



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# GENDER, AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA

Brief overview of regional  
trends and challenges





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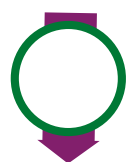


# Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 CURRENT CHALLENGES IN THE REGION</b>	<b>3</b>
2.1. Insecurity and crisis	3
2.2. Unrealized gender mainstreaming commitments	5
<b>3 GENDER INEQUALITIES AND RURAL LIFE</b>	<b>8</b>
3.1. Women's economic empowerment and access to decent work	10
3.2. Women's roles in unpaid work and in their communities	11
<b>4 GENDER GAPS IN AGRICULTURE</b>	<b>14</b>
4.1. Land tenure	14
4.2. Farm ownership and management	16
4.3. Agricultural labour and employment	19
4.4. Access to agri-inputs: seeds, fertilizers, equipment and irrigation	20
4.5. Access to agricultural resources: extension services, information and communications technologies, and finance	21
<b>5 KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>ANNEX: OVERVIEW OF GENDER INTEGRATION IN AGRICULTURAL CENSUSES</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>NOTES</b>	<b>27</b>

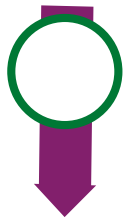






# Acknowledgements

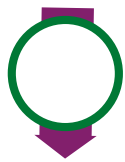
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# Abbreviations and acronyms

<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>CGA</b>	Country Gender Assessment
<b>EIGE</b>	European Institute for Gender Equality
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FAO REU</b>	FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia
<b>GDP</b>	gross domestic product
<b>ICT</b>	information and communications technology
<b>IDP</b>	internally displaced person
<b>IFAD</b>	International Fund for Agricultural Development
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UN Women</b>	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>WFP</b>	World Food Programme
<b>WUA</b>	water users' association





# Executive summary

In its 2011 flagship publication, *The state of food and agriculture – Women in agriculture: closing the gender gap for development*, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) made the case that women's unequal access to resources and opportunities not only holds them back but is a determining factor in the underperformance of the agriculture sector in many countries. Furthermore, the report documented the gender gaps in access to a wide range of productive resources relevant to agriculture and rural development. The message was clear that such inequalities must be addressed, or they will undermine food security and inhibit economic growth. While the focus of the flagship report was global, there is no region in which gender inequality does not persist, including in Europe and Central Asia.

More than a decade has passed since the report's publication, and it is evident that while some advances have been made in closing gender gaps, progress has not always been consistent or far-reaching. The need to accelerate efforts to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is still on the agenda for the Europe and Central Asia region. In regional meetings, FAO has consistently reiterated the need for gender-transformative approaches to overcome deeply rooted structural barriers in agriculture<sup>1</sup> that perpetuate inequalities, reinforce the gender dimensions of rural poverty and create barriers to women's economic independence.<sup>2</sup>

Farming has long been considered a “man's job”, and this conception has changed little. In fact, many practices in the agriculture sector, including traditions around farm ownership and the criteria for receiving agricultural support, perpetuate men's dominance in the sector and obscure women's contributions to farming.

Although women play key roles in agriculture, on family farms and also as labourers, often informally, they are significantly under-represented as farm owners and within producers' associations. They own and use fewer agri-inputs, including machinery, and have more limited access to the kinds of informational, technological and financial resources that are needed to increase productivity and profitability. Among smallholders, women's contributions are essential but are also concentrated at the input and production stages of value chains. As value is added to a particular chain, through processing, marketing and sales, women's involvement grows sparser. Men's participation increases at points where greater resources are required but profits are also higher. It is, however, not only women's lack of access to capital and other resources that creates barriers to moving up value chains, but their lack of mobility also reflects entrenched gender roles and norms. Women in rural areas typically play a triple role: in unpaid domestic and care work, work on family farms and also community-oriented work. They contribute substantially to the lives of their households and communities, but they also lack time, empowerment and access to entry points that would lead to formal decision-making roles, whether in running family farms or in setting priorities for the development of rural areas.

The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia has, to date, published twelve Country Gender Assessments (CGAs) for the region, with two additional ones in progress in 2022.<sup>a</sup> The assessments have generated a body of information about key gender gaps in the Member Nations that should be used for policymaking on the development of rural areas and transformative food systems.

The present regional overview is based on these Country Gender Assessments and synthesizes their findings to create a regional snapshot of persistent inequalities. By highlighting priority issues, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia, strategic partners and other stakeholders can, likewise, use the CGAs when developing technical assistance programmes and policies, in implementing projects and to advocate for increased attention to the status of women in agriculture. In fact, the production of Country Gender Assessments is just one facet of FAO's commitments to gender mainstreaming – that is, a process to ensure that the needs and priorities of rural women are embedded in law, strategic planning and public policy related to the development of transformative food systems, including agriculture, and for rural areas more generally.

During the Thirty-third Session of the FAO Regional Conference for Europe in 2022, Member Nations called on the Organization to “step up efforts to better promote gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment in all activities across the region”.<sup>3</sup> Emphasis was placed not only on improving the evidence base, through generating sex-disaggregated data, but also on interweaving policies on gender equality into food security and nutrition interventions at the country level.

In the decade since the above-mentioned State of Food and Agriculture report was launched, Europe and Central Asia have experienced unprecedented challenges, in the form of increasing environmental instability, a global health pandemic and, most recently, military tensions and war in Ukraine. In different ways, and to varying degrees, these events all threaten to increase food, economic and political insecurity and to push those who were already at risk of being left behind even further from the goalposts for human development. No less significant, there is evidence that gender gaps are widening and progress towards gender equality may even be slipping backwards. Increasing gender inequalities will undermine development efforts and exacerbate the vulnerabilities of rural women. When facing these regional challenges, the gender mainstreaming of agrifood systems is indispensable. Integrating a gender perspective means responding to the different needs, priorities and capacities of women and men. Gender mainstreaming also underpins FAO's use of transformative approaches that aim not only to increase women's productive capacity but also to enhance their control over essential resources, thus changing the current agriculture landscape into one of gender-equitable agrifood systems.

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a In addition, the FAO Global Report on the Status of Rural Women will be published in 2022/2023, with plans for regional overviews to follow.



# Introduction

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) recognizes that without addressing pervasive gender inequalities, it cannot fulfil its mandate of a world free from hunger, malnutrition and extreme poverty. As long as women continue to undertake the majority of unpaid work, including in agriculture, have more limited access to decent employment and productive resources, and are under-represented in power and decision-making structures, they will continue to feel the impacts of poverty, food insecurity, violence and climate change disproportionately. Because it is these constraints that ultimately inhibit inclusive and sustainable development, FAO regards investments in women and girls as a catalyst to accelerate progress in agriculture, rural development and food security.<sup>4</sup>

While FAO acknowledges that it is critical to identify and tackle gender-based constraints, the Organization views rural women and girls as key agents of change, and as neither inherently vulnerable nor passive observers. Thus, FAO's efforts to promote gender equality are aimed at unleashing "the ambitions and potential of rural women and girls".<sup>5</sup> By ensuring that women have the same access to a full range of resources as men, their capacities will be enhanced, as farmers, entrepreneurs and leaders.

In carrying out its normative and technical work, FAO uses two key strategies: integrating an intersectional gender perspective (gender mainstreaming) and implementing interventions that target women. These strategies are informed by an overarching transformative approach that challenges the root causes of gender inequalities and redresses unequal power dynamics.<sup>6</sup> Such an approach certainly places women and girls at the centre, but transformation cannot be achieved without men's and boys' engagement as partners.

The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia works to close gender gaps in agriculture and empower rural women in the region, affirming the mandate of the Organization to address inequalities between women and men that "undermine food security, hold back economic growth and limit advances in agriculture".<sup>7</sup>

FAO assistance provided to Member Nations also reflects the commitments expressed by the international community to eliminate discrimination, to protect the rights of rural women and to leave no one behind in implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>b</sup> Indeed, the situation of rural women cuts across much of the 2030 Agenda, and the goal of gender equality is mutually reinforcing with goals such as ending poverty and achieving food security that are bound up with fundamental rights to land and property, decent work, health and education for all. Even those Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that do not refer to gender targets explicitly have the potential to improve the lives of rural women and girls by reducing vulnerabilities.<sup>8</sup>

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b Examples of these commitments include Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 2016. *General recommendation no. 34 on the rights of rural women*, CEDAW/C/GC/3 (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/recommendations.aspx>); the Beijing Platform for Action (<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform>); and the Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 5 on gender equality and empowering women and girls (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment>).

This regional overview of agriculture and rural development in Europe and Central Asia identifies the persistent gender gaps that are limiting progress among Member Nations. It highlights priority issues as an evidence base for continued efforts by FAO, strategic partners and other stakeholders in technical assistance, policy development, project implementation and advocacy.

The overview covers three specific subregions: the Western Balkans and Türkiye, Eastern Europe and the Caucasus, and Central Asia. It focuses on the 14 countries across the subregions<sup>c</sup> in which the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia currently implements development activities or where it provides expertise and services.

The information within this overview is drawn primarily from the knowledge that FAO has generated through Country Gender Assessments (CGAs).<sup>d</sup> The CGA is a gender mainstreaming instrument required by FAO gender equality policy that improves the integration of gender-related outputs, activities and indicators in country-level work.<sup>9</sup> In the Europe and Central Asia region, CGAs have been used to compile quantitative data and qualitative information from disparate sources, presented as national profiles on the intersections of gender, agriculture and rural livelihoods. The CGAs are based on extensive literature reviews, data analysis and, increasingly, information obtained through focus group discussions that give voice to rural women. The CGA reports contribute to the evidence-base that should inform policymaking linked to the development of transformative food systems, including agriculture, and for rural areas more generally. At the same time, the CGAs improve awareness of the fundamental importance of conducting gender analysis in food security and agriculture, and in the context of improving rural livelihoods.

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c These are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye (Western Balkans and Türkiye); Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (Eastern Europe and the Caucasus); and Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Central Asia). Additionally, in 2022, the FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia is currently preparing a Country Gender Assessment for Belarus. The Regional Office also works with institutional partners in Kosovo. All references to Kosovo in this document shall be understood to be in full compliance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).

d Country Gender Assessments have been conducted in: Albania (2016), Armenia (2017), Azerbaijan (2022), Bosnia and Herzegovina (2021), Georgia (2018), Kyrgyzstan (2016), the Republic of Moldova (2022), Serbia (2021), Tajikistan (2016), Türkiye (2016), Ukraine (2021) and Uzbekistan (2019), and are in the pipeline for Belarus and Kazakhstan. CGAs for Albania, Georgia and Uzbekistan are being updated. FAO is also supporting the development of a gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods in Kosovo. Links to published CGAs are included in the Notes section of this review.



## Current challenges in the region

During the 2021 United Nations Food Systems Summit, the UN Secretary-General noted that conflict, climate extremes and economic volatility are drivers of food insecurity and malnutrition, and, moreover, that these forces are “further exacerbated by poverty and high levels of inequality”.<sup>10</sup> Global and regional crises, whether they are health, humanitarian or environmental, have deeply gendered impacts. Recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as military conflicts (here, the most critical being the war waged against Ukraine), rising poverty and violence, and climate change, are threatening to reverse progress towards gender equality in the Europe and Central Asia region, as is occurring in other parts of the world.<sup>11</sup>

In the face of crises, gender equality is frequently deprioritized, based on the notion that “other pressing issues need to be resolved first”. In fact, gender equality cannot be unlinked from insecurity. Crisis exacerbates existing inequalities, putting women and girls in even more disadvantaged positions. Conversely, full respect for the rights of women and girls and ensuring inclusivity can offer unique solutions to various unfolding crises. Thus, the inclusion of a gender perspective across policymaking, planning and programming – whether related to specific anti-crisis measures or for national development on the whole – is vital. Gender mainstreaming is the tool for ensuring that the specific needs and priorities of rural women in general, as well as the most vulnerable groups of women, are reflected in law, strategic planning and public policy pertaining to agriculture and rural development. This process should not be interrupted by crises but, rather, should be intensified.

*The clock  
on women's rights is  
moving backwards ...  
it's time to turn the  
clock forward for  
every woman  
and girl.*

**Source:** UN Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women). 2022. Statement by UN Secretary-General António Guterres on International Women's Day, 7 March 2022. In: UN Women. New York, USA. Cited 21 July 2022. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/statement/2022/03/statement-by-un-secretary-general-antonio-guterres-on-international-womens-day>



### 2.1. Insecurity and crisis

In the Europe and Central Asia region, instability in different forms is endangering the hard-won gains towards gender equality. This review cannot do justice to the many complex events that have unfolded over the past few years, but it does present a short overview of the gendered dimensions of current forms of insecurity and risks that should be considered alongside longstanding gender gaps in agriculture and rural livelihoods.

#### The COVID-19 pandemic: recovery and response

The COVID-19 health crisis laid bare the pre-existing constraints that rural women and girls faced in accessing productive resources, services, technologies, markets, financial assets and local institutions

which, in turn, have left them more vulnerable to the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic.<sup>12</sup> New challenges for protecting the most vulnerable segments of the rural population have arisen, especially in light of economic downturns. The pandemic has not only delayed progress towards achieving gender equality and reaching the Sustainable Development Goals, but it has led to backsliding on the “limited gains” that have been made in recent decades.<sup>13</sup> Thus, in view of the emerging challenges, one of which is regression, policymakers, programme developers and implementers will be required to examine the approaches they have been using for the empowerment of rural women and girls and seek new solutions that respond to changing conditions and make up for lost time.

### War in Ukraine and risk of humanitarian crises

The war currently being waged against Ukraine is the most recent example of a humanitarian crisis that puts whole populations in the country, in the region and beyond, at risk. The violent conflict, that has been ongoing in Ukraine since 2014, is not only affecting women and men differently but also has specific impacts on the rural population. The FAO Regional Office for Europe and Central Asia published its first ever CGA for Ukraine in 2021, identifying many gender issues, including those specific to conflict-affected areas, that have become more acute since the research was conducted.

The prior conflict and recent invasion have caused massive civilian displacement. In early 2021, the Ukrainian Ministry of Social Policy had registered over 1.4 million people as internally displaced, and the United Nations estimated that more than 3.5 million were in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>14</sup> Before the February 2022 invasion, women and children made up two-thirds of the country’s displaced population. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Ukraine is estimated to have now reached 7.7 million.<sup>e,15</sup> An estimated 12 million people in Ukraine are in need of humanitarian assistance.<sup>16</sup> Increasingly, the affected population is seeking safety outside of Ukraine, and as of April 2022, 5.5 million refugees had fled the conflict: of those refugees who have left the country, 90 percent are women and children.<sup>f</sup> Neighbouring countries, such as Poland, Romania and the Republic of Moldova, are facing pressures to accommodate the influx of refugees, while refugees themselves, as well as IDPs, have complex needs, including for long-term support.

In Ukraine, food insecurity had been increasing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the outbreak of war, and women were already more food insecure than men.<sup>17</sup> The war is further constraining agricultural production and limiting economic activity. Food supply chains within Ukraine have been disrupted because the population has been displaced during the spring/summer harvest season, agricultural inputs are not available, and fewer men are available to work in agriculture because they are engaged in fighting. The latter has especially resulted in an increased labour burden on the women who remain.<sup>18</sup> Rising prices, isolation and reduced mobility in conflict-affected territories mean that many households will face further difficulties accessing nutritious food and water. Women-headed households, which previously represented 71 percent of the total households in the government-controlled areas of Ukraine,<sup>19</sup> are especially vulnerable in terms of poverty, food security and physical safety.

Because the Russian Federation, which is currently under sanctions, and Ukraine are major exporters of wheat, maize, sunflower, barley and fertilizers, the war has implications for global agricultural markets and food security for many countries and the vulnerable populations within them.<sup>20</sup> The impacts of the war are already seen in rising food prices in the Eurasian Economic Union countries (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and the Russian Federation)<sup>21</sup> as well as others that are major importers of Ukrainian and Russian wheat, including Azerbaijan, Georgia and Türkiye.<sup>22</sup>

Political tensions, civil unrest and “frozen” conflicts with periodic escalations have taken place in other countries in the Europe and Central Asia region. These unstable conditions disrupt the lives of rural populations, encourage outmigration and hold back the economic development of rural areas.

e As of 24 July 2022, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recorded a total of 5 237 persons killed (2 019 men, 1 379 women, 143 girls and 164 boys, as well as 41 children and 1 491 adults whose sex is yet unknown) and a total of 7 035 injured persons (1 384 men, 1 017 women, 150 girls and 215 boys, as well as 195 children and 4 074 adults whose sex is yet unknown).

f Note that men aged 18–60 are required to stay in Ukraine.



## Climate change and environmental degradation

Environmental instability, in the form of climate change, extreme weather events and natural disasters, is no less of a threat to the livelihoods of rural populations in the region than humanitarian and health crises. For example, severe droughts in some parts of Europe and flash flooding in others have resulted in the loss of human lives and agricultural crops. Climate change is especially significant for Central Asia because the region is prone to environmental degradation and natural disasters, such as droughts, floods and earthquakes. Past extreme weather events have demonstrated that rural women and men have differing vulnerabilities and levels of resilience, and extreme climate events exacerbate pre-existing gender disparities. For example, women tend to farm smaller plots of land, using fewer agricultural inputs, and have less financial stability, and thus the negative impacts of climate change on their production can be especially difficult to overcome. Women are often excluded from climate change decision-making processes and are under-represented in agencies that deal with environmental protection or climate change mitigation. Therefore, while women have unique knowledge and perspectives on the protection of biodiversity and disaster risk reduction, for example, their contributions are minimally reflected in national policy.



## 2.2. Unrealized gender mainstreaming commitments

On the whole, the Europe and Central Asia region has a strong legislative and policy base for the promotion of gender equality, through gender-sensitive laws, national strategies and action plans. A key feature of many of the laws on gender equality is the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming, a process in which gender issues are considered throughout policymaking. However, significant challenges remain for the full realization of gender mainstreaming commitments in terms of implementing concrete actions that support the empowerment of rural women and girls.

### Invisibility of rural women in public policy

Reviews of the national context, conducted as part of the CGAs in the region, reveal that despite high-level commitments to increasing gender-sensitive public policy, considerable work is required to systematize gender mainstreaming across public policy, during the design and consultation stages and, critically, also as part of procurement and implementation through national activities.

First, in practice, gender equality commitments are poorly reflected in national policy that is relevant to agriculture or rural areas. Too often, sectoral policies refer generally to “farmers” or “the rural population”, which renders women’s contributions invisible. Broad national development strategies that cover rural development may refer to gender equality as a high-level goal but seldom specify concrete actions or allocate budgets for gender-responsive measures. At the same time, stand-alone national strategies on the promotion of gender equality rarely include topics related to women’s roles in agricultural production. In general, sectoral policy is siloed; a gender perspective is included in policies for issues that are traditionally associated with women, such as health care, education, and increasingly also micro or small business, yet is virtually absent from agricultural policy. Moreover, national action plans to implement strategies follow a similar pattern: with the exception of national action plans on gender equality, they tend to lack gender-sensitive targets and indicators, do not specify a responsible institution and have no budgets for the implementation of concrete activities.

While there are a few positive examples in the region of strategies and public programmes dedicated to improving the lives of rural women, the misconception persists that agriculture is a gender-neutral topic. This failure to recognize gender as cross-cutting means that issues such as women’s unpaid work on family farms are frequently overlooked, resulting in women’s further isolation from key resources. Policies that aim to be inclusive must not ignore the inputs of half of the population. When they do, there is an increased risk that women and girls, as well as those in minority groups, will not fully benefit from the development of rural areas or in agriculture and will be left behind.



## Inconsistent political will

A positive trend is the increased capacity of public institutions to implement gender equality law and policy and to reflect gender considerations in their work. Initiatives include the creation of gender units or networks of gender focal points in line ministries or in inter-ministerial bodies. However, the practice of appointing gender advisors within ministries of agriculture, forestry and fisheries, or ministries concerned with rural development or the environment, is not consistent. The ministries of agriculture in Bosnia and Herzegovina (both Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina), Serbia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan have directives referring to gender advisors, but the gender mainstreaming practices of these institutions have not been widely disseminated. Furthermore, the responsibilities and authority of gender focal points vary considerably. In many cases, this role is an additional responsibility to other work, without terms of reference, funding or time allocated for this function.<sup>23</sup> Thus, while a promising practice, gender focal points tend to play an informational and advisory role, and their ability to influence policymaking in the agriculture sector remains very limited.

## Weak evidence base

FAO has consistently raised concerns over the lack of sex-disaggregated data and statistics relevant to agriculture and rural development.<sup>24</sup> Insufficient data obscures the picture of where gender gaps are most pronounced and this, in turn, leads to policies and programmes that are not inclusive or evidence-based and thus neither targeted nor effective. While the collection of sex-disaggregated data has become a standard practice across the region, the statistics that are produced are insufficient to inform policy on agriculture or rural development specifically. Comparing existing statistics against FAO's recommended core set of gender indicators in agriculture,<sup>g</sup> data are missing for fundamental indicators such as access to and control over a range of productive resources (including agricultural extension services, machinery and equipment, and irrigation) as well as benefits (agricultural credit and membership in farmers' organizations, for instance). These kinds of data are needed to clarify the picture concerning the relative productivity of female- and male-led farms and the constraints they face, in order to devise responsive strategies.

The process of conducting CGAs has shown that all Member Nations collect data and produce statistics on agriculture, fisheries and forestry. These are compiled and published regularly, but their primary purpose is for monitoring agricultural markets. For this reason, the data collections are oriented towards indicators on crop production, harvests and yields, and land use, but do not include individual-level indicators<sup>h</sup> that would allow for data to be disaggregated by sex.

The majority of countries have conducted an agricultural census in the last two decades, but gender has been integrated only minimally.<sup>25</sup> Gender-sensitive indicators that have been included in agricultural censuses tend to cover farm ownership and management (the sex of the "holder" or the "manager" of a farm), the agricultural labour force and members of farming households (see Table 1). Very few censuses have generated sex-disaggregated data about the size of farmland, farming purposes, the educational background of farm holders and the contributions of unpaid family members to household or smallholder farms. Furthermore, not all sex-disaggregated data collected during previous censuses were included in census publications, but it is theoretically possible for national statistical institutions that have access to the primary databases to use it to produce gender statistics. Note that a more detailed overview of the types of gender-sensitive indicators included in past agricultural censuses is presented in the Annex to this review. An additional consideration is the fact that the majority of countries have plans to conduct a census in 2023/2024, which offers opportunities to improve indicators for measuring women's contributions to agriculture.

g The Core set of Gender Indicators in Agriculture, 18 indicators in total, is available at <http://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/7bf039ca-5a61-4629-bbe5-593d9a8d5d86>.

h Specifically, data are not regularly collected at the level of individual farm owners, farm managers, heads of households that engage in farming or owners of agricultural businesses that would allow for disaggregation by sex and to measure gaps between women and men, changes in gender roles or progress towards gender equality, for example.

**Table 1. Overview of gender-sensitive data collected in agricultural censuses in Europe and Central Asia**

Country	Sex of farm holder*	Sex of farm manager	Sex of members of holder's household working on the holding	Sex of non-family employees working on the holding**
Albania	✓	✓	✓	✓
Armenia	✓		✓	✓
Azerbaijan	✓		✓	✓
Kyrgyzstan	✓***			
North Macedonia			✓	✓
Republic of Moldova	✓		✓	✓
Serbia	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tajikistan		✓		✓
Türkiye			✓	

**Notes:**

\*This indicator refers to household farms.

\*\*This indicator may include seasonal work (as is the case in North Macedonia).

\*\*\*In the case of the agriculture census for Kyrgyzstan, this indicator refers to both “peasant and individual farms”.

**Source:** FAO. 2022. World Programme for the Census of Agriculture, Country participation by round. In: FAO. Rome. Cited 21 July 2022. <https://www.fao.org/world-census-agriculture/wcarounds/census/en>

The selection of gender-sensitive national targets and indicators for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also has the potential to increase the availability of relevant data. Particularly notable efforts are underway in the Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) and the Western Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, as well as in Kosovo) to enhance reporting under SDG 5.a.1 and SDG 5.a.2 on women's ownership of agricultural land and women's equal rights to landownership.<sup>i</sup>

National data collections are generally disaggregated by settlement type (rural or urban) or by sex, but not both variables at once. Limited data concerning rural areas mean that information about the sectors in which disparities are the most pronounced or where there may be opportunities for improving rural livelihoods is obscured. Furthermore, there is a lack of complex disaggregation by location and sex, age, ethnicity, disability status, and refugee or internally displaced status, among other variables. Such data, as well as analysis, are needed to “provide a better understanding of subgroups of rural women most at risk of being left behind”.<sup>26</sup> Specialized data collection is also necessary to identify particular constraints, risks and opportunities for rural women – for instance surveys on time use, patterns of household decision-making and the prevalence of gender-based violence. Even more so in the current period, sex-disaggregated data and gender analysis are vital to assess the differential indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, conflict and climate change in order to design gender-responsive recovery<sup>27</sup> and humanitarian measures.

<sup>i</sup> Additional information is available at FAO. 2022. *Achieving SDG Indicator 5.a.2 in the Western Balkans and beyond, partnerships for gender equality in land ownership and control* (3rd edition). Rome. Note that the Land Resources Management Committee of the Ministry of Agriculture of Kazakhstan also collects data for Target 5.a.1.



## Gender inequalities and rural life

The social, economic and political contexts in which gender inequalities play out are deeply affected by spatial differences – that is, urban and rural differences. While there are a number of consistent areas in which women and girls experience disadvantages across the region, spatial disparities also have a significant impact on poverty rates, employment opportunities and engagement in unpaid work.

In the Europe and Central Asia region, a considerable proportion of the population lives rurally, although the share of rural residents varies by country, from less than a third of the population (in Belarus, Türkiye and Ukraine, for example) up to more than half of the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Moldova, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (see Figure 1). As the demographic profiles of countries are changing, the disparities between resources available to the urban and rural populations are also widening. Yet, although a significant number of people still live in rural areas, there is a persistent lack of both data and qualitative research about many facets of rural life, including from a gender perspective. Addressing gender disparities among the rural population is, however, central to improving the rural way of life – itself critical for poverty reduction, increasing agricultural production and transforming food systems.

The depopulation of rural areas and subsequent urbanization processes are typical for the Member Nations of this review in the Western Balkans, and Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. However, the pattern differs in countries that are experiencing overall rural population growth, such as in Central Asia.<sup>j</sup> Urbanization is primarily driven by migration, both internally from rural areas to more economically developed cities and abroad. After socioeconomic factors, such as the lack of jobs and declining social conditions in rural areas, people are driven to migrate due to armed conflict, natural disaster and environmental degradation. Still, labour migration predominates in Central Asia and has similar consequences for the demographic situation in rural areas.

Migration patterns also have a gender dimension. Throughout the region, economic migration has historically been male-dominated and also viewed more favourably as an option for men. In Central Asia, for example, men are still the “typical” labour migrants. Men make up 77 percent of labour migrants (aged 15 years and older) who travel abroad from Kyrgyzstan for work; and 79 percent of Kyrgyz labour migrants are former rural residents.<sup>28</sup> In other subregions, the number of women migrating for work from rural areas, both internally and abroad, may be equal to or higher than the rate for male migration. For instance, in Serbia, rural to urban migration is more prevalent among women due to factors such as women’s lack of assets, their weaker ties to land and other property, and the lack of employment opportunities.<sup>29</sup> Migration has therefore had significant impacts on rural labour markets in the region, with the workforce moving away from jobs in agriculture.

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j Countries in Central Asia have not seen declines in rural populations but, rather, the rural populations of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have increased significantly over the last decade, as shown in World Bank estimates, available at [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?end=2020&name\\_desc=false&start=1960&view=chart](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?end=2020&name_desc=false&start=1960&view=chart).


**Figure 1. Rural population for selected countries of Europe and Central Asia, 2020**


**Source:** Estimates from The World Bank. 2018. Rural population (% of total population). World Bank staff estimates based on the United Nations Population Division's World Urbanization Prospects: 2018 Revision. In: *World Bank DataBank*. Washington, DC. Cited 21 July 2022. [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?end=2020&name\\_desc=false&start=1960&view=chart](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.RUR.TOTL.ZS?end=2020&name_desc=false&start=1960&view=chart)

The gendered impacts of migration on the population structure of rural communities are twofold. On the one hand, outmigration of the working age population has left rural areas with a higher proportion of older people and the very young. Declining birth rates are a factor in the ageing of the rural population, for instance in Serbia and Ukraine.<sup>30</sup> It is worth noting that this trend is not uniform across the region; for example, in Azerbaijan and Tajikistan the birth rate is higher among women in rural areas, particularly evident among adolescents.<sup>k</sup> When women's longevity into old age is also considered, this explains the fact that villages tend to have a higher proportion of older, often single, women than urban areas, and this is especially prevalent in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, where men make up the majority of long-term labour migrants, this has created the phenomenon of women and children in rural areas who are "left behind", as seen in both Central Asia and Armenia. In both cases, the result is an increase in the number of households headed by women.<sup>l</sup> In Armenia, 27 percent of rural households are de facto headed by women.<sup>31</sup>

The ageing rural population and prevalence of women-headed households both have important implications for the viability of agricultural production, the former in terms of whether there is a

<sup>k</sup> In Azerbaijan in 2020, the birth rate for women aged 15 to 19 was 57.6 per 1 000 in rural areas, compared with 25.7 per 1 000 in urban areas (additional information is available in the State Statistical Committee's 2021 publication *Women and men in Azerbaijan*); and in Tajikistan in 2017, the birth rate for women aged 15 to 19 was 59 per 1 000 in rural areas, compared with 41 per 1 000 in urban areas (additional information is available in the Statistics Agency's 2020 publication *Women and men of the Republic of Tajikistan*).

<sup>l</sup> Note that FAO distinguishes between two types of female-headed households: those in which an adult male partner is working away from the household but remains involved through remittances and other economic and social ties (de facto); and those which have no male partner, such as women who are widowed, divorced or never married (de jure). Further information is available in FAO's 2011 report, *The State of food and agriculture. Women in agriculture: closing the gender gap for development*.

sufficient labour force, and the latter in terms of women's empowerment to act as smallholders or farm managers in the absence of men who are typically viewed as the heads of households and breadwinners. Women, as members of households and those who are “left behind”, make up a considerable proportion of rural communities. Although they are often managing family farms and farming small plots of land for their own subsistence, they are not typically recognized as “farmers” in terms of agricultural policies and support programmes.

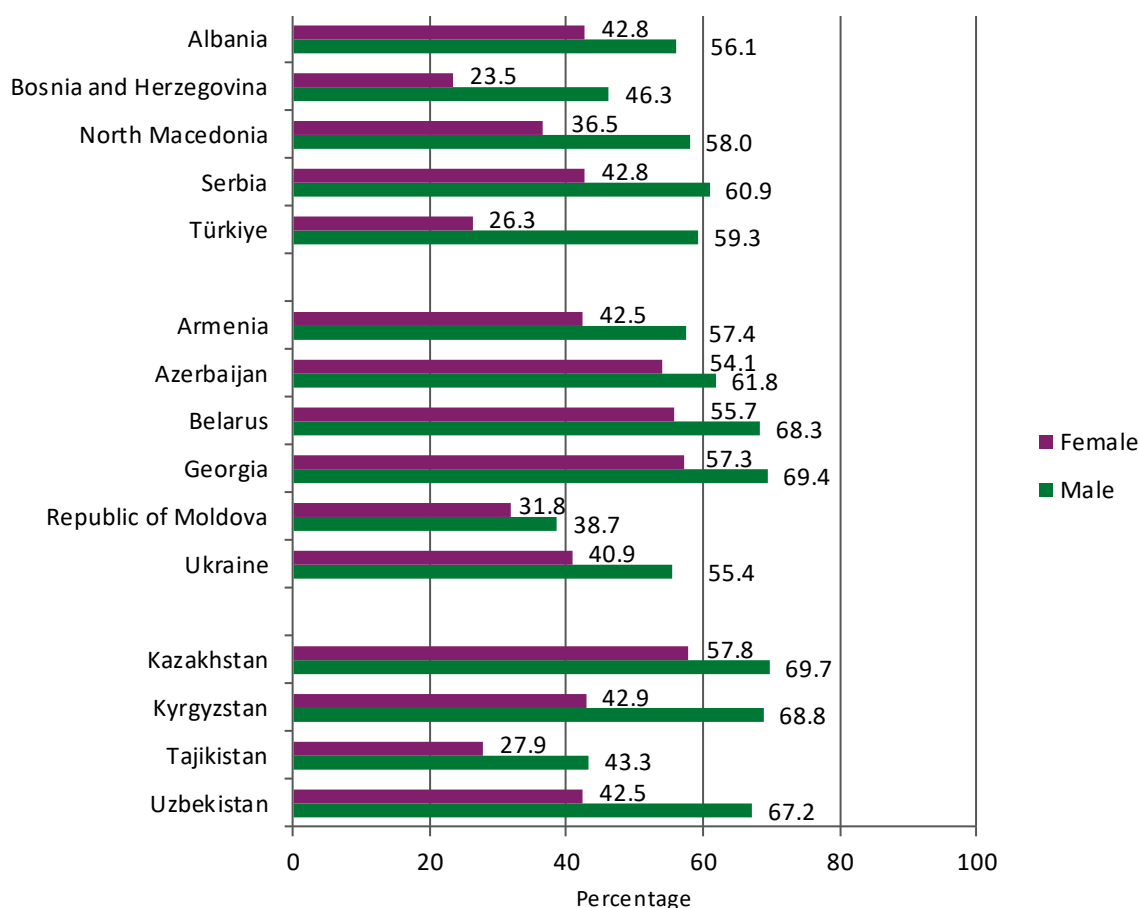


### 3.1. Women's economic empowerment and access to decent work

While extreme poverty has been largely eradicated in the focus countries of this review, inequality and social exclusion have increased, with rising “pockets of poverty and inequalities” both within and between individual countries and territories.<sup>32</sup> The CGAs for the region reveal that national poverty data are incomplete, and data disaggregated by location, sex, age and social group are lacking. Thus, many forms of poverty remain hidden, especially among disadvantaged populations. Still, the available national data demonstrate that the risks for poverty and social exclusion remain higher in rural areas than elsewhere. The rural population, as a whole, experiences a number of deprivations, including income poverty, lack of decent work, lack of access to basic infrastructure, services and social protections and the risks of environmental hazards.



**Figure 2. Employment-to-population ratios in rural areas of selected countries, by sex, 2020**



**Note:** The data concern young people and adults, aged 15 and above.

**Source:** ILOSTAT, ILO modelled estimates, November 2021

Vulnerabilities to poverty are gendered, and particular groups of women are at an elevated risk of falling into poverty (for example, older women, single mothers, mothers of many children, women with disabilities, from ethnic minority groups and those with lower levels of education). Women in rural areas may be included in any one or more of the aforementioned categories. Women's poverty

“derives from multiple factors, not only the absence of economic opportunities, but also the lack of access to: economic resources, education, support services and decision-making processes”.<sup>33</sup>

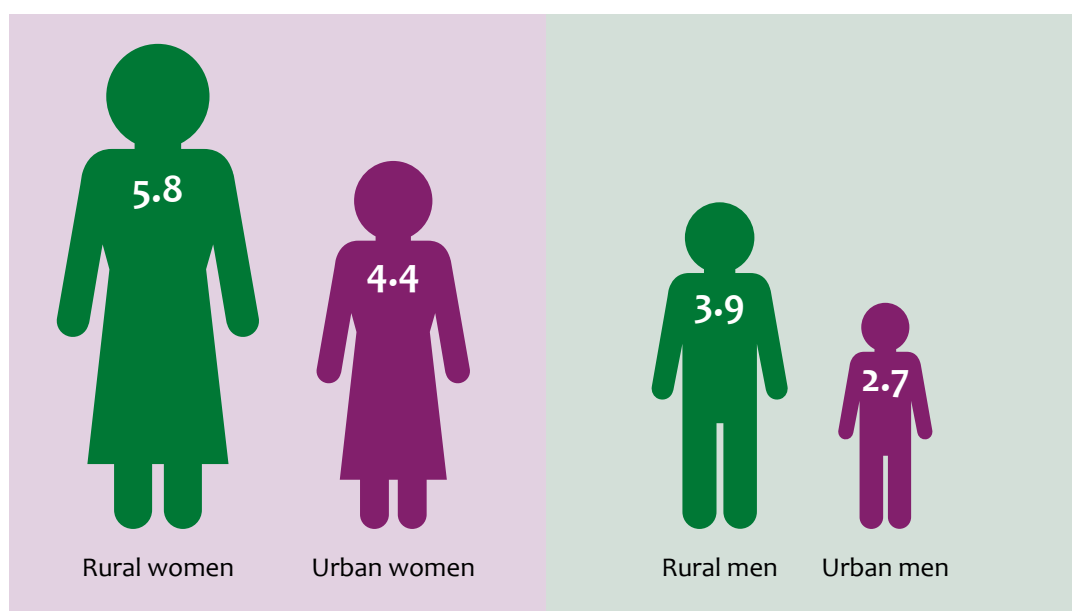
Employment opportunities for women in rural areas are much more limited than they are for men or for the urban population, due to a combination of factors including gender norms and discrimination. In each country of this review, the proportion of rural working men, when compared with the total working age population, is higher than that of working women. For a significant number of countries,<sup>m</sup> the difference is close to double (based on modelled estimates of the International Labour Organization; see Figure 2). Women living in rural areas are especially prone to vulnerable employment – that is, work associated with “small-scale activities, low earnings, weak market orientation, informal work arrangements, difficult or dangerous working conditions, and inadequate access to social protection and social dialogue mechanisms”.<sup>34</sup>



### 3.2. Women’s roles in unpaid work and in their communities

It is not only the scarcity of off-farm work opportunities that contributes to rural women’s economic dependency, but also their triple role, which includes unpaid domestic and care work, such as housework, caring for children and other family members, work on family farms and also community-oriented work.<sup>n</sup> Women typically weed and water kitchen gardens, tend to small livestock, prepare agricultural products for home consumption or for sale, and carry out supportive work (such as preparing food for farm workers or washing clothes). Very often, rural women perform such tasks without adequate infrastructure or labour-saving devices, further increasing their daily workloads if they must spend time collecting fuel and water or when they have to rely on limited public transport to reach schools, health facilities and local markets. Underdeveloped social infrastructure in rural areas (such as early childhood education facilities and care centres for older people or people with disabilities) push the care responsibilities onto rural women and further restrict their opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, education or involvement in local decision-making.

#### REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA Hours per day of unpaid work



**Source:** FAO. 2022. *National gender profile of agricultural and rural livelihoods: The Republic of Moldova*.

<sup>m</sup> Namely, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kyrgyzstan, North Macedonia, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Türkiye and Uzbekistan.

<sup>n</sup> It is worth noting that while many rural women are officially classified as “housewives” and not in formal work, others are employed – not in agriculture but in the public sector, in schools, clinics or for the local government, for instance.

## KYRGYZSTAN

Rural women spend time (minutes)  
on the following activities per day:

Rural men spend time (minutes)  
on the following activities per day:



**Source:** National Statistical Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2021. Результаты выборочного обследования бюджета времени [Results of a sample time budget survey], p. 92.

Women's unpaid workload is generally not valued as "work" that would be accompanied by social protections, such as unemployment, pregnancy or maternity benefits. Moreover, it is not factored into national gross domestic product (GDP). Nevertheless, the unpaid work undertaken by rural women contributes significantly to the well-being of rural households, especially in terms of food security and nutrition.

Women's unpaid activities are estimated to contribute the equivalent of 10 to 39 percent of the global GDP – more than manufacturing, commerce and other sectors of the economy.

**Source:** Commission on the Status of Women. 2016. *Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work. Report of the Secretary-General*, para. 25.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had profound economic impacts across the subregions in terms of lost income and increasing unpaid workloads. Rural women depend heavily on income from farming and remittances. In spring 2020, women in seven out of ten countries and territories of the subregions reported a one-third loss of income from farming, with the most affected women being those who live in Albania and Türkiye.<sup>35</sup> A larger proportion of women, as compared with men, in several countries (Albania, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, the Republic of Moldova and also in Kosovo) reported that remittances decreased when borders were closed and family members in labour migration could no longer transfer funds.<sup>36</sup> Because many rural women were already earning and saving less before the pandemic, the impacts of the health crisis, such as restrictions on movement and the closure of local markets, may well have pushed them closer to or into poverty.

In addition to their roles in the care economy (which includes child care and care for family members who are ill, elderly or have disabilities), women in rural areas also contribute substantially to community life. Although women's representation in national political office remains quite low across the Europe and Central Asia region, it should be noted that special measures (such as gender quotas) have had a positive



impact.<sup>o</sup> As a general rule, women find more entry points into representative government at the local (village) council level.<sup>p</sup> This pattern is explained by the “glass ceiling” effect that presents increasing challenges for women entering political office at higher levels. On the other hand, it also speaks to rural women’s desire to be engaged in community decision-making. Women in rural areas undertake community-oriented civic projects as volunteers and informally, but also as part of civil society organizations. Rural women, therefore, represent important drivers of change in community life and, as such, they are vital stakeholders in sustainable development initiatives led by FAO and other organizations.

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o The subregions have the following profiles: in the Western Balkans and Türkiye, women represent 32.2 percent of members of national parliaments; for Eastern Europe and the Caucasus this figure is 26.8 percent and for Central Asia it is 27.0 percent in 2022. Simple averages for subregions were calculated from national data for the countries included in this review from the Inter-Parliamentary Union Parline Database, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments, data for 1 April 2022, <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=4&year=2022>.

p While countries should not be directly compared due to differences in political systems and electoral law, the following are illustrative examples. Whereas women hold 18.2 percent of seats in the national parliament of Azerbaijan, they occupy 38.8 percent of seats in municipal councils; in Ukraine 21.0 percent of national parliamentarians, and 41.0 percent of village council members, are women; in Tajikistan, women represent 27.0 percent of members of the national parliament but 43.0 percent of the heads of local authorities (the chairperson) at the jamoat level. Additional information and discussion can found in the FAO National gender profiles of agriculture and rural livelihoods for The Republic of Azerbaijan, Tajikistan and Ukraine.



# Gender gaps in agriculture

Agriculture (referring to the combined sector of agriculture, forestry and fisheries) occupies an important place in the economies of the countries and territories of this review. While agriculture supplies 2 percent of the GDP for the larger Europe and Central Asia region, it makes a more significant contribution to many national economies, ranging from under 10 percent (in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, for example) to around 25 percent (for instance, in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan).<sup>q</sup> Women, despite their key role in agriculture, face discrimination in access to productive resources such as land, agricultural extension and rural advisory services, and inputs such as irrigation, fertilizer and credit. The compounded impact of these inequalities is poor livelihood outcomes and limitations on what women are able to contribute to agricultural production and food security.

## 4.1. Land tenure

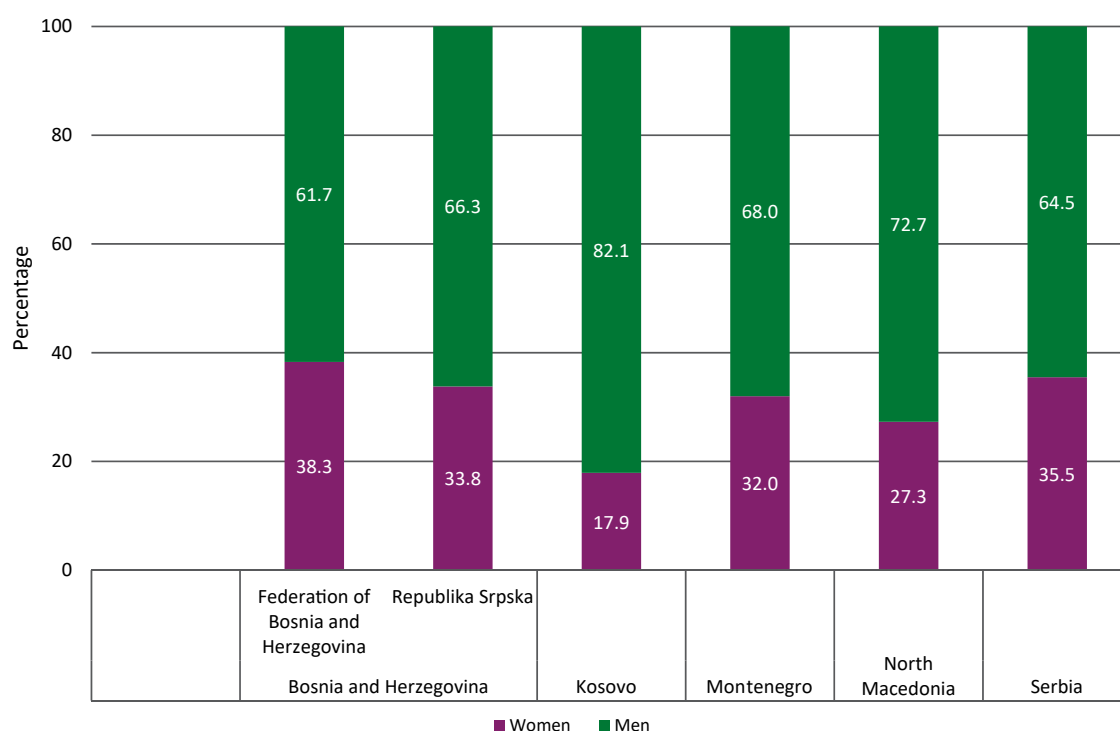
Land is a crucial resource for poverty reduction, food security and rural development, and thus women's secure land rights are also a proxy for their economic empowerment. As the "custodian" United Nations agency for two indicators under SDG 5, FAO addresses women's ownership and secure rights over agricultural land (SDG 5.a.1) and guarantees of women's equal rights to landownership and/or control (5.a.2). Across the three subregions of this review, there are virtually no legal barriers to the full respect for women's rights to own and use land and other forms of property freely. Women can inherit, buy, sell, rent or lease land on an equal basis with men.

In practice, however, women represent a far smaller share of landowners and co-owners than would be expected given their engagement in agricultural labour. When women do own land, they are more often joint owners than sole owners. Data on the number of women and men registered landowners are incomplete in much of the region. Most countries and territories are in the process of reforming cadastral systems (which includes increasing registration and also disaggregating records by sex). Still, the available data indicate that despite an increase in women as registered landowners, their representation as owners and co-owners remains disproportionately low. For instance, in the Western Balkans, women represent around one-third of registered owners or co-owners of land, but in some cases, they are less than one-fifth of registered landowners or co-owners (see Figure 3).<sup>37</sup>

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q World Bank data from World Bank national accounts data and OECD National Accounts data files for 2020 are available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS?end=2020&start=1980&view=chart>.

**Figure 3. Share of women and men as registered owners or co-owners of land in the Western Balkans, 2019**



**Source:** FAO. 2022. *Achieving SDG Indicator 5.a.2 in the Western Balkans and Beyond, Partnerships for Gender Equality in Land Ownership and Control* (3rd edition). Rome, pp. 14–15.

Data on women's landownership vary considerably, depending on the availability of records and the type of ownership that is recorded in a particular country, specifically whether cadastral records or census data are disaggregated by sex. Furthermore, data generated from land title records do not always specify that the lands are for agricultural use. In the Caucasus – Azerbaijan<sup>r</sup> and Georgia<sup>s</sup> – women represent around 40 percent of landowners. In Uzbekistan,<sup>38</sup> the figure is comparable at 36 percent. In Tajikistan, where individuals have a right to use land through land tenure, only 16 percent of rural women have “ownership” through registration on land certificates.<sup>39</sup> Positive trends include the incremental increase in the proportion of women as registered landowners (seen in the Western Balkans and Uzbekistan) as well as the practice of co-registration of land in the names of both spouses (in Georgia).

Women's limited land and property ownership stems from inadequate knowledge of women's equal rights among the rural population, as well as professionals working in the area of land registration (notaries or staff of cadastral offices, for example) and long-held traditions that landownership is passed to male family members. Men customarily inherit land, and other property, and the bias in favour of male family members is linked to patrilocal marriage practices, common in rural areas. Daughters are expected to join their husband's family when they marry and sons to remain and run the family farm and support older parents economically. In the process of marrying, women either lose or give up their rights to the portion of land from their parents' household and do not gain any rights over land that their spouses owned before the marriage. In Albania and Kyrgyzstan, women are often unaware of their rights to land when marrying,<sup>40</sup> or it is not acceptable culturally for them to protect their right to sell their land share to their families and receive compensation.<sup>41</sup> By default

<sup>r</sup> The World Bank estimated in 2014 that women represented 42 percent of all registered landowners in Azerbaijan. According to a 2020 household budget survey, 47 percent of all female-headed households have access to a plot of land. Additional information can be found in the FAO publication *National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods: The Republic of Azerbaijan*.

<sup>s</sup> In 2015, 56 percent of land records in the Georgian National Agency of Public Registry were in men's names, with the share being considerably higher in rural areas. Additional information can be found in the FAO publication *Gender, agriculture and rural development in Georgia*.

a woman's share of land goes to her parents and then becomes part of the inheritance of their sons or grandsons. Land is usually registered only in the name of the husband who is considered the head of the household/holding (for example, in Armenia<sup>42</sup> and Georgia<sup>43</sup>) and women tend not to assert their rights to land when a marriage ends (in Uzbekistan, for example<sup>44</sup>). Even if women are willing to claim a portion of land as part of a divorce, if they are unable to cultivate it, they cede ownership and control to male relatives (as seen in Kyrgyzstan<sup>45</sup>).

Women's lack of authority to manage family farms is especially relevant in countries in which a large share of men migrate from rural areas to work. Even though men are not present for the day-to-day decision-making, gender norms still favour them as the landowner and recognized head of the holding. While women form the majority of land users, and de facto farm managers, they are rarely recognized as landowners or farmers.

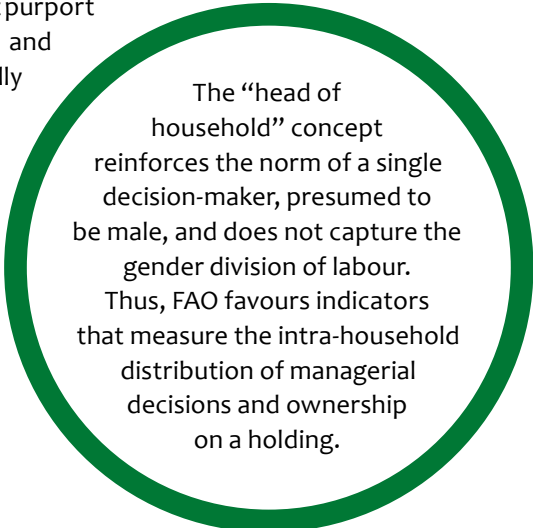
Women's limited landownership is not only an issue of discrimination, it also prevents rural women from utilizing a key economic resource to its full potential. The implications are land insecurity and dependency on male family members to use and access land, as well as reducing access to a form of collateral for credit that can be used to finance other productive resources, such as equipment or fertilizer. Women's reduced power and decision-making over land and family farms ultimately leads to less-than-optimal productivity.

## 4.2. Farm ownership and management

Throughout the subregions of Europe and Central Asia, the prevalent image of the "typical" farmer is a man who is considered the holder and manager of a small family farm. Because the region is largely dominated by smallholders and family farms, they are the focus of this review. Consequently, when women are not classified as farmers, even if they regularly undertake agricultural activities, they are overlooked in agricultural and related policy development and in the implementation of capacity-building projects.

Understanding how women are represented as "farmers", using the word in its broadest sense, is complicated because indicators that purport to measure women's agricultural roles are imperfect and definitions are not consistent. Statistical collections usually refer to heads of formally registered farming enterprises, owners or managers of family farms (whether legal entities or not). A second statistical category is the head of a rural household<sup>t</sup> that undertakes farming activities (whether for self-consumption or for market, or a combination of the two). Table 1 presents examples of the varied definitions used for women engaged in farming that have been included in agricultural censuses in the region.

In very rare instances, national statistics cover rural residents who use garden plots primarily for subsistence agriculture, but in fact this is a type of farming in which a large number of women are engaged.



The "head of household" concept reinforces the norm of a single decision-maker, presumed to be male, and does not capture the gender division of labour. Thus, FAO favours indicators that measure the intra-household distribution of managerial decisions and ownership on a holding.

Source: FAO. 2016. *Agri-gender statistics toolkit*, p. 12.

Reviews of national data for the CGAs indicate that women represent no more than around one-third of the heads of agricultural holdings (referring for the most part to smallholder farms). Although the data between countries cannot be directly compared, women's engagement ranges from 6.5 percent (women farm managers in Albania<sup>46</sup>) up to 36.6 percent (female-headed holdings in the Republic of Moldova<sup>47</sup>).

<sup>t</sup> For instance, male-headed households or female-headed households.

For most of the subregions, women consistently represent only around 20 to 25 percent of farmers, again with variations based on how this term is defined.



**Sources:** FAO. 2021. *Gender equality, agriculture and rural development in Serbia*, p. 28; FAO. 2022. *National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods: The Republic of Azerbaijan*; Agency for Strategic planning and reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National statistics. 2022. Distribution of registered small and medium-sized businesses as at 1 January 2022 by type of economical activity. In: *Agency for Strategic planning and reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National Statistics*. Nur-Sultan. Cited 3 August 2022. [https://gender.stat.gov.kz/page/frontend/detail?id=108&slug=1-2018-3&cat\\_id=6&lang=en](https://gender.stat.gov.kz/page/frontend/detail?id=108&slug=1-2018-3&cat_id=6&lang=en)

A noteworthy trend is the apparent gain in the number of women registered as farmers (farm owners or managers), observed in Bosnia and Herzegovina (the proportion of women registered as the heads of family farms has increased by eight percentage points since 2016<sup>48</sup>), in Kazakhstan (the proportion of women heading peasant farms or farming households increased by almost ten percentage points in the last decade<sup>49</sup>) and in Tajikistan (the share of women managers of dekhan [private smallholder] farms doubled between 2009 and 2019<sup>50</sup>). However, it is not clear what is driving this trend – for example, whether it relates to an increasing recognition of women’s ownership rights or reflects the fact that a larger share of men are leaving farming for other occupations.

Additionally, the overall low representation of women among agricultural holders is concerning as it distorts their role in the sector. Women represent a large proportion of the total agricultural workforce on smallholdings (including as informal workers), but their contributions are largely considered to be that of “wives of farmers” or “helpers”, and thus secondary to contributions of the “head of the holding”.

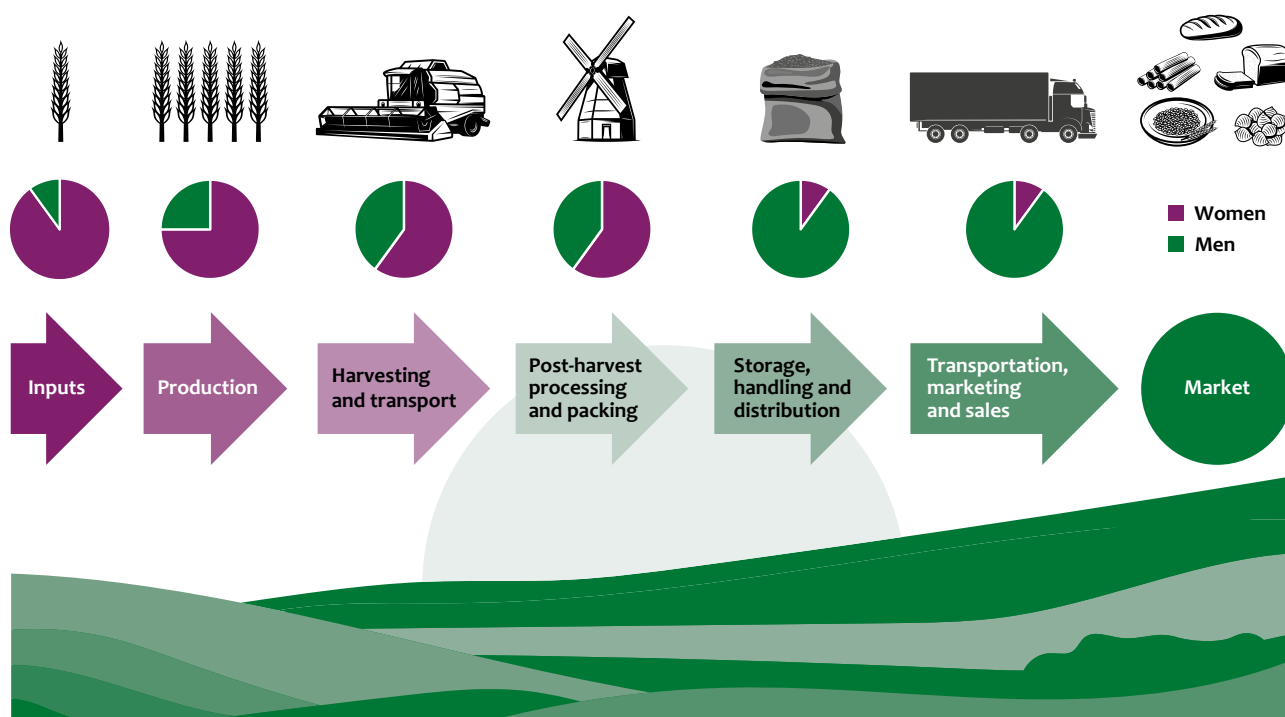
### The gender division of labour in farming

The work that women and men perform on family farms reflects long-held stereotypes about “appropriate” gender roles. In horticulture/crop production, women undertake manual labour with minimal mechanization, such as sowing seeds, weeding, hand-spraying small plots with pesticides, hand harvesting, and sorting and packing products. Men more often perform mechanized work, such as tilling, ploughing and planting fodder crops, harvesting crops with combines and transporting products to markets. While women sell their produce in open-air markets or even from their yards, it is usually men who are involved in selling to larger supermarkets, speciality traders or exporters.

Concerning livestock, women are responsible for tasks such as grazing and feeding animals, livestock hygiene, rearing calves and milking, as well as collecting eggs. Men, in contrast, are most often engaged in the purchase and sale of livestock, breeding, slaughtering and marketing. Of note, beekeeping is a male-dominated activity across the subregions, although experts have assessed that the subsector could provide opportunities for women to start their own enterprises; beekeeping can be carried out on small land plots, is less physically demanding than livestock breeding, and the products have a high market value.<sup>u</sup> Conversely, sericulture (silk worm breeding and silk harvesting) practised in Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan is one of the more gender-balanced subsectors, with women and men carrying out many of the same tasks in household-based enterprises.

In line with the tasks they perform, men hold more power over farm management and decision-making, especially around high-value financial transactions. In Serbia, for example, women hardly participate in decision-making concerning agricultural production. Although they represent 19.4 percent of farm holders, women are the primary decision-makers (managers) in only 15.3 percent of farms.<sup>51</sup> On family farms, decision-making is influenced by intra-household dynamics – who is perceived to be the head of the household or to have the most relevant knowledge and experience – and the particular decisions being made. Thus, in the Republic of Moldova, questions concerning types of crops to cultivate and sales are likely to be resolved jointly by women and men, while decisions about irrigation are more often made by men alone.<sup>52</sup> A similar pattern is observable in Central Asia, with the addition that there, men more often are the primary decision-makers about sales of agricultural products and the use of profits in the household.<sup>53</sup>

### Sample agricultural value chain



Identifying gender differences in job availability, types of work performed, access to labour-saving devices and differences in remuneration will also shed light on how women and men are represented along particular agricultural value chains. Gender relations are part of the social and economic

<sup>u</sup> Additional information can be found in the FAO publication *National gender profile of agriculture and rural livelihoods: The Republic of Moldova*.

context that shapes how value chains function, and gender relations can also be impacted on by shifts and improvements in value chains.<sup>54</sup> In the subregions, women occupy the lower value-added ends of agricultural value chains and mainly perform “upstream” activities, whereas men may also undertake such work, but they are generally concentrated in “downstream” activities at the higher-value ends of the chains. The lack of recognition of women’s role in running smallholdings, and gaps in value chains in terms of limited access to key inputs, such as land, credit and extension services, directly and negatively affect the productivity of women farmers.

### 4.3. Agricultural labour and employment

Agriculture is a key employer of the rural population and is crucial to the livelihoods of many families. In several countries, more than one-fifth of the working population is employed in agriculture.<sup>v</sup> The proportion of women working in agriculture, as compared with all working women, can be even greater (see Table 2).

**Table 2. Share of people working in agriculture, as a percentage of total employment**

Country (latest year)	Total share working in agriculture (%)	Women (as % of female employment)	Men (as % of male employment)
Albania (2019)	36.4	41.6	32.3
Armenia (2020)	52.4	60.9	42.7
Azerbaijan (2020)	36.3	42.2	30.9
Belarus (2020)	10.9	7.4	14.3
Bosnia and Herzegovina (2020)	12.0	14.0	10.7
Georgia (2020)	41.1	42.7	39.6
Kazakhstan (2020)	13.5	11.8	15.0
Kyrgyzstan (2020)	17.2	18.8	16.2
North Macedonia (2020)	11.6	10.3	12.4
Republic of Moldova (2021)	21.5	17.1	25.4
Serbia (2020)	14.6	12.1	16.5
Tajikistan (2018)	45.8	60.8	35.5
Türkiye (2020)	17.6	22.7	15.2
Ukraine (2017)	15.4	13.0	17.6
Uzbekistan (2020)	26.9	27.6	26.4

**Note:** Date after country name indicates latest available national labour force survey data.

**Source:** International Labour Organization. no date. Country profiles: The latest decent work statistics by country. In: ILOSTAT. Geneva, Switzerland. Cited 21 July 2022. <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/countryprofiles>

In countries in which the proportion of women working in agriculture is larger than the proportion of men, it speaks to the fact that the sector is one of the few that employs rural women. In contrast, men have more diverse employment opportunities and thus move away from agricultural labour, or they migrate for work.

<sup>v</sup> Note that the data are derived from national labour force surveys that classify formal employees in one of three sectors: agriculture, industry and services. The data are limited in that they do not provide information about the many forms of agricultural labour. Furthermore, due to differences in national survey methodologies, the data should not be used for comparison between the countries.



Data from labour force surveys often fail to capture all facets of employment in agriculture, including not only formal sector wage employment, but also self-employment, less than full-time employment, informal work and unpaid work as a contributing member of a family farm. A significant number of women who are classified in national labour statistics as economically inactive (meaning they are neither working nor looking for work), in fact work as farmers on their own land (they are own-account workers or a type of self-employee) or as unpaid workers on family farms or in kitchen gardens. Women's contribution to agricultural production also includes seasonal and part-time work, on family farms and as hired labourers.

Informality in working arrangements is common in rural areas. An estimated 73.9 percent of informal employment for the Central and Western Asia region<sup>w</sup> takes place in rural locations.<sup>55</sup> In number, more men work informally, mainly in agriculture and construction. For rural women, agriculture is their primary source of informal work, although a small number find informal jobs in domestic services. The International Labour Organization estimates that in Central and Western Asia, when agricultural work is included, 47.3 percent of women's total employment is in the informal sector; for men this figure is 41.1 percent.<sup>56</sup> Due to its unregulated nature, informal labour leaves employees ineligible for social guarantees such as pension payments, health insurance, annual leave, sick leave or pregnancy and maternity/paternity leave. In Albania, for example, only 19 percent of women from rural areas who gave birth received maternity allowance (compared with 59 percent of urban women) in 2014.<sup>57</sup> In Ukraine, among rural women participating in a 2015 survey, 17 percent reported that their employers had not paid them for sick leave and 14 percent were not paid for maternity leave.<sup>58</sup> Labour law in Azerbaijan extends special protection to agricultural workers; namely, women who work in agricultural production are entitled to additional statutory maternity leave. This provision, however, only applies to contracted employees, meaning that in practice, the large number of women who work on family farms cannot claim this benefit.<sup>59</sup> Both men and women are at risk of job insecurity, but because rural women have more limited access to formal employment, they are in an especially precarious position that keeps them in a cycle of economic dependency and poverty.

Women are more likely than men to be in part-time, seasonal and low-paying agricultural jobs. Much of this type of work is low-skilled manual labour undertaken by rural women who are classified as non-working "housekeepers" or pensioners (they are economically inactive). In Uzbekistan, for example, women represent up to three-quarters of cotton harvesters; they primarily work for cash and for an average of around 30 days annually. They may work as individuals or in organized brigades but typically do not have employment contracts. The Government of Uzbekistan has taken steps to incentivize farmers to conclude contracts for such work.<sup>60</sup> A high number of women in the Republic of Moldova are involved in informal seasonal work, estimated to be as many as 80 to 90 percent of this workforce. Women, mainly over the age of 40 who have lower levels of education and live in small villages, harvest, sort and pack agricultural products as day-labourers for income that is not formally declared.<sup>61</sup>

Women often work on family farms with no contract, social benefits or remuneration. In a few instances, the farm owner can claim family workers as employees, granting them access to health insurance (for example, in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>62</sup>) or if the farm is registered, women are entitled to health care insurance, pensions and disability insurance (as in Serbia<sup>63</sup>). However, such arrangements still place women in a dependent position, on their spouse or another male family member, to formalize their working status.

#### 4.4. Access to agri-inputs: seeds, fertilizers, equipment and irrigation

Agricultural inputs are resources that can improve primary production, ranging from soil and water (irrigation) to seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, as well as machinery and equipment. Unfortunately,

<sup>w</sup> Note that this grouping for Central and Western Asia includes the following countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cyprus, Georgia, Israel and Türkiye.

sex-disaggregated data and even dedicated research into women's and men's differential access to, control over or ownership of key inputs are scarce.

Agricultural census data and household surveys do, however, paint a picture of the serious constraints that women face in accessing these products. For example, in Georgia, many smallholders have difficulty obtaining blended fertilizers and high-quality seeds because they cannot afford to purchase them or lack information about their appropriate uses.<sup>64</sup> While specific gender analysis is limited, the fact that women farmers have fewer resources – not only financial but also personal networks – suggests that they are even less likely to use these kinds of inputs.

Gender gaps in access to agricultural equipment are consistent for the subregions. In Georgia, “[m]achinery, pesticide/fertilizer use, and water management are stereotypically linked with masculine gender roles”.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, in Armenia, even in female-headed households, women seldom use farm machinery personally but instead hire assistants or ask male relatives for help.<sup>66</sup> Small-scale research in Uzbekistan suggests that female farmers are more likely to rent equipment from machine-tractor fleets than to own it, but due to frequent breakdowns and because they cannot obtain spare parts, they also experience lower crop yields.<sup>67</sup> According to the agricultural census for the Republic of Moldova, among holders with agricultural equipment, such as tractors, combines and harvesters, seeders, mechanical cultivators and ploughs, around 90 percent of the machinery was located on holdings headed by men.<sup>68</sup> Some of the disparity is attributable to the fact that women-headed holdings are smaller on average than those headed by men and they may have different cropping practices, but nevertheless the large gap also suggests that women farmers face serious constraints to obtaining equipment.

Just as heavy machinery use is seen as a male domain, women traditionally do not exercise control over irrigation. In Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Türkiye, where water for irrigation is a scarce resource, women's engagement in water users' associations (WUAs) varies but is generally quite low. For the most part, irrigation is considered men's responsibility because the process of opening canals requires physical strength or is carried out at night. Thus, men undertake most decision-making concerning irrigation, on WUAs and informally. Moreover, in regions with high levels of male labour outmigration, women who are managing households alone can struggle to contribute financially to canal maintenance and repair, and often have insufficient access to irrigation for their farms, land plots or kitchen gardens.

## 4.5. Access to agricultural resources: extension services, information and communications technologies, and finance

Farmers depend on a range of other resources, informational, technological and financial, to increase productivity and profitability. As is the case with access to agri-inputs, gender norms and discrimination often determine how resources are allocated.

In the Europe and Central Asia region, state-supported extension and advisory services is a developing field. Current services often do not meet smallholders' needs, and there is almost no gender-specific training or other opportunities for information sharing and skill-building (the exceptions are donor-led projects that have particular components for women farmers). Gender stereotypes impede women from attending training events; often their domestic workload simply does not allow them time to be away from home. It is widely expected that men, as recognized farmers, will attend and convey the knowledge they gain to other family members, an approach that reinforces stereotypes and ignores women's role in farming. In Azerbaijan, joining agricultural training activities, especially those that require travel, may be considered unacceptable and “inappropriate” for a woman.<sup>69</sup> Women tend to receive information from male farmers and mass media, while men are targeted by public service providers of extension services. On a positive note, rural women in Azerbaijan are well-connected digitally and so online training sessions are more accessible to them. In Albania, most often, the mobilization of farmers for extension services is “carried out via

male-dominated channels of communication”, through the heads of farmers’ associations (the majority of whom are men) who then contact the male membership. In only a few cases are men explicitly asked to bring their wives and/or female relatives.<sup>70</sup> This reliance on established networks and associations that are male-dominated not only isolates women farmers from extension and advisory services but also discourages young women from participating in activities such as farmer field schools or demonstration plots.

FAO’s strategy for the coming decade recognizes that digitalization is a driver of food and agricultural production, and thus digital information and communications technologies (ICTs) must be integrated into agrifood systems policies and programming and made accessible to the rural population equitably. ICTs are increasingly becoming inseparable from both agriculture and rural development. Access to innovations, financial services and markets, increasing the reach of networking and advisory services, and using ICTs for tracking (for example, relevant to disaster risk management, food safety and traceability standards or pest and disease surveillance) can potentially transform how farmers and entrepreneurs operate in rural areas. Despite the fact that rural areas in the subregions are generally well-covered by mobile and internet services, the “triple divide” – a digital, rural and gender divide – places women farmers in “the most marginalized position when it comes to access to, and use of ICTs”.<sup>71</sup>

Incentives, subsidies and loans, offered through ministries for agriculture, are an important means by which farmers can invest in their own enterprises. In several of the focus countries, such support schemes have recognized the gender gaps in access to resources and give special priority to or have dedicated incentives for women farmers (for example, in Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Moldova and Serbia). Women’s uptake of these incentives remains low, however. For instance, in the Republic of Moldova, women represented only 19 percent of unique applicants for post-investment subsidies in 2020. Women constituted a much larger group of recipients (almost half) of a one-time-only incentive dedicated to start-ups (specifically for women farmers, young farmers, green agriculture and domestic production). Still, when the share of women who benefited from the special incentive is compared with all applicants for subsidies, women’s representation is very low, at only 2.7 percent.<sup>72</sup> In Azerbaijan, from 2015 to 2018, women represented 7.7 percent of the beneficiaries of agricultural loans.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, women who head family farms in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina represent around a quarter of those receiving incentives, while in Republika Srpska, the proportion of women is 17.9 percent.<sup>74</sup> The pattern is similar in North Macedonia where women represented 16.9 percent of applicants for financial support in agriculture, and women received 12.4 percent of the value of approved applications in 2017 (the figures do, however, show an improvement from the situation in 2013).<sup>75</sup>

A combination of factors explains the apparent limited access that women have to such support schemes, and include lack of information about the programmes, difficulties in applying, and eligibility requirements that women farmers cannot meet. An additional issue that requires further evaluation is whether women, as recipients of loans or subsidies, ultimately exercise decision-making around how such funds are allocated on smallholdings or family farms.

The gender gaps in access to agricultural resources as well as inputs, whether machinery, water for irrigation, skills, knowledge, innovations or networks, contribute to the lower productivity of women’s farms in general. If access to key resources was equalized, women’s potential would be increased, leading to greater economic independence and enhanced agricultural production.<sup>x</sup>

x For example, in the 2011 report, *The state of food and agriculture. Women in agriculture: closing the gender gap for development*, FAO estimates that, worldwide, the yield gap between women and men farmers ranges from 20 percent to 30 percent, mainly due to differences in resource use. If farm yields for women were equal to that of men, agricultural output in developing countries would be increased by 2.4 percent to 4 percent, and the number of undernourished people would be reduced by 12 percent to 17 percent.



## Key messages and recommendations

This review reiterates the recommendations made by FAO in its submissions to the European Commission on Agriculture, as well as proposals raised during regional review events, such as the FAO/European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) regional conference on promoting socially inclusive rural development in Europe and Central Asia (2017).<sup>76</sup> The recommendations included in this review should also be considered in the context of the agreed conclusions of the Sixty-second Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2018)<sup>77</sup> and the 25-year regional review of progress in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (2019).<sup>78</sup>

Since the aforementioned regional and global events took place, Europe and Central Asia has been confronted with unprecedented challenges in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war in Ukraine. The consequences for each country, the region and globally are far-reaching, with implications for food security, nutrition and agriculture. With the threat of inequalities widening farther than they were even three years ago, there has never been a better justification for gender analysis and the gender mainstreaming of agrifood systems.

In light of the findings documented above, the following messages and recommendations are presented to FAO, as well as to Member Nations and civil society organizations. FAO, in particular, should prioritize gender transformative approaches and increase support for more effective gender mainstreaming of agricultural and rural development throughout its technical assistance.

1. FAO strives to use gender transformative approaches in its work, recognizing that there is a need to go beyond merely improving rural women's access to sustainable livelihoods, and that the very norms perpetuate inequalities must be challenged. FAO has identified several priority areas which, despite some indicators of progress, represent longstanding challenges and barriers to gender equality:
  - The contributions of rural women to agricultural production, as household members and farmers, remain largely invisible. Therefore, the development of normative, legal and policy frameworks should reflect a gender perspective and include the collective views and priorities of rural women. In light of potential austerity measures as part of the COVID-19 pandemic recovery, there is an urgent need to ensure that rural women are not further deprioritized in public policy and budget allocations.
  - The evidence base and gender statistics relevant to agriculture and rural development must be strengthened so that policymaking, and programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation are gender-responsive and, thus, effective and sustainable. Methodological revision of agricultural censuses and relevant household surveys to improve the use of gender-sensitive indicators, as well as the dissemination of gender statistics on agriculture, are needed at the national level.
  - Further support is required to empower rural women as leaders in their households, as farmers, as stakeholders in rural development and to enter governance at all levels. Strategic planning and decision-making should be inclusive of rural women from diverse backgrounds.

- Rural women, and farmers in particular, have limited access to resources that are critical for agricultural production. Precise analysis of gender gaps in access to inputs, and the origins of these gaps, is needed so that interventions can be designed to remove persistent barriers.
  - Rural women have very limited opportunities for economic empowerment, in on- or off-farm work, leaving them dependent on male family members or vulnerable to poverty. Targeted economic policies and projects are vital to provide rural women with diverse and viable opportunities for income generation, through decent work, entrepreneurship, inclusive value chains and by reducing the gender pay gap and women's unpaid workload.
  - Social protection policies that are transformative have the potential to improve rural women's lives and livelihoods. In addition to investments in physical and social infrastructure, there is a need to both recognize women's role in unpaid domestic and care work and reduce this burden.
2. The governments of Member Nations are called on to support the advocacy initiatives of FAO around these priority areas. Representatives of Member Nations are important allies in conveying information about critical gender gaps to national stakeholders; and key line ministries, such as ministries of agriculture, can also commit to taking concrete actions to end persistent inequalities that are holding back progress towards sustainable agriculture, food security and ending poverty.
  3. Civil society organizations have an important role to play in bridging gaps between rural stakeholders, women and men, and decision-makers at the local, regional and national levels in order to improve the gender sensitivity of relevant policy and national programmes. There is a need to increase the synergies between civil society organizations with mandates to promote women's rights and gender equality and those that work with rural populations on projects to improve agricultural production, small business development, and environmental protection and climate change mitigation, for example.
  4. The private sector can do more to empower women in agriculture through actions such as improving the delivery of training (extension and rural advisory services) and technologies to female beneficiaries, increasing access to financing, and advocating for the recognition of women's contributions to agriculture and areas of persistent discrimination. Private institutions should foster partnerships with the public sector, as well as with civil society organizations.



# Annex: Overview of gender integration in agricultural censuses

The following information has been compiled from a review of the census questionnaires from the website of FAO's World Programme for the Census of Agriculture, indicating the gender-sensitive data that were collected during the last censuses. The information in the following table demonstrates the potential for sex-disaggregation of the census results. Not all of the sex-disaggregated data appeared in the census publications, but in principle, it would be possible to obtain them from the primary census databases upon request to the agency that conducted the census.

Country	Most recent census year	Summary of gender-sensitive information collected during the last census	Planned census year
Albania	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sex and age of the holder and the manager of the holding</li><li>• Sex and age of household members working on the holding</li><li>• Sex of non-family employees working on the holding</li></ul>	2024
Bosnia and Herzegovina	–	–	2023
North Macedonia	2007	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sex and age of household members working on individual agricultural holdings</li><li>• Sex and age of employees working in agricultural business entities</li></ul>	2023
Serbia	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sex and age of household members and permanently employed persons working on the holding, with number of days worked</li><li>• Sex and age of the holder and the manager of the holding</li></ul>	2023
Türkiye	2001	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sex and age of members of households engaged in agricultural activities</li></ul>	2023

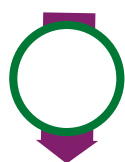


Country	Most recent census year	Summary of gender-sensitive information collected during the last census	Planned census year
Armenia	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sex, age, education and duration of work on the holding of the head/members (15 years and above) of the household</li> <li>Sex and duration of work on the holding of hired workers</li> </ul>	2024
Azerbaijan	2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sex and age of the holder</li> <li>Sex, age and number of days worked by family members and employees working on the holding</li> </ul>	2025
Belarus	2019 <sup>(i)</sup>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sex and age of members of household farms</li> </ul>	–
Georgia	2014	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sex and age of members of household farms</li> </ul>	2024 <sup>(ii)</sup>
Republic of Moldova	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sex, age and education level of the manager/head of the holding</li> <li>Sex, age, education level, practical experience in agriculture and duration of work on the holding of the members of the household</li> <li>Sex, age and duration of work on the holding of the employees</li> </ul>	2024
Ukraine	–	–	–
Kazakhstan	2006/2007	none	2024/2025
Kyrgyzstan	2002	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sex of holders of peasant and individual farms</li> </ul>	2024
Tajikistan	2013; 2021 <sup>(iii)</sup>	<p>Concerning <i>dekhan farming</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sex of the manager of the agricultural enterprise/dekhan farm/household farm</li> <li>Sex, age and number of workers at agricultural enterprises</li> </ul>	2023
Uzbekistan	–	–	2024

**Notes:** (i) An agricultural module was included in the Population and Housing Census. (ii) Planned as part of the Population and Housing Census. (iii) The Agency of Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan periodically conducts a survey of gender indicators in *dekhan farming* (private smallholder farming).

**Sources:** FAO. 2020. World Programme for the Census of Agriculture, country participation by round. In: FAO. Rome. Cited 21 July 2022. <https://www.fao.org/world-census-agriculture/wcarounds/census/en>; FAO. 2020. World Census of Agriculture 2020 – country information. In: FAO. Rome. Cited 21 July 2022. <https://www.fao.org/world-census-agriculture/wcarounds/wca2020/en>; Institute of Statistics. no date. Albania, Agriculture census. In: *Institute of Statistics*. Tirana. Cited 21 July 2022. <http://www.instat.gov.al/en/themes/censuses/agriculture-census/#tab2>; Republic of North Macedonia State Statistical Office. 2008. *Census of agriculture, 2007: Book III, Individual agricultural holdings grouped by total available land, by regions*. [https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPoslednaPublikacija\\_en.aspx?id=51](https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziPoslednaPublikacija_en.aspx?id=51); Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. no date. Census of Agriculture. In: *Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia*. Belgrade. Cited 21 July 2022. <https://data.stat.gov.rs/?caller=1300&languageCode=en-US>; Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia. no date. Main findings agricultural census 2014 of the Republic of Armenia. In: *Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia*. Yerevan. Cited 21 July 2022. <https://www.armstat.am/en/?nid=82&id=1860>; National Statistics Office of Georgia. 2016. *Census of agriculture 2014*. [https://www.geostat.ge/media/22760/AG-Census-Release\\_ENG\\_2016.pdf](https://www.geostat.ge/media/22760/AG-Census-Release_ENG_2016.pdf); National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. 2011. *General agricultural census of the Republic of Moldova, main results*. <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=en&id=4095&idc=350>; National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Moldova. 2014. *Women and men in agriculture of the Republic of Moldova*. <https://statistica.gov.md/pageview.php?l=en&id=4095&idc=350>; Agency of Statistics under the President of the Republic of Tajikistan. Gender indicators in *dekhan farming* for 2009–2014 (2015); 2012–2017 (2018) and published in 2021. [https://stat.www.tj/publications/September2018/Pressemitteilung\\_Gender\\_2018.pdf](https://stat.www.tj/publications/September2018/Pressemitteilung_Gender_2018.pdf); <https://www.stat.tj/en/news/publications/thepublication-gender-indicators-in-dekhanfarms-was-released> [in Russian]





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