



D1.5: Initial Guidelines for Policy Benchmarking

Grant Agreement n°. 101084234



Funded by
the European Union





VERSION HISTORY

Ver.	Date	Comments/Changes	Author/Reviewer
0.1	29/05/2024	Working draft version	Galway/ Consortium partners
1.0	31/05/2024	Final draft	Galway/ Consortium partners

DELIVERABLE INFORMATION

Project Acronym	FLIARA
Project Title	FLIARA: Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas
Type of action	HORIZON-RIA
Topic	HORIZON-CL6-2022-COMMUNITIES-01-01
Project Start Date	01/01/2023
Project Duration	36 months
Work Package	WP1: Contextual Concepts and Assessment Frameworks
Deliverable	D1.5: Initial Guidelines for Policy Benchmarking
Due Date	31/05/2024
Submission Date	31/05/2024
Dissemination Level	Public
Deliverable Responsible	University of Galway
Version	1.0
Status	Final
Author(s)	Aisling Murtagh, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir
Contributor(s)	<i>Czech Republic:</i> Antonin Vaishar; <i>Finland:</i> Tuomas Kuhmonen, Belyta Tembo; <i>Germany:</i> Lutz Meyer-Ohlendorf; <i>Ireland:</i> Aisling Murtagh, Maura Farrell, Louise Weir, Tara Farrell, Anne Kinsella; Niamh McGuinness; Niamh Nolan; <i>Italy:</i> Silvia Sivini, Irene Leonardelli and Giovanna Vingelli; <i>Romania:</i> Anastasia Oprea, Laura Incze; <i>Slovenia:</i> Barbara Lampič, Sara Mikolič; <i>Spain:</i> Patrizio Ricci, Víctor Ricardo Martínez; <i>Sweden:</i> Annie Roos, Helene Ahl; <i>The Netherlands:</i> Willem Korthals Altes, Vitnarae Kang
Reviewer(s)	Consortium partners



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

EC	European Commission
ECA	European Court of Auditors
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
EU	European Union
DG	Directorate-General
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Project Partners	
Galway	NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND GALWAY
TU Delft	TECHNISCHE UNIVERSITEIT DELFT
TEAGASC	TEAGASC - AGRICULTURE AND FOOD DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
UNICAL	UNIVERSITA DELLA CALABRIA
LWL	LONGFORD WOMEN S LINK CLG
UTU	TURUN YLIOPISTO
UL	UNIVERZA V LJUBLJANI
CE	CONSULTA EUROPA PROJECTS AND INNOVATION SL
HNEE	HOCHSCHULE FUR NACHHALTIGE ENTWICKLUNG EBERSWALDE
ELARD	ASSOCIATION EUROPEENNE LEADER POURLE DEVELOPPEMENT RURAL
UOULU	OULUN YLIOPISTO
ECOLISE	RESEAU EUROPEEN POUR DES INITIATIVES COMMUNAUTAIRES SUR LES CHANGEMENTS CLIMATIQUES ET LE DEVELOPPEMENT DURABLE
MENDELU	MENDELOVA UNIVERZITA V BRNE
LNU	LINNEUNIVERSITETET
HLK	HOGSKOLAN FOR LARANDE OCH KOMMUNIKATION I JONKOPING - HLK SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND COMMUNICATION, JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY



1. INTRODUCTION

This report emerges from FLIARA Work Package 1 Task 1.4. This task involved an assessment of policy and legal frameworks related to women-led innovation in farming and rural areas, which was carried out to support the FLIARA policy benchmarking activities. This report (D.1.5) provides initial, preliminary guidelines on policy benchmarking on gender equality performance in relation to women-led innovation in farming and rural areas. It draws out insights and broad learnings for policy benchmarking from the inventory and assessment of policy and legal frameworks. The detailed findings, such as the analysis of specific policies and laws that exist in the partner countries and at EU level, as well as the approach to the assessment and inventory, are provided in the report 'Assessment of Rural and Farming Policy and Legal Frameworks in relation to Women-led Innovation' (D1.3).

This report is a first step in the FLIARA project benchmarking activities. FLIARA will also produce two further benchmarking reports. The second is the 'Benchmarking Initial Report' (D4.3). Emerging from Work Package 4, this report will build on the results of Work Package 1 and 3, as well as drawing on the outcomes of the focus groups/workshops on benchmarking held at the Community of Practice events. The multi-actor approach is applied to engage women innovators, policy makers and other key stakeholders in the FLIARA benchmarking activities and the Community of Practice provides a central space for this engagement. The final 'Gender Benchmarking Report' (D5.3) will follow on from work carried out already across the different Work Packages and combine this with learnings from available outcomes of Work Package 5 on Policy Design and Assessment. This final report will outline the state of current gender benchmarking and provide a set of guidelines for gender benchmarking that incorporates a role for the application of gender responsive practices/delivery mechanisms.

This report firstly provides an explanation of the initial considerations that have shaped the FLIARA benchmarking activities so far. We detail how the EU Gender Equality Strategy provided initial objectives to guide our policy assessment and inventory. The report then moves on to provide a short review of policy benchmarking considerations and challenges in the context of the FLIARA project. Following from this, the initial policy benchmarking guidelines are outlined. The report closes with further wider considerations to guide the future benchmarking activities of the FLIARA project.



2. BACKGROUND AND APPROACH: EU GENDER EQUALITY STRATEGY

The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 outlines objectives for achieving the goal of a 'Union of Equality'. This sees both women and men "free to pursue their chosen path in life, have equal opportunities to thrive in, participate and lead our European society" (EC, 2020, p.2). Analysis of the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025 provided FLIARA with a starting point for assessing policy and legal frameworks on gender equality performance. Other relevant policies and strategies were also examined for their relevance. However, the seven key objectives which make up the EU Gender Equality Strategy were chosen to guide the assessment and inventory because they encapsulate the gender-related aims of the other policies and strategies examined. The objectives provided FLIARA with a set of principles from a wider gender equality context to frame the scope of the policy and law assessed in relation to rural and farm women-led innovation. The objectives became key guiding principles and the seven objectives, as relevant to FLIARA, are:

- *Ending gender-based violence*: Gender-based violence is a pressing societal issue connected to how men and women are treated unfairly. This form of violence, including harassment and mistreatment of subordinate groups, mainly affects women due to their gender or has a more significant impact on them.
- *Challenging gender stereotypes*: Challenging gender stereotypes involves questioning and interrogating rigid societal norms that dictate specific expectations for women, men, girls, and boys. These expectations can limit aspirations, constrict choices, and impede freedom.
- *Closing gender gaps in the labour market*: The process of closing gender gaps in the labour market involves the concerted effort to enhance women's involvement in the workforce, creating a substantial and positive impact on the economy.
- *Achieving equal participation across different sectors of the economy*: The attainment of equal participation across various economic sectors with a focus on women involves tackling the imbalanced presence of women in lower-paying jobs, sectors, and lower hierarchical positions.
- *Addressing the gender pay and pension gap*: Addressing the gender pay and pension gap requires recognising the ongoing disparity where, on average, women earn less than men. The cumulative effect of gender employment and pay gaps throughout a lifetime widens the pension gap, making older women more susceptible to poverty compared to men.
- *Closing the gender care gap*: The gender care gap refers to the uneven distribution of domestic and care responsibilities influenced by gender norms. The challenge of balancing work and personal life is especially pronounced for women, impacting their employment decisions based on caregiving duties. The gender care gap is more significant for single parents, primarily women, and individuals in remote rural areas with limited support solutions.



- *Achieving gender balance in decision-making and in politics:* The pursuit of gender balance in decision-making and politics is grounded in the view that it improves decision-making, strengthens corporate governance, and stimulates economic growth through the utilisation of a varied range of talents and skills.

These objectives were taken forward as principles to guide the assessment and inventory of policy and legal frameworks. They were used in two ways. They informed the structure of the assessment questionnaire where they were grouped around three areas: rural and farm economy; empowerment and pay, pension work-life and family (see Annex 1 of report D1.3: Assessment of Rural and Farming Policy and Legal Frameworks in relation to Women-led Innovation' for more detail of this approach). They were also used in an Excel inventory that draws together policies and laws identified in the questionnaire and categorises them based on which principles they interact with. The principles are also taken forward further as they inform and shape the areas identified for benchmarking (see Section 4.2).

3. POLICY BENCHMARKING AND GENDER EQUALITY

3.1 BENCHMARKING: A TOOL SUPPORTING GENDER MAINSTREAMING?

The FLIARA Conceptual Framework identifies gender mainstreaming and policy benchmarking as promising tools for improving policy to enhance gender equality in relation to women-led innovation in farming and rural areas (Farrell et al., forthcoming). Gender mainstreaming can be described as a simple idea, yet potentially powerful strategy towards achieving gender equality (ECA, 2021; Farrell et al., forthcoming). Gender mainstreaming can be defined succinctly as: “Systematically considering gender issues at all stages in the lifecycle of policies, instruments, programmes and funds” (ECA, 2021, p.53). A more extended definition is: “The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, regulations, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality” (OECD, 2018, p.114-115).

A range of tools and methods can be used to achieve gender mainstreaming (see Figure 1). EIGE, for example, has devised tools for different stages of the four-stage gender mainstreaming cycle (define, plan, act, check), which include gender budgeting and impact assessment (EIGE, 2024c). Policy benchmarking as a tool to support gender mainstreaming merits further exploration. Depending on how policy benchmarking is designed, it could cut across different stages of gender mainstreaming and provide a more comprehensive tool. In practice however this idea needs and merits further exploration.



Figure 1: Overview of components of gender mainstreaming



Source: EIGE, 2024c

Gender mainstreaming requires an institutional framework to ensure it is implemented. ECA (2021) outline key areas that are prerequisites for this, including training and expertise in how to implement gender mainstreaming, implementation plans and clear objectives to meet. The ECA identified weaknesses at the EC level in terms of applying gender mainstreaming across the EU budget where generally implementation and monitoring mechanisms to support Directorate-Generals (DGs) were not found in place (ECA, 2021).

At the Member State level, EIGE has assessed the legal basis for gender mainstreaming finding that most have some level of commitment however strong weaknesses are identified such as an absence of enforcement or sanctions (EIGE, 2024d). National assessments also touched on this issue (full details provided in Annex 2 of report D1.3:



Assessment of Rural and Farming Policy and Legal Frameworks in relation to Women-led Innovation’) aiming to assess if gender mainstreaming or other forms of gender equality assessment of policy are practiced in relation to rural and farm policies. When gender mainstreaming is practiced this implies that all policies are subject to gender mainstreaming. In some cases, a more specific focus is identified related to gender issues in farming and rural areas. For example, in the Slovenia national assessment it is noted that all ministries must appoint a coordinator responsible for integrating gender perspectives into measures and policies. More broadly in Slovenia the 2023-2030 Resolution includes specific actions targeting vulnerable groups of women, mentioning women in agriculture and other rural women. In Spain it is explained its dedication to gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development is key in its national Rural Development Program. Mechanisms noted include evaluation of policy impacts on gender equality to ensure continuous improvement and alignment with national and European goals. Overall, this would merit further assessment, however some national assessments appear to echo the analysis of the ECA (2021). In Sweden the national assessment reports that guidance and explicit tasks related to gender mainstreaming for government authorities are not clear and the onus is on each agency to direct their work on the issue. In Ireland, the national assessment highlights how the 2017-2020 National Strategy for Women and Girls recognised the need to increase public sector capacity and expertise in gender mainstreaming and includes an action to build capacity in gender mainstreaming and budgeting.

3.2 APPROACHES AND CHALLENGES

Policy benchmarking is essentially a comparative analysis tool for policy assessment. It can be used in a range of fields, both within and beyond policy. Benchmarking has its origins in the corporate world developed as a tool to improve business competitiveness by using comparison against the highest performers. It became a topic theorised in management literature and a tool then capable of being applied in a variety of organisations (Bruno et al. 2006; Fagerberg, 2003).

The specific activity of policy benchmarking involves the systematic comparison of policies in different contexts in an effort to improve policies by learning from the results (Fagerberg, 2001; 2003). In the gender equality context, benchmarking has been defined as the: “Establishment of a criterion, standard or reference point against which targets can be established and progress measured” (EC, 1998, p. 13). Benchmarking is a term also used broadly and narrowly. For example, international standards and policies that are considered the leading and desired target can be referred to as ‘international benchmarks’. For example, in the OECD (2018) Toolkit for Mainstreaming and Implementing Gender Equality, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and Goal 5 on gender equality, are referred to as an ‘international benchmark’.

In the context of our current focus, policy benchmarking, gender equality and women-led innovation in farming and rural areas, in this section we draw on a range of benchmarking examples in a variety of areas. This is to identify what we can learn from current approaches as well as key challenges.



There are different approaches to how benchmarking comparison is done and this is next discussed. Indices that combine a range of quantitative statistical type data can be used to benchmark. In the field of regional benchmarking there are also rural focused examples. For example, Simms et al. (2014) benchmark rural regions against each other to understand their strengths and weaknesses to support community-based economic development. Makkonen and Inkinen (2023) have developed an index to benchmark shrinking rural regions and the concept of smart shrinkage. Indices also may not be described explicitly as benchmarking, but essentially this is what they do. At the European level, a number of gender equality indices already exist that monitor regional gender equality, such as the female achievement index (FemAI) and the female disadvantage index (FemDI) and are based on 33 indicators (D'Ambrogio, 2023).

Statistics and quantitative data can also be used as a part of benchmarking policy. This can present a challenge if wider statistics are used, beyond data collected as part of the policy process. This is due to for example data availability and the comparability of what is available. Statistics used as benchmarks might include a range of indicators related to women-led innovation such as number female enterprises, start-ups and self-employed. From this perspective, key to effective and reliable benchmarking is comparable data. This is an issue often cited in benchmarking studies, particularly in relation to those that use quantitative indicators (e.g. see Ruest-Archambault, 2008). Other benchmarking studies have also noted wider limitations of such an approach. For example, Ruest-Archambault (2008) note that changes in particular statistical measures related to gender equality are difficult to link to policy as many other factors are at play in the wider socio-economic context and this needs to be taken into account if using such measures.

Deficiencies in how the presence and role of women in rural areas is reflected in statistics and the need for better data is highlighted (e.g. ECA, 2021; EU CAP Network, 2022; Franić and Kovačićek 2019). National assessments also touched on this issue (full details provided in Annex 2 of report D1.3: Assessment of Rural and Farming Policy and Legal Frameworks in relation to Women-led Innovation') and reflected on the existence of official datasets showing women's participation in rural and farm innovation and/or the wider farm and rural economy. A range of statistics are described, but weaknesses are also evident. The analysis provides a starting point towards assessing data availability in the context of gender benchmarking and policy. However much deeper and focused examination would be required to assess how and if quantitative data could be utilised in the context of benchmarking policy on gender equality performance.

Depending on how benchmarking is approached, it can be a significant activity over a period of time. For example, the Working Group for the Initiative on Women in Science and Engineering Institutional Report Card benchmarked efforts to support greater gender equality in STEM disciplines. This included a four-year pilot phase where data was collected to establish the benchmark and a follow-on recognition phase to highlight high performers and motivate institutional changes (Beeler et al. 2019).

Areas where benchmarking are applied can be complex, with many interacting influences, such as social, cultural, economic factors. Gender equality in the context of



women-led innovation in farming and rural areas is a significantly complex area. This is clearly demonstrated by the concept of the women-led innovation ecosystem as detailed in the FLIARA Conceptual Framework (Farrell et al., forthcoming). In the context of regional benchmarking, Navarro et al. (2013) also raise this issue outlining that as benchmarking was originally conceptualised as a tool for one specific unit of analysis (a company) applying it in more complex contexts must recognise and deal with the complexities of the context under comparison. Hence one of the fundamental challenges of policy benchmarking for gender equality performance is dealing with complexity and brings a challenge to effectively compare. However, also in the context of regional benchmarking and its influence on regional policy, Huggins (2010) notes that advances are being made in how this type of benchmarking influences policy, but also faces the constraints of political and financial factors. Benchmarking policy on gender equality performance in the context of women-led innovation in farming and rural areas is an area where benchmarking could also have significant policy impact, but the wider factors, similar to Huggins (2010) highlight, also need consideration.

One such issue that is part of this complexity is if a place-based approach to benchmarking is taken then the scale and geography of benchmarking is important to consider when designing benchmarking tools. Further to this, benchmarking different national policy frameworks from across the EU against each other is not also without challenges as identified from our assessment and inventory of policy and legal frameworks. Given that benchmarking is essentially a comparative exercise, there should be a certain level of homogeneity in governance structures, law and policy if benchmarking at the EU and Member State levels. For example, Germany is a Federal Republic that is made up of 16 states that have a large degree of autonomy in terms of their internal organisation (DG Communication, no date). This resulted in an adapted approach to the policy and law assessment in Germany. Due to the Federal State structure, it was not possible to examine the full picture but look at the national level and two Federal States. Another challenge relates to different fundamental laws at the national level. Finland for example has an Act on Equality between Women and Men. The specifications of this act apply to all other policies and legislation. It requires authorities to promote equality between women and men in a purposeful and systematic way. If there are circumstances that prevent achieving gender equality changes must be made. This means that benchmarking policy around targeted measures to support women reveals virtually no comparable results when compared to countries that do not have such legislation. Benchmarking at national levels at the level of comparing sub-national policy within the boundaries of sub-national governance structures could present a more comprehensive comparative approach, in general.

Context-related issues also arise related to the wider issue of the diversity of rural regions and women in these areas face different needs, opportunities and challenges (EU CAP Network, 2022). These are also potentially important considerations because different benchmarks may have varying levels of importance in different region types (e.g. remote rural versus rural areas close to urban areas). Further to this, as clear from the project Conceptual Framework (Farrell et al., forthcoming), FLIARA does not view women as a



homogenous group. For example, women of different ages, cultures and ethnicities engage in rural and farm innovation and they experience different enabling and constraining conditions. Different groups of rural women can also experience different degrees of marginalisation.

Activities post-benchmarking and learning from benchmarking to improve policy is also an important step to actively consider. For example, impactful benchmarking ideally continues after the study or evaluation of policy ends. This may include identifying and developing transferable good practice case studies, as demonstrated by the ‘recognition phase’ of the STEM Institutional Report Card discussed above (Beeler et al. 2019). In addition, the policy improvements suggested by benchmarking may provide more generalised evidence. Context is important to take into account as the actual issues, challenges and institutions may limit the potential and relevance of transferring the findings of policy benchmarking to policy (Fagerberg, 2001). Similarly broader warnings against transplanting policy from different contexts without due consideration of local circumstances and the need for place-based policy well-made (e.g. Atterton, 2016; Copus and de Lima, 2015).

Benchmarking can also be built into policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation to understand how gender equality is supported. For example, in relation to gender equality action plans, benchmarks are outlined by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) as part of a wider roadmap of activities (see Table 1).

Table 1: Roadmap steps for Gender Equality Plan implementation, monitoring and evaluation

Step	Explanation
Benchmark	Linked to the measures proposed in the gender equality plan, these are measures used to track current performance and are then compared with desired performance.
Target	Desired performance for each measure in the gender equality plan and the timeframe this should be achieved.
Performance indicators	Metrics used to determine progress.
Data	Specific data that is needed to measure progress towards the performance indicators and sources of this data.
Responsibility	Who is responsible for implementing the measures contained in the gender equality plan.
Financial resources	Budget to achieve the measures in the gender equality plan.

Source: Derived from EIGE, 2024a



In this approach, benchmarks are not the desired situation; they represent the current state of performance. Targets are included that represent the desired situation. An example of one benchmark and the specific approach to its monitoring in the area of improving the gender-sensitivity of recruitment procedures for parliamentary employees (in a fictional gender equality plan) is outlined in Table 2. This benchmark is one of a number outlined to assess in relation to this area of a gender equality plan. While this example is not directly comparable and transferable to the FLIARA policy benchmarking context, it provides an illustrative, practical example of how a benchmarking tool can be designed with clarity and pragmatism.

Table 2: Examples of benchmarks, targets and timeframe for measures in a fictional gender equality plan

Step	Explanation
Measure	Establish a paid internship programme within the parliamentary administration, with a focus on gender balance and underrepresented groups (with ethnic minority background, with disabilities, etc.) – members of which should make up at least 40 % of the interns.
Responsible groups	HR department, gender equality office.
Benchmark	No paid internship programme, with a focus on gender balance and underrepresented groups, exists within the parliamentary administration.
Target	A new paid internship programme with a focus on gender balance and underrepresented groups is established. Each year, 10 women and 10 men interns should enter the programme. At least 40% of these interns should be from underrepresented groups.
Timeframe	A new paid internship programme is established by 31 July 2024. On 1 January 2025, 2026 and 2027, at least 10 women and 10 men interns should be recruited in the programme (at least 40 % of whom are from underrepresented groups).
Indicators	Existence of an active paid internship programme, with a focus on gender balance and underrepresented groups (yes/no). Number of women and men interns in the programme. Percentage of women and men interns from underrepresented groups.

Source: Extract from EIGE, 2024b

Policy benchmarking is therefore a tool that can be used to learn from better performing geographies and policies. What is learned and how it can be applied depends on the benchmarking approach.



4. INITIAL POLICY BENCHMARKING GUIDELINES

To ensure benchmarking tools are effective, their design in the context of the general challenges of policy benchmarking, as well as policy benchmarking on gender equality in the context of rural and farm women-led innovation context, must be taken into account. In this section, we outline some initial general guidelines to consider in our next steps in how we approach FLIARA's policy benchmarking. The previous section focused on approaches and challenges can also provide guidance for our next steps. Derived from the report 'Assessment of Rural and Farming Policy and Legal Frameworks in relation to Women-led Innovation' (D1.3) we also present some initial good practice benchmarking statements in Section 4.2 below. With further work and refinements, these could provide the basis for benchmarking tools. These might include qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods tools that tease out methodologies to support their practical application in policy benchmarking on gender equality performance related to women-led innovation in farming and rural areas.

4.1 GENERAL GUIDELINES

Developing effective policy benchmarking tools is a significant task. For this first step, to advance the FLIARA work on policy benchmarking it is also important to raise more general considerations for future reflection to help guide FLIARA benchmarking activities and the final guidelines produced.

Who is our benchmarking for? Policy makers appear a key target group for the FLIARA policy benchmarking outputs. But perhaps there is a need to think deeper about what we mean by policy makers to ensure our final benchmarking guidelines are tailored to stakeholder needs. Also depending on the type and nature of policy benchmarking tools (e.g. rapid assessments, as mentioned below), they could also have relevance for wider stakeholders, such as advocacy groups.

What is our benchmarking for? Benchmarking tools need clarity on their focus, for example are they aiming to benchmark specific policies or national contexts against each other? Further to this if assessing specific policies there is a need to consider what aspect is being benchmarked e.g. measures that exist and/or strategies or outcomes of these?

Do we need different tools to benchmark policy? There is a potential role for different types of benchmarking tools e.g. tools that provide more high-level assessment potentially learning from wider policy assessment approaches such as the OECD rapid assessment approach (e.g. see OECD and European Commission, 2017). Different tools could also focus on assessment relating to different target groups (e.g. supporting women-led innovation in farming or rural areas) or topics (e.g. sustainability). Also, tools for benchmarking at different policy stages or the whole policy cycle are potentially important to distinguish.



How is the benchmark determined? Benchmarks can be determined from existing policy, however benchmarking tool development potentially needs a more dynamic, multi-actor approach.

Should, and how should, the benchmarking approach be tested? Benchmarking tools potentially need a validation, testing, refinement and revision process as part of their development.

What are the benchmarking methods? Benchmarking could take or combine a quantitative and qualitative approach. However, given the issues already highlighted in relation to statistics, quantitative approaches are potentially challenged. Spin off outcomes however of exploring and testing benchmarking could also be a set of new indicators that could be collected at the EU level.

4.2 INITIAL GOOD PRACTICE BENCHMARKS DERIVED FROM THE FLIARA POLICY ASSESSMENT

If we wish to benchmark policy, we must first establish what the benchmark is. In this section we outline a set of initial broad benchmark statements that act as potential reference points for good practice (see Table 3). These benchmarking statements need further reflection and present working ideas. Development of more specific tools would allow their application in practice. They can be refined through future FLIARA activities and its multi-actor process. For example:

- Specific indicators would need to be attached to the benchmark statements that allow for their assessment.
- There is potential need for greater refinement through a separate benchmarking process and set of benchmarks for both women-led innovation in rural and farming contexts.
- The benchmark statements present working ideas and potentially could be further developed to support benchmarking at different stages of the policy process, such as applying the benchmarking statements in the policy plan stage (i.e. benchmark what policy promises).

The benchmark goals are informed by the Gender Equality Strategy principles. The initial good practice statements are informed by the results of the FLIARA Assessment of Policy and Legal Frameworks (report D1.3). There is also potential for further and deeper analysis of the findings of this report to refine and develop these good practice benchmark statements. This could occur within the scope of Work Package 5 and based on the findings emerging from Work Package 4 activities related to benchmarking.



Table 3: Initial good practice policy benchmark statements related to supporting women-led rural and farm innovation

Goal	Initial good practice benchmarks
<p>Close gender gaps in farming and the rural labour market</p> <p>Achieve equal participation in rural and farm innovation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Women are a target group in rural and farm policy ✓ Rural and farm policy include specific measures for achieving gender equality ✓ Supports for rural and farm innovation are not uncertain or volatile. ✓ Supports for rural and farm innovation address the specific disadvantages women face. ✓ Supports for rural and farm innovation harness underutilised or untapped areas of opportunity related to women-led innovation in farming and rural areas. ✓ Policy does not treat women as a homogenous group and targets the specific needs of particular groups of women in relation to rural and farm innovation. ✓ Policies exist that are community-led and place-based that allow for the specific needs of women in particular places to be addressed through a bottom-up approach.
<p>Achieve equal empowerment of women</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Adequate opportunities exist for women to influence the decisions that impact them. ✓ Adequate cooperation and networking opportunities exist for women supporting participation and success in women-led innovation. ✓ Adequate supports exist to build skills and innovation capacities supporting participation and success in women-led innovation. ✓ Policies address increasing the visibility of women-led innovation and challenge gender stereotypes related to work life and professions.
<p>Address gender related work-life conflicts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Certain and stable support services exist that assist work and leisure life balance. ✓ Certain and stable supports exist that assist work and family life balance. ✓ Policies address features of professional life so that they do not discourage women's participation and success in innovation.



5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

The initial policy benchmarking guidelines presented here reflect the complexity of the task of policy benchmarking. Finally, we draw together some ideas that could help our next steps in further refinement of the FLIARA policy benchmarking guidelines. Potentially, and guided by FLIARA's future work, further consideration and exploration of the following could be carried out:

- Further assessment of benchmarking challenges, the extent of these issues and how to reconcile them as relevant.
- Further assessment of the existing state of development of benchmarking tools that support gender equality assessment in relation to women-led innovation in farming and rural areas, as well as the feasibility of new approaches in general and in relation to gender mainstreaming.
- Assessment of other methods of policy assessment on gender equality performance and analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches compared to benchmarking.
- Consider if FLIARA should focus its benchmarking work on particular policy areas, to realign with the original project goals and allow for a more in-depth work in particular areas. This could be guided by FLIARA's future multi-actor engagement (notably through the FLIARA Community of Practice workshops) and wider project findings (particularly Work Package 2 and 3).
- Further analysis of the D1.3 report as well as the national questionnaire assessments and inventories.



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