The one that aligns most closely is the National Plan for Official Control of the Food Chain 2021-2025 (thereafter plan) and this was used for the benchmarking alongside the Strategy for Supporting Organic Production (thereafter strategy). The plan aims to: reduce risks to health of people, animals and plants; ensure animal welfare; guarantee food quality (including Differentiated Quality and Organic Production of agri-food products); combat food fraud throughout the food chain; achieve a sustainable agri-food system; increase consumer confidence; guarantee consumer rights to information and protect against unfair commercial practices. The plan does not mention gender apart from stipulating that officials must avoid discriminating in terms of "*birth, racial or ethnic origin, gender, sex, sexual orientation, religion or beliefs, opinion, disability, age or any other personal or social condition or circumstance*". The plan does not have a gender dimension, nor support for entrepreneurship, nor does it mention wage or pension gaps between men and women. The main aims of the strategy are to preserve the environment, maintain or increase soil fertility, and provide quality food. Our analysis also refers to this strategy. It does not refer specifically to gender. The strategy aims to improve the sector in general mostly through education/training and access to markets but makes no mention of gender. Both documents do not include measures that specifically target women or any other social group and do not mention specific supports to advance women entrepreneurs or rural women. The National Plan for Official Control of the Food Chain includes programs (e.g. for auditing, inspection and data collection) that will necessarily employ AI and digital technologies, although this is not mentioned in the document. The same applies to the Strategy for Supporting Organic Production. However, neither strategy considers these technologies in terms of gender equality. The plan is based on the principles of safety, health, quality, animal welfare, and the sustainability of the Spanish food system, which accord with the actions to combat climate change. However, the policy does not consider whether or how women and men might be differently affected by climate change. The strategy highlights the importance of organic production in combatting climate change and maintaining biodiversity and states the need to take '*the social*

[34] Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill. For policy details of the Bill, see: https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/legislation/bills/s6-bills/agriculture-and-rural-communities-scotland-bill/introduction/policy-memorandum-accessible.pdf.

*aspect of organic production*' into account.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Food of Spain publishes an annual study of national organic farming. This does not include gender-differentiated statistics regarding farm type or ownership of organic farms. Also, Spain has various Autonomous Communities and cities that have implemented food strategies within the scope of their competencies. Some of them include *Strategic Food Plan for Catalonia 2021-2026, Strategic Plan for Gastronomy and Food of Euskadi 2024, Agri-food Strategy Valencia 2025* and these mention gender equality and support for women as part of their objectives.

**Sweden**

Sweden's National Food Strategy extends from 2016 to 2030 was used for the benchmarking exercise and it envisages a globally competitive, innovative, sustainable food sector with attractive employment conditions.

Its overarching goal is for a competitive food chain that benefits from increased production; achieves national environmental goals; creates growth and employment and contributes to sustainable development throughout Sweden. Production, both conventional and organic, should be consumer-driven and aim to improve national food security. The policy does not consider issues related to gender. Instead, it states that '*The food strategy is not considered to have any direct consequences for gender equality*' (Government bill 2016/17:104, p. 91). It only occasionally refers to '*women*' first, in the context of young women having healthier diets than men; and second in recognising the vital role of Sámi women as carriers of essential knowledge for preserving and developing Sámi food (Government bill 2016/17:104, p. 96). The Swedish food strategy does not consider differences between men and women in occupations/enterprises related to the food chain. There are no specific measures that target women in the Swedish food strategy. While there is mention of women entrepreneurs, in conjunction with mentioning men, there are no specific measures in the Swedish food policy that sets out to support women entrepreneurs, or rural women. This policy does not include specific supports to advance women entrepreneurs or rural women. The Swedish food strategy is not concerned with the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas. It does however recognise that '*a competitive food sector*' is important for the long-term sustainable growth of the country as whole, and '*for maintaining attractive rural areas and for the environmental values that depend on active agricultural activity*" (Government bill 2016/17:104, p. 10). The Swedish food strategy does not discuss AI. It talks about digital technologies in terms of opportunities to streamline production and optimize use of resources for a '*new, smarter and more sustainable food industry'*. The policy does not consider the use of digital technologies in relation to gender (in)equalities. The Swedish food strategy is concerned with climate change but makes no explicit connection to gender or questions of gender equality.

***Table 2. National Policy Documents use for Benchmarking (Farm to Fork Strategy)***

| Country | Policies Benchmarked |
|---|---|
| Croatia | National action plan for the development of ecological agriculture 2023-2030. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Ireland | Food Vision 2030: A World Leader in Sustainable Food Systems |
| Italy | Strategia "Dal produttore al consumatore" (there is not a different document at the national level, it the Commission Communication) |
| Lithuania | **Managers of the 2022-2030 Development Program Ministry of Agriculture of The Republic of Lithuania Land and Food Agriculture, Rural Development and Fisheries Development Program**<br>There is no policy directly corresponding to the Farm to Fork policy at the national level in Lithuania. |
| Netherlands | Van Boer-tot-Bord strategie indicatoren in Nederland *(Farm to Fork strategy indicators in the Netherlands)* |
| Norway | Document A (THE MAIN DOCUMENT): *Meld. St. 11 (2016-2017) Endring og utvikling. En fremtidsrettet jordbruksproduksjon. Landbruks- og matdepartementet*. (white paper)<br>Document B: *Prop. 1 s (2023-2024) For budsjettåret 2024. Landbruks- og matdepartementet* (Proposal for the next year's state budget) |
| Scotland | Scotland's Good Food Nation Plan (January 2024) |
| Spain | **National Plan for Official Control of the Food Chain 2021-2025**[1]<br>**Strategy for Supporting Organic Production**[2] |
| Sweden | *Government bill 2016/17:104. A food strategy for Sweden - more jobs and sustainable growth throughout the country (my translation) (Regeringens proposition 2016/17:104. En livsmedelsstrategi för Sverige – fler jobb och hållbar tillväxt i hela landet Prop. 2016/17:104). There is no policy directly corresponding to the Farm to Fork policy at the national level in Sweden.* |

## 6.3 EU Green Deal

Findings from the benchmarking exercise in all nine countries for the EU Green Deal are presented below for each country. See table 3. for titles of the policy documents used for each country.

**Croatia:**

Seven policy and strategy documents equivalent to the EU's Green Deal policy were identified and used for gender benchmarking. First, the National Development Strategy (NDS) of the Republic of Croatia presents the vision for Croatia until 2030 and considers the European Green deal and the European Territorial Program 2030 in developing it objectives. It presents comprehensive directions and strategies for the long-term development of society and the economy in all important issues. The NDS does acknowledge the inequality between men and women in the labour force and have begun to implement several initiatives to help protect women's rights and increase employment outcomes for women. There is also an expectation that future work of institutions should lead to the complete elimination of inequality in wages and leadership positions in the labour market. There are also plans to reduce and eliminate the loss of income of parents, especially women during maternity and parental leave. 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. There is however no clarity from the NDS on what initiatives

have been launched, how the institutions can contribute to the complete elimination of inequality between women and men or how women's entrepreneurship can be improved. One of the strategic objectives of the NDS lists support for female entrepreneurs as priority at the national level and not specifically for the EGD. The policy presents pathways for funding the objectives it plans to achieve in the short to medium term from a combination of national funds, private capital funds and European funds. The strategy also promotes support for women in agriculture and aquaculture especially entrepreneurs and considers the need for work-life balance and childcare needs. However, there is no clarity on whether this support will promote women's leadership and decision-making. Digital technology and AI are recognised as important for productivity and competitiveness as well as the educational skills developed and programmes designed to meet technology needs, but a gender perspective for women's inclusion is not addressed.

Overall, while this strategy presents a holistic approach to achieving its objectives at national level and tackling the threats that climate change pose while decarbonising the energy, there is no gender disaggregated data on uptake or success. There is also no recognition of the differential effects of climate change on women, no measures that include women or treat them as a special category, and no specific groups of women or other social groups.

Second, Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia Until 2030 with a view to 2050 is the overarching document that serves as a guide for Croatia's transition towards low carbon economy and efficient resource use for sustainable development. This strategy seems technically comprehensive and shares the climate neutrality ambitions expressed in the EU's Green Deal and is regularly reviewed. It presents several scenarios and initiatives for achieving the EU's net emission target across different sectors including agriculture, land use, land use change and forestry. For these sectors, it plans to follow a rural restorative approach which will drive economically viable and competitive economies and is expected to help attract "young and educated" farmers and help large farms improve yields without jeopardising food production. The strategy also acknowledged that the implementation of the measures to reduce carbon emission in the agricultural sector would have both economic and sociological implications. All emphasis placed on improving technical aspects of the production and land use in agriculture that contribute to carbon emission. However, how these sociological implications will be measured and assessed especially from any gender dimension remains vague.

The five (See table 3) remaining policies and strategies benchmarked align with the EU's Green Deal and Croatia's National Development Strategy (NDS). They all present comprehensive strategic, legal and even scientific frameworks to help achieve their respective objectives for the citizens of Croatia at both national and regional levels in agriculture and other sectors. However, when measured against the benchmarking framework, they fall short in explicitly presenting how the measures in the documents assess any gender issues in line with the requirements of the EU GES or address how gender equality will be achieved through their implementation.

**Ireland:**

The **Climate Action Plan** (3rd annual update[35]) and **Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan** were used in the benchmarking exercise for Ireland. The Climate Action Plan is part of Ireland's obligations under EU and international treaties like the Green Deal and the Paris Agreement. It aims to follow the principles of Ireland's Just Transition Framework that promotes citizen engagement for achieving climate objectives across several sectors including agriculture. For agriculture and land use, land use change and forestry (LULUCF), the Just Transition Framework seeks to provide targeted efforts towards Ireland's carbon emission objectives. This entails an "*integrated, structured and evidence-based approach, ensuring the "the right skills*", "*equitable impact*", and "*social dialogue*" to enable Irish farmers and food producers further "*prioritise the delivery of environmental, social and economic sustainability*". However, there is no mention of how gender is integrated into this. It also does not mention, or challenge gender stereotypes related to climate change within these sectors. Gender neutral language is mostly maintained and the specific value of women's (or men's) contribution and challenges to achieving Ireland's climate targets are not mentioned. There is limited specificity on what women contribute as well as the challenges and vulnerabilities that they face as a result of climate change. There is also mention that Ireland supports the UNFCCC's Gender Action Plan, but it is not clear in the document how this will be applied. The few instances where women are mentioned in the whole document was in "*International Climate Action*" where it categorises women with girls and other vulnerable groups and mentions a "*gender sensitive approach*" to international climate finance. With citizen engagement in Ireland, it was made clear that climate change affects everyone but not equally, as well as the need for government to engage with individuals, communities and organisations to take climate actions. However, data collected from insights from citizen engagement for farmers is not gender-disaggregated neither does it break it down by any social or vulnerable group. There is also no mention of specific measures targeted at engaging women specifically, although there is mention of "*engaging the disengaged and empowering the engaged*". The plan also states that there is government funding commitment for reaching carbon emission goals through the "*results-based Agric-Climate Rural Environment Schemes (ACRES)*", with farmers as the "*leading actors of change*". But is not specific on the how gender is considered for this. The right skills also mentioned the need for identifying skills needs and improving skills and competencies in the agri-food sector, but remains gender neutral with no mention of women, men or new entrants in the agri-food and Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sectors. The only reference to women training in the Climate Action Plan 2024 is in terms of Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB)/ Retrofit training where it is mentioned that record numbers of women participated in the scheme in 2023 (+2% since 2022) (p. 215). Also, no context is provided for this figure and the potential positive consequences of increased female participation in this scheme is not explored. At no point in the document is this linked to women's (or specifically women in agriculture or rural sectors) entrepreneurship activities. With the equitable impact in agriculture and LULUCF sectors, there is no mention of gender gaps in care needs, pay, participation or women's leadership and participation in agricultural organisations and networks, and decision-making at all levels. The just transition action of equitable impact also recommends "*effort-sharing*

[35] This plan is also the second to be prepared under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021. A more recent Climate Action Plan was published in 2025 when this report was being written and was also reviewed.

*strategy, data collection, evidence and monitoring of the distributional impacts in agriculture and LULUCF*", but there is no mention of how gender is considered in these.

The report also mentioned "*investment in new systems and through digitalisation including the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) into Earth and climate observation systems*" but does not consider gender difference in digital inclusion or AI in agriculture and LULUCF.

Ireland's **4th National Biodiversity Action Plan** (NBAP) reflects several EU policies including the EU Green Deal to meet global and local biodiversity targets. The National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) sets out 23 targets in the appendix of the document to help achieve its objectives and plans. Target 23 is set to "*ensure gender equality in the implementation of the framework through a gender-responsive approach*" as one of the targets. And target 22 plans to "*ensure inclusive, effective and gender-responsive representation and participation in decision-making*" (p. 122). With target 22, reference is made to the Aarhus Convention and its protocol that empowers citizens with the right to access information. Target 23 refers to the National Biodiversity Action Plan on women's rights with references to the Irish constitution "all *citizens shall, as human persons, be held equal before the law*" (p. 122) and the National Strategy for Women and Girls (which ended in 2020) promoting gender equality. This policy asserts that it recognises "*their [women's] equal rights and access to land and natural resources and their full, equitable, meaningful and informed participation and leadership at all levels of action, engagement, policy and decision-making related to biodiversity*." (p. 122). However, the historical issues and socio-cultural factors and gender norms around land succession that have traditionally led to women being sidelined in land ownership are not mentioned. Throughout the document, gender stereotypes are not challenged. Women are referred to in combination with "*women and girls*" (p. 122) and along with other marginalised groups i.e. indigenous people and other communities, children and youth and persons with disabilities.

**Italy:**

The ***Piano per la Transizione Ecologica (PTE)*** (English: Ecological Transition Plan) approved in 2022 was used for the benchmarking exercise for Italy. It provides a concrete roadmap for actions in the coming years for environmental problems and the solutions to address them and aligns with the EU Green Deal. The PTE does not have a specific section dedicated to gender, but it recognizes the importance of integrating gender equality into policies and actions for the ecological transition. The section "*Leaving No One Behind*" explicitly mentions gender equality as one of the cross-cutting objectives of the Plan. The document states that the ecological transition must be fair and inclusive, ensuring that no one is left behind. In this context, it emphasizes the importance of addressing gender inequalities and promoting equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender. The policy does not mention difference between men and women with regards to pay gaps, pension gaps or occupation. 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. But there are no specific measures targeted at women and as such it is not possible to identify budgetary allocation targeted at women. The plan

focuses on broader goals and actions aimed at achieving climate neutrality and promoting a just transition, without providing a detailed breakdown of how these goals will be achieved in relation to gender equality. The PTE explicitly mentions the empowerment of young people as cross-cutting objectives. It recognises the importance of participation and involvement of young people in the transition process through training, upskilling and creation of business and job opportunities. But there are no specific measures targetted at young people. While the plan promotes the importance of education and skills for green transition, entrepreneurship, financial instruments for investment in sustainable projects 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. It also does not explicitly address women's leadership and participation in agricultural organizations and networks, or in decision-making processes related to the ecological transition. Clear concern for the long-term vision of rural areas in terms of the opportunities and challenges is stated in the PTE, again there is no gender dimension to this. The document does not explicitly mention digital inclusion, and it does only mention the use of Artificial Intelligence to monitor the territory and combat the abandonment and burial of waste. Despite the focus of the PTE on environmental outcomes and concerns with climate change, the policy does not explicitly acknowledge the differentiated impacts of climate change on women and men. The document primarily focuses on the environmental and economic aspects of the transition, without delving into the social and gendered dimensions of climate change vulnerability and adaptation. However, the plan's emphasis on social equity and inclusivity can be interpreted as an implicit recognition that climate change may affect diverse groups in society disproportionately. While not specifically mentioning gender, the PTE's commitment to "*leaving no one behind*" suggests an awareness that vulnerable groups, which often include women, may require particular attention and support in adapting to the challenges of climate change.

**Lithuania:**

The **Lithuanian Climate Change Management Agenda** 2021 was used for the benchmarking exercise as it aligns with the EU's Green Deal to work toward sectoral transformation in different sectors including agriculture to achieve carbon emission goals for Lithuania. The document considers several EU policies and initiatives on climate change; however, it does not explicitly consider gender. It uses gender-neutral language and approaches inclusivity based on social and economic equity without specifying gender-based strategies. While the document advocates for social equity in the transition to a low-carbon economy, it does not specifically address or seek to dismantle gender stereotypes. Women and men are not specifically mentioned in the document. Instead, terms like "*social inclusivity*" and "*vulnerable groups*" are used, but gender-specific language is absent.

The document does not address women's rights or focus on promoting equal opportunity from a gender perspective. It primarily emphasizes inclusivity in economic opportunities tied to green jobs, support for vulnerable groups, and reductions in energy poverty, but without a targeted focus on gender equality. The importance of retraining and encouraging new entrants to support green technologies and sustainable industries is mentioned, but there were no specific strategies to encourage women or address any gender-specific entry barriers or support for women in green jobs

or training. There is also no mention of gender pay gaps or pension disparities. The agenda discusses economic benefits from climate action, such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and reduced energy poverty, but without addressing gendered financial inequities specifically. Although rural areas are targeted for climate resilience, it does not address gender-specific care burdens. The policy does include a long-term vision for rural areas, with several objectives aimed at enhancing rural resilience to climate change. However, it does not specifically target women entrepreneurs or rural women, nor does it provide gender-specific measures for rural economic development. Reference is made to digitalization, the use of technology and skills that prepare workers for changes in the labour market to support the transition to a low-emission economy, but does not explicitly promote digital inclusion, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) or gender differences that could arise. Finally, 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 communities but lacks specific gender-based analyses, gender-disaggregated data or considerations regarding differentiated climate impacts on women and men.

**Netherlands:**

The ***Integraal Nationaal Energie- en Klimaatplan*** **2021-2030 (Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030)** and ***Klimaatakkoord*** **(Climate Agreement), 2019** were used in the benchmarking exercise for the Netherlands. With regards to the Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030 there are no gender considerations integrated in the policy. There is no acknowledgement or intent to address gender inequalities regarding climate change and mitigation and adaptation strategies. 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 seemingly acknowledgement of unevenly distributed consequences of climate change is the referral to low- and high household income groups, and the financial relief the policy integrates for lower household incomes. There is generally little reference to individuals in the policy, with no mentioning of men and women particularly. It is stated that by 2037, The Netherlands will rely on immigration to continue population growth, yet immigrants are also not addressed in this policy as a separate identity group (pp. 11). The document appears written from a strong macro-economic lens, and mainly refers to different sectors, national trends and different energy sources. The policy seemingly has a strong top-down and technocratic character. For example, looking into agricultural and land use policies more specifically, there are four main lines, all focused around reducing $CO_2$ (or similar) emissions. These are: a) emission reduction in livestock farming, b) emission reduction and $CO_2$ storage through smart land use, c) Food consumption and waste, d) Making greenhouse horticulture more sustainable. The role of '*people*' in general fails to appear in any of these approaches – commonly using top-down terms such as '*companies*' and '*organisations*' (pp. 57). The role of people, and of consumers more specifically, is a little more elaborated on regarding food consumption and waste. But this is still abstract and no real targets, or even budget, is discussed. Overall, there is a large

dependency on external parties and sector stakeholders finding solutions themselves (pp. 67). It recognises that more people are needed to work in energy transition and thus this work needs to be made attractive with good working conditions, development opportunities, knowledge, skills, targeted (although unspecified) technological and social innovation. The policy does not have specific measures targeted at women and does not identify any other social groups as specific targets. There is a strong emphasis on public-private partnerships in terms of funding; to stimulate private investment to avoid giving subsidies (pp. 79). This could be considered as excluding women who tend to have smaller-scale initiatives and less financial capital to invest with. There is a clear desire to invest in research & development with the ambition to spend 2.5% of GDP in RD&D. 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. While the policy concerns climate change mitigation and adaptation as its main topic, it does not specify how women and men, or other social groups, are impacted by climate change differently. It does briefly acknowledge how citizens and companies are confronted in diverse ways with the burdens and benefits resulting from energy and climate policy (pp. 18). The policy does acknowledge the importance of citizen participation in the design of policy (instruments). However, it does not consider digital inclusion or the use of AI. There is no mention of long-term vision for rural areas and is written for a top-down transition. There is also no standardisation between provinces so each region can focus on the most relevant issue at hand.

The objective of the **Climate Agreement** is a national reduction target, as established in the Climate Act (p. 8) and aligns with the emission targets in the EU Green Deal. The policy dedicates a chapter specifically to Agriculture and Land Use and consider them essential for reaching national ambitions for carbon goals. The policy seems very business-orientated and written from a supply-chain perspective. There are no gender considerations integrated in the Climate Agreement. The policy does not challenge gender stereotypes, raise awareness about women's rights, or promote equal opportunity. The policy does not refer to individuals often. It does refer to male and female farmers a few times by using the Dutch male version of the word farmer(s), namely '*boer(en)*'. It also refers to entrepreneurs (a gender-neutral term in Dutch). The female version of the word farmer ('*boerin*') is not mentioned, while the male version ('*boer*') is mentioned seven times. The document does not include any kind of statement about the use of '*boer(en)*' referring to both male and female farmers. The policy contains one section that structurally refers to the businesses individual farmers by using '*his/her*' (p. 135). However, it also contains sections that refer to farmers specifically by using male pronouns. There is an acknowledgment that the agricultural sector comprises of a "*large number of family businesses and cooperative structures*" (p. 127) but that investments in ecological innovation need to be commercially and economically stable. It does not go into the distinct roles, or actors, involved in farming family businesses and how they will be supported during the proposed changes. The policy contains no gender dimension, does not address gender pay gaps, pension gaps, or gender care gaps. The Climate Agreement proposes that transition will be an "*inclusive process…including those at a disadvantage from the labour market*" (p. 209) but fails to elaborate on who these people may be. Furthermore, it declares that "*new and existing jobs should be of an adequate standard*" (p. 209) but it fails to specify to what standard this could be or entail. The policy does however mention how the success of the energy transition depends on employment

opportunities, but there is no mention of creating gender equal opportunities. The capacity and needs of the agricultural labour force is only fleetingly addressed with the suggestion for employment opportunities outside the sector as part of the solution for energy transition. It is however recognised that the agricultural sector needs the *"development of reliable, structural earnings model*" (p. 128), but concrete proposals are not forthcoming, and no obvious plans are being made to encourage new entrants (even women) to the farming occupation. The policy mentions the role of agricultural education in contributing to the knowledge of the climate and *"climate-smart production methods"* of entrepreneurs, business successors and site managers (p. 131). However, there is no mention of budget allocation to the education of both farmers and advisors. The policy also does not consider areas that advance women entrepreneurship, or support/promote women's leadership and participation in agricultural organisations and networks, and decision-making at all levels. Despite acknowledging that innovation is required to meet the policy objectives, there is no clarity on where the funding for innovation will be sourced from. The Climate Agreement shows commitment to a participatory approach; it is not clear how this is formalised as localised regions and municipalities are left to determine the best way to engage stakeholders and citizens. Also, there is no guarantee that gender considerations or inclusivity with the participatory approach. *LTO Nederland* is mentioned often as the partner representing farmers and a collaborator with the government to implement the changes. However, it is not addressed that they do not represent every farmer especially women, and this could lead to excluding the voice of farmers who are not members of this group. Digital learning is mentioned as part of the proposed changes to the educational system for skill to reach objectives, but this is not further elaborated in the policy (p. 131). In fact, the policy acknowledges uncertainty regarding the feasibility and intensification of technology measures and developments that form part of this agreement (p. 7). There is also no consideration for AI. Climate change is one of the key drivers of this policy. Yet, the policy does not acknowledge how women and men are impacted by climate change differently or present why it is important to have everyone – men and women - fully involved, committed, and supported in the green transition. It is however acknowledged the proposed changes may be difficult and challenging (p. 124).

**Norway:**

Two documents were used for benchmarking (See Table 5.3). First, **the *Meld. St. 13 (2020-2021) Klimaplan* for 2021-2030** is a plan to achieve the climate target of 50-55% cuts by 2030 and the long-term target of 90-95% cuts by 2050. The plan contains policies to reduce emissions subject to quotas and those not subject to quotas, to increase the uptake of $CO_2$ and reduce emissions from forests and other land use. Gender considerations are not integrated in this policy and thus does not challenge gender stereotypes. 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 also contribute to the reduction of emissions. It does promote digital inclusion as part of the green transition and circular economy but does not consider AI, gender differences or even inequality in the context of the framework used in the benchmarking exercise.

The ***Prop.1 S (2023-2024) Proposisjon til Stortinget*** presents the challenges, result areas and national goals in climate and environmental policy and main priorities in the budget for 2024. It contains budget proposals, climate and environmental policies to achieve national goals and sustainability of social security and preparedness, renewal and equality in environmental management. It considers gender equality and diversity in environmental management and sets it as a requirement to actively ensure equality and stop discrimination. The status of gender equality in the Ministry of Climate and Environment is reported using various indicators. However, it is not clear whether this is done for other sectors especially agriculture and rural areas as there was no consideration for the differences between women and men in occupation or enterprises related to the policy. Further, it highlights differences in the way climate change and policies affect men and women and that it therefore is important to implement a gender perspective in the development of climate change policy and to ensure that girls and women are included and have real influence in decision-making processes about climate. Through Nordic co-operation, a joint Nordic declaration on "*A Green and Gender Equal Nordic Region*" has been drawn up, which was presented during the UN Women's Commission Conference in March 2022 (CSW66). Gender considerations are also included in the theme of cultural heritage and environment as most cultural heritage is gender neutral, and the equality aspect is therefore linked to gender functions and roles in the home and in society. It highlights differences in the way climate change and policies affect men and women. It draws attention to women's rights to participate in decision-making processes and emphasizes inclusion and equal opportunities to influence processes and decisions. There are no specific measures to support entrepreneurs or women in rural areas. Also, it does not consider different employment/income/social security needs, different ageing issues or gender and care gaps. Digitalization is considered as a strategy both in businesses and society to support the green transition in diverse ways but does not consider gender differences or inequality as part of this.

**Scotland:**

While Scotland does not currently have a correspondingly named equivalent, following Brexit, the Scottish government has sought to align its policies to those of the EU, while noting that its powers and capacity are necessarily limited by dependency on the United Kingdom government. Two documents[36] that align closely with the EU's Green Deal were used in the benchmarking exercise. The **Green Industrial Strategy** "*aim to ensure that Scotland realises the maximum possible economic benefit from the opportunities created by the global transition to net zero*". 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. 40). This business base include: (i) developers and large businesses; (ii) small and medium enterprises (SMEs); (iii) professional and financial services; (iv) investors. Support for SMEs '*will be inclusive for rural and island businesses*

[36] Five other documents were assessed but where not included in the benchmarking exercise. These documents include Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill, National Good Food Nation Plan, Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation, Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan and Scottish Biodiversity Strategy to 2045.

*that are well-placed geographically to benefit from supply chain opportunities*.' Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) 'will *offer strategic and operational support to deliver the regional transformation opportunities of offshore wind and green hydrogen'* (p. 17). While fostering European partnerships, it also envisages growth, in-demand high quality training and reskilling, entrepreneurship, financial investment and innovation in different target sectors while remaining mindful of the potential impacts on communities. Although this strategy makes provision for education and training, it makes no specific provision for women in this respect. It acknowledges that women business founders face inequalities in accessing funding. The Strategy does not refer to a specific policy for a Long-Term Vision for 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. The Strategy refers to AI, but as a phenomenon whose growth will produce a demand for data centres (pp. 34-35). These fall into the category of EIIs (Energy Intensive Industries) and, as such, are presented here as offering an economic opportunity. The Strategy does not explicitly address digital inclusion, nor does it make provision to address gender inequality in this respect. It makes no direct reference to gender in relation to climate change.

The accompanying **Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Summary** summarises the Green Industrial Strategy's aims and expected outcomes and assesses their impact on existing identified inequalities, especially gender. It notes that the benefits of economic growth are not felt equally by individuals and communities; women and ethnic minorities tend to be under-represented in most sectors expected to grow under the net zero transition. Gender considerations are integrated in the assessment, and it challenges gender stereotypes. It acknowledges inequality in working opportunities among disabled people as well as the unbalanced care responsibilities and unequal access to investment and entrepreneurial activity that women mostly face. It also highlights gender pay gaps (26.6% which is higher than the overall Scottish gender pay gap of 15.6%), including in Low Carbon Transition sectors where women account for only 22% of those employed in energy, transport, construction, agriculture and manufacturing. The Assessment does not mention gender-related pension gaps but highlights the barriers to women participating in the green sector alongside sex-disaggregated data to support this. However, there are no specific references to rural women or entrepreneurs, rural areas or long-term plans for rural areas. The assessment concludes by noting that additional action will be needed to avoid perpetuating inequalities that exist in the 5 '*opportunity areas'* (wind power, carbon capture, utilization and storage (CCUS), Professional and Financial Services, Hydrogen, and Energy Intensive Industries) targeted for growth and investment, and anticipates '*that further impact assessments will be completed for specific projects as required*'. There is no reference to AI, but the topic is arguably beyond the scope of the document and makes no reference to climate change, but the topic is implicit in its rationale.

**Spain:**

Four policy documents were identified and assessed for the benchmarking exercise for Spain that aligns with the EU Green Deal (See Table 5.3). The aim of **Law 7/2021 on Climate Change and Energy**

**Transition** is to meet the Paris Agreement objectives through the decarbonisation of the Spanish economy. Law 7/2021 on Climate Change and Energy Transition is governed by equality between women and men. The law provides that the Just Transition Strategy, and the instruments for its implementation and development are developed considering the gender perspective. In this Law, women are not directly targeted, and gender stereotypes are not challenged.

The **Spanish Circular Economy Strategy 2030** aims to reduce national resource consumption, waste generation and food waste per person for retail and households, compared to 2010 levels. There are no gender considerations and no reference to women in this strategy.

The **National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan** aims for a 23% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions compared to 1990. This is consistent with an increased ambition at the European level for 2030, as well as with the Paris Agreement. In this Plan, all policies and actions developed must have a gender perspective and raise awareness of existing inequalities between women and men to overcome discrimination in the field of employment, education and training, and leadership. There are also specific references to women as consumers and users of energy. The aim is to reduce inequality from a gender perspective to reduce the gaps between women and men in consumer protection measures and vulnerable groups. It promotes women's participation and leadership in the new green jobs resulting from the energy transition. It plans to measure and analyse women's participation in energy transition employment to reduce participation gaps. The plan will launch two new funds to foster the development of business innovation and entrepreneurship and promote collaborative crowdfunding to boost eco-entrepreneurs. The plan wants to ensure compliance, fostering equality commitment to and diversity in all areas. The plan 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. The collaboration of municipalities, sectoral associations and promoters will be sought. 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 areas such as access to education and training; access to finance; access to innovation and other relevant policies. This is also in line with 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 among stakeholders. 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 regarding the promotion of entrepreneurship and the improvement of the employability and working conditions 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. This plan only makes generic references to the consideration of different employment/income/ 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 integration of climate change adaptation objectives and gender perspective are two of the cross-cutting measures of the plan.

The main objective of **Biodiversity and Science Strategy** is to organize, within the framework and as an application of the Spanish Strategy and the Spanish Science, Technology and Innovation Plan

(EECTI and PEICTI), a system that favours the generation and transfer of knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services, of quality, coordinated and integrated, inclusive and effective, that covers the needs of planning and management to achieve its protection, conservation, sustainable use, restoration and its economic and social value. One of the key principles on which the strategy is based is participation with a gender perspective through the opinions of the different actors involved in implementation and governance.

Apart from the **National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan**, all the other documents do not consider differences between men and women in occupations, new entrants, pay gaps and pension gaps. All documents do not mention explicitly the difference in care responsibilities. They also do not make differential gender considerations about AI.

**Sweden**:

Several government agencies work alongside the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency to develop strategies for climate and environmental goals in each sector. However, **Sweden's National Plan for Energy and Climate 2021-2030** was used for the benchmarking exercise as there is no single policy document equivalent to the EU Green Deal. The plan's objective includes reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, energy market efficiency and research innovation and competitiveness. When benchmarked against the framework for the EU GES, gender is not discussed. It also does not consider any form of gender stereotypes, nor does it raise any awareness about women's rights or promote equal opportunities for both men and women. How new entrants will be encouraged is also not mentioned. Gender pay gaps are also not considered. It does acknowledge a skills supply deficit in the energy sector because there are few women and a large gender difference as a result of more men working in the sector than women but there are no specific measures mentioned in the policy that target women or women entrepreneurs or any other social groups. The long-term development plan for rural areas within the context of the policy does not also consider gender, socio-economic aspects, or different care responsibilities. Overall, the policy focuses on technical solutions to climate change and climate adaptation. It does not consider the non-technical and social aspects that are crucial for the implementation of the technical solutions especially since women and men are affected differently.

***Table 3. National Policy Documents use for Benchmarking (EU Green Deal)***

| Country | Policies Benchmarked |
|---|---|
| Croatia | 1. National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia till 2030<br>2. Low-Carbon Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia Until 2030 with a view to 2050<br>3. Draft of Strategy for Bioeconomy 2035<br>4. Plan for Industrial Transition (PIT) of Northern Croatia, 2022<br>5. Plan for Industrial Transition (PIT) of Pannonian Croatia, 2022<br>6. Plan for Industrial Transition (PIT) of Adriatic Croatia, 2022<br>7. *Uredba o obnovi prirode* (Nature Restoration Regulation) |
| Ireland | 1. Climate Action Plan 2024 (3rd Annual update to Ireland's Climate Action |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Plan 2019)<br>2. Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023–2030 |
| Italy | *Piano per la Transizione Ecologica (PTE)* (English: Ecological Transition Plan) |
| Lithuania | Lithuanian Climate Change Management Agenda 2021 |
| Netherlands | 1. *Integraal Nationaal Energie- en Klimaatplan* 2021-2030 (Integrated National Energy and Climate Plan 2021-2030).<br>2. *Klimaatakkoord* (Climate Agreement), 2019. |
| Norway | 1. *Meld. St. 13 (2020-2021) Klimaplan* for 2021-2030. *Klima og miljødepartementet.* (white paper)<br>2. *Prop.1 S* (2023-2024) *Proposisjon til Stortinget. For budsjettåret 2024. Klima og miljødepartementet*. (Proposal for the next year's state budget) |
| Scotland | 1. Green Industrial Strategy<br>2. Green Industrial Strategy: Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Summary |
| Spain | 1. The Law 7/2021 on Climate Change and Energy Transition<br>2. Spanish Circular Economy Strategy 2030.<br>3. National Integrated Energy and Climate Plan (PNIEC) 2021 - 2030<br>4. Biodiversity and Science Strategy. |
| Sweden | Sweden´s updated national plan for energy and climate 2021 – 2030 |

## 6.4 Long Term Vision for Rural Areas

Findings from the benchmarking exercise in all nine countries for the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas are presented below for each country. See table 4. for titles of the policy documents used for each country.

**Croatia:**

One national and nine regional/local development strategy (LDS) documents were used for LTVRAs benchmarking exercise for Croatia (See Table 5.4). The main objective of the Local Development Strategy (LDS) is to improve rural development in each local action group (LAG) in the regions. They also aim to promote the sustainable management of natural resources, improve the quality of life in rural areas, promote the development of the rural economy and preserve rural heritage and traditions through the implementation of LEADER programme and other programmes. While men and women are mentioned in the LDS as part of the target group of projects or activities, there is limited clarity in gender policy, or considerations for addressing gender stereotypes or inequality. In interventions[37] where gender-specific aspects are mentioned, it is not clear how these interventions will really contribute to gender equality as there are no measurable goals. All LDSs state that they will contribute to the achievement of SO8 of the Common Agricultural Policy Strategic Plan (CAP SP), but most do not explain how they will contribute to the achievement of SO8. For some interventions, targets are set for reaching a small proportion of female-managed farms with selection criteria that do not consider gender differences in access to resources. Other interventions state that female managers/owners and young people will be given priority and

[37] For example, intervention (INT 2.1 and intervention 1.2) makes direct and significant contribution to objective SO8 of the CAP.

advantage in project selection with some advocating for at least 40% women represented in their boards for LAG tenders. Some LAGs have also organised trainings for women to close the knowledge skills gap and employment afterwards. But this was mostly for 2014-2020 and 2020-2021 with no recent projects/plans reported. What women need is mostly mentioned in some policies and trainings are organised in some instances, however how these needs or gaps will be filled are not specified. Overall, where gender stereotypes are mentioned, they are not challenged. Women are referred as '*žene*' (women) but there is no differentiating between different socio-economic positions or identities – there is no mention of rural women, farm women, young women (or of any specific age), women managers, women entrepreneurs, low employable/unemployed women, with children, ethnic/religious/linguistic minorities, migrants, LGBTIQ. LDSs do not address gender pay gaps, but it mentions there is a higher share of unemployed females than males. All LDSs aim to create new jobs and encourage new entrants, however there are no specific plans on how to encourage new entrants, as is the case in all analysed documents and they do not address the gender dimension. Some of the LDSs state that women are among the most vulnerable social groups. However, these documents do not address gender care gaps in rural areas nor the pension gaps. For example, the fact that there is huge lack of nursing homes in most municipalities is not related to reproductive work and unpaid work mostly done by women despite the ageing population. The LDSs do not analyse the differences in participation in women's and men's initiatives, different employment/income/social needs, aging issues. From the LDSs it is not possible to directly assess how the LAGs' policy participates in initiatives and whether men and women are considered differently in its activities. There is no single policy that identifies a specific need for the promotion of women entrepreneurs or rural women. Only policies that could contribute to improving life in rural areas in general have been identified.

The LDSs often mention digital transformation and digital agriculture but not in the context of gender difference. It is noted that the Information Technology (IT) sector and digitalization are underdeveloped in the LAGs' area. The aim of all LDSs is the digitalization of agriculture. However, the LDSs do not consider gender differences in the digital integration of AI and in terms of tackling gender inequality, the documents do not provide any concrete measures or provisions to address gender inequality. Climate change is mentioned in the context of the development of agriculture by preserving the environment, improving resilience to climate change and green transition. They do not consider that climate change affects men and women differently.

**Ireland:**

The Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025[38] was used for benchmarking. It establishes nine specific thematic objectives for development of rural Ireland and is informed by

[38] While it contains no direct reference to the EU-level "Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas," this policy document was selected for analysis as it outlines the strategies and objectives for rural development in Ireland during the timeframe of the GRASS CEILING project. It also covers the work of the Local Action Groups (LAGs), and partnerships involved in the implementation of the LEADER Programme in Ireland. There is no other Rural Development Programme (RDP) policy document for this timeframe as the previous iteration covered the period 2014-2022.

several national and EU policies including Project Ireland 2024, National Economic Recovery Plan, CAP and EU Green deal, among others. The chief focus of this policy is on establishing Ireland's response to the long-term vision for rural areas for the 2021-2025 period. Gender considerations are linked with the UN's SDGs on Gender Equality. One major gender consideration mentioned is succession and the "*cultural bias towards male successors*" in farms. This is linked to how it impacts women's engagement with agriculture and measures to address this bias are mentioned, but without being developed in any significant detail that can address this and other gender-based issues especially access barriers that women face. It also does not consider the contributions of women to the rural economy despite the roles that they play in organic, sustainable farming and diversification. No sex-disaggregated data are presented and not even for the consultative process used to develop this policy document despite contribution from participants of Rural Conversations Series, Regional Stakeholder Workshops, Youth Workshops or the Rural Development Monitoring Committee. While it is acknowledged that the traditional perception of farming as a male-dominated sector needs to be challenged, on the basis that the sector will not achieve its full potential otherwise, it does not go beyond this to debunk gender stereotypes. Women are referred to in terms of "*women and girls*" twice in this document where measures are proposed to understand their specific needs (pp. 57, 108). There is no reference to "*men and boys*" in this policy, highlighting that the needs of "*women and girls*" are presented here as a special category and not mainstreamed in the document. This policy raises awareness about women's rights by highlighting that farming has traditionally been a male-dominated area and that women have generally been overlooked in terms of farm succession (p. 86). It also asserts that further research is required to fully understand women's needs in agriculture (p. 108). The encouragement of new entrants and youth participation in agriculture and related enterprises are key considerations of this policy. For this, it promotes generational renewal, improving youth participation through participation in policy development, education in rural communities, mentorship opportunities and development of community leadership networks for young people. However, there is no gender dimension to the measures proposed for new entrants and similar measures are proposed for women and young people for generational renewal. Pay gaps are considered for regional and not on a gender basis. Moreover, when it mentions that farm incomes can be low, it does not acknowledge that this has been traditionally a critical issue for women who have traditionally not been formally registered as employees on family farms. Also, while figures from the Central Statistics Office (CSO) are included in this policy, quoting low levels of women registered as working in agriculture, forestry and fishing along with EU data on low levels of female farm managers in Ireland relative to the European average of 28% (p. 82), it does not mention the high numbers of women working in this sector who are unregistered as formal workers. There is no reference to pension gaps and gender care gaps are not addressed in this policy document. As an addendum to this, it must be noted that where women have been working unregistered on farms, they have faced barriers in accessing social security benefits and pensions. This widespread issue among older women working on family farms in Ireland is not acknowledged in this policy.

This policy briefly mentions specific measures targeted at women as part of Policy Measure 131 that aims to promote generational renewal. These measures are mentioned as "*the CAP, taxation measures and access to finance initiatives*" (p. 194) but they are not explained in greater detail.

This policy does not set out gender targets for its funding. There are no references to expenditures being tracked for gender equality. Each of the few measures mentioned to promote women's participation in agriculture treats them as a special category. These are not mainstreamed in the document. While this policy sets out 20 specific policy measures with the aim of "*Enhancing Participation, Leadership and Resilience in Local Communities*," only one of these mentions "*women and girls*" in rural areas and even then, not concerning their specific needs but in conjunction with other minority groups. Moreover, the delivery body for this measure is listed as "Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth" highlighting that women are not mainstreamed in this policy but are considered in connection with other disadvantaged groups. This policy measure sets out the need to conduct research to "*understand their needs*" (p. 88) rather than proposing proactive measures to promote women's leadership and participation in rural organisations and networks. While this policy references Ireland's National Positive Ageing Strategy it does not consider the different ageing issues experienced by men and women (p. 56)

Also, while the policy refers to plans to revise legislation in relation to the Nursing Home Support Scheme (Fair Deal Scheme) and its treatment of family-owned farm assets, (p. 15) it does not acknowledge that women in particular, can be negatively impacted on this issue when they are not named on farm bank accounts and title deeds. This policy notes that accessing childcare in rural areas is challenging as it might not be available in areas of low population density. Some options to address this are mentioned, for example, community-based childcare models. However, the importance of the gender dimension to this research is not noted nor is the fact that women generally carry the burden of childcare and require specific supports as a result. Mitigating measures are not proposed for different care responsibilities. The emphasis of the policy is on the expansion of health services in rural communities through the provision of digital health services. These are targeted at pregnant women (e.g. antenatal care; diabetes clinics), new mothers (breastfeeding clinics) and children (childcare clinics). However, the different benefits of these digital health services for men and women are not explored. This policy highlights two key initiatives for digital inclusion: the National Broadband Plan (p. 99) and the creation of 400 Remote Working Hubs in rural areas throughout the country. However, gender difference is not included in these plans. There is no reference to Artificial Intelligence (AI) in this policy. The focus of this policy throughout is on promoting digital connectivity and not on gender equality in terms of promoting digital inclusion. While a full chapter (8) of this policy document is dedicated to Ireland's commitment to climate action and the transition to a climate-neutral society, the different impacts of climate change on men and women are not acknowledged at any point. This policy uses gender-neutral language in relation to the green transition e.g. "*rural communities and businesses*" and *"communities*" (p. 69). It does not present why it is important to have everyone included, committed and supported in the green transition through the gender lens. It should also be noted that while Ireland's key sources of funding to support the green transition are established (e.g. from the EU's Just Transition fund and Climate Action Fund), no national gender targets are established.

**Italy:**

For Italy, this benchmarking looked at regional measures addressing gender and youth policies in

three Italian regions: the centre of Italy – Toscana -, the south – Puglia -, the north of Italy - Veneto. Several documents were consulted at regional level including tenders, measures (e.g. LEADER), ongoing projects. The measures are within the "*Complemento regionale per lo sviluppo rurale del* PSP 2023-2027 (CSR)", former regional Rural Development Plans (Piani di Sviluppo Rurale – PSR) and was used for the benchmarking exercise. The Italian long-term vision for rural areas is aimed at encouraging the active role of rural areas in implementing the green and digital transitions by improving the attractiveness and quality of life in rural areas and by developing intervention for stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040[39]. Overall, gender is marginally considered in the policy. Equal opportunities are described as fundamental to achieve the same level of integration between men and women. In this sense, there is mention of younger generation and women within which the promotion of the conditions of access to credit and land aims to allow young and women to run and develop new farms. There is not a specific consideration concerning gender stereotypes, it is mostly focused on how to address the gender inequalities-related issues.

The policy considers how to encourage new entrants to the occupation/enterprises to the extent that it provides for specific measures, also by distinguishing new entrants from young people. There are several examples of contributions provided for new businesses; in one of these cases the measure is principally addressed to young people among 18 and 35 and to women (Veneto region, measure "*female and youth entrepreneurship*"[40]. In other cases, it is indicated that in the event of equal scores, priority will be given to the application submitted by the younger beneficiary. The measure "*settlement of young farmers*" aims to contribute to the achievement of two strategic objectives: attracting and supporting young farmers and other new farmers and facilitating sustainable entrepreneurial development in rural areas, and promoting employment, growth, equality including women's participation in agriculture, social inclusion and local development in rural areas, including circular bioeconomy and sustainable forestry. Within this measure, among the selection principles there is also that of gender, without however specifying whether women are a priority subject. Some measures were planned to specifically support female entrepreneurship (for example, Veneto region, "*Investments in agricultural companies for diversification into non-agricultural activities*"[41]. Apart from that, when women are considered, they are usually mentioned among the selection principles. For example, priority criteria for investments in agricultural areas for diversification favour applicants under the age of 40 and farms run by women.

The policy does not consider specific groups of women according to age, migration, religion: this might be seen, on one side, like a neutral criterion or rather as a lack of due considerations, intersectionality related issues. It could be argued that to some extent, some measures support women's leadership since women are included as a priority category, it is not clear the extent to which female leadership is supported in networks and organisations.

The policy documents also do not consider if men and women participate differently in initiatives nor consider different employment/income/social security needs. There seems to be awareness that rural areas need to be more accessible and attractive by providing efficient social services,

[39] The long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: key achievements and ways forward
[40] https://www.regione.veneto.it/web/rete-degli-urp-del-veneto/imprenditoria-femminile
[41] Delibera-n.-19-del-07-08-2023-SSL-SRG.-con-allegato.pdf

however no measures are envisaged for the (child)care gap or to mitigate different care responsibilities. AI is also included to the extent that the regions have committed to a regional strategy for digitalisation in rural areas, but not specifically for women or gender related issues or purposes. Digital skills are indicated, in general, among those skills that need to be implemented, by stressing that in terms of digital skills, Italy ranks 25th out of 27 member states. This policy acknowledges the necessity to strengthen risk management tools and to enhance a climate commitment, to increase the degree of resilience of agricultural businesses, however it does not acknowledge that women and men are impacted by climate change differently. Additionally, the policy does not illustrate why it is important for everyone – men and women – to be fully involved, engaged and supported in the green transition.

**Lithuania:**

Lithuania does not have a document that directly addresses EU LTVRA policies at national level. Therefore, the National Progress Plan of the Republic of Lithuania 2021-2030 and Lithuania's 2022-2030 Agriculture and Food, Rural Development and Fisheries Development Programme were used since they cover rural areas and agriculture. The Agriculture and Food, Rural Development and Fisheries Development Programme does not mention the word '*woman*' or provide any gender dimensions, stereotypes, women's rights or promote equality of opportunities. The programme provides measures for regionally important economic activities and their development, but it does not include gender or gender equality dimensions. The National Progress Plan seeks to improve Lithuania's low gender equality index[42]. The implementation of the plan is expected to consider the needs of people with disabilities, women and men, different age groups, national minorities and other groups likely to be discriminated against and must provide for measures and indicators that implement the principle of equal opportunities. The plan highlights that there is still insufficient attention to areas such as the high burden of household and childcare on women, the availability of childcare facilities, the reconciliation of work and family responsibilities, gender balance in politics, the prevalence of gender stereotypes, the extent of domestic violence, and the differences in salaries and pensions between women and men. However, there are no specific measures targeted at women to help improve equality outcomes. Also, both documents do not consider how to encourage new entrants to rural areas and agricultural enterprises and do not show any specific measures targeted at women. One of the strategic objectives of the plan is "*to develop Lithuania's territory in a sustainable and balanced way and to reduce regional exclusion*" especially because regional areas in Lithuania are facing both population decline and chaotic urban development (suburbanisation). However, the plan does not provide a clear path to achieving this. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is mentioned only one time in the Plan with the need to increase digitalisation and technological renewal, however no specific measures are described on how to achieve this from a gender perspective. Overall, the Plan pays considerable attention to climate change and provides a coherent description of the climate change problem, statistics and targets for contributing to

[42] Lithuania has one of the lowest gender equality indices among EU countries and has not made significant progress in this area since 2005.

climate change mitigation for all without acknowledging how women and men are impacted by climate change differently or what their contributions are.

**Netherlands:**

There is no Dutch equivalent to the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas' (LTVRA). The LEADER could arguably be one of the policies that have inspired the LTVRA. It offers rural citizens the opportunity to develop projects that enhance the quality of rural life. There are 31 LEADER regions in the Netherlands and upon consultation with an expert in the Dutch LEADER network, one LEADER region – Salland - was selected for benchmarking. The Salland Local Development Strategy (LDS) reflects the vision for the future of Salland that has been created in consultation with over 400 people including local residents, entrepreneurs and stakeholder organisations. It emphasises collaboration to find solutions for major social challenges in rural areas and identified two themes that will improve social inclusion by making greater use of women's strength and talents to support LAGs. While this is a positive addition since women's potential and skills will be given more attention, women are not further identified in the remaining 40 pages. Gender equality is identified 3 times, all within the context of the first sentence quoted above and never further expanded on. *'Women'* appears once in the document and only within the theme on rural socio-economic development and not on theme on sustainable development despite it including potential entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, there is also no indication about what '*social inclusion*' entails.

Networking between and within groups of residents and entrepreneurs is seen as an existing strength within the LDS. Entrepreneurship is encouraged, especially as LEADER itself focuses on a bottom-up approach. There is a clear motivation and funding to support initiatives that add value to the community and promote collaboration and innovation. The need for the investments to benefit the community, however large or small, could potentially exclude women looking for a grant to begin an individual enterprise as no distinctions are made between men and women entrepreneurs. There are no measures specifically to advance women entrepreneurs. However, applications to the funding are open to all. There is no attention to pay or gender gaps and data on Salland is broken into postcodes and not by gender or age. There is a desired target of 50% women on the LAG, but it currently stands at 34% and there is no indication as to how it will change in the future. In terms of the budget available for the LDS, 60% of it has been allocated to the first theme (on rural socio-economic development) where gender equality falls under. Although it is not clear how much of this will target gender equality for women. 40% of the budget is for the second theme on sustainable rural development. While these are not fixed amounts, the type of projects that apply for the funds cannot be foreseen. Also, increase in inequality is identified as a threat to the area regarding opportunities in health and education but not gender. Aging population, unsatisfied youth and a polarizing population is a greater concern. This policy does not address digital inclusion or AI at any point. It is concerned with climate change, but it does not specify men or women in this context. There is emphasis on collaborative projects, but between who and the scale are left open.

**Norway:**

Two documents were used for benchmarking for Norway (see Table 5.4). The first document is on regional and rural policy for the future in Norway (thereafter policy) while the second document – proposal for the state budget (thereafter state budget) is necessary to find relevant budget allocations related to the LTVRA policy. The policy's objective is to ensure that people live good lives in all places in Norway including rural municipalities with room for development, value creation and access to work, housing and good services. While there are considerations for geographical location, age and immigrant in this policy, gender considerations are not mentioned explicitly. The previous white paper of the same kind, published in 2019 by the former government had gender considerations mentioned more explicitly (related to women and particularly rural women's, higher share of part-time working; women's lower share of entrepreneurial activities which they wanted to increase; as well as boys' higher share of withdrawal from secondary education). Gender considerations are better reflected in the state budget. With the state budget, county authorities are encouraged to ensure that a significant share of their business development funding goes to women-owned or women-led firms or to projects defined as women-oriented in other ways to improve women's skills, membership in boards, leadership, ownership and participation in business. The state budget supports entrants to entrepreneurial activities and there are specific measures targeted at women, where funding to women-oriented projects[43] is allocated and monitored. In the policy however, there are no mentions of specific measures targeted at rural women and women are not treated as a special category. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is responsible for coordinating the national work on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and efforts connected to some of these goals are also financed through this ministry's budgets, including Target 5.5: to "*Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life*." While women are specifically mentioned in the title of several others of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets that the ministry is responsible for, gender considerations are not mentioned explicitly in the strategies described for each of these targets. However, it is stated clearly that women and men should have equal opportunities, and that no-one should experience harassment or violence at their workplace. The policy mentions that funding is channelled through the county authorities to support and strengthen businesses in rural areas through rural-oriented risk loans, guarantees and investments. However, there is no reference to pension gaps in the policy. When gender is included in data, it is mainly explained with differences in the statistics for women and men; that the share of women needs to be increased. The measures further reflect the recognition that cultural conditions may impede gender equality in various cases. It mentions gender pay gaps, but mostly within public enterprises with reference to ensuring equality in pay regardless of gender. It does not address gender care gaps, but free childcare in kindergartens (together with payment of student loans) is used to reduce geographical "population gaps" by increasing the attractiveness of living in the most

[43] For example in 2022, : NOK 415,4 million was used for business development and investments funding, and women-oriented projects received 25 % of the total; NOK 163 million was used for rural-oriented risk loans and guarantees for short-time financing and women received 24 %; NOK 50,7 million was used for installation grants (both rural-oriented and nationwide) and women-oriented projects received 37 % of the rural-oriented grants and 24 % of the nationwide installation grants. (pp. 135-137).

peripheral areas in (Northern) Norway. The policy considers the long-term vision for rural areas different employment/income/social security needs that are related to geographical differences and age differences (the elderly), not so much on gender. Digital inclusion is mentioned in the policy however, it is not related to gender but to the elderly. The state budget mentions ICT within the context of regulation and ensuring equal participation. AI is mentioned in both documents but not related to gender or individual levels.

**Spain:**

Two policy documents were used in the benchmarking exercise for the LTRVAs for Spain. First the National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge (thereafter strategy), approved in 2019, aims to lay the foundation of a country project that guarantees equal opportunities and the free exercise of citizenship rights throughout the territory, through the coordination and cooperation of all Public Administrations, the sustainable use of endogenous resources and close public-private collaboration. This strategy does not expressly refer to gender perspective. Equality between women and men throughout the territory does not appear as one of the cross-cutting objectives or as one of the three main lines of action. However, there is recognition of the masculinization of the rural areas, limited opportunities for women compared with men and specific measures to achieve equality are established in some objectives and lines, especially in line II (improving the evolution of the population pyramid). To that effect, data on gender gaps in pay and contributory payments are present at the end of the document. In terms of finance, the Spanish Government, through the Ministry for Ecological Transition and Demographic Challenge, has invested EUR 10,000 million to achieve the proposals contained in the 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. Line of action II of the **Strategy** (section c, mainly) includes measures to empower women (revision of the Law on Shared Ownership and the CAP), subsidies to rural women's associations, digital training and entrepreneurship programmes for rural women (CERES, Empléate desde la Igualdad, Desafío Mujer Rural) or the creation of an Observatory for Women, Science and Innovation. The strategy has a long-term vision of at least two decades. It recognizes that women encounter greater difficulties for employment in rural areas. There is no express reference to the fact that women bear most of the care work, and only a very general mention is made of the need for measures to favour conciliation and co-responsibility. Older women are considered to be a particularly vulnerable group, with a significant presence in rural areas.

The strategy also has measures aimed at facilitating the digitization of the primary and agrifood sectors, as well as improving connectivity and supporting the transition to a smart rural economy, but they still do not differentiate between men and women. Another measure is the creation of Digital Innovation Hubs. However, AI is not considered. In the Strategy, climate change does not expressly appear either as one of the transversal objectives or as a line of action. But green jobs cited through the Just Transition Strategy and the National Energy and Climate Plan are aimed at areas affected by the ecological transition. Also, no gender dimension is specified.

Second, the Demographic Challenge Action Plan (thereafter action plan) operationalizes this National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge and translates it into more specific measures. This action plan is articulated around 10 axes and 130 measures whose implementation is expected to extend from 2021 to 2023. The main objective of the action plan is to improve the country's territorial cohesion, eliminate the urban/rural gap and promote actions in the areas most affected by inequality, i.e., small municipalities and rural areas. Gender considerations and perspectives are more present in the plan, and it expressly states that territorial cohesion is addressed with a gender perspective. The Government's priority is to eliminate the gender gaps resulting from the lack of territorial cohesion, in relation to the masculinization of the territory, the lack of opportunities for women in rural areas and regions in demographic decline, the burden of care for women resulting from the aging of the population, as well as gender violence. Equal rights and opportunities between women and men are taken into consideration by creating a specific axis for this purpose, axis 5. Likewise, gender measures are included in other axes, such as axis 6 on entrepreneurship and axis 2 on digitalization. The reference to men and women in the document is made in inclusive language, without making any distinction beyond the situations in which inequality is incurred. The plan promotes the incorporation of women into the labour market in all productive sectors through specific measures that support entrepreneurship and self-employment, training and education. These include financial support for entrepreneurship in innovative projects with a high technological component led by women (axis 5). Likewise, measures are proposed to support generational replacement in the agricultural sector, especially aimed at rural women and young people, as well as to increase the presence of women in decision-making in agrifood cooperatives (axis 5.3 and 5.12). Similarly, it should be noted that specific measures are proposed for other disadvantaged social groups, such as young people living in rural areas (to whom special reference is made throughout the text), people with disabilities (in terms of health or accessible tourism) or the creation of safe environments and anti-hate policies for women, minors, the elderly and immigrants. There is no specific mention of the pay gap in the plan, but the need to incorporate rural women into decent, quality jobs in order to achieve female empowerment and, therefore, real equality, is highlighted. On the other hand, the need to eradicate the care gap through measures that promote conciliation and co-responsibility, seeking an equitable distribution of responsibilities for the care of dependents, is mentioned on several occasions. The plan shows that appropriate measures in terms of "*conciliation and co-responsibility will increase the employability and job opportunities of rural women*". With regard to the data supporting the proposed measures, the plan disaggregates by sex the number of women and men in the Spanish rural areas compared to urban areas and the percentage of women participating in the governing councils and management boards of agrifood cooperatives, among others. The action plan consists specifically of the design of a series of long-term measures to improve Spain's rural areas and address their main problems. While emerging technologies such as AI may not be the main concern of rural areas in Spain, the action plan raises various proposals around two problems that are simpler from a technological point of view, but more serious from a rural reality: the connectivity problems that smaller municipalities face with difficulty and the deficiencies in digital skills. The plan also highlights the inequality between women and men stating that young women are affected in a particularly negative way. AI is referred to in the fourth axis, on sustainable tourism, providing for a specific line of financial support for the digital

transition of the tourism value chain, without appreciating distinctions by gender regarding this matter.

In terms of climate change, the action plan incorporates measures related to sustainable energy, energy rehabilitation of buildings, biodiversity, sustainable forest management or efficient and sustainable mobility, among others. In particular, different plans are proposed for agricultural and livestock farms in the search for sustainability, with part of the budget allocated to this through financial aid for companies in the sector. However, there are no distinctions between women and men in this regard. It is being understood that the measures for the green transition are aimed at society in general. In addition to the national-level policies, it should be noted that the three Spanish regions to which the women participating in the project belong, have their own rural Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA) policies (*Aragón, Asturias* and *Castilla y León*).

**Sweden:**

There is no recent policy directly corresponding to the Long Term Vision for Rural Areas (LVTR) at national level in Sweden. The Swedish Government is working on a comprehensive review of the Swedish rural policy, which was put in place in 2018. The ambition with the review is to present a new bill before the general election in 2026. The review is not presented in writing but has been reported upon by the Government[44]. As such this benchmarking exercise for Sweden used the policy currently in place, presented in the *Government bill 2017/18:179. A coherent policy for Sweden's rural areas – for a Sweden that sticks together (thereafter bill)*. It is currently being reviewed, was based on 75 proposals for a coherent rural development in Sweden put forward by a parliamentary rural committee working 2015-2017. In the instructions to the committee, the Government stressed the mainstreaming of gender equality. The parliamentary committee made 75 suggestions for a national rural policy to reach the overarching goal. The suggestions cover areas such as broadband; access to service; entrepreneurship; community planning and housing construction; skills supply and education; state presence in rural areas; and rural proofing. The overall goal is presented as: a coherent rural policy for viable rural areas with equal opportunities for entrepreneurship, work, housing and welfare which aims to lead to long-term sustainable development throughout the country. Rural policy is thus not only focused on the agricultural and forestry sectors, even though the government in the bill emphasized the importance of agriculture and forestry as well as other place-based industries. Rather, the purpose of the coherent policy has been to create better conditions beyond state and sector policy, as a previous challenge has been an increased 'sectorization' and downsizing of a rural perspective.

The Government Official Report (SOU 2017:1) states that the committee has adopted a gender equality perspective in the analysis work and reported how some of the committee's proposals measures promote equality between women and men. In total, '*gender equality*' is mentioned a handful of times, while '*women'/'woman*' is mentioned around 25 times in the bill, which is just over 100 pages. Gender mainstreaming is not mentioned in the bill.

The reasoning on gender equality is focused on the introduction of the bill, where it is stated that in

[44] https://www.regeringen.se/artiklar/2023/11/landsbygdernas-framtid-ar-sveriges-framtid/

order to increase diversity in rural areas women and men should have the same conditions to start and operate businesses. The bill recognizes that the majority of entrepreneurs in rural areas are men, while women forest-owners constitute Sweden's largest group of women business owners, even if the men still make-up the majority of forest-owners. Also, regarding gender equality, the report largely focuses on the conditions for women's entrepreneurship and access to distance education. Whilst these issues are important, it represents a limited view on both women and gender equality as only two of the 75 suggestions mention gender. One on establishing a research centre on entrepreneurship and the other on '*popular adult education*' (Swe. *folkbildning*) with aims of improving knowledge on women and men's conditions for entrepreneurship and increasing educational levels of men and women in rural areas, respectively. The bill also points to the importance of the Swedish system for equalizing tax resources and stresses that access to public childcare services is important for men and women's possibilities to take on employments.

At the launch of the policy, the Government constructed a rural policy budget framework of approximately SEK 750 million per year for three years, but the current Government (elected in 2022) has chosen not to take that further. The Swedish Agency for Economic and Regional Growth has had the task to coordinate and strengthen the rural development policy.

The bill presents gender in relation to education. It is argued that among those who leave the countryside for higher education elsewhere, the majority are women: Therefore, improved access to distance education is suggested, as it contributes to raising the level of education in rural areas and increases the supply of highly educated labour to benefit rural businesses and municipalities, as well as enabling both women and men to train for qualified jobs in the countryside. The bill does not challenge gender stereotypes, and it does not clearly raise awareness about women's rights or promote equal opportunity.

The bill argues that women's entrepreneurship is a strategic growth issue, and that a broad variety of businesses and entrepreneurs are important for competitiveness, renewal and sustainability. This can be interpreted as gender equality being more a means than a goal in the policy.

While conditions for women entrepreneurs are considered, no specific support or measures to advance women entrepreneurs or rural women more generally, are presented in the bill. The bill was presented before the EU LTVRAs, in 2017 and so does not have long-term vision for rural areas. There is also no consideration of digital inclusion and AI. The bill mentions climate change, but not in relation to women and men, or gender equality. The rural policy includes all three dimensions of sustainable development; economic, environmental and social. Finally, a review to ascertain how much of the 75 suggestions made by the parliamentary committee were performed was conducted by the Swedish NGO Rural Sweden's (*Hela Sverige ska leva*), in 2020, and they concluded that only three were completed – two on broadband and one on access to and participation in cultural activities in rural areas – and 32 were partly completed (Rural Sweden, *Rural Investigation*, 2020).

***Table 4: Documents Benchmarked for the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas***

| Country | Policies Benchmarked |
|---|---|
| Croatia | 1. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG-a Baranja for period 2023.-2027.<br>2. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG-a IZVOR for period 2023. – 2027. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 3. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG Una for period 2023. – 2027 (Previous version was 2014-2020)<br>4. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG Međimurski doli i bregi for period 2023. – 2027<br>5. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG Adrion for period 2023.-2027.<br>6. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG LIKA for period 2023.-2027.<br>7. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG VIP for period 2023.-2027.<br>8. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG Sava for period 2023.-2027.<br>9. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG Kvarnerski otoci for period 2023.-2027.<br>10. Lokalna razvojna strategija LAG Središnja Istra for period 2023.-2027.<br>11. National Development Strategy of the Republic of Croatia till 2030 |
| Ireland | Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 |
| Italy | *"Complemento regionale per lo sviluppo rurale del PSP* 2023-2027 (CSR)", former regional Rural Development Plans (Piani di Sviluppo Rurale – PSR). |
| Lithuania | 1. Lithuania's National Progress Plan 2021-2030.<br>2. Lithuania's 2022-2030 Agriculture and Food, Rural Development and Fisheries Development Programme |
| Netherlands | Salland Local Development Strategy (LDS) |
| Norway | 1. Meld. St. 27 (2022–2023) A good life throughout Norway – regional and rural policy for the future. Report to the Storting (white paper)<br>2. Prop. 1 S (2023 –2024) Proposal for the state budget in 2024. Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development |
| Scotland | 1. Agriculture Reform Route map (22 June 2023)<br>2. Policy Memorandum (Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill (28 September 2023)<br>3. Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) (21 February 2024) |
| Spain | 1. National Strategy against the Demographic Challenge<br>2. Demographic Challenge Action Plan |
| Sweden | *Government bill 2017/18:179. A coherent policy for Sweden's rural areas – for a Sweden that sticks together (Regeringens proposition 2017/18:179. En sammanhållen politik för Sveriges landsbygder – för ett Sverige som håller ihop).* |

# 7. Key Themes from the National Policy Benchmarking

The assessment of the national policy documents produced five overarching themes. These include clarity on gender mainstreaming in policy, gender data and gaps, gender and intersectional bundles, gender implementation Vs. inclusivity, gender technicality Vs. technical.

**Clarity on Gender mainstreaming in policy**

There is no doubt that across all the policies benchmarked, gender equality and gender are mentioned. Countries acknowledge that gender equality needs to be achieved by including gender in policies and strategies. However, most lack clarity on how their policy mainstreams gender. The majority do not provide country-specific information on the gender gaps that impact gender

equality. Also, in absence of clear guidance on how these policies intend to mainstream gender, it becomes difficult to assess performance on specific measures targeted at women for gender equality. Policies bounce between saying that they will use either a "*gender sensitive approach*" or "*gender responsive approach*" without elaborating how and why these approaches would help them achieve a gender equality objective in agriculture and rural areas.

**Gender data and gaps**

Data gaps reflect gender gaps. It also reflects achievements in closing gender gaps. In all the policies analysed, gender data gaps persist and continue to undermine the depth of information that policymakers rely on to formulate policies. Conscious efforts to use and state gender-disaggregated data is crucial for targeting measures for empowerment or support for women. Yet all the policies lacked structured mechanisms for gathering gender-disaggregated data. The raises the questions of whether gender data are collected to reflect the realities that show gender differences in agriculture and rural areas as designed with the intention that they can be assessed for performance in developing specific measures to support gender equality. Strategies that are not backed by data omit gender gaps in pay, pension and care.

**Women and intersectional bundles**

In all the policies analysed, women are mostly categorised with girls, young people, disabled or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+), and Intersex People. This sets a precedence that women belong to a category that should be treated as "special" and "vulnerable". As a result, almost all the policies reflect what can be done for women and fail to reflect what women contribute to the sector that should justify supporting them to ensure equality. What this may create is a notion that women only need support and cannot contribute to agriculture and rural areas without support.

**Inclusivity Vs. gender implementation**

A common theme across all the national policies is the inclusion of all citizens. This shows clear expectations that inclusion is equivalent to equality. However, inclusion is only one prerequisite for achieving equality. Other factors are needed to support inclusive policies to achieve equality. Also, for specific measures to support women, focusing on inclusion criteria alone may lead to excluding women who do not meet the inclusion criteria set. Since policies provide a roadmap on what is expected to be implemented, it is imperative that assessment mechanisms are set such that each policy can be assessed using them, however, none of the policies set clear assessment mechanisms for policy implementation.

**Gender Vs. technical requirement.**

A recurring theme is the focus on the technical requirement for achieving policies objectives. There is no doubt that these technical needs are crucial. For example, most of the climate-related policies benchmarked give details of technical climate targets and emission reduction strategies, but do not consider the social or human component required to achieve their targets. When inclusivity is mentioned in policies, there is limited clarity and attention to the non-technical and social needs that reinforce gender inequality. This suggests that issues with a demonstrable impact on gender

equality outcomes may not receive the systematic policy attention required to reinforce technical objectives. It remains unclear whether Member States have established mechanisms for the regular exchange of knowledge and good practices to advance gender equality. Without such provisions, policies risk falling short of their stated aims, as they neglect the broader social context in which technical measures must operate.

# 8. Recommendations and Conclusion

Specific recommendations from key findings for the national equivalent policies benchmarked are presented in Annex 1.

Five main recommendations are suggested based on the findings from the benchmarking analysis. First, the European Union Gender Equality Strategy (EU GES) and the European Pillar of Social Rights present several principles to improve gender equality that are mostly absent in the policies benchmarked. As such, there is a need for all the policies benchmarked to address the gaps that still exist by ensuring that gender is mainstreamed into policies such that both men and women can get the support that they need to achieve their objectives without excluding one or the other. This entails ensuring that support for women and gender in policy move beyond being added as an annex or a section of a chapter that may easily be overlooked. Each strategy in policy should have a gender component with targeted measures that showcase the unique nature of challenges and contributions that concerns gender as well as measurable concrete actions or action plans for that strategy's objectives to be met. While most policies clearly state that they are designed to ensure inclusivity, it does not necessarily mean that they are designed to ensure gender equality, because inclusivity does not guarantee that equality will be achieved. Policies should aim to ensure that women are able to get the support that they need to achieve gender equality.

Second, the majority of the policies do not show or back their strategies with gender disaggregated data. There is a need for gender data to be included in policies both to inform policy formulation and for assessing whether the policies made any difference in closing the gender gap. Beyond using data, policies should also consider how gender data is collected to reflect the realities of women in agriculture and rural sectors. Therefore, alongside policy formulation, clear assessment criteria should be established to evaluate whether each policy is meeting its objectives while simultaneously advancing gender equality.

Third, policies should ensure that women are not just bundled with other or vulnerable groups. Across almost all of the policies benchmarked, women are mostly bundled with young people, girls and those considered to be vulnerable. This could create several exclusion criteria for women who do not fall into the groups. As such, policies should address women based on an assessment of their needs and contributions to the sector by identifying the support women need for gender equality. However, addressing intersectional issues is also critical. Irrespective of gender, people in agriculture and rural sectors often face compounded challenges due to factors such as age, socio-economic status, and geographic isolation, among others. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to gender equality must consider these intersecting identities to create inclusive policies that will

ensure gender equality.

Fourth, the technical requirement for policies to achieve their objectives seems to overtake the human factors especially gender issues that are crucial for achieving those technical requirements, making most of the policies gender blind in their design. Also measures targeted at new entrants tend to be gender blind in the majority of the policies benchmarked. Therefore, policies should ensure that there is consideration for the gaps and roles gender will play in achieving each objective.

Finally, most policies need to reflect that they follow and consider a localised bottom-up approach that can empower communities to achieve policy objectives and improve gender equality. Programmes designed for agriculture and rural sectors would also benefit from this approach. There is also the need for policies or strategies to present a clear budget for targeted measures aimed at improving gender equality.

To conclude, some key setbacks have also been uncovered that need to be addressed. These 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 gender goals and objectives, lack of follow-up;
- 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;
- Limited budgetary considerations targeted specifically at women farmers and rural women entrepreneurs;
- Limited information on 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 EU equivalent policy document at the national level.

The pursuit of gender equality in agriculture and 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 fiscal 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 what is necessary 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, decision-making, leadership 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. There is a recurring theme on clarity. Most of the policies do not necessarily state clearly how gender will be integrated in them despite stating that they ensure gender equality. This raises a question on whether the practice of achieving gender equality is hindered by the limited clarity on how country policies can meet gender equality needs.

Also, this EU and national benchmarking exercise should not be a one-time event, but part of an on-going and regular process. This study provides an especially important baseline that can and should be regularly revisited. 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 includes 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 baseline for further regular and targeted actions in each country and at the EU level. 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 will be 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 have to 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.

Finally, this report has identified the underrepresentation of women in EU and national policies on 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. 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). 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 and accessible support. A more equitable future relies on recognizing and utilizing the talents and insights of women, particularly in rural areas, for everyone's benefit.

# Annex 1. Summary tables per country

Suggested recommendations for next steps on policy review and adaptation to improve gender equality in each country are presented below.

## Croatia - Summary Table

| Issue | Recommendation<br>Bullet points / operational action |
|---|---|
| **Disregard of gender specific terminology.** | As Croatian language has 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 acting 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… |
| **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. |

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| **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 |

## Ireland - Summary Table

| Issue | Recommendation<br>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 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Intersex People, and Intersex People 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 significant 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. |

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| **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. |
| **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. |

## Italy - Summary Table

| Issue | Recommendation<br>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 |

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| **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. |

## Lithuania - Summary Table

| Issue | Recommendation<br>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 Artificial Training (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. |

## Netherlands - Summary Table

| Issue | Recommendation<br>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 Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (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 |

## Norway - Summary Table

| Issue | Recommendation<br>Bullet points / operational action |
|---|---|
| **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.** | 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. |
| **There is no targeted effort to ensure women's participation in technology-enhanced agriculture.** | 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, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and precision agriculture technologies, closing a potential digital divide in agricultural communities. |

## Scotland - Summary Table

| Issue | Recommendation<br>Bullet points / operational action |
|---|---|
| **(CAP) i) Agriculture Reform Route Map; ii) Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill (passed into law 18.06.24) plus Equality Impact Assessment (EIA**)<br>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. | Reconsider the gender-neutral approach to the writing of policy documents.<br>Recognise and highlight how increasing women's participation will benefit the sector as a whole.<br>Set out and apply a clear mechanism to ensure that the intended further assessment is applied to future policy.<br>Reconvene the/a Task Force to review the current context and refresh the government's commitments for the future.<br>Ensure provision for women at all stages of the life course |
| **(LTVRA) Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Bill (passed into law 18.06.24) plus Equality Impact Assessment**<br>**"**Scotland has no coherent rural policy or vision" (Atterton et al, 2023) | That the working party/task force proposed in Section 1(above) contributes to the delivery plan |
| **(Farm to Fork) Good Food Nation Plan** This Plan includes few specific references to women. The *People and Communities* 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.<br>Other than in the instances cited above, women are not explicitly mentioned in relation to achieving the ambitions of this Plan.<br>The policy does not, however, explicitly consider differences between men and women in occupations/enterprises in the sector it concerns. | 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'. |

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| **(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'.<br>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.<br>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.<br>The accompanying Fairer Scotland Duty Assessment Summary necessarily takes account of gender, but the Assessment Summary makes no specific reference to rural women or to entrepreneurs.<br>5 opportunity areas are identified, but they are all dependent on Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (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. | 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:<br>Look to how other countries in the GRASS CEILING Consortium are approaching questions of scale and gender in relation to Net Zero targets.<br>Review the Strategy through the lens of women-led rural enterprises, e.g. via a task force as mentioned in sections 1 & 2 above. |

## 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, |

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|---|---|
| | 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 |

## Sweden - Summary Table

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