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Change Through
an INclusive Green deal

Ensuring an Inclusive Farm to Fork Strategy

Policy Brief #2

Yellow Window

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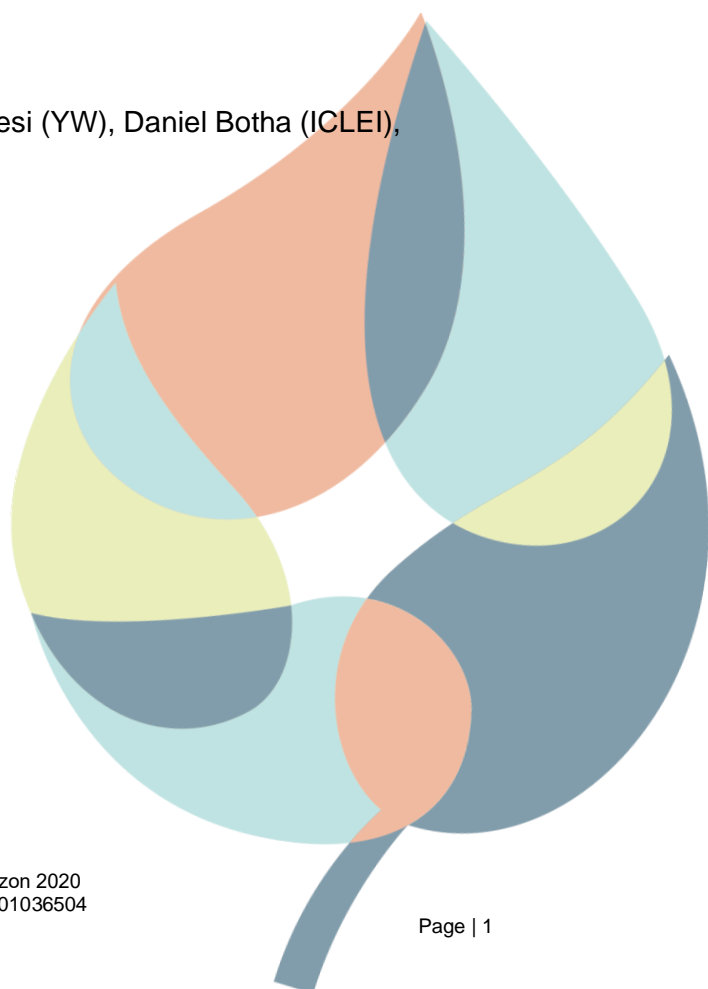
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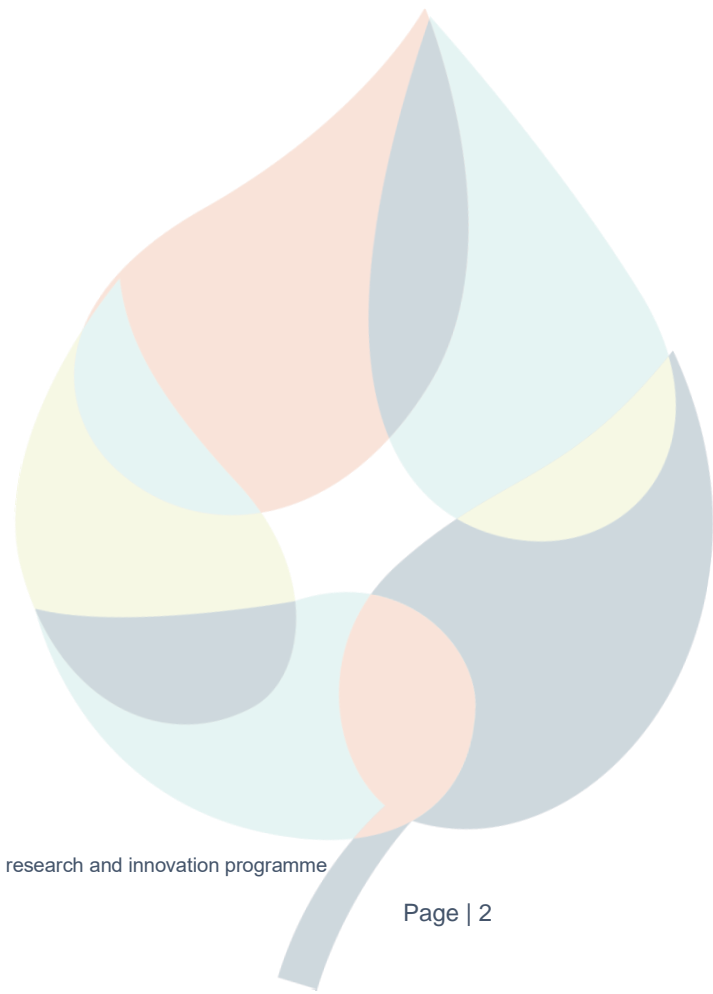
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Introduction

The European Green Deal aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, while ensuring a fair transition for all and that no one is left behind. However, policies designed to mitigate and adapt to climate change have largely failed to consider gendered and intersectional factors. This has resulted in uneven and unequal consequences for different social groups, with uncertain long-term impacts.

Despite these insights, there remains a significant research gap regarding the exact nature and cause of unequal and unequalising effects of different policy and societal responses to climate change. The EU-funded ACCTING research project contributes to filling this gap by exploring the impacts of Green Deal policies on the individual and collective behaviour of vulnerable groups, and how policies can effectively integrate gendered and intersectional perspectives to address the climate crises, thereby promoting an inclusive and socially just European Green Deal.

In this second policy brief, the ACCTING team outlines selected recommendations relating to the transition to sustainable food production and consumption. **These focus on project insights highlighting drivers of, and barriers to, one of the sub-goals of the European Green Deal's Farm to Fork strategy – (equal) access to sufficient, safe, nutritious, sustainable food.** These recommendations are addressed to the European Commission both as a policymaker and as a funder of research. Knowledge gaps are translated into concrete research questions that can serve as inspiration for future research work programmes.



Evidence and analysis

ACCTING's research highlights the significant challenges related to accessing environmentally friendly food that is local, seasonal, organic and affordable in urban areas.

Intriguing and noteworthy observations are:

- The lack of proximity to stores that sell (affordable) environmentally friendly food, or the lack of knowledge regarding where to find and access such stores, is a major hindering factor to changing eating habits.
- The lack of public transport in areas where vulnerable people live – also in some areas of big cities – frequently intensifies the lack of access to supermarkets and farmers' markets and hinders access to environmentally friendly food.
- Even when access to these stores is feasible, additional costs can render such food unaffordable.
- Eating seasonal/locally produced food is more time-consuming because there are few stores offering these products, they are more difficult to find/identify; and many of them have a poorly diversified product range requiring customers to go to several stores.
- There is a lack of access to land to grow food, and farmers' markets at which to sell it. Yet fundamental barriers to behavioural change can also be social, i.e., unsupportive family members and a lack of supportive community networks to tap into.

Food consumption

The research identifies street markets and small market stores as key resources that offer cost-effective choices while providing fresh, seasonal and locally produced food. These can in many instances also save vulnerable users time and help bridge transport shortcomings – being more widely and locally distributed. In addition, the research shows the positive impact of urban gardens as a way of simultaneously addressing economic needs and concern for sustainable food consumption.

Food production

The ACCTING interviews consistently showed that many governments lack coherent policies to facilitate the transition towards more small-scale environment-friendly agriculture, resulting in significant insecurity among, and exclusion of, small farmers. High agricultural costs coupled with economic uncertainty hinder their ability to adapt. This is oftentimes exacerbated by urban encroachment into peri-urban areas, culminating in the loss of fertile arable lands. Some interviews highlighted that small farmers are in situations of weakness, suffering from lack of public and political support and are being slowly pushed out of agricultural production.

To address these challenges and compensate for the lack of support, some small farmers have turned to cooperation practices, such as collective procurement and sharing tools and



equipment for sustainable farming that they would not have been able to afford individually. While these cooperative efforts have helped them overcome financial and resource limitations, they still face unequal competition with larger agricultural players.

Gendered aspects of food consumption and production

In addition, the research highlights the significant roles of women in both consumption and production. In their consumer roles, they tend to take the leading role in ensuring food security and nutrition, especially in enabling behavioural change for themselves, their children and their families (through knowledge about food and cooking techniques). This is the case even within limited and economically challenging conditions. They also tend to contribute to responsible home waste management practices and rely on family ties and social networks for support. Another observation, which shows persistent gender inequalities, is that some minors take on household and cooking responsibilities, raising concerns about the potential exploitation of children generally and girls in particular.

Women are likewise often actively involved in various aspects of farming, from growing food in gardens and farms to preparing food sources for the entire year through methods like drying, canning and pickling vegetables. Cooperation is seen as necessary by women, and particularly entrepreneurs in the food sector (oftentimes female), as it enables them to withstand competition from large multinationals.

In light of these findings, ACCTING emphasises the importance of devising policies and support for small-scale farming that are particularly considerate of gender+ inclusiveness, in order to empower small farmers and particularly women to maximise their potential to contribute to improving food security, promoting sustainable food practices, and creating more resilient food systems.

Knowledge gaps

The ACCTING research has identified some remaining knowledge gaps described briefly below. In the recommendation section, themes for future research are suggested to the European Commission. These knowledge gaps can be grouped into five main subjects.

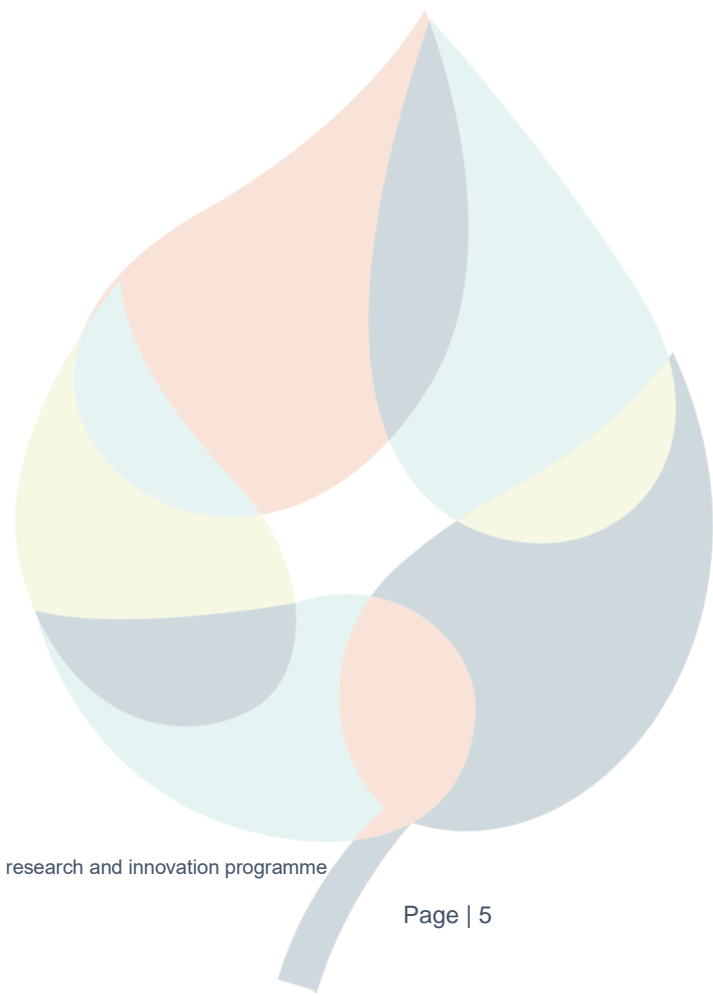
Intersectional data and analysis. The intersection of multiple inequalities positions people differently in terms of behavioural change. There is a need for multidimensional data, methods, and monitoring systems, which fully capture how multiple inequalities intersect and affect people's ability to make behavioural changes toward the EU Green Deal goals.

Consumption. The interviews show a near total lack of possibilities and drivers to reduce consumption of those foods with a higher environmental impact, although this is essential to achieve sustainability and climate goals. Rather, there are huge infrastructural as well as socio-cultural obstacles to reduce consumption. A crucial future question is thus to investigate how policymakers can be pushed to take note of existing research – indicating how policy, communities, civil society and other actors are moved to better challenge structures of overconsumption and facilitate reduced consumption.

Norm change and masculinities. The results suggest that men tend to make different choices than women with regarding to food production and consumption. However, it is important to address this topic further, as there is a lack of knowledge about *how* masculinities (i.e. gender socialisation) work as enablers or hindlers of sustainability, and how they are/can be transformed.

The role of authorities and legislation. Wider society faces difficulties in understanding top-down and sectoral policies by decision-makers. This is preventing entrepreneurs and individuals from making decisions with a long-term sustainability view. Accordingly, research is needed on trust and the role of streamlined legislation among the marginalised and vulnerable.

Intergenerational and cross-cultural dialogue. There appears to be significant potential for cross-cultural and inter-generational exchange to play a pivotal role in advancing sustainable values and practices, yet it continues to be an underexplored area. For instance, the narratives reveal that, in some cases, learning processes arise from the fact that different generations are involved in cooking, promoting healthy food consumption, producing food, waste disposal, etc.



Policy implications and recommendations

ACCTING is formulating recommendations towards the European Commission both as policymaker and as funder of research. The section directly below covers policy recommendations; the following section covers research questions that still need to be addressed and can feed as inspiration into the future work programmes (based on the knowledge gaps highlighted).

Policy recommendations

- **Develop programmes that stimulate supermarkets to create a supply of environmentally friendly, local, seasonal, and organic product quotas:** To foster environmentally friendly food consumption in a socially just way, it is crucial to reshape food systems and emphasise the broader and universal provision of seasonal, organic, and locally produced food. Key policy measures to promote such a shift could include the establishment of quotas for supermarkets to offer these products or tax deductions for supermarkets that stock more environmentally sustainable food products. This can also alleviate accessibility problems related to transport and time poverty. Any such programmes would need to encompass stricter definition and regulation of what these concepts entail.
- **Support community-led local initiatives:** Community-led local initiatives and food cooperatives can help facilitate shorter supply chains and broader access to food, thereby making small-scale agriculture more viable and strengthening regional food producers and networks. Policymakers can foster programmes to support and promote such initiatives¹. This should be complemented by sustained financial incentives for urban farming, and for farmers to transition to organic or agroecological farming.
- **Facilitate access to information on where people can find nutritious, environmentally sustainable and affordable food in their neighbourhoods:** This would entail the establishment of online platforms or databases that collect information about points where people can buy local, seasonal, and organic food. This should be accompanied by campaigns that raise awareness about local (farmers') markets and direct-to-consumer food distribution initiatives; particularly targeting those in marginalised neighbourhoods, to ensure the platforms and knowledge reach them.
- **Establish urban gardens in low-income areas:** Reduce food access challenges for vulnerable groups by providing access to gardening spaces or to urban agriculture. Simultaneously, offer financial support and educational programmes

¹ For an example of such an initiative supported by the local municipality, see [Connecting people living in urban cities and the ones in agricultural areas](#) on ACCTING's project website.

(including at the EU-level) to teach individuals how to cultivate their own healthy food, fostering a culture of self-sufficiency and sustainability within communities.

- **Promote farmers markets in marginalised areas and make space for the sale of local produce:** Public authorities should explicitly prioritise the allocation of space to farmers, small-scale food producers and other people for selling local and regional, ecological food products, as well as clarifying the certification process for such products (see below). Policymakers can also set incentives to establish more local farmers markets in marginalised areas. This includes streamlining regulatory processes and reducing bureaucratic hurdles.
- **Reflect environmental impacts in prices:** Advocate for EU-wide pricing mechanisms that reflect the environmental costs of food. In addition, environmental certification schemes tend to be costly to obtain, altogether making it hard to compete for small-scale organic producers. There is an urgent need for policymakers to introduce a price scheme reflecting the environmental costs of food properly, for instance, through a tax related to food miles, water consumption, and/or pesticide use. Policymakers should also initiate a transformation of the certification processes towards prices adjusted to the size of the farm and amount of produce.
- **Extend the 15-minute city concept to peri-urban areas:** With growing urbanisation and traffic, the concept of the “15-minute city” has attracted much attention, based on the idea that everyone should have access to basic daily needs within a short walk or bike ride. Expansions of this concept to peri-urban areas (e.g. through multifunctional green corridors), would benefit many families, seniors, and other vulnerable groups of people with restricted mobility who might be unable to afford living in core urban areas.
- **Prioritise local and seasonal food in public procurement:** Public actors (including at the European Commission level) are role models, who spend large sums on procurement of food and other products. They need to use this leverage and prioritise the purchase of local, regional, and seasonal food products, both to provide positive examples to the population, and to support the development and establishment of local food producers that sell seasonal and organic produce.
- New policies are needed at all levels of governance (local, regional, national and EU) to boost local food strategies and plans, and to support the gender+ inclusive implementation of the European Green Deal, regarding rural areas in general and small farming in particular. This includes:
 - Incentivising environmentally sustainable and gender+ inclusive small farming practices and initiatives such as waste management, composting, and soil regeneration by announcing new awards and making existing ones accessible, thereby enabling a bottom-up approach.
 - Designing more financially and technologically accessible alternatives to certification systems (including organic certification), such as ‘participatory guarantee systems’ that operate at the local level in order to enable fair access to certification for new farmers, women, and other vulnerable groups.

- Supporting farmers' right to seeds² and their capacity to grow food to feed themselves and other people adequately, particularly in line with Article 14 of the Convention of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) on rural women's rights to seeds, as they play a key role in local and global food systems and food security.
- Establishing regulations that require public procurement (school canteens, hospitals, public offices, employee canteens, etc.) to prioritise products from local farmers and particularly women and minority group farmers. This will help to restore fairer competition with industrial producers that are not required to integrate social and environmental costs.
- Broadening participatory urban planning and design principles to also consider questions of agricultural production in urban areas. A gender+ inclusive approach can help proliferate environmentally sustainable small farms and women's food cooperatives which sell their produce at the local level.
- Developing gender+ inclusive mechanisms for networking, knowledge-sharing and collaboration between policymakers, experts, civil society organisations, and small farmers; and reform the current institutional structures (such as farming advisory systems) to have gender+ inclusive participatory governance.
- Creating gender+ inclusive education and training programmes for small farmers that weave together local, indigenous, gender+ experiences and intergenerational wisdom with scientific research towards the development of environmentally sustainable, fair, and healthier farming and food systems.

To the European Commission as funder of research

Intersectional data and analysis

Methodological approaches must be refined to better understand food security, sustainability of diets (with low environmental impacts while contributing to food and nutrition security and healthy life for present and future generations), and food uses among vulnerable and marginalised groups. The European Commission is recommended to fund research that overcomes the challenges of comparability in diverse situations, considering the stratification of samples or categories of vulnerability for more effective policy translation.

Consumption

An essential matter concerns how to both promote agri-food literacy and diversify food options for vulnerable people. This includes enabling regular access to healthier food and

² For further information see: [Resolution 73/165 of the UN General Assembly](#); [General recommendation No. 34 on the rights of rural women of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women](#).

the use of sustainable processes from the perspective of the circular economy, i.e., reducing waste and better (re)using resources. Examples of questions to pursue further include:

- How to encourage – both on an individual level and generally – the change to a vegetarian or (organic) plant-based diet that favours local consumption?
- How can educational organisations (formal and informal) be utilised/recruited for community-wide learning processes focused on sustainable production, consumption, and waste mitigation?
- How can vulnerable groups obtain access to relevant information and knowledge on food security, waste mitigation, and healthy eating (e.g., schools, demonstration gardens, social support organisations)?
- To what extent can schools be paired with urban gardens and farms to provide educational environments for social innovation related to agricultural practices?
- How can women be empowered to become significant actors for sustainability within their local food systems?

Norm change and masculinities

The European Commission is encouraged to prioritise initiatives that harness and reinforce sustainable food *values* in the context of the “Farm to Fork” strategy, fostering a widespread shift towards sustainable food consumption behaviours. These initiatives should aim at promoting sustainable food consumption behaviours across diverse European populations, taking into account the various socio-cultural and socio-demographic contexts (e.g., cultural context of the country, consumer characteristics, etc.). In addition, the Commission can invest in research that explores the dynamics of how these values and norms influence sustainable food choices, particularly focusing on the interplay between individual choices and broader societal trends. The research should extend to understanding the influence of food supply chains, food-related marketing and social media in shaping societal, regional and communal food values. It should further seek to steer these elements towards promoting sustainability.

Here, relevant values and norms include project findings suggesting that men tend to make different choices than women. It is imperative to address the role of masculinities as potential hindrances for sustainability, as it is not yet known how different masculinities can be transformed and/or challenged in the context of the sustainability transition; and how these may work as enablers or hindrances of transformation.

The role of authorities and legislation

ACCTING’s research has indicated that urban agriculture can be crucial for improving the food security of vulnerable groups and that more research into their role, facilitating conditions, and hindrances is essential. For instance, there remain important questions about how urban agriculture – and the allocation of land that enables small-scale farming – can be made an integral part of an inclusive spatial planning strategy. How can it be ensured that vulnerable groups have access to these spaces and can benefit from them? And what is the role of forms of local food production that don’t require additional land (i.e., home/vertical gardens)?

The Commission is also recommended to invest in research that investigates which institutions, organisations, and relational dynamics are crucial to induce improvements in food security, local production and consumption, healthy diets, and circularity utilising an intersectional gender+ perspective. This research can provide in-depth knowledge about the actors, strategies, and policies that advance food justice, utilising an intersectional gender+ perspective, as well as insights into what governance mechanisms are missing that might enhance environmentally friendly food production and consumption.

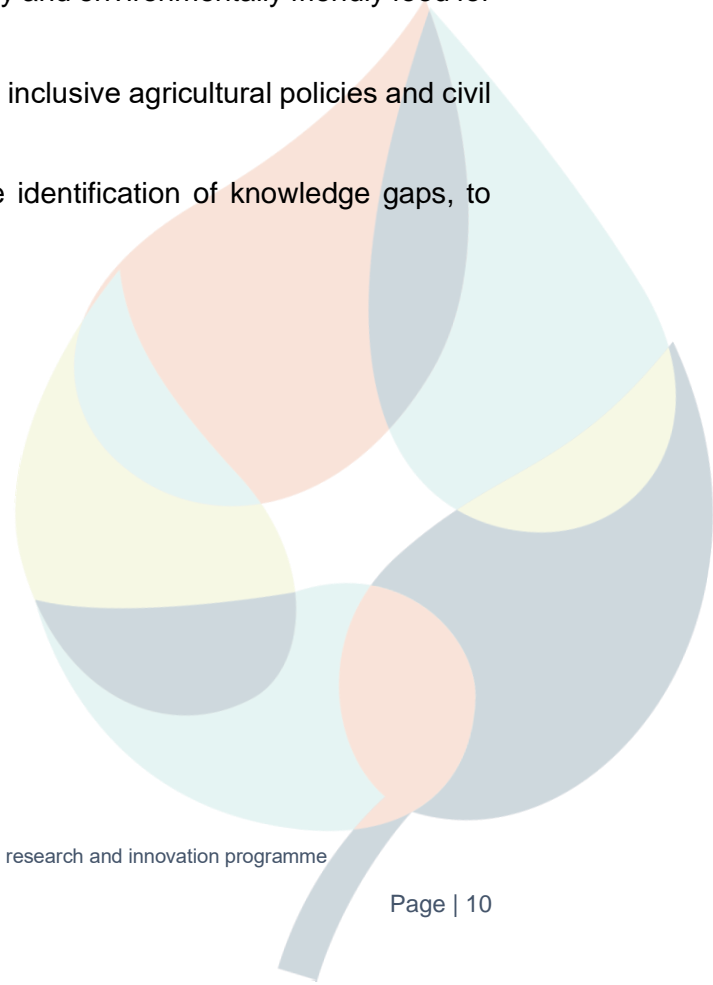
Intergenerational and cross-cultural dialogue

Community-led initiatives as avenues for change and outreach to vulnerable communities have also been identified as important topics for further research. These can delve into the strengths of existing strategies and practices with regard to communicating policies and initiatives in an inclusive way. The European Commission can also invest in research on the interplay of traditional practices and values and the promotion of environmentally conscious behaviour, especially from an intergenerational knowledge transfer perspective.

Further reading

From ACCTING:

- The [first Policy Brief](#) produced by ACCTING in May 2023
- The [factsheet](#) on “Promoting access to healthy and environmentally friendly food for the marginalised and vulnerable”
- The [factsheet](#) on “Local is beautiful: Gender+ inclusive agricultural policies and civil society practices for and with small farmers”
- ACCTING’s [research agenda](#), based on the identification of knowledge gaps, to inspire research funding organisations



The ACCTING project

It is acknowledged by now that the global climate crisis is not only an ecological crisis but also an economic, social and political crisis, with devastating effects on individuals and societies. These negative effects are not evenly distributed within societies. It is the poorer, marginalised and vulnerable groups who are the most acutely affected, exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities. The European Green Deal foresees efficient use of resources for a circular and clean economy. However, inequalities emerge in the context of its policy and interventions.


The EU-funded ACCTING project takes these considerations as a starting point for a complex series of research and experimental activities aimed at identifying, analysing and testing policies and initiatives capable of responding to this crisis, mitigating its effects on the most vulnerable and helping them play a significant role in the pursuit of greater environmental sustainability.

The project mobilises research experimentation and innovation to promote an inclusive and socially just European Green Deal focusing on the inequalities produced by its policies and supporting behavioural change at individual and collective levels.

ACCTING explores the impact of Green Deal policy initiatives on individual and collective behaviours, provides evidence, and empowers policymakers and stakeholders to anticipate policy responses and potential negative influences, and mitigate such impacts in decision-making. The project collects new data on Green Deal policy interventions and co-designs and implements pilot actions to reduce or prevent policy-related inequalities and advance behavioural change for an inclusive and equal European Green Deal.

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Disclaimer

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