



Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture and Rural Development Policies



This project is financed by
the European Union



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This publication was produced with financial support of the European Union.
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The principle of gender equality, as fundamental human right that must be respected by all individuals and in all spheres of society, is gaining in importance, especially in the last several years, i.e. after re-emergence of many issues which, at first glance, seemed to have been resolved long ago. Such is the case with gender equality and equity, especially in regard to their practical enforcement in individual sectors, including the agriculture and rural development sector.

Agriculture is among the most widespread activities across the world and plays a key role in food production, environment protection and preservation, employment in rural areas, and food safety. Globally, women do three times as much unpaid work compared to men.[1] Only 38% of women in rural areas consider themselves as economically active, while the remaining share of them belong to the so-called informal economy where the status of women in terms of health and social protection is not regulated. This directly increases the already existing discrimination, making women in rural areas an even more vulnerable category.[2]

Women in rural areas are facing multiple challenges, such as: social exclusion, unemployment, gender discrimination, inequitable distribution of income and resources, dominant traditional norms, denied property rights on agricultural land and real-estate, denied right to paid parental leave, limited access to and offer of education, information, healthcare, public and social services.

These conditions push women from rural areas into greater poverty and encourage their migration. Such state-of-affairs is additionally affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Around 62% of women in rural areas are not active on the labour market due to their household responsibilities and care for children, while 47% of unemployed women in rural areas do unpaid work in family agricultural holdings.[3] According to family income source, households that are sustained by agriculture income are second-ranked in terms of poverty (57.4%), while the highest level of poverty is noted with households that are sustained by social allowance (90.6%). Among all women in rural areas, 58% do not have personal income, which is two times higher compared to men in rural areas.[4] On average, women work 11.06 hours per day (41.7% of the overall scope of their work concerns unpaid work). Average working hours among men account for 9.68 hours per day and mainly concern paid work.[5]

Women's participation in labour and economic growth is of key importance for attainment of objectives defined under the Strategy EU 2020, whereby agriculture and rural development could make significant contribution in that regard. In 2014, at the level of EU-28, agriculture was the seventh biggest employer of women (3.3%). In the case of men, agriculture is less important in terms of finding employment (5.2%).[6]

[1] UN Women Report, Progress of the World's Women 2019 – 2020, available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/progress-of-the-worlds-women>

[2] Multidimensional Analysis of Poverty in the Republic of Macedonia, Federation of Farmers of RM, Skopje, 2017, available at: <https://bit.ly/3cxO3uC>

[3] Trendafilovska, O., Ristevska B., Jovanovska, P., "From Rural Woman to Successful Entrepreneur without Stereotypes and Prejudices", Green Stock Exchange, Bitola, 2019

[4] Ibid.

[5] "Measuring Women Empowerment in Agriculture by Applying Experimental Economic Method", research paper by the Faculty of Agricultural Science and Food – Skopje, supported by UN Women, 2019

[6] Analysis of Perspectives for Women in Agricultural and Rural Areas in the Republic of North Macedonia, National Council on Gender Equality, Association for Local and Rural Development and Rural Coalition, Skopje, 2019

Nevertheless, these data could be incomplete because they do not cover informal economy in rural areas where women are still engaged. Women play an essential role in rural families, communities and economies, and they are the driving force behind maintenance, preservation and development of rural areas, both in cultural and in economic context. Women contribute to preservation of the rich and diverse cultural heritage and to passing down traditions. Also, they account for significant portion of the labour force in agriculture and contribute to rural development at times of continuous depopulation. Unfortunately, women in rural areas are an invisible force because their presence and role are not precisely reflected in official statistics, i.e. because they tend to register as unemployed, especially when they do unpaid agriculture work.

The above-enlisted fact is confirmed by data obtained from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy (MAFWE), whereby among total of 175,088 registered family agricultural holdings the number of those managed by women is marked by an increase over the last two years, accounting for 36,685 (in 2019) and 38,328 (or around 21.7%) women holders of family agricultural holdings by June 2020.[7] This upward trend in terms of the number of registered women famers, inter alia, is due to lessened criteria for obtaining additional points or additional subsidy percentage, social and health security, and possibilities for personal pension insurance. Also, particular effect on this upward trend in terms of women engagement and registration in the agriculture and rural development sector is attributed to measures that focus on women as holders of family-run agriculture businesses, for example, measure 115 that supports active female members in family agricultural holdings, which was created with participation of all stakeholders in the sector and was announced for the first time by the end of 2019.[8]

Table no. 1: Report from records on registered family agricultural holdings[9], status in August 2020

Holders of family agricultural holdings	2019	2020
Number of men holders of family agricultural holdings	135.978	136.760
Number of women holders of family agricultural holdings	36.685	38.328
Young farmers below the age of 40	24.285	24.423
Total number of family agricultural holdings	172.663	175.088

Republic of North Macedonia is candidate-country for EU membership and has already established mechanisms for equal opportunities, i.e. gender equality. Inspired by the EU's Common Agriculture Policy, the country has confirmed its rural development policy. This is particularly important having in mind that 45% of the country's population lives in rural areas. However, it cannot be disputed that gender should be mainstreamed in the rural development policy, together with definition of developmental priorities for women in rural areas engaged in other sectors (such as education, healthcare, social protection and economy) having in mind that women account for 49% of residents in rural areas.[10]

[7] Source: MAFWE, Sector on Rural Development

[8] <http://www.mzsv.gov.mk/Events.aspx?IdRoot=1&IdLanguage=1&News=813>

[9] Records on Registered Family Agricultural Holdings

[10] Analysis of Perspectives for Women in Agricultural and Rural Areas in the Republic of North Macedonia, National Council on Gender Equality, Association for Local and Rural Development and Rural Coalition, Skopje, 2019

Definition of policies and strategic development in this sector; planning of agricultural and rural development in the country; objectives of the national agriculture policy; planning, monitoring and evaluation of the national agriculture policy; partnership with social and economic partners in the area of agriculture; measures for regulation of and support to agricultural markets, direct payments and rural development; state aid in agriculture and rural development; forms of organization and association in agriculture, as well as control and supervision on implementation of measures are regulated under the **Law on Agriculture and Rural Development**.^[11]

According to this law, objectives of the national agriculture policy in the Republic of North Macedonia are geared towards:

- Ensuring stable production of quality and cheaper food and securing the population with sufficient quantity of food;
- Increasing the agriculture's competitive ability;
- Ensuring stable level of revenue for the agriculture holdings;
- Sustainable development of rural areas; and
- Optimizing the use of natural resources, with due respect for the principles of nature preservation and environmental protection.

In order to attain these objectives, the legislator anticipated a series of measures and policy instruments intended to regulate and support agricultural markets, direct payments, and rural development. The national agriculture policy is financed from the budget of the Republic of North Macedonia, budget of the European Union, donations and other sources in compliance with the law.^[12]

The Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance in Rural Development – IPARD II Programme (2014-2020)^[13] holds special importance for development of agriculture in the Republic of North Macedonia, as it allows access to EU funds intended as financial assistance for sustainable agriculture and rural development with focus on implementation of the European Community acquis in regard to the Common Agriculture Policy and policies on competitive sustainable agriculture, strong and sustainable rural communities, and diversified and sustainable rural environment.

IPARD contains measures that give advantage to women farmers, i.e. assigns them more ranking points, but these measures have yielded certain tangible results only in the last two or three years. This is confirmed by data on applications approved under open calls announced by the Agency for Financial Support to Agriculture and Rural Development. Notably, throughout the duration of IPARD Programme 2007-2013, only 15 from the total of 125 contracts signed were awarded to women.

[11] Law on Agriculture and Rural Development, consolidated text, March 2017, available at:

<http://zpis.gov.mk/Upload/Documents/Zakon%20za%20zemjodelstvo%20i%20ruralen%20razvoj%20mart%202017.pdf>

[12] Ibid.

[13] IPARD II Programme (2014-2020), available at: <https://ipard.gov.mk/mk/ipard-2014-2020-2/%d0%b8%d0%bf%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%b4-2014-2020/%d0%b8%d0%bf%d0%b0%d1%80%d0%b4-%d0%bf%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b3%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bc%d0%b0-2014-2020/>

In that period, only 4% of women were holders of family agricultural holdings, only 5% held property in their name, and high 92% of women reported they have not benefited from any kind of financial assistance offered under different programs.[14] Moreover, the overall absorption rate of funds available was unsatisfactory, i.e. according to data from the Agency for Financial Support to Agriculture and Rural Development only 16% of funds allocated under IPARD I Programme for the given period have been absorbed. Hence, **education of farmers about the importance of measures under the IPARD Programme** is of outmost significance in order to ensure full utilization of potentials in agriculture. All that will help in bringing Macedonian agriculture closer to the European, and in creating competitive products of high added value.

Moreover, as part of efforts to motivate women in rural areas to apply for funding MAFWE allows them up to 65% reimbursement of eligible costs from realized investment, both under IPARD and the Program for Rural Development. In order to provide greater incentives for women, the ranking process of applications for financial support under IPARD measure 1 and measure 7 awards women additional 20 points, while women applying for support under measure 3 are assigned additional 10 points. Additional 20 points are awarded to women when applying for measures under the Program for Rural Development. By doing that, MAFWE motivates women to be brave, to register own businesses and thereby develop areas where they live.

According to most recent analyses, absorption of funds from the IPARD Programme among women is marked by 7% increase. On the first call announced for measure 1 under IPARD II, a total of 893 contracts were awarded, of which 220 contracts were awarded to women and they have been paid 156,554,353.50 MKD in total. In 2018, the first call for measure 1 was presented with 1,099 applications, of which 262 were submitted by women. A total of 23 contracts were awarded under measure 7, of which 9 were signed with women. As regards measure 7, a total of 23 contracts were awarded, of which 9 were signed with women, while this year, 343 from the total of 1,347 applications for procurement of tractors were submitted by women. As much as 91 from the total of 481 applications for procurement of beekeeping equipment were submitted by women. As regards measure 112, intended to support young farmers, 140 from the total of 526 contracts for start-up agro-businesses are signed by young women farmers who appear as investment holders, accounting for around 27% of the total number of contracts signed under this measure. In the case of direct payments, 11,906 from the total of 68,079 beneficiaries under the Program for Financial Support to Agriculture were women.[15]

In that context, in 2018 MLSP and MAFWE signed the Declaration for Improving the Social and Economic Status of Women in Rural Areas.[16] Additionally, gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development is further enhanced with formation of the Group on Gender Equality and Economic Empowerment of Women in Rural Areas. This group is formed with support from UN Women and, for the first time, involves all stakeholders in this sector - institutions, civil society organizations, women farmers, educational institutions, and the business sector. For the first time, the group succeeded in defining and publishing measure 115, which is exclusively intended to support active women holders of family agriculture holdings.

[14] Information on progress of AFSARD's activities in respect to the IPARD Programme, May 2019, available at:

<https://cutt.ly/khc9HUK>

[15] Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, Sector on Rural Development

[16] <https://akademik.mk/potpishana-deklaratsija-za-podobruvane-na-sotsijalnata-i-ekonomskata-polozhba-na-zhenite-od-ruralnite-sredini/>

This measure concerns support for economic activity of women in rural areas and anticipates assistance in the value of up to 3,000 EUR for investments in this sector, with a tendency for further increase, all for the purpose of promoting the status of women in rural areas and contributing to their economic independence and financial stability.

For this upward trend related to gender mainstreaming in the sector to be maintained at higher strategic level, efforts are needed for aggressive action towards attainment and practice of gender equality in rural areas, which will contribute to overall development of local communities. In parallel to these processes, activities are needed to create space for engagement of women in rural areas and their impact on the process for development of gender-sensitive agricultural policies.

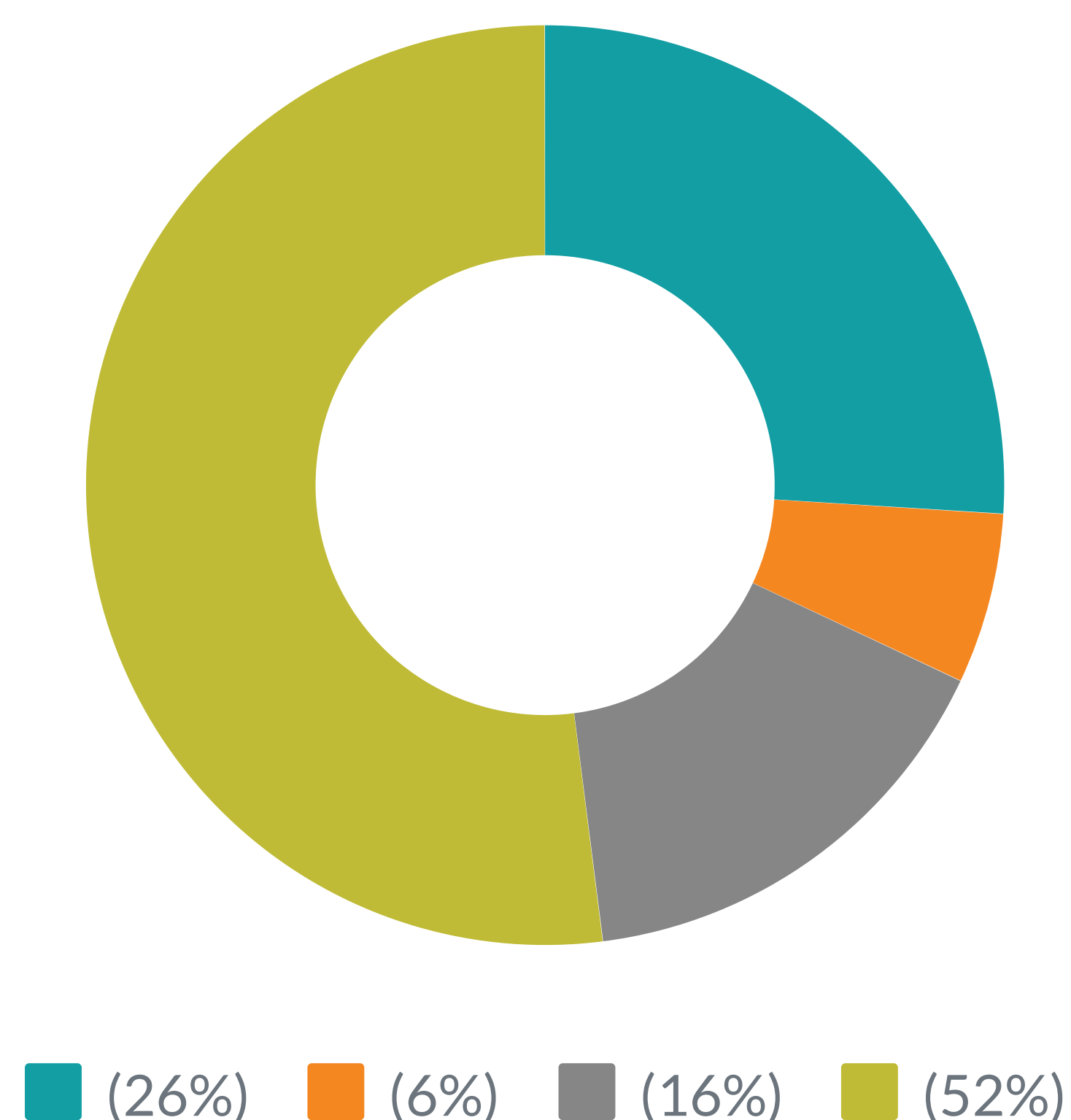
Another very important segment related to women in rural areas concerns their involvement in decision-making processes, starting at local community and ending at national level, i.e. at the level of policy-makers. Namely, although women are actively engaged in their households and activities to assist their community, which makes them knowledgeable of citizens' actual needs, due to different reasons they are rarely involved in participation mechanisms at local level, primarily because lack of time to participate in such activities, but also lack of self-confidence that their engagement would have any effects. It is exactly their lower engagement that leads to their needs, views and perceptions being excluded from policy-making at local level. Therefore, women's participation in decision-making is necessary in order to ensure inclusive democracy and to integrate their interests in local policies. On the contrary, decisions that would be taken by local governments without participation of women from these communities could be considered non-inclusive and undemocratic and might not be adequately accepted by all citizens. Consequently, women's participation might necessitate additional efforts for dissemination of required information on possibilities for participation, for securing direct (or indirect) participation, for allowing women to express their needs and interests, and for providing them adequate feedback on outcomes from their participation.

Despite the fact that we live in the era of modern technologies, women in rural areas mainly lack information about the field in which they work. Most of them are not familiar with state programs or, generally, they lack information about projects that offer support to women in rural areas, and therefore they lack sufficient information about IPARD Programme. This situation is further complicated by the fact that, on the scale from 1 to 5, as high as 52% of women in rural areas have assigned a score of 2 to presence of gender perspectives in the national agriculture policy.



Chart no.1: Presence of gender equality in the process for development of agriculture policy in RNM^[17]

Gender equality and equity are sufficiently promoted and represented in the country's agriculture policy



This is complemented with data that **not a single** woman respondent has been informed on how to participate in work of local and national institutions (primarily the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy as the key institution in this sector) nor has been informed about the existence of person for equal opportunities or person for gender equality that should serve as contact point and be available to answer any questions related to gender equality and equity in agriculture. An additional disappointing fact in regard to above-elaborated data is that the share of women who have heard about or have practiced the concept of gender-sensitive budgeting in their local communities accounts for zero.[18] The same share of answers was obtained to the question whether respondents are familiar with the gender index, which speaks volumes about insufficient involvement of the gender component (on all grounds) in agriculture policy- and decision-making by institutions in the agriculture and rural development sector, which inevitably raises the need for continuous efforts in respect to formal and informal education on topics related to this basic gender concept.

Moreover, these data support the fact that women in rural areas believe they are insufficiently involved in the decision-making process, starting from their households, and they strongly agree with the statement that traditional division of household roles into male and female is still dominant. In particular, female roles are understood to include care for home and family members, contribution to work of family agricultural holdings, which in most cases remains invisible, while decisions are taken exclusively by male family members, i.e. husbands or fathers-in-law.

This tradition starts to slowly change, as evidenced by the trend on annual increase of the number of registered women holders of family agricultural holdings, although the situation is still far from actual gender equality for women within family agricultural holdings.

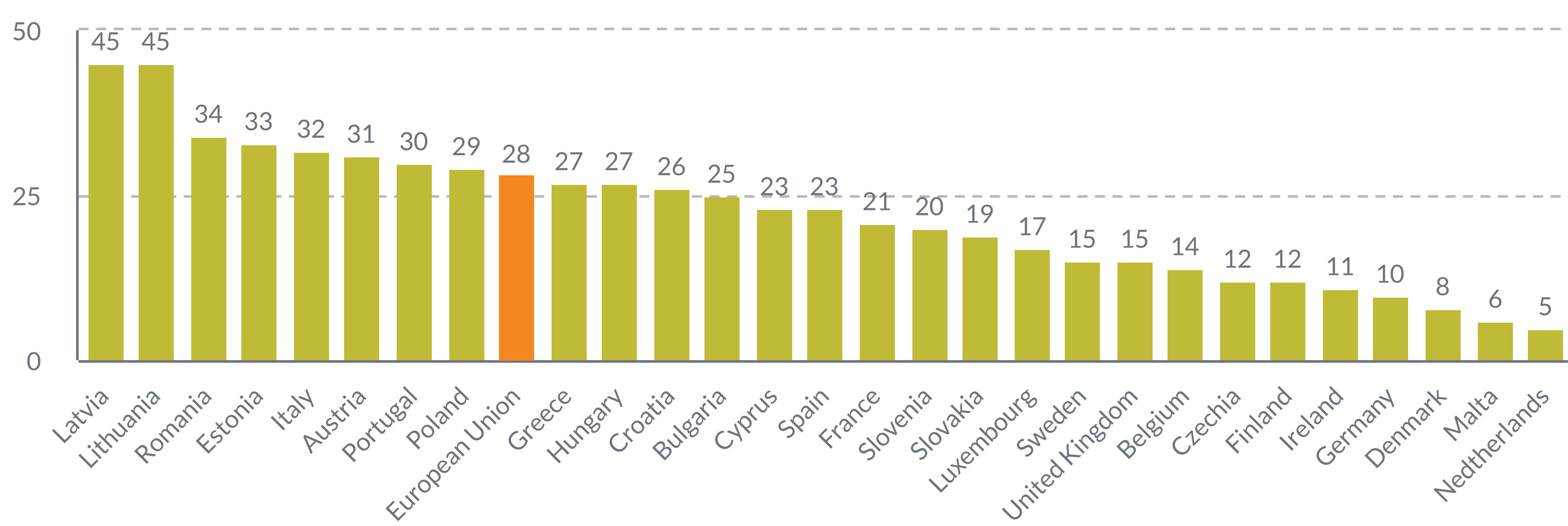
[17] Results from quantitative and qualitative field survey conducted among 150 women in rural areas across the Polog and Northeast planning regions, as part of the Report on Actual State-of-Affairs in Respect to Gender Equality in Rural Areas Across the Polog and Northeast Planning Regions, Rural Coalition, Skopje, 2019, available at: <https://rural.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Izvestaj-RK-finalno.pdf>

[18] Report on Actual State-of-Affairs in Respect to Gender Equality and Equity in the Northeast and Polog Planning Regions, Rural Coalition, 2019, available at: <https://rural.mk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Izvestaj-RK-finalno.pdf>

If we take EU member-states as benchmark, in spite of certain progress made in regard to gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development, major efforts are still needed in this regard. Namely, the economic gap based on gender is still present in all sectors, especially in the agriculture and rural development sector. According to Eurostat, around 30% of farms in this sector are managed by women,[19] but it should be noted that in countries like the Netherlands, Germany and Denmark, which are considered to have high gender index, the share of family agricultural holdings managed by women is below 10 percent, while in countries like Latvia and Lithuania this share accounts for up to 50%, i.e. half of family agricultural holdings are managed by men and the other half are managed by women. (Chart 2)

Chart no.2: Number of women holders of family agricultural holdings in the EU [20]

Proportion of farm managers who are women, 2016%



Furthermore, reports from EU member-states about their progress in respect to gender equality in agriculture and rural development show the multifunctional role of women on farms - as household keepers, mothers, workers, caregivers, teachers, etc., and the fact that women remain economically invisible, i.e. they are not paid for this type of work, which deprives them of adequate health and social services.

Furthermore, this fact is complemented by data that, according to the European Agricultural Union COPA - COGECA,[21] farms or family agricultural holdings managed by women are by 40% smaller in size compared to those managed by men. This is due to the family role of women, which leaves them little time to focus on their carrier and, to some extent, explains the fact that difference in pension benefits between men and women in some EU member-states reaches high 51% in favour of men.

The EU justifies such gender indicators with the fact that, across Europe, population engaged in agriculture is aging. Evidence thereof is found in the fact that women farmers below the age of 35 years account for only 4.9% of the total number of farmers. This fact, coupled with data that as many as 40% of women working in the agriculture and rural development sector are aged above 65 years,[22] clearly shows that overcoming this gender gap will be a true challenge for Europe as a whole, as it will become more visible in the years to come.

[19] "Croatian MEP: Women farmers should be key element of the new CAP", available at"

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/croatian-mep-women-farmers-should-be-key-element-in-next-cap/>

[20] Females in the field: more women managing farms across Europe; available at: <https://cutt.ly/Thvwurw> [last retrieved on 25.08.2020]

[21] The united voice offarmers and their cooperatives in European Union, available at: <https://copa-cogeca.eu/Menu.aspx> [last retrieved on 30.08.2020]

[22] Females in the field: more women managing farms across Europe, достапно на: <https://cutt.ly/NhvwzNF>, март 2019 год., [последен пат пристапено на: 25.8.2020]

CONCLUSIONS

01

Gender statistics and gender indicators in the agriculture and rural development sector are key elements to advance exercise and practice of gender equality in rural areas.

02

Information, informal education and association are necessary for economic empowerment of women in rural areas, but also for their involvement in decision-making processes in the local communities.

03

Improving rural infrastructure for unhindered access to health and social services is the main precondition for inclusion of women from rural areas in all spheres of society.

04

Establishment of a fund and measures exclusively intended to support economic activity of women in rural areas will contribute towards their financial power and independence.

05

Gender equality in agriculture and rural development needs to be introduced as strategic objective under the National Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2021-2027.

06

Lessening application criteria for the IPARD Programme and increasing points allocated to women registered as holders of family agricultural holdings under all programmes will contribute to continued trend on increasing number of registered women farmers.

07

Increased cooperation, trust and transparency among institutions, local governments and women in rural areas will signal the green light for their involvement in agriculture policy-making and in adopting public decisions and measures.

08

Positive practices and measures from EU member-states should be used as model for gender mainstreaming in the national agriculture policy, which also implies alignment with the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP).
