

Power and culture: Understanding EU policies on agriculture and gender equality

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Abstract

In this article, we examine how the European Union (EU) acts as an international organisation, developing policies to be implemented by national governments. We focus on agriculture and gender equality. We examine the relationship between the EU and Member States regarding the construction and delivery of policies. It is a complex process, with differential levels of power and other actors in the process, notably lobby groups. We examine how agricultural policies and gender equality policies are developed. We examine the 2014–2020 Rural Development Regulation and carried out research in four member states. Interviews were undertaken with people who have experience of implementing the Common Agricultural Policy measures at a national level. We find the power of key players to be very strong in the agricultural context and weak in the gender context. When the two fields are ‘married’, we find there is little scope or interest to advance gender equality measures in agricultural policy.

KEYWORDS

agricultural policy, EU institutions, gender policy, lobby groups, power

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INTRODUCTION

In this article, we focus on the process by which the European Union (EU) develops macro policies and how these are in turn implemented by the Member States. It is not a straightforward process, and in many cases, the Member States have considerable power to choose whether to implement EU policies or not. In this article, we focus on two macro EU policies and how they are implemented at Member State level. We focus on agricultural policy and gender equality policy. We are particularly interested in how they intertwine and how agricultural policy takes account of gender. The EU's stated policy on gender equality requires all policies to consider, and act on potential gender inequalities.

What is gender equality, and how to achieve it through policy initiatives is the subject of lengthy debates. The understanding of how best to address it has changed over time (Shortall, 2015). Initially, policies focused on 'equal treatment' (presuming the male position to be the norm) (Daly, 2005). This was then replaced by positive action approaches (specifically focusing on women) (Rees, 2005). Both of these approaches were seen as limited because they failed to consider how the gendered structures through which equality measures were implemented actually prolonged inequalities (Daly, 2005; Prugl, 2010; Rees, 2005). 'Gender mainstreaming' was then developed as a means of moving the focus from the individual and their 'shortcomings' to social structures and social practices and their shortcomings (Shortall, 2015). The EU has had a commitment to gender mainstreaming since 1996. Gender mainstreaming is, in theory, seen as the most effective way to address gender inequality. It takes the focus away from deficiencies in women and instead focuses on inbuilt assumptions that perpetuate gendered inequalities (Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022; Daly, 2005). An example here is parental leave in Ireland; women are entitled to 26-week leave, and men are entitled to 2-week leave. This policy embodies and reinforces the notion that women are responsible for childcare and are expected to take time out of the labour force. When we compare this with Sweden, where there is parental leave with the policy expectation that each parent takes a minimum amount of leave, there is greater equality in childcare (Shortall & Hansda, 2020). This is an example of how a policy with inbuilt assumptions can perpetuate gender inequality. Since the early 2000s, European researchers have examined how effectively EU rural development policies have addressed gender mainstreaming (Bock, 2015; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022; Safiliros-Rothschild, 2006; Rossier & Wyss, 2008; Oedl-Wieser, 2015; Prüggl, 2010). There was a stated commitment in the Rural Development Regulations 2000–2006 and 2007–2014 to gender equality. The statement was vague, had no targets or goals and there was no baseline information against which to judge progress. Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development have at best paid lip service to gender mainstreaming. There was no effective training on how to gender mainstream and gender budget, and if gender impact assessments were undertaken, they were at best 'tick box' exercises (Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022; Bock, 2006; Safiliros-Rothschild, 2006). The general European backlash against gender equality (European Institute for Gender Equality [EIGE], 2020) was evident in the last Rural Development Regulation 2014–2020, which had no statement whatsoever about gender equality. Initially, studies focused more on rural development than agriculture, as it was clearer how rural initiatives could achieve gender balance compared to the masculine industry of agriculture. However, more recently, the lens has turned to the inbuilt biases in agricultural policy (Prugl, 2010; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022; European Court of Auditors [ECA], 2021). The European agricultural guarantee fund (EAGF) is the largest part of the EU budget, and the majority share of it is direct payment to farmers, who are predominantly men. How this policy is socially constructed and the gender implications are

increasingly coming under scrutiny, with the European Court of Auditors giving a damning report (ECA, 2021).

In this article, we want to increase our understanding of the link between how policies unfold at the national level and how they are constructed at the EU level. Ostensibly, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and EU gender equality policy are similar. Both are underpinned by the belief that collective action will be more effective than individual action by Member States. However, we argue that the power of political actors and lobby groups in each context is very different. Agricultural policy has a powerful bloc behind it, with multi-actors who cooperate closely towards common goals. Gender equality policy is the opposite. It has a weak bloc advocating for equality, no clear champions with authority and poor interaction among key players. We examine how policies are shaped by the strength of the political actors involved and what this means for how policies are implemented at national level. We examine how agriculture and gender policies interact in four Member States. We pay particular attention to how EU policies act as an enabler or inhibitor of gender equality at national level. The quest for gender equality is vexingly slow. One reason for this, and it arises in our context of looking to advance gender equality in agriculture, is that vested interests support the status quo. Even when vested interests are not antagonistic to gender equality, they can turn antagonistic when rearrangements favouring women disrupt the established order (Rueschemeyer & Rueschemeyer, 1990).

The article is structured as follows: First, we offer a conceptual deconstruction of the history of EU agricultural and gender policies, the power of key political actors and the institutional apparatus to roll out these policies at national level. Next, our methodology is explained, including the rationale for our four case studies: Sweden, Romania, Ireland and Spain. In the case studies, we examined if there is a gendered understanding of CAP payments, who is responsible for gender equality, representation in farming organisations, land ownership, generational renewal and organic farming. We conclude that the weakness of the gender lobby and its subsequent incompetence, combined with the strength of agricultural policies with clearly defined goals, impedes progress in both gender progressive and gender regressive socio-political contexts.

THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY: AN OVERVIEW

Extensive literature details the development of the CAP, its many flaws including trade distortion and the economic and social inequalities it created and that persist (European Parliamentary Research Service [EPRS], 2022; Matthews, 2018; Papadopoulos, 2015; Shucksmith et al., 2005). There is no need to repeat this knowledge here. This overview highlights elements of the CAP relevant to this article; background, some of the CAP's limitations and the difficulty of achieving change; the power of lobby groups to shape the CAP; and the apparatus through which CAP is implemented.

Background

The CAP is one of the few EU federal policies. Introduced in 1962, very soon after the Treaty of Rome established the European Economic Community in 1957, it was seen as necessary to address the special needs of agriculture as an exceptional sector (EPRS, 2022; Scharpf, 1988). It is a long-held belief that the CAP is of critical importance to the EU and farmers, and this

commitment has existed since the foundation of the European Economic Community (EEC) (Papadopoulos, 2015; Vonk, 2022). Originally, the CAP aimed to guarantee a minimum living wage to European farmers and to guarantee food supply and security. A common policy was thought best to ensure food prices were not different in the Member States while distorting competition in other sectors (EPRS, 2022). The many problems of the CAP are well documented. It distorted World Trade Organisation rules, led to overproduction, became excessively expensive and led to inequalities among regions of the EU and between large and small farmers (Navarro & Lopez-Bao, 2019; Papadopoulos, 2015; Shucksmith et al., 2005). Although it is no longer consuming almost 80% of the EU budget as it did in the past, it remains the most expensive EU policy at 34.7% for the 2014–2020 programme with 77% going to the EAGF, which is mainly income support (Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022). Despite the many reforms of the CAP, most notably the MacSharry and Fischler reforms, it remains an unequal policy on many levels, and more recently, scholars have shown the gendered inequalities of the CAP (Bock, 2015; Shortall, 2015). Yet, real change is hard to achieve. Despite the growing call for the need to consider environmental concerns, attempts to make the CAP more environmentally orientated have been largely symbolic (Candel, 2021). One of the main explanations for the difficulty in achieving change is that the CAP is characterised by a high degree of path dependency, that is it continues to function according to decisions made in the past that constrain the ability or willingness to make changes in the present (Candel, 2021; Papadopoulos, 2015). Although environmental, social and rural concerns have developed over the decades, the predominant feature of CAP continues to be about providing subsidies to ensure the survival of farmers in the sector (Bednarikova & Jilkova, 2012; Henke et al., 2018; Papadopoulos, 2015). When more flexibility was introduced in the 2014–2020 programme, it was found that path dependency persisted (Henke et al., 2018). The main reason, however, for the stubborn resistance to change of the CAP rests with the power of the lobby groups involved. It is to this that we now turn.

The CAP, EU institutions and lobby groups

Lobby groups are a key actor shaping the development of EU policy. LobbyEU describes lobbying, or European interest representation, as providing specialist and specific knowledge about complex areas of regulation (Vonk, 2022). Lobby groups also play a role at national level. There are many lobby groups in the agricultural sphere, but the most significant is Copa-Cogeca, and they have a close working relationship with DG AGRI, the branch of the Commission responsible for agricultural policy (Vonk, 2022; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022). Copa was formed in 1958, the year after the Treaty of Rome, and this long history lends legitimacy to its lobbying power. Copa-Cogeca defines itself as the united voice of farmers and agri-cooperatives in the EU and as having a strong presence in EU public discourse to shape the future of agriculture (<https://copa-cogeca.eu/about-copa>). Whether the EU spends its budget based on power struggles or needs is a constant topic of debate. Kauppi and Widgren (2009) argued that when it is compulsory expenditure, such as the CAP, power struggles are more influential, and it is the Council of Ministers who are the key players. If it is non-compulsory spending, it tends to be needs-based and involves the European Parliament. Although the European Parliament has recently developed more influence over the CAP, it is concerned about its limited ability to date to shape negotiations (EPRS, 2022). Agricultural policy has been described as the archetype of political clientism, where agricultural interest groups trade political support for favourable agricultural policies. Candel (2021)

specifically mentions the privileged access Copa-Cogeca receives to informal gatherings of the Council of Ministers, often motivated by the fact that many of the Ministers are farmers or landowners themselves and thus beneficiaries of the CAP. The same is true of representatives on the Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, with whom the lobby group also has close ties. Copa-Cogeca has far-reaching access to DG AGRI, with their relationship described as one of mutual understanding, where Copa-Cogeca has a dominant voice in the discussion (Politico, 2023). A former secretary general of Copa-Cogeca argues that they worked very closely with key EU institutions, and many of their staff subsequently went on to work for DG AGRI, further cementing the tight relationship (Gueguen, 2021). Copa-Cogeca, who are almost entirely men (Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022), are conservative, anti-change and deny the role of the agricultural sector in global warming (Vonk, 2022). Bednarikova and Jilkova (2012) have argued that, given the level of subsidy and the length of its history, farmers are dependent on direct payments and resistant to their removal. The more organised a group is and the more significant the threat to its wellbeing, the more fiercely it will resist political reforms (p. 27). This is what we see with Copa-Cogeca at the EU level, and with national farmers' organisations at the Member State level (Papadopoulos, 2015).

Institutional apparatus: implementing the CAP

When the power play between the EU and Member States is considered, the reliance of the EU on member governments to execute its policies is significant (Trondal, 2007). The EU does not have administrative agencies at regional and local levels to implement its policies. Again, agriculture is the exception here. Because the CAP is a federal policy, it has replaced national agricultural policies. Therefore, the national apparatus to execute agricultural policies exists, with ministries of agriculture across Europe doing so (Scharpf, 1988). The administration of Pillar I funds is seen as particularly straightforward; it is paid by ministries of agriculture to beneficiaries according to EU rules. It is agreed as part of the Multi Financial Framework has the backing of the Council of Ministers and therefore national support, and Copa-Cogeca, which represent national farming interests. It is the most favourable context in which to administer European policy. When we consider how gender equality is administered, we find that the lack of a similar institutional apparatus is a significant impediment.

PROMOTING EQUALITY BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN: AN OVERVIEW

Like the CAP, there is a vast body of literature on the promotion of gender equality by the EU (Fagan & Rubery, 2018; Shortall, 2010; Daly, 2005; EIGE, 2020; Jacquot, 2017; Walby, 2005;). There is also some literature, both pan-European and country case studies, which has considered gender equality in the CAP (Bock, 2015; Shortall, 2015; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022; Safilios-Rothschild, 2006; Rossier & Wyss, 2008; Oedl-Wieser, 2015; Prügl, 2010). There is no need to rehearse the well-developed arguments in this research. Instead, we will examine, like CAP, the background, limitations of gender equality policy and the difficulties in achieving change; institutional actors and the power of lobby groups; and the institutional apparatus to implement gender equality.

Background

There is extensive debate about how successfully the EU has achieved gender equality. Advancing gender equality is understood as best addressed through the collective action of the Union rather than by individual Member States (European Commission, 2020). The EU has a long history of promoting equality between women and men. The principle that both sexes should receive equal pay for equal work was included in the 1957 Treaty of Rome. On the one hand, the EU has been a force advancing women's equality in the labour market, and this has been most effective when it has a legal underpinning (Fagan & Rubery, 2018; Guerrina, 2020). On the other hand, there are restrictions on the EU's legal basis. Although Member States approve European directives, they have discretion over how they are implemented (EPRS, 2019; van der Vleuten, 2005). Despite legislation, significant gender pay gaps persist in employment, including pensions (European Commission, 2020). In addition to 'hard' law, the EU also has a number of 'soft' measures to advance gender equality. Since 1996, the European Commission has adopted the dual approach of targeted measures to achieve gender equality alongside gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming basically means including a gender perspective into all stages of policy design in all EU policies (European Commission, 2020; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022; Daly, 2005). Extensive research and reports from EU institutions have systematically found that the EU institutions themselves, as well as Member States, do not implement gender mainstreaming (ECA, 2020, 2021; EPRS, 2021; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022; Spehar, 2012). In other words, there is a weak commitment to addressing gender equality, and consequently, the tools and processes advocated at the EU level are not enacted. The European Institute for Gender Equality, which provides tools and training on gender mainstreaming, is very critical of the commitment to gender mainstreaming. Welfare cuts are taken without gender analysis; many elements of the European Employment Strategy are gender blind; and so too are EAGF payments (EIGE, 2020; Fagan & Rubery, 2018; Shortall & Marangudakis, 2022; ECA, 2021). As Fagan and Rubery note, 'gender mainstreaming has remained rather superficial and is often totally ignored at both member state and EU level' (p. 303). In addition to the limited progress, there is an evident backlash against gender equality. The Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 notes that 'unfortunately progress with regard to gender equality is neither inevitable nor irreversible. We therefore need to give a new impetus to gender equality' (European Commission, 2020, p. 2). The backlash is partly related to the financial crisis and austerity programmes. The lower importance of the commitment to gender equality means that equality measures are often delayed in favour of economic and fiscal measures (EIGE, 2020; Fagan & Rubery, 2018).

Gender equality, EU institutions and lobby groups

Unlike agriculture, which has always had a secure home and champion in DG AGRI, this is not the case for gender equality. Originally based in DG Employment and Social Affairs, it was transferred to DG Justice in 2011. This was seen as a significant destabilising factor. It happened during the economic crisis, which meant less scrutiny of employment inequalities. The move to DG Justice also meant that gender equality policy was no longer seen as an objective in itself but rather as rights-based – one ground for discrimination among many (Jacquot, 2017; Kantola & Lombardo, 2017). At the EU level, there are so many bodies involved in the administration of gender equality that it generates a great deal of noise and makes it difficult to see who is responsible for what.

It rests under what is now called DG Justice and Consumers. The inter-service group on gender equality brings together representatives of DGs. The Advisory Committee on equal opportunities between women and men brings together Member State representatives, social partners and interest groups. The High Level Group on gender mainstreaming brings together ‘Member States’ representatives. In reality, these groups are unfocused, meet irregularly and demonstrate limited commitment to gender equality (Kantola & Lombardo, 2017). The European Institute for Gender Equality was formed in 2011 but provides technical support rather than strategic vision. It is somewhat marginalised, not included in some groups and based in Lithuania, far from the EU centre of power (Fagan & Rubery, 2018). In the Parliament, the Committee on Women’s Rights and Gender Equality, known as the FEMM Committee, advances gender equality and is generally understood as a committee weak in power and clout, not least because the legislative power remains with Member States (Ahrens & van der Vleuten, 2017). One of the key lobby groups is the European Women’s Lobby. Founded in 1990, it is unlike the single-issue focus of Copa-Cogeca and instead has a very broad remit from violence to ageing to education. The Women’s Lobby’s ability to shape policy is limited. The ECA (2021) showed how their call for the Commission to set out gender-equality goals in a strategy were ignored (p. 18). The Women’s Lobby does not seem to have any agricultural focus. Copa-Cogeca has a Women’s Committee, but this does not question the role of women in agriculture, or act as a lobby group for change. The recent Gender Equality Strategy, 2020–2025 outlines the many players involved in gender equality; ‘achieving gender equality in the EU is a joint responsibility. It requires teaming up and action by all EU institutions, Member States and EU agencies, in partnership with civil society and women’s organisations, social partners and the private sector’ (p. 19). Responsibility is so diffuse that it is hard to identify who is accountable.

Institutional apparatus: implementing gender equality

The EU is heavily reliant on Member States to implement gender equality policies. The lack of cohesion and agreement within the European institutions has already been discussed. This is further compounded by the lack of any real integration between EU and Member States. There is insufficient training for national officials and no monitoring of performance. There is no incentive, then, for national equality bodies to train or monitor how gender equality is integrated across different government ministries, from employment to health or education. The chaos at the EU level is replicated at national levels. Research has shown the disjuncture between EU level commitments and outcomes at Member State level (Spehar, 2012). Spehar presents evidence that new Member States develop gender equality strategies to be eligible to access different EU domains; once eligible, the implementation of EU gender legislation is slow and inconsistent (p. 365). The adoption of EU gender equality policies varies significantly between states and across time. The institutional apparatus is missing, and so too is the political commitment.

To conclude this section, EU agricultural policy has powerful actors who formulate clear goals and resist change. It remains a predominantly male occupation with little regard for gender equality. EU gender equality policy has no powerful actors or clear goals. The EU itself does not enact the rhetorical measures it advocates for gender mainstreaming. There is little meaningful interaction with Member States. We now turn to explain our methodology and examine how agricultural policy and gender policy interact in four different contexts.

METHODOLOGY

In 2020, interviews were undertaken with people who have experience of implementing the CAP measures at a national level. We did this in four Member States: Republic of Ireland (hereafter Ireland), Romania, Spain and Sweden. They were chosen as cases representing very different forms of agriculture and gender regimes. Romania was included as a relatively new Member State (2007), and research has found that in Central and Eastern European countries, gender equality is weaker than in the EU generally (Spehar, 2012). Educational levels are low, and farm size is almost four times lower than the EU average at 4.4 ha. Mechanisation is low. In 2016, 34% of farm managers were women. Previous research has found that women are often disadvantaged by managing very small non-commercial holdings (Shortall et al., 2017; Shortall et al., 2020). Sweden (EU membership in 1995) is an example of a socially democratic society committed to equality. Sweden is the only Member State whose gender equality policies were more progressive than those of the EU when it became a member (Fagan & Rubery, 2018). Agriculture in Sweden varies by region. Holdings are large with an average of 36 ha. In 2016, Eurostat reported 15% of Swedish farm managers as women. Spain (EU membership 1986) is an example of a country that has been advocating for gender equality in agriculture for over a decade (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2018). Spain has some very large holdings, but the majority, 62%, are small, less than 5 ha. In 2016, 21% of farm managers were women. Ireland (EU membership in 1973) is the longest member of the EU of our four case studies. Farms are on average 32 ha, and focus predominantly on beef and dairy production. In 2016, 11% of farm managers were women. The Irish Farming Association, the main farming union, has recently started to address gender inequalities in their organisation by launching their equality and diversity programme in 2019. As well as the size and structure of farming differing in each case-study, the administration of the CAP also differs. Ireland and Romania are highly centralised, Spain is devolved to 17 regions and Sweden separates political and technical expertise between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Swedish Board of Agriculture. Fourteen interviews were conducted in total, including one with an organic expert who is a researcher with the European Parliament. In Ireland, three interviews were conducted: Policy officer in the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine who is responsible for policy formulation for agriculture and Secretary of the Gender Balance Steering Group; senior official of the Irish Organics Association; journalist with a farming magazine and member of the Irish Farmers' Association's (IFA's) Diversity Strategy. In Romania, two interviews were conducted: a senior official of the managing authority for the National Programme for Rural Development, and a senior official with the Romanian Maize Growers' Association. In Sweden, four interviews were conducted: senior advisor, Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, Division for Agriculture and the Food Production¹ and a senior agricultural adviser from the Swedish Board of Agriculture, senior adviser on agricultural production in the Swedish Board of Agriculture, member of the Evaluation Secretariat in the Swedish Board of Agriculture and gender mainstreaming expert, member of a rural women's organisation. In Spain, four interviews were conducted: senior official in the Gender Unit, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Environment, Aragon, and a senior researcher in an Agrifood and Natural Resources Economics Institute, Aragon, senior official of the Gender Unit, Ministry of Agriculture, Andalusia, Member of a women's farming organisation, and a Member of a farming organisation with a women's branch.

All these interviews were done remotely by Zoom due to Covid-19. Interviews were taped and transcribed with the interviewees' permission, and the data was analysed thematically. All the

interviews were conducted in English except for three of the Spanish interviews, which were transcribed by a native Spanish speaker.

We now turn to see how various elements of agricultural policy combine with gender equality policy in the four case studies.

ANALYSIS

Common agricultural policy, the European agricultural guarantee fund (EAGF) and gender blindness

In Ireland, the EAGF is seen as money in and money out with no monitoring. One place where Ireland saw that it might be possible to consider how EAGF addresses gender equality was through greening measures. In the past, this was linked to direct payment. It was questioned whether these payments could be separated and rewarded at differential rates as women tend to have smaller, organic and greener farms. This shows awareness of gender segregation in the farm labour force, and it should be possible to target industry support to address this employment difference.

In Romania, because women are on smaller holdings that are often subsistence plots, they will benefit less from the EAGF. Education and training were identified as particular needs in the Romanian context. They also reported, 'there is a large portion of holders who do not register with a Paying Agency and who do not receive any kind of support. There you will find even more women'. There was also the view that women would benefit from agricultural training, teaching them how to farm better and how to do some basic processing to widen horizons. In Romania again, there is evidence of gender segregation and gender segmentation in the farm labour force.

The people interviewed in Spain had the strongest views on the gender blindness of the EAGF as implemented by the European Commission. The officials interviewed in the Ministries in Andalusia and Aragon and the two farming organisations saw it as a significant problem. The Ministry in Andalusia noted, 'the Commission in our opinion is only worried about budget execution, they don't worry about where the budget goes, how it divides between women and men and how to change the situation if it's necessary'. One of the farming organisations believes there is no gender perspective and that the EU regards the EAGF as a *neutral policy* because it is aimed at a specific economic sector and does not consider the different impact on women. They argued that there are differences between men and women in agriculture, and 'the CAP disregards these differences and therefore the gap between them cannot be narrowed'. They have advocated affirmative actions to elevate the status of women but were told by the European Commission to remove them as they showed favouritism. The European Commission tries to ensure revisions to the CAP do not exacerbate income inequality by individual and territory. This response signals how blind the EAGF revisions are to gender inequality. Andalusia has very comprehensive gender budgeting and people interviewed expressed frustration that the Andalusian Agriculture Guarantee Fund is excluded from gender budgeting because the rules are determined at the EU level and they are unable to introduce gender considerations.

Sweden also reported that, in relation to EAGF, 'The policies come from the Commission; we do what we are told'. The policies are not set up by the Member States in the same way as for Pillar II, and there are no national monitoring committees for Pillar I. The view is that the EAGF is seen as a rights-based support attached to land ownership, the eligibility criteria are not questioned, so if the Commission says it will not be gender mainstreamed, it will not be gender mainstreamed. The Swedish Ministry of Agriculture and the Swedish Board of Agriculture instigated their own

evaluation to consider gender implications of the operation of the CAP. They examined the norms and perspectives of officials handling and processing applications for farm modernisation and investment. They found gender bias. If applications were more traditional, investing in machinery and other large-scale equipment, they were more likely to be successful. If they were smaller scale, less tangible and 'softer' applications, they were less likely to be successful. They found that 'the bias is definitely there in terms of personnel' and going forward, they want greater gender training and anonymous applications. Frustration was expressed that gender budgeting is not a mandatory requirement of the CAP. They have excellent baseline data and could easily implement gender budgeting, but because they implement rather than design the policy, gender budgeting would have to be mandatory in the Regulation. If they were implementing gender budgeting and had identified this bias, then they would have the power to *cause correct*, that is correct for this gender bias.

Overarching apparatus: who is responsible for gender equality?

There is a complicated and fractured apparatus overseeing gender equality and gender mainstreaming at the EU level and in the Member States, which has already been explained. Now we turn to the apparatus in the case studies.

The apparatus at Member State level varied by the political commitment to gender equality in each place. In Ireland and Romania, there is no overarching structure, whereas in Spain and Sweden, the situation is very different. In the Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine in Ireland, 'gender mainstreaming is not to the fore of policy formation'. There is a general awareness of gender inequality in agriculture, but staff are not trained on gender mainstreaming, gender impact assessments are not carried out, they do not report to anybody and they are not monitored. There is no interaction with EU bodies, and there is no EU requirement to demonstrate gender mainstreaming.

In Romania, the situation is similar. There is nobody responsible for gender mainstreaming in the Ministry; staff are not trained; there are no targets, monitoring or evaluation at a national level or an EU level 'Of course, I've seen under the National Programme for Rural Development occasionally mentioned the equality of chances, the equality of gender, but I've never seen something specific to address this or to encourage women in agriculture'.

The two relevant Ministries in Andalusia and Aragon interviewed represent cases of best practice regarding gender mainstreaming. Both were clear that this was because of regional and national requirements rather than guidance from the EU. In the Ministries of Agriculture, there is a gender equality unit that develops a plan, targets and policies. In Andalusia, 'At the end of the year we have another meeting to evaluate what was done, what not, why, if it is something they can do later in the next year or not. That's how we work'. They are answerable to the Regional Minister and a Commission which follows the execution of the agreed plan. The Commission comprised stakeholders, unions, women's organisations in agriculture and fisheries, women's unions and other organisations from the regional government with competencies in equality. Andalusia has a Gender Budgeting Impact Commission and is exemplary in the implementation of gender budgeting, but their ability to gender budget the EAGF is hindered by the European Commission. In Aragon, it is also a legal requirement that every government department have someone in charge of gender. There is comprehensive training undertaken and provided. They have targets, goals, monitor and report to the Aragon Women's Bureau.

In Sweden, the Swedish Board of Agriculture reported that they do not gender mainstream or monitor in the way previously described by the EU. The general view is that it has not been an EU target for almost 10 years, and a woman's organisation represented on the Monitoring Committee reported they have not received any gender mainstreaming training. However, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Swedish Board of Agriculture reported that because of a strong national commitment to gender equality, they are very aware of this in agriculture and enact their own policies around the promotion of women in agriculture. The Ministry has recently undertaken a review on gender equality in the agricultural sector and considered their own policies and actions in relation to gender equality. They have very detailed baseline data, broken down by gender.

All the case-study Member States, those progressive on gender mainstreaming and those less so, were of the strong view that if gender equality and gender mainstreaming were requested in the Rural Development Regulation, they would be implemented, and for those further ahead, they would be empowered to do more. For those Member States less advanced with gender equality, mandatory requirements from the EU, training and support are essential for progress.

Representation in farming organisations and in agricultural positions of leadership

The weak representation of women in Copa-Cogeca and how this means women are not present when the CAP is negotiated with the Commission have already been discussed. Now we turn to the situation in the four Member States to assess women's representation at national level in national discussions about the CAP.

Ireland's main farming organisation is the IFA. They have a long history of poor representation of women, such that they launched their inclusivity and diversity strategy in 2019, which entirely focuses on women. It includes several aspirations to increase the representation of women, which remains very low at all levels of the association. In terms of the National Council, 13% were women in 2019, and 87% were men (IFA Strategy, 2019).

The Irish Organics Association has a better representation of women. They have only very recently become represented at national level. Although 12% of farm holders in Ireland are women, 26% of organic licence holders are women. Before her interview, the senior official asked a number of women members if there were particular gender issues they wished to raise. 'The only thing they raised unanimously was the farm organisation side. The farm lobby groups are quite powerful and to say the least we need a better gender balance'. The senior official gave the example of one woman member who said, 'when she had a problem on the farm she had to go to her husband, he had to make the call before they would listen to her even though it was obviously a genuine problem'. If farming organisations are not diverse, they will continue to reinforce cultural norms and stereotypes about the farming workforce. Several regional women's organisations have sprung up in Ireland, giving voices to women on farms and providing a space for women to meet. These organisations are not taken seriously by mainstream corporate agricultural boards, and they are not represented at a national or EU level in agricultural negotiations.

In Romania, gender representation in farming organisations is very poor, and the view is that the representation of Romanian agriculture is poor at the EU level. Four big farming groups have just recently put together an alliance, and they have submitted the application to join Copa-Cogeca, which has been favourably considered. 'The Chairs of these organisations and confederations are all men'. Again, this suggests there is little cognisance of the gendered makeup of the farming organisations joining Copa-Cogeca.

Spain has a very strong representation of women in agriculture. FADEMUR is a group organisation of rural women underpinned by women farmers and women cattle breeders. They are represented and consulted at the national level and at the European level. They are part of COPA's Women's Committee. They are consulted at the national level before agricultural and rural laws are passed, and they are consulted by the Ministry of Agriculture on CAP Reforms and revisions to policies. They were heavily involved in advocating for the joint titling of land and sharing ownership rights between couples living on farms. They attributed their success to their level of organisation but also to a government that is politically open to the idea of gender equality, 'There is an organized women's movement pursuing progress and equity, by making more evident those inequalities already existing that need to be tackled. When you deal with sensitive governments, it makes progress totally possible.' The Ministry in Andalusia agreed that women's organisation and representation in farming organisations were essential to progress, 'Women have organized themselves and become visible in the last years. I think they have made a very important movement, there are lots of women's organisation, we have representation, and this has obliged the administration to work in gender'.

In Sweden, women are also under-represented in farming organisations. The Federation of Swedish Farmers at national level is 77% male, and this is the corporate board consulted on CAP programmes and plans. Unlike Ireland, representation is better at the regional level than the national level. The Ministry of Agriculture reported that their recently commissioned report on gender equality within the agricultural sector found a homo-social culture, there is unwelcoming jargon in organisations and the expected norm is that men will be the landowner and represented in farming organisations. The Swedish Government has funded WINNET, an organisation to work with women entrepreneurs in rural areas, including farm diversification. They have a position on the Monitoring Committee of the RDP.

Land ownership

Over 70% of EU farmers are men, and therefore the beneficiaries of EAGF subsidies. Ownership of land, the cultural norms of transferring land between men, from father to son, reinforces gender stereotypes and acts as a form of occupational closure to women.

In Ireland, the Ministry of Agriculture reported that there is a growing awareness that most of the land is owned by men. 'Whether anything is being done about it is a separate thing. I mean whether they tried to get people to take out partnerships, that is possibly a way, it seems to have more traction than before. There's an awareness certainly that it's there, but there's nothing happening about it'. From looking at Irish literature and policies, there is certainly a national push towards farm partnerships with a campaign highlighting the tax incentives. The person involved in the IFA's diversity strategy also suggested that even if farm partnerships are not in place, the EU could make provisions available to partners or couples rather than an individual agricultural holder as is currently the case. She gave the example of knowledge transfer, where in the last programme, the holder/farmer was paid an amount to go to meetings and had to attend ten meetings a year. If this had been made available to partners or holders in plural, then attendance could have been rotated depending on people's interests and availability.

In Romania, although there are many women holders, they do not own much Romanian land because their plots are usually subsistence. The main issues around ownership are how to support these tiny plots, organise women in cooperatives so that they have greater market power, and provide training to develop food chains to make them more sustainable.

Spain has the most far-reaching views on land ownership. Their attempts to implement joint titling, and co-ownership of farms between men and women was detailed already. FADEMUR is of the view that the CAP needs to find a way to adopt the shared ownership measure across Europe. The Ministry of Agriculture in Andalusia also believes that ownership of land must be considered. It was also stated that more affirmative actions are needed to reach better equality and equity. One of the farmers' unions noted that the farms that are using the legal status of joint titling mostly comprised young couples, indicating it is the youngest generation taking advantage of this law. Scottish research also found the highest level of equality between new entrant couples (Shortall et al., 2017).

The Swedish Ministry of Agriculture is beginning to think about how to address the inequalities in land ownership. Following their report on gender equality within the agricultural sector, this is likely to be a multi-pronged approach. This will include measures to diffuse cultural norms and stereotypes, gender budgeting to correct for gender bias in EAGF and RDP spend and measures to try and ensure more than one agricultural holder can be listed on EU forms.

Generational renewal and new entrants to farming

As discussed in the previous section, there was a general reluctance to see access to land as a gendered issue. This then has implications for how the young farmer payment (YFP) is constructed. As part of the EAGF, it is obligatory in all Member States to offer up to 2% of total direct payment national allocations to incentivise new entrants (under 40). It includes tax incentives for a maximum of 5 years and can require mandatory agricultural training.

In Ireland and Romania, there were no targets around gender for new entrants, and in both cases, the view was that it should be stipulated in the Regulation if it was to be undertaken. The person from Ireland involved in the IFA's Diversity Strategy underlined the importance of taking account of maternity leave. This was an issue also raised in Spain, which was the most vocal about the need for the YFP to include some measures to encourage new entrant women. In Aragon, the Ministry of Agriculture has established an email address where women can email issues that arise for them in the farming sector. The Ministry has found this very important in understanding the realities for women in agriculture, and it allows them to work to improve their policies. 'For example, yesterday I received a complaint with regard to an outcome which didn't take into account that the woman affected was in a period of delivering her baby and this circumstance wasn't considered as an exemption'. An intervention was then made by the Ministry to amend the error and allow for greater flexibility.

FADEMUR reported that when consulted on the EAGF, they had advocated for affirmative actions for women where the YFP would award more points to women applicants, but the European Commission refused these inputs. The European Commission's view was that this was a form of discrimination that made women more likely recipients of public investment. In both Aragon and Andalusia, the Ministries overcame the European Commission's refusal by introducing additional points and special aids for new entrant women under Pillar II of the CAP, over which they had greater national control.

The Ministry of Agriculture and the Board of Agriculture in Sweden recognised that entering farming as an occupation was a particular obstacle for young women, as the *homo-social culture* means that men are seen as the natural heirs to the farm. They did not have any special measures to encourage young women farmers, but it is a matter they are researching, and they plan to change their practice going forward.

Organic and green farming

The European Commission is keen to raise awareness and engagement with organic farming because of its positive greening implications. Organic farmers automatically qualify for greening payments. Although the overall gender disaggregated data on gender and organic farming is poor, what is there suggests it might have a better gender balance. Research has shown that organic farmers are more environmentally aware, younger, better educated and more likely to be women than conventional farmers (Läpple, 2012; West, 2018). A report for the FEMM Committee suggested that encouraging women into non-conventional forms of agriculture such as organics might be a route for women to enter farming and encounter less obstacles (Dwyer, 2015). Other research suggests that organics may already have a better gender balance; using data from 2013 (Francic & Kovaciccek, 2019) noted that 2% of farmers in the EU were organic and of these 24% were women, and they occupied 13% of the land devoted to organic farming. The question of organic farming and gender equality is now briefly considered.

Although 12% of women in Ireland are farmers, 26% of organic licence holders are women, indicating that women are more likely to engage in organic production. Examples were given of organic dairy farmers who have diversified into cheese production, 'on the packaging it is always the man who is actually the image on the front, but when I've spoken to them, it's definitely the women driving the fact that it is an added value, and they are bringing that kind of common sense thing'. The senior official of the organic association reported that men are more likely to stick to traditional methods of farming, whereas women are more adventurous, study marketing and grow slowly. 'What I see is that when women get involved suddenly we start going into doing markets, box schemes, working with restaurants, they are just more aware of what the consumer wants'. The senior official also said that women have a different approach to the market, 'the key difference to me is where women are involved it's very much more about producing for a market as opposed to producing the food and then trying to find a market. This is the key difference and that's why women are successful at it'. This supply chain approach, reacting to the demands of the market, is the preferred model of the EU.

FADEMUR also reported that many of their members are engaged in organic production and choose to overcome the *middle man* to engage in short food chains, because their plots of land are small and selling directly to the consumer is the only way to make a profit. Romania is keen to develop education and training for women to assist them to engage in these types of short food chains to help ensure their sustainability.

Although Sweden has one of the highest percentages of organic farms in the EU, there is no information available on gendered differences other than that women are more favourably disposed towards buying organic produce.

CONCLUSIONS

This article has explored the power play involved in the construction of EU agricultural policy, gender equality policy and how they are 'married' and rolled out in four case-study Member States. We find a strong agricultural lobby that has a federal agricultural policy replacing Member State agricultural policies. Gender equality does not have the same powerful lobby groups that share strong commitments with the European Commission. As a consequence, there is little political will to implement gender equality components into agricultural policies. We find that the

weakness of gender equality requirements acts as a deterrent in both countries that are committed to progressing gender equality and those that are less committed. In Spain and Sweden, both of whom are committed to gender equality, they are thwarted by the fact that European agricultural policies do not require gender budgeting and do not allow favourable incentives for women. In Ireland and Romania, where there is less commitment to gender equality, they will only be motivated if the European Commission makes it a requirement and monitors it. It has previously been argued that there is an assumption that the goals of the mainstream and gender will be compatible (Verloo, 2005). The mainstream can use business rationale that seems more legitimate and convincing than gender language. This is very clearly the case with agricultural policies, where the business of farming is understood as the primary purpose, and policies are seen as gender neutral.

Our findings show that agricultural policies do not consider how women farm differently, the gender of new entrants, who receive the bulk of payments, or the gender of the farming unions that negotiate agricultural policies at the national and EU level.

This article supports [Arora-Jonsson and Sijapati's \(2018\) findings](#) that when global or international organisations insert feminist language into official gender documents and then do nothing, it has a detrimental impact at the local level. The EU has the language of gender mainstreaming but, in reality, demonstrates no commitment to it as a policy. Gender-progressive Member States are thwarted, because they now administer a federal agricultural policy and cannot apply national gender norms to this policy. With less progress, Member States have no incentive to consider gender.

Our analysis relates to the previous rural development programme 2014–2020. In the current programme, Member States have increased control over Pillar I and are specifically encouraged to include measures addressing gender equality. It is hoped that this article will provide a baseline against which to measure how successful this initiative will be. We are pessimistic. Although it is encouraged, it is not mandatory, and there are no sanctions if equality is not addressed. It is likely that what will emerge is wider variation across the EU. Without a common gender policy, implemented and regulated by DG AGRI, the more reluctant Member States will not progress equality in agriculture.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

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ETHICS STATEMENT

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PATIENT CONSENT/PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE

Not applicable

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ENDNOTE

¹Unlike other European countries, Sweden does not have a separate Ministry for Agriculture.

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