All across the Mediterranean, women contribute to food systems at multiple levels, be it as food producers, innovators, researchers, consumers, or decision-makers. Although with significant differences across countries, agriculture remains a key source of livelihoods for many women. Particularly striking in terms of women’s employment in agriculture are the cases of Morocco (52.2 percent) and Albania (51.6 percent). Women should therefore play a key role in the “green transition” of Mediterranean food systems, aimed at achieving a neutral or positive impact on the environment, increasing the food system’s resilience to the impact of climate change, and promoting a more sustainable management of natural resources.

However, significant gender gaps persist that undermine women’s potential to build more resilient and inclusive food systems as documented by the new comprehensive FAO report “The status of women in agrifood systems”. The data presented in the report clearly show that, while women have gained more access to some resources – such as digital technology and financial services – over the past decade, the gaps are either unchanged or growing in far too many areas, particularly for rural women.

Women’s contribution to the agrifood system tends to be underestimated in many Mediterranean countries (such as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, just to name a few). This is due to the fact that women take on a large burden of unpaid agricultural work, and that they also make up a significant proportion of the informal, or shadow, agri-food labour market. Such lower visibility of women’s roles is heightened by the gaps in reliable and updated national statistics, particularly gender and sex-disaggregated data relevant to the subject.

If not combined with efforts to ensure equity and social inclusion, the green transition of Mediterranean food systems bears the risk to exacerbate existing gender gaps, thus creating further marginalization and inequality. Across the Mediterranean, many women and girls still face considerable challenges in accessing specialized and mostly male-dominated education and training (e.g. Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, as well as agriculture-related subjects), agricultural support and financial services, green job opportunities, and innovative and climate-smart technologies and practices.

Owing to these persisting gender inequalities, women and girls in the region experience climate change in different and uniquely gendered ways. Their resilience and adaptive capacities are often undermined by their lack of control to key assets and resources, such as land and water, or access to appropriate information, inputs and practices. Limited mobility compared to men also poses women more at risk of climate shocks and catastrophic events. As such, their needs and constraints should be fully reflected in climate-related policies, programmes and national adaptation plans. However, despite the progress achieved in the past decades, wide gender gaps are still observed in political participation and decision-making in many countries, and more specifically in natural resource governance mechanisms, relevant policy processes and climate negotiations.

While Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) have emphasized the importance of women’s leadership in climate change policymaking across several key decisions, progress remains uneven and slow. Women remain widely underrepresented on the Conference of the Parties (CoP) delegations of many countries, particularly in high-level positions, as well as on the CoP delegations of countries most vulnerable to climate impacts. At the national level, it is also crucial that policies and interventions have a more explicit focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment and that gender issues are considered from the design and planning stage. However, national strategies related to agriculture, climate change and natural resource management often do not integrate gender-responsive considerations adequately. It is the case for example in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Egypt and Lebanon. Some of the limitations observed include the lack of policy objectives that address gender-based discrimination in rural areas and in the agri-food sector; in some cases, where high-level strategies do exist, there is a disconnect vis-à-vis action plans, hence interventions targeting women-specific needs and opportunities for climate action or natural resource management are absent. The collection and use of high-quality of sex- and age-disaggregated data, supported by enabling policy and institutional frameworks, is crucial to foster substantial progress and drive a sustainable Mediterranean food transition.
Finally, as new policies incentivize the green transition, the market demand for "green skills" is expected to increase. The green economy sectors have the potential to provide solutions to the high unemployment levels affecting Mediterranean youth, by providing new career and training opportunities and fostering jobs with higher wages. However, it may also further deepen pre-existing barriers to young women’s full inclusion in the economic space and the labour market, such as the digital gender divide and the employment gap in STEM sectors.

Women represent 57.7 percent of tertiary graduates in the European Union (EU); proportions of female students in STEM programs represent 34–57 percent in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. However, the rate of women working in STEM fields is significantly lower than men throughout the Mediterranean. To realize a green and equal transition of the agrifood labour market, hence contributing to more inclusive and resilient Mediterranean food systems, investments are needed in upskilling and reskilling women in green sectors and supporting the STEM school-to-work transition. At the same time, working conditions must reduce unconscious biases against women’s scientific and digital abilities, while promoting equal childcare responsibilities.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Based on the above background, the SFS-MED Platform is organizing the fifth technical webinar of a series about the levers for food systems transformation. This webinar aims to discuss the contribution of women to Mediterranean food systems and green transition. The speakers will be invited to reflect on what needs to change to address the persisting gender gaps undermining women’s potential role and equal participation in green food systems in the Mediterranean region. Bringing together representatives from governments, agri-food enterprises, researchers, international organizations and civil society, the webinar will provide a forum to exchange knowledge and concrete experiences about the role that multiple stakeholders can play in promoting the effective participation of women to greener, more sustainable and more resilient food systems in the Mediterranean.

This session will aim to address some key questions:

* How can the greening of Mediterranean food systems be a driver rather than a challenge for women’s equal participation, and what are the risks that a gender-blind green transition would entail?

* Are there any specific policies, programmes, or technological or scientific advancements that have proven to be effective in overcoming the barriers that women face to participate in the green transition?

* What needs to change to ensure that food systems become both green and inclusive of women’s participation and leadership, and who should be involved in / who is responsible for this transformation?

4 See 2.
12 See 2.
13 See 6.
14 See 2.
16 See 1.
19 See 10.

OBJECTIVES

KNOWLEDGE
Create a knowledge base about opportunities, innovative solutions and gaps or limitations for food systems transformation, specific to the Mediterranean context.

EVIDENCE SHARING
Facilitate replication and upscaling of concrete solutions for food systems transformation through the dissemination of evidence about successful approaches and lessons learned from across the Mediterranean.

AWARENESS
Promote and raise awareness on food systems thinking by facilitating multi-disciplinary and multi-sectorial exchanges.
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<td>Welcome remarks</td>
<td>Lauren Phillips, Deputy Director, Inclusive Rural Transformation and Gender Equality Division, FAO</td>
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<td>14.10-14.20</td>
<td>Keynote remarks</td>
<td>Frida Krifca, Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development of Albania and President of the Governing Board, CIHEAM</td>
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<td>14.20-15.30</td>
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<td>Moderator: Anna Dorangricchia, Project Manager, Gender Equality, Social and Civil Affairs Division, Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)</td>
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<td>Policy framework: Eastern Mediterranean</td>
<td>Gordana Rokvić, Associate professor, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Banja Luka</td>
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<td>Policy framework: Southern Mediterranean</td>
<td>Sarine Karajerjian, Programme Director of the Environmental Politics Programme, Arab Reform Initiative (ARI)</td>
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<td>Access to green finance/investments and STEM careers</td>
<td>Shada El Sharif, Senior Advisor, Green Economy, Climate Change &amp; Sustainability Founder, SustainMENA</td>
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<td>Green entrepreneurship for sustainable food systems</td>
<td>Guadaluna Chaer, Co-founder, LUXEED Robotics</td>
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<td>Gender gap in climate negotiations</td>
<td>Rajae Chafil, Director, Climate Change Competence Center of Morocco (4C Maroc)</td>
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<td>15.30-15.50</td>
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LIST OF RESOURCES

Publications
- FAO. 2023. Gender, water and agriculture – Assessing the nexus in Egypt. Cairo, FAO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc3019en
- FAO. 2023. The status of women in agrifood systems. Rome, FAO. https://doi.org/10.4060/cc5343en

Articles

Websites and online resources

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