

EU CAP Network Workshop "Advancing gender equality in rural areas in the EU"

Highlights report

The workshop aimed to raise awareness of the barriers and challenges faced by rural women regarding access to employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, access to services and infrastructure, and representation and participation in decision-making processes. The meeting highlighted various policy and funding mechanisms available at EU and Member State level aiming to promote gender equality, as well as good projects examples, experiences and lessons learnt. Discussions and networking continued the following day with field visits to Or du Commun, a non-profit organisation promoting networking and entrepreneurship among women, and Maison Luquet, a female-managed forge that specifically trains women to become professional blacksmiths.

Event information

Date: 15-16 November 2022

Location: Andolsheim, France

Organisers: CAP Implementation Contact Point (CAPI CP)

Participants: Managing Authorities of the CAP Strategic Plans / RDPs and other relevant EU funds and programmes, NRNs, LAGs, rural women networks, NGOs, researchers and European Commission representatives.

Outcomes: Exchange of experiences and approaches taken at EU, national, regional and local level to promote gender equality, challenges encountered and possible tools and solutions to overcome them.

Web page: [Advancing gender equality in rural areas in the EU](#)

Conference opening and keynote speeches

Welcome speeches by **Susan Grieve** (CAPI CP) and **Margaret Bateson-Missen** (DG AGRI) emphasised the importance of the workshop's overarching topic. **Sylvie D'Alguerre** (Région Grand Est) welcomed all the participants and highlighted approaches taken by the region to support rural women, e.g. a hotline to support victims of domestic violence, childcare to make training more accessible.



Following a short [presentation](#) by **Anna Nowak-Wood** (DG AGRI) on the recently launched EU CAP Network, **Margaret Bateson-Missen** (DG AGRI) provided an [overview](#) of the EU's holistic approach to improve gender equality. [The Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025](#) aims to address the inequalities faced by women across the EU, including in the agriculture sector and in rural and remote areas. Ms. Bateson-Missen referred to indicators that reveal the ample gaps between rural women and rural men as well as those which exist between rural women and urban women, demonstrating that there is a need for action to close these gaps and strengthen the position of women in rural areas. She highlighted how the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) can advance gender equality since for the first time in the history of the CAP, Specific Objective 8 for the 2023-2027 programming period includes a reference to enhancing the position of women in farming and accelerating the social inclusion of rural women. Member States will thus have the opportunity to design interventions under their CAP Strategic Plans to promote women in farming and support women living in rural areas. In addition, the collection of gender disaggregated data under the 2023-2027 CAP will be strengthened to allow for monitoring of progress in the field of gender equality.



Professor Maura Farrell (University of Galway, IE) set the scene, [presenting](#) the key challenges faced by rural women. These range from gender pay gap to traditional gender roles in society, access to land and succession / inheritance issues in agriculture. Universal Public Services Investment and adequate services within rural areas are crucial for women, while quotas, gender proofing and positive discrimination can all help to level the playing field. However, 'rural women' are a heterogeneous group with a diversity of experiences, which should be taken into account.



The Q&A highlighted the importance of training and support specifically for rural women and encouraged rural networks to learn from, share and replicate examples of positive action adopted in other policy areas (e.g. DG REGIO). Refusing EU funding to entities that have no women in management positions is also a possibility.

Member State approaches

Three Member States offered perspectives on how they are advancing gender equality through their CSPs and other policy and funding mechanisms.



David Armellini (National Agency for Cohesion of the Territories – ANCT, FR) [presented](#) a national funding initiative undertaken in conjunction with the Minister for Gender Equality, which awarded 1.5 million EUR in 2021-2022 to projects led by national / regional associations supporting women's rights in rural areas. Projects addressed domestic violence, rural women's financial autonomy and access to employment.



Tania Lucía Benito (Ministry of Agriculture, ES) [highlighted](#) the EAGF and EAFRD interventions that can be used under the new CSP to achieve [Specific Objective 8](#), such as eligibility and selection criteria favouring women and higher support rates. Based on a thorough needs assessment, the Spanish NRN has taken action to address gender inequality issues, developing a thematic group and action plan. A national law on 'Farms shared ownership' and an annual award from the Ministry of Agriculture for innovative women-led projects also aim to promote rural female entrepreneurs and farm owners.



Eleftheria Bakali (Ministry of Rural Development and Food, GR) [described](#) how the Greek RDP (2014-2020) encouraged representation of women and other marginalised groups in decision-making bodies, as project holders and as beneficiaries (half the jobs created by LEADER are held by women). As the former proposal to give bonus grades for women in the selection criteria for other EAFRD measures failed, the [Greek CSP](#) will mainly promote gender equality through LEADER eligibility and selection criteria.

Projects and Initiatives

Initiatives from around the EU showcased different approaches to support rural women.



Sirje Vällmann and **Reena Curphey** (ETNA, EE) provided [insights](#) about the use of microcredit to **support female entrepreneurship and employment opportunities**. Participating women have been [empowered](#) to realise their ideas and dreams, formed cooperation networks and actively exchange information and mutual support – 'We understand that positive silence can be a supportive tool'.



Tara Farrell (Longford Women's Link, IE) [presented](#) the wide scope of activities undertaken since 1996 to increase women's **representation and participation in decision-making processes** by promoting economic and social choice and opportunity, crisis and practical support, and leadership networking and influence. The SHE (See Her Elected) campaign specifically offers guidance and training for women to run for political office at all levels.



Valérie Bernardoni (Rural Family Association, FR) and **Simon Autin** (Rural Households Association, FR) [introduced](#) their respective NGOs supporting **access to services and infrastructure** for families and households in rural areas. Together they have organised a joint project to fight against gender inequality in rural areas, which has increased since COVID-19 in terms of isolation and insufficient support. They aim to train volunteers to support domestic violence victims, equipping local actors with skills to listen / respond to victims and offer tailored support.



Breakout Groups



Group 1: Rural services and infrastructure: **Popi Sourmaidou** (Peri-ergon, GR) [presented](#) their initiative on skills training and integration for marginalised populations, and **Anabel Calderín Castro** (OCIRIF project, ES) [outlined](#) their project activities designed to provide a safe space for domestic violence victims and their children. The group discussion identified the importance of tailoring to local needs / gaps in services and infrastructure, as well as the importance of dedicated safe spaces for women to share, build self-confidence and recognise their transferable skills. Overcoming traditional mentalities about gender divisions requires action from both men and women and bottom-up approaches to promote a level playing field. EU funding opportunities need to be explained and accessible to small NGOs / organisations (e.g. co-funding requirements) and women should be part of the consultation about strategies to address their needs.

Group 2: Support for entrepreneurship: **Silke Mock** (Bauerinnen, IT) [shared](#) their organisation’s experience in training women to develop their own social farming activities, and **Lina Noreikaitė** (Pociūnėlių Istorijos, LT) [spoke](#) about developing a community brand for women’s products and thematic villages to (re)integrate rural women into the labour market. The group discussion found that training and services are essential to empower women to access employment as well as participate more actively in decision-making processes. Cooperation among local actors (farmers, institutions, tourism boards, etc.) is key, but rural areas need to become more attractive, especially to retain young people. Cultural norms need to be challenged and men and women must come together as allies. Participants agreed that ‘success’ is not only about money, but also social capital, connections, self-confidence and advancing communities.

Group 3: Decision-making processes: **Laura Albu** (Centre for Mediation and Community Security, RO) [shared](#) how they promote rural women’s civic participation and women farmers’ products, and **Valentina Tomezzoli** (Azienda Agricola Tomezzoli, IT) [spoke](#) about modernising the family farm business through integration of new skills, marketing and technology. The group discussion identified that there are gaps to increasing rural women’s representation and participation in decision-making processes, including education and urban / rural as well as a gender gap. The importance of networks and building support within local communities and from mentors / advisors were emphasised. Also, women should feel confident that they can make mistakes without the threat of stigma because of their gender.

Closing Panel – How to move forward

Professor Sally Shortall (University of Newcastle) moderated the closing panel with **Dr. Sylwia Michalska** (Institute of Rural and Agricultural Development of the Polish Academy of Science, PL), **Vesna Jankovic** (LEADER Network Croatia), **Veronika Resch-O’Hógáin** (Ministry of Agriculture, AT), and **Branwen Miles** (Copa-Cogeca).

Key points included:

- Advocacy for gender equality shouldn’t be necessary anymore – it should be mainstream by now.
- Women need to come together at all levels and share experiences, knowledge, examples, but also highlight country-specific challenges and bottlenecks as one approach cannot fit all.
- Role models and examples are important - “if you can’t see it, you can’t be it”, e.g. Copa-Cogeca’s award [Inspire Us](#) for innovation projects by women farmers.
- Tools to promote gender equality must take into account contextual differences and look at root causes of inequalities, such as lack of access to finance, indirect discrimination, need for life-long learning, poor broadband.
- Strong top-down political commitment at EU level is needed and should include clear goals, funding to achieve them and monitoring indicators – otherwise, gender equality risks being a tick-box exercise by Member States.
- Country examples from CSPs can help provide inspiration, but the Commission may have to ‘push’ broadscale action.
- Social norms must be addressed across Member States, including teaching women to be leaders, entrepreneurs, networkers, but men need to change too.
- Overarchingly, the panel agreed that there is an urgent need for more / better quality data about women in rural areas and farming to help stimulate change.



Closing remarks



Susan Grieve (CAPI CP) concluded by saying that rural women are not a homogenous group, but instead are very diverse with diverse needs. Ultimately, diversity is beneficial for everyone. Rural women's contributions need to be visible, and we should move away from stereotypes, as well as create more safe spaces and networks where participants can share examples (e.g. with initiatives through the CAP and other tools / mechanisms).



Elena Schubert (DG AGRI) closed the workshop, thanking all the participants for their inspiring examples and reflections and acknowledging that their collective challenges and efforts set high expectations and hard work ahead for the Commission and the Member States. It will be important to monitor the action taking place on the ground as the Member States proceed with implementation of their CAP Strategic Plans. Later on, it will be necessary to take stock of the progress achieved in terms of reducing gender inequalities in rural areas and agriculture, also with a view towards preparing for the next CAP programming period.