

Mapping Report on Challenges



EUROPEAN SYNTHESIS REPORT



Improving Farmers' Wellbeing
through Social Innovation

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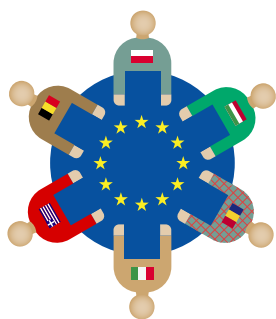
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1.

Introduction



This paper presents a synthesis of 6 mapping papers that have been developed within the framework of a Horizon 2020 Thematic Network entitled 'FARMWELL' (2021-2023). This project primarily aims at making social innovations¹ that attempt to enhance the wellbeing of farmers, farming households and farming communities more accessible.

With this objective in mind, research has been conducted in the first half of 2021 by all partners from the following 6 countries: Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania. This research primarily aimed at mapping the most pressing social challenges that had a discernable impact on the wellbeing of farmers, farming households and farming communities. The data gathered by the 6 country teams hereby allows for a better understanding of the challenges in farming these countries are being confronted with, to get an insight in

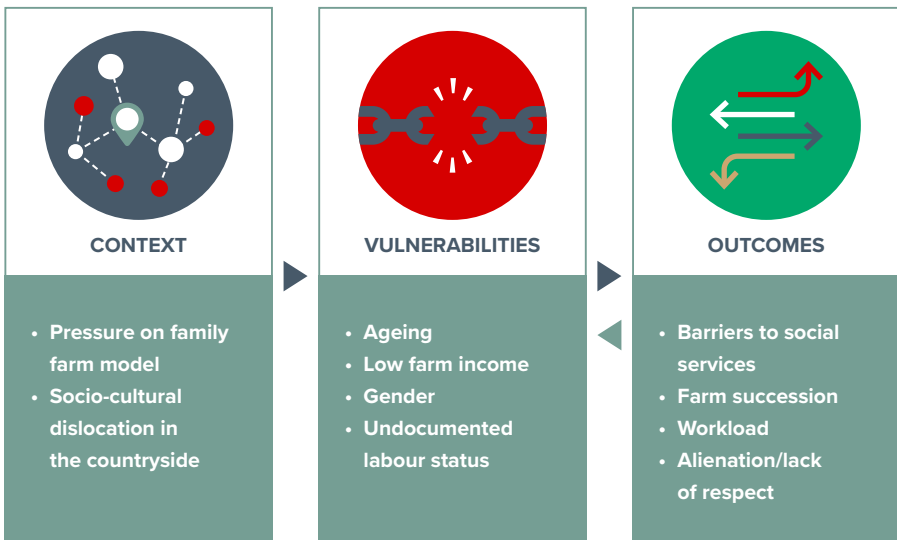
¹ Following the grant agreement of the project, a pragmatic working definition of 'social innovation' is being followed throughout this synthesis and the other mapping papers wherein the end goal of improving wellbeing of farmers through innovative social processes is of prime concern.

the specific vulnerabilities of farming communities and to obtain a better understanding of the overall wellbeing of these communities. Preliminary insights have also been gathered in the manner farmers attempt to cope with the challenges they are confronted with. Lastly, these data also serve as an evidence base upon which the relevance and urgency of certain social innovations that aim to improve wellbeing among farmers, farming households and farming communities will be grounded in a later stage of this project.

With this synthesis paper, we provide a systematized overview of the different insights that have been put forward in the different mapping papers.

With this synthesis paper, we provide a systematized overview of the different insights that have been put forward in the different mapping papers. These different insights and data are hereby compiled in a threefold structure, consisting of (1) context, (2) vulnerabilities and (3) outcomes. In the outcomes section, attention is also being paid to coping mechanisms developed by farmers.

Table 1: Systematized overview of social challenges



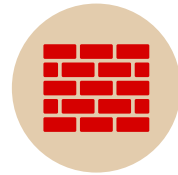
In the first part of the main findings of this synthesis paper, we will provide a concise overview of some of the larger structural challenges the farming sector is being confronted with (context). Considering the larger rationale of this project, these contextual features are hereby selected that have a direct impact on farmers' wellbeing. Two large structural/contextual features hereby run as a red thread over the 6 mapping papers. A first one is the observation that the still dominant model of the family farm is declining in both absolute and relative numbers, signaling how a large proportion of these family farmers is confronted with considerable socio-economic pressures. Second, in almost all of the countries, we see how many rural regions are being confronted with population decline, relative impoverishment and an overall feeling of abandonment resulting in what we label as a socio-cultural dislocation of the countryside.

For obvious reasons, these larger contextual factors have their impact on the wellbeing of farmers. Importantly, this impact is not linear but differentiated as all 6 mapping indicate how not all farmers are affected by these broader dynamics in the same manner. Rather, more vulnerable groups of the farming population tend to be confronted with a stronger impact on their wellbeing. Next, different vulnerabilities intersect with each other and tend to have a mutually reinforcing downward effect. Therefore, in section 2 of the paper, we will zoom in on these vulnerabilities that large parts of the farming population are being confronted with. These consist of: i) an ageing farming population, ii) low farm income, iii) gendered farmer identities and power dynamics, iv) laborers working in informal/undocumented conditions.

In the last section, it will be shown how these larger structural features, mediated through a set of specific vulnerabilities, produce a set of outcomes that have an immediate impact on wellbeing. At the same time, it will be shown how these outcomes often reinforce existing vulnerabilities (the green feedback arrow in the drawing above). After a description of these outcomes, the impact on 3 types of wellbeing (mental, social and physical) will be mapped. It will also be indicated how far and in what way farmers are coping with these problems they are being confronted with.

More specifically, the following outcomes will hereby be discussed:

- particular vulnerable sections of the farming population are confronted with **barriers in accessing crucial social services**, hereby further aggravating these vulnerabilities and negatively impacting on farmers wellbeing
- **Farm succession and generational renewal is a challenge to many family farms**, leading to feelings of failure and misunderstanding between generations. At the same time, it reinforces an ongoing dynamic wherein older farmers have to continue their business, which has a negative impact on their physical wellbeing.
- Farmers/farming households are confronted with a very **high workload**, negatively impacting on social and physical wellbeing. Women farmers are disproportionately affected by this problem. Farmers also feel a lack of bargaining power and impotency in the daily management of their farm wherein external economic pressures such as low prices for their produce negatively impact on their overall satisfaction and feeling of autonomy.
- Farmers in different countries indicate they are being confronted with **alienation** and have the feeling they lack respect by the wider society. This process of alienation can also be evidenced through the lower levels of social trust that can be observed among farmers/farming communities.



Vulnerable sections of the farming population are confronted with barriers in accessing crucial social services, hereby further aggravating these vulnerabilities.

Finally, this paper will then be concluded with some general lessons that can be drawn when it comes to assessing the impact of different types of social innovations that aim at improving the wellbeing of farmers, farming households and farming communities.

2.

Background to the mapping papers

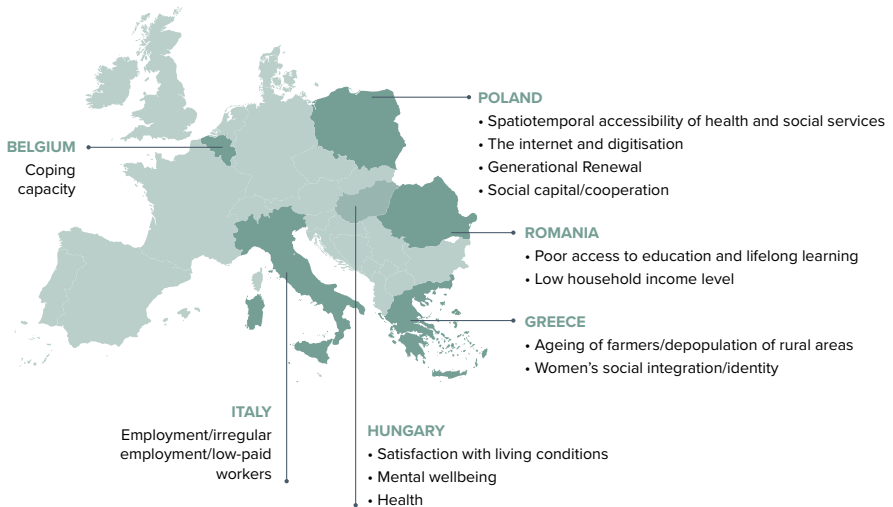
Before delving into the actual research data, we first wish to provide an overview of the different steps that have been taken in the completion of the mapping papers as these constitute the empirical foundation of this synthesis paper. Next, the transition from the 6 mapping papers to the full synthesis paper will shortly be explained.

2.1. Outline of the Mapping Papers

The 6 mapping papers that form the empirical backbone of this synthesis report consist of two major parts. After a general introduction and clarification of the different methodological steps undertaken by each country team, the first major section of the paper entitled: '*Description of Main Social Challenges – National Level*' provides a general overview of the different social challenges a particular country is being confronted with. At the same time, a concise, yet rich introduction into the most important characteristics of the farming sector in a particular country is being introduced. This description of main social challenges is based on a review of existing literature such as academic articles/books, government reports and published statistical data. As such, rather than introducing a set of new and innovative insights, this part is above all a compilation of existing data that are presented in a coherent manner. In all countries, this literature study is further complemented with semi-structured interviews with key informants/experts, further adding detail, nuance and clarifications to the data.

This general mapping exercise is then followed by an: *'In-depth analysis of selected theme(s) in social challenges'*. For this part, some social challenges are selected for deeper analysis that is understood to be the most urgent ones in a specific country. While some countries based this selection on a systematic measurement/scaling exercise with different key stakeholders, others choose for qualitative individual and group interviews that indicated which social challenges are most pressing.

The following themes for in-depth qualitative analysis were hereby selected for each country:



Most importantly, these selected themes are more systematically elaborated based on primary data gathering through individual or group interviews, hereby presenting new insights in the nature, origins, consequences ... of these social challenges. The focus of these interviews for all different country teams consisted of the following components:

- an analysis of the gravity of the selected social challenges farmers and farming families are confronted with
- the impact of these social challenges on farmers' and farming families' wellbeing. For the sake of coherence and comparison between different national contexts, a differentiation was hereby made between 3 types of wellbeing (mental, physical, social)
- the roots of these problems, i.e. what causes the specific social challenges identified?
- an insight in the manner farmers are attempting to deal/cope with these social challenges

After these 2 major sections, and a final conclusion that concisely sums up the main findings of the paper, 10 social innovations attempting to tackle one or more of the main social challenges detected, were mapped through a standardized table. The mapping of these social innovations – that have been compiled, based on existing literature and interviews with relevant stakeholders throughout the research phase – constitutes the starting phase for WP 4 of this project wherein these social innovations will be subject to a methodology measuring their impact and effectiveness.

2.2. Some Conceptual Remarks

As can be derived from the 6 mapping papers, the social challenges each country is being confronted with consists of a variety of issues, ranging from broader socio-economic transformations, demographic changes, norms and values prevalent in farming communities ... The relevance and selection of this diversity of social challenges, and the validation exercises that have been systematically conducted with farmers by the different country teams, are based on the impact these social challenges have on actual wellbeing of farmers, farming households and farming communities. Yet, a feeling remained that our analysis could be refined through a sharper and more refined conceptualization of this rather broad term 'social challenges'. We therefore unpacked this term in 3 different components. First, we delve in the larger structural transformations with which farmers/ farming communities are being confronted with and that we have labelled as **context**. This context goes beyond the individual capacity/agency of individual farmers and plays at a larger macro-level. We also introduce the concept of **vulnerabilities**, understood here as layers of social differentiation through which these larger structural dynamics are mediated in an uneven manner. Thirdly, the **outcomes** will be discussed wherein we make explicit the effect on wellbeing of farmers and the manner farmers attempt to cope with these particular outcomes.

We also introduce the concept of vulnerabilities, understood here as layers of social differentiation through which these larger structural dynamics are mediated in an uneven manner.

A second general term that needed some further refinement is the concept of wellbeing. Wellbeing can be defined in numerous manners such as the satisfaction one has in life (Pavot and Diener 2007), the pursuit of happiness (Kitayama and Marcus 2003), the freedoms one enjoys to lead the life one wishes to (Sen 1999, Nussbaum 2013). To narrow down this rather vague term, 3 dimensions of wellbeing have been distinguished throughout the research process from the very start:²

- I. **Mental wellbeing:** the ability to realize your own potential wherein a person is not hindered by mental health issues such as depression, suicidal thoughts, lack of confidence and self-esteem ...
- II. **Physical wellbeing:** the ability to maintain a healthy quality of life. For obvious reasons, this physical wellbeing will, amongst others, depend on the provision of crucial social services.
- III. **Social wellbeing:** the ability to develop meaningful social relations with other people. This category of social wellbeing hereby includes issues such as social isolation, generational renewal, position of women farmers ...

These three dimensions of wellbeing are not separate categories and a lot of a grey zone exists in-between them. These should also be understood in relation to each other wherein problems in one type of wellbeing will have spill-over effects to other types of wellbeing. For instance, an older farmer living in a peripheral rural region with minimal road connections and with chronic back pain and mobility constraints (physical wellbeing), will most probably face problems in terms of social wellbeing as meaningful interactions with friends, colleagues ... will be limited. As a result, personal mental wellbeing will be problematic as well. The wellbeing more in general of an individual will greatly increase when these 3 dimensions mutually reinforce each other.

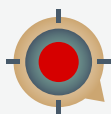
The choice for these 3 categories was further informed by, a) taking into account a relational approach to wellbeing that goes beyond individual measurements of wellbeing through the inclusion of the dimension of 'social wellbeing'. This sociological-relational approach was driven by the explicit objective in the grant agreement to focus on linkages between individual farmers, farming families/farms, farming community and the wider rural community, b) the inclusion of the category of physical wellbeing was informed by an initial preliminary literature review that informed that farming populations tend to be affected more by accidents and a process of ageing when compared to the population more in general.

² These definitions are adapted from the World Health Organization (WHO): Mental health: strengthening our response (who.int)



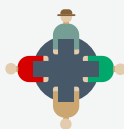
**Interviews with farmers,
farming organizations, experts**

Belgium	43
Greece	32
Hungary	14
Italy	11
Poland	20
Romania	12



Focus Group Discussions

Belgium	36
Greece	3
Hungary	2
Italy	/
Poland	3
Romania	/



Practice Group Participants

Belgium	29
Greece	25
Hungary	18
Italy	20
Poland	19
Romania	8

2.3. Methodology

As explained above, the section: ‘*Description of Main Social Challenges – National Level*’ was mainly based on a literature review/desk research with a particular emphasis on statistical data – often based on official government reports, as well as independent bodies – allowing for a representative overview of dynamics playing at the national scale. The section: ‘*In-depth analysis of selected theme(s) in social challenges*’ has been tackled through a qualitative set of data gathering methodologies that can be divided between individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with farmers. As such, own data gathering by the country teams has primarily taken a qualitative turn. The main reason for this choice was to get a better understanding of the specific perceptions and farmers’ point of view in the manner they experience, make sense of, and deal emotionally with the social challenges they are being confronted with. These subjective complexities, often of a sensitive and personal nature, are hard to grasp through statistical/quantitative types of research methodologies. These interviews were conducted digital or non-digital, based on different national policies and the larger security situation concerning COVID-19 in each country. The Practice Groups (D1.1) that were held over the months of June and July 2021 constituted a last component in this data gathering process wherein data and insights were further validated and refined through a group discussion with farmers and farming experts (farmers’ leaders, policy makers, academics ...).

2.4. Organization of the Writing Process

The research and writing process for the mapping papers was spread from March 2021 until October 2021 and consisted of the following phases:

- 1 --- A **digital consultation** was organized by ILVO as lead coordinator of WP2 with each country team throughout March 2021. In this meeting, first initial ideas, methodological options and a division of tasks between the different partners of the country team were discussed. After this meeting, each country team could go ahead with literature review and primary data gathering. The outcome of this meeting was formalized through the submission by each country team of a standardized document wherein the main themes, methodological steps and division of tasks between partners were summarized. This document was submitted by April 15.
- 2 --- A **first draft** consisting of the general mapping of main social challenges on the national scale was submitted by the country teams by April 30 after which a written feedback was provided by ILVO
- 3 --- A **second draft** including a reworked version of the main social challenges and a first version of an in-depth analysis of selected social challenges based on primary data gathering, was submitted by the partners by May 31 after which a written feedback was provided by ILVO.
- 4 --- These versions were then also forwarded to other partners who provided oral feedback/comments through a **digital joint meeting**. Each country team hereby had to read the paper from one other country team and organize a 15 minute presentation based on a set of standardized questions. These sessions were organized throughout the month of June. The prime purpose was to provide additional feedback for each country team and allowing an exchange of ideas and research experiences between the different country teams.
- 5 --- Based on this written feedback by ILVO and oral comments by one other country team, a **full version** of the paper was uploaded by July 31 as Deliverable D2.1
- 6 --- This full version has been reworked throughout September and October based on a final **language editing** provided by ILVO and a reworking of the **layout** by a professional company.
- 7 --- The **final mapping reports** have been uploaded by October 31 the latest as **Deliverable D2.3**.

2.5. From the Mapping Papers to the Synthesis Paper

This synthesis report is based on the data gathering that has taken place for the 6 mapping papers. As such, no additional interviews or other research methodologies have been organized within the framework of this synthesis paper. Additional literature analysis/desk research has been incorporated, in particular to put the data that were gathered throughout the mapping papers in a larger European perspective. It hereby also needs to be stressed that this synthesis paper strongly relies on the literature search and analysis conducted by each country team and that these references could not be double checked within the framework of this synthesis paper.

The main objective of this synthesis paper is to provide a structured and coherent overview of the main social challenges that have been detected and analyzed by all research partners. A choice by the lead coordinator ILVO has been taken not to follow the outline of the actual mapping reports wherein a differentiation was made between a more descriptive mapping of social challenges playing at the national level and a more in-depth, analytical part based on primary data gathering. Instead, a decision has been made to compile the different insights through a threefold structure that is concisely explained above and that will be empirically illustrated below. The writing of this paper has been done by ILVO based on the facilitation of the larger research process (WP2) within the FARMWELL project and a careful reading of all mapping papers. However, this process was not possible without additional input and feedback from all partners involved in the project. On 20 September, a first outline of this synthesis paper has been sent to all partners in preparation of the digital partner meeting on 23 September. On this meeting, the outline was discussed and feedback was provided. Written feedback based on the outline was also sent to ILVO by different country teams. Based on this valuable input, the outline was further refined and reworked, making sure all themes from the mapping papers are sufficiently covered in a balanced manner. On 12 October, a full written version has been sent to all partners after which everybody could provide comments and feedback. This allowed for further refining of the arguments put forward and careful attention for the correct rewording of the insights developed by the different research partners.

3.

Main Findings

Before delving into the contextual/structural factors, vulnerabilities and outcomes, we first wish to provide some preliminary insights on general wellbeing in farming compared to the larger population or other socio-professional groups. For obvious reasons, answers to this question will be nuanced and complex. As said, various definitions circulate when it comes to wellbeing, there are multiple dimensions of wellbeing that can be measured, different research teams use distinct proxies for measuring these dimensions, there exist differences in methodological approach between countries, research teams...

Taking these caveats into account, it can nevertheless be argued that overall wellbeing for farmers/farming households tends to be lower compared to national averages or most other socio-professional groups. This seems to be particularly the case when it comes to physical wellbeing (accidents, chronic illnesses, physical demanding profession ...) and social wellbeing (limited time for relaxation and leisurely activities, developing friendships, high workload tying farmers to the actual farm ...) This statement needs to be assessed with the necessary circumspections, based on the observation that statistical data available tends to point at lower wellbeing in farming; however differences with other socio-professional groups are not always that significant and should not be overestimated. Therefore, we should be careful not to fall into the trap of a 'stereotyped miserableness' as there are different aspects of the job contributing positively to wellbeing. Lastly, these statistical data also tend to be nationally aggregated and do not take into account internal differentiation(s) within farming community.

When studying statistical data on wellbeing in the 6 mapping papers, the most systematic analysis is put forward by the Hungarian country team as they provide an elaborate overview of different dimensions of subjective wellbeing of Hungarian farmers, compared to the larger national Hungarian population. Overall, this analysis provides a nuanced picture that warns not to approach the wellbeing of farmers as

too much of a negative cliché. In general, huge differences between the farming population and national averages are limited. At the same time, there is a range of dimensions in which the Hungarian farming population reports lower satisfaction rates. These include:

- a. Satisfaction with the quality of the living condition
- b. Satisfaction with current work
- c. High workload and limited free time

Interestingly, in terms of mental wellbeing, no significant differences could be noted with the larger Hungarian population. On the other hand, considerable problems in terms of physical wellbeing can be noted; a point that is also elaborated in many other mapping papers and to which we will come back later.

Observations made for the Flemish/Belgian case point at similar nuanced findings. These data indicate that the relative number of farmers (43,4%) experiencing problems in terms of work-life balance is higher when compared to the average self-employed (30,4%). Next, 50,3% of farmers experience their work pressure as high, compared to 20,9% for the average self-employed. Complementary qualitative data-gathering for the Flemish/Belgian case indicated this results in certain frustrations when it comes to time for relaxation, hobbies and overall development of friendship outside the immediate farming community (social wellbeing).

By and large, these findings are generally in line with other published literature, including meta-studies indicating how problems in mental health for farmers worldwide is higher compared to the general population (Hagen et.al. 2019).

Despite this observation, there are different aspect farmers experience as positive and that contribute to their wellbeing, satisfaction ... Throughout the different mapping papers, the following points were hereby mentioned. Many farmers enjoy working outside, seeing crops and animals grow, experience their work as in relation to nature/natural processes ... These findings are in line with other studies confirming that having a 'connection' with the land promotes mental health and wellbeing of farming communities (Lawrence-Bourne et.al. 2020). In different countries, it was also mentioned how farmers enjoy a sense of autonomy, freedom and independence; being nobody's boss, managing and organizing the farm in a manner they deem proper and suitable ... These findings thus warn us not to fall into the trap of 'stereotyped miserableness' as many farmers indeed still enjoy what they are doing, despite some problems they are being confronted with. The downside obviously is that when farmers have the feeling this autonomy is being threatened, that this has a considerable negative impact on their wellbeing (Janker et.al. 2021)

Lastly, and maybe most importantly, it is one of the most crucial insights that can be deduced from the different mapping papers that wellbeing differs significantly within the farming population and that nationally aggregated data too often do not take this internal differentiation into account. We will hereby see how there are particular vulnerabilities within the farming population that explain the differentiated experiences in terms of wellbeing. However, before delving into these vulnerabilities and their impact, we first need a better understanding of the larger contextual challenges farmers are being confronted with.



3.1. Context

Discussions about wellbeing cannot be separated from larger structural transformations the farming sector is being confronted with. Within the framework of this paper and the larger FARMWELL project, we do not have the intention to provide a truly elaborate analysis of these larger transformations. At the same time, there are a couple of dynamics that we shortly need to touch upon as they directly impact on wellbeing of individual farmers and farming families; these are 1) the pressure being put on the model of the family farm, 2) a larger socio-cultural dislocation of the countryside.

3.1.1. Pressure on Family Farms



A first crucial observation that comes back in all of the 6 mapping reports is that small to medium sized farms that are primarily worked by individual farmers/farming households remain the dominant model of farming. In Greece for instance, 77,3% of all farms still measure 5ha or below. Farms up to 20ha even constitute around 95% of all Greek farms.³ In Romania 91,8% of the total number of farms is smaller than 5ha. Interestingly, the Romanian data indicate how these small farms

³ The different country teams have not pursued one and the same definition of what constitutes a family farm as different governments, research institutes... define this in another manner. The most important criterion however is that these family farms are primarily run through family labor. This description by and large follows the definition of Eurostat (2020b) wherein a family farm is being defined as one wherein at least 50% of the labor is provided by family members. As a consequence, the overall size of these holdings will in general be limited, although this does not have to be a fixed rule and wide variation can be witnessed between different EU member states (Eurostat 2019). Yet, these same data provided by Eurostat (2019) also show how non-family farms on average are considerably larger.

are also disproportionately owned by older farmers of over 65 years, a point to which we will come back later. These findings seem to be reflected at the larger EU level where it is indicated that in 2016, 96,3% of all farms in the EU can be labeled as family farms (Eurostat 2020a: 18).

Despite this dominance of small to medium sized family farms, we also witness how the sharpest decline in the number of farms should be situated in this category. In Greece, the category of farms from 0 to 5ha and from 5 ha up to 20ha showed the sharpest decline with a reduction of 22% between 2005 and 2016. Data for Poland are more difficult to find. However, a study on the number of farms in South and South-east Poland show how the sharpest decrease between 2010 and 2016 can be witnessed among small farms below 5 ha. We hereby notice a reverse dynamic on the other side of the spectrum; that is one of scale enlargement whereby large farms are growing. In Poland for instance, the number of farms with over 20ha of arable land has increased by 26% between 2006 and 2016. The total area these farms are working has increased from 5.0 to 6.4 million ha.

Based on the above, it can therefore be stated that the farming community in all 6 countries under scrutiny, but also in the larger EU, is confronted with a set of economic challenges to the dominant model of small to medium sized family farms which results in a disproportionate high share of these farm models leaving the business. These findings can be confirmed for the large majority of EU countries (Eurostat 2020b). As a result, larger, capital-intensive farming systems seem to be on the increase.



3.1.2. Socio-Cultural Dislocation of the Countryside

In most of the countries, we witness a process whereby more rural and peripheral regions are confronted with a dynamic of socio-cultural dislocation.⁴ This dynamic consists of a number of dimensions that all point at a process of relative marginalization of the countryside, when compared to more urban regions. This dynamic manifests itself in a number of ways:

- Many rural/peripheral regions are being confronted with a relative population decline. For instance, in Hungary, the largest population decline in the country between 2008 and 2018 was experienced in rural areas. This phenomenon was

⁴ One exception to this rule is Belgium/Flanders. This can be explained by the peculiarities of this region that is confronted with an exceptional high population density and small country size. As a result, distinctions between the urban and the rural tend to be less sharp compared to other European countries.

also discussed for the Romanian case where we see the sharpest depopulation happening in the countryside. Interestingly, data provided by the Romanian country team also indicates how the sharpest decline takes places among the younger working population. Between 2014 and 2018, the Romanian countryside was confronted with a decline of 6,4% amongst the age cohort 18-41 years old. The population over 65 on the other hand registered an increase of 2,28%. Another relevant point for this case is that people not only left for urban areas in the country, but people also left to live and work abroad. This phenomenon of so-called 'rural ageing' (Burholdt and Dobbs 2012) seems to be prevalent in the majority of EU countries. Another interesting insight is put forward by the Italian country team. First, also for this country, it is confirmed how multiple rural regions face depopulation. Second, it is also shown how those regions confronted with the sharpest population decline, also experience a sharper abandonment of crucial public services, a point we will further elaborate below.

- The provision of social services in rural regions is limited in almost all of the countries involved in this project. First of all, social services tend to be of lower quality. In the case of Greece for instance, issues such as an old road network, energy poverty and inadequate broadband infrastructure is being pointed at. Second, there is a lack, or at least a very wide geographical dispersal of some social services such as sports and school facilities (especially for higher education), making them less accessible. The point about schooling was hereby mentioned for Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania. Another important discussion concerns access to health services that, for rural areas in Greece, Italy and Poland is considered to be limited when compared to urban areas. This point is particularly well illustrated in the mapping report of the Polish country team wherein a systematic evidence base is provided about the limited provision of different types of health care in the countryside. Similar issues are found in Hungary, where, as a result, rural populations are disproportionately confronted with long-term illness and health problems.
- Many rural regions are confronted with higher relative poverty when compared to urban centres. For instance, in Greece, in 2018, 31,8% of the population at the national level was at risk of poverty, whilst in rural areas this number reached 35,2%. In Hungary, a quarter of the rural population can be considered at risk of poverty and social exclusion, a number which far exceeds the one measured for cities. 46% of rural residents in Romania are at risk of poverty or social exclusion, compared to 19% for cities in Romania. Next, in Romania the average disposable income for a member of a household in urban area is 1.9 times higher in rural areas.

Research data indicate how rates of social trust, participation in public organisations, readiness for cooperation and a sense of agency is considerably lower when compared to urban areas.

These 3 dynamics (population decline, limited access to social services, higher relative poverty) put together, result in a larger feeling of socio-cultural dislocation among many rural communities, but also among many farming communities. We hereby wish to point to larger feelings of abandonment, of not being part of a dynamic of modernity and progress. Next, it also points at a weakening of strong social ties and communal bonds, and the declining societal relevance of agricultural organizations. As extensively discussed for the Polish case, research data indicate how rates of social trust, participation in public organisations, readiness for cooperation and a sense of agency is considerably lower when compared to urban areas. Similar findings were also provided for the Hungarian case.



3.2. Vulnerabilities

Throughout the 6 mapping reports, different vulnerabilities could be detected that are specific to, or at least more outspoken for significant parts, of the farming community. These vulnerabilities consists of:

1. an **ageing** farm population,
2. a farm population that is confronted with **low farm income**, resulting in higher incidences of absolute and relative poverty
3. **gender** imbalances and identities
4. a considerable portion of the farm population working in **informal/unprotected circumstances**; this is especially the case for foreign farm workers whom often have an undocumented status

Importantly, these different vulnerabilities mutually reinforce each other. Often, older farmers also tend to be poorer farmers. In general, undocumented farm laborers are confronted with a high degree of poverty. Female farmers own smaller plots of land, hence, tend to be poorer. As one example of these intersecting vulnerabilities, we refer here to the analysis put forward by the Polish country team wherein it is shown that in particular an ageing farm population in combination with a dynamic of impoverishment, tends to have limited access to crucial social services such as health care. One of the reasons is that due to limited financial means, people have no transport available to go to a doctor,

health care center, hospital ... As a result, chronic illnesses continue and even aggravate as there is no treatment being followed, people have to continue working in farming up until a very old age out of financial necessity, further putting pressure on physical but also other dimensions of wellbeing, but also adding further to an ongoing dynamic of ageing.

3.2.1. Ageing Farm Population

The farming population in Europe is being confronted with a gradual but steady ageing. This observation is not a new one, neither is this observation confined to the 6 countries under scrutiny. Overall, conclusive evidence is at hand that clearly shows that both at the level of the EU and even worldwide, farming populations are decreasing as a relative share of the overall population; and that this relative decrease is accompanied with a relative ageing of the farming population. Tellingly, in the EU, more than half (55%) of all private farmers are over 55 years old (Rovny 2016).



The table below provides an overview of the relative share of farmers of age 40 and below in the total farming population in 2016 (Eurostat 2020).

Table 2: Share of farmers below 40 years

EU	10,7%
Belgium	10,2%
Greece	8,3%
Hungary	12,6%
Italy	7,9%
Poland	20,3%
Romania	7,4%

As can be seen from this table, in particularly Greece, Italy and Romania are being confronted with a relatively old farming population that lays below the EU average. A remarkable exception is Poland that has one of the youngest farm populations in Europe. However, as these data do not provide an evolution, neither do they make a comparison with larger national averages, it might make sense to delve deeper in some of the socio-demographic data that are provided in the different

national mapping reports. These data provide further evidence that, 1) compared to national averages in the overall working population and the larger population, farming populations indeed tend to be relatively older (with the notable exception of Poland), 2) there is a gradual evolution towards further ageing, also in cases such as Poland that still have a relatively young farming population.

Farming population versus overall population

- In Hungary, the share of people between 50-64 in 2020 employed in agriculture in 2020 stands at 35,4%, while the average for the working population lays at 29,3%
- In Greece, 35,6% of the farming population is over 65 years old, while for the overall Greek population, only 19% of the people are aged over 65.

Evolution of the farming population

- As noted above, Poland is among the countries in Europe with the youngest farm population. It is also the only country among the 6 studied that has a farming population that is younger than the national average. For instance, national data published in 2020 show how the proportion of people aged between 15 and 29 that are employed in farming stands at 26,1%, a figure that is higher when compared to the non-farming population (21,0%). People in farming over the age of 65 stand at 13,4% compared to 21,9% for the non-farming population. Yet, despite these figures, also in Poland, the farming population is steadily ageing due to increasing outmigration from rural areas to urban centers. An observation that counts for the farming population, as well as the larger rural population.
- When looking at the situation for Belgium, a similar process of ageing can be noticed. Whilst in 2007, the average farmer still was 50 years, in 2018 this had already increased to 54 years.

Based on the above, it is obvious that when compared to national averages, farming populations are older, and, when in exceptional cases such as Poland we see a relatively young farming population, also in these cases, one is confronted with an ageing trend.



3.2.2. Low Farm Income

Overall, it can be argued that the level of income generated through farming is lower compared to national averages or other professional groups. As a result, significant parts of the farming community are being confronted with dynamics of poverty.

When looking at data that apply for the overall farming population, we see that farmers in general make less money than other people. In Poland for instance, farming families' average income in 2019 stood at 76% of the average income of the self-employed. In Hungary, the average annual income per capita in the agricultural sector stands at 78,3% of the average labor income in the national economy.

To a certain extent, these averages do not tell that much, considering the above mentioned dynamic of scale enlargement and differentiation wherein a set of larger and capital-intensive farms seem to be growing. In other words, there is a strong internal differentiation within the larger farming population in socio-economic terms that these averages do not bring into the picture.

Tellingly, based on a detailed report recently published by the department of Agriculture and Fisheries on the economic situation of the farming sector in Flanders (Belgium), it is clearly indicated how there is huge differentiation over different sectors in terms of income. For instance, the average family income over the period 2014-2018 is remarkably higher in horticulture (93,600 €) when compared to the overall agricultural sector (44,700 €). A remarkable outlier hereby is constituted by 'vegetables cultivated in greenhouses' (glasgroentebedrijven) where the average annual family income over 2014-2018 is an impressive 206,800 €. A remarkable low annual income is generated by beef cattle farms with an average family income of 15,400 €. As such, it can be argued that some sectors are, on average, clearly confronted with considerable financial difficulties and even outright poverty with an average family income that lays below the officially designated poverty line (even not taking into account differentiation within this sector). This observation of a farming sector that is confronted with poverty is confirmed in different other countries. For instance, in Greece, it is confirmed that poverty in agriculture (if not in absolute data, then at least in the subjective perception of farming and non-farming communities) results in a problem of farm succession wherein in particular small farms run by older farmers, have difficulties in finding a successor. This point will be further elaborated below. Similar observations about the relatively high level of poverty among farming communities is confirmed for the Hungarian, Italian, Polish, as well as the Romanian case.



3.2.3. Gender

Gender is here understood as the manner in which power imbalances are distributed over sexual difference and the particular symbolic/cultural qualities that are attributed to certain sexual differences (gender identity). This point on gender is especially developed for the Greek case wherein it is shown how gendered imbalances persist in farming.

Interestingly, Greece is hereby one of the countries in which land ownership for women is quite high: 34,84% of all agricultural land is run by women. This figure also has been increasing from 2000. This figure lays above the EU average of 28,7% women farmers in 2016, a figure that also has been increasing as in 2005 there only were 26,5% women farmers in the whole of the EU (Eurostat 2020b: 24). Interestingly, significant differences can be discerned over different countries in the EU. The Belgian mapping report for instance indicated there were only 9,3% women farmers in 2016.

This relatively high number of female farmers in a country such as Greece is nevertheless accompanied by a remarkable power imbalance which is manifested in different arenas. First, decision making often still lays with men and data on the number of farms owned by women can therefore be understood as a form of false feminization, often with the objective of taking advantage of EU-funded agricultural subsidies. Too often, women hereby are not considered as 'real' farmers, either within the household, but also by larger farming associations that are for instance involved in agricultural training services. Second, in case women are land owners, these tend to be smaller farms with low productive output. It can therefore be argued that many women in farming stand in a vulnerable position, which has particular outcomes on their wellbeing; a point which will be discussed in the following section.



3.2.4. Undocumented Labour Status

Importantly, the larger farming community is not uniquely constituted of farmers/farm managers as owner-cultivators. Farm workers/labourers, often having no private property rights over agricultural land, are inasmuch part of this farming community. An exceptionally rich analysis is hereby provided by the Italian country team about the status of many of these farm workers. First, these farmworkers increasingly are of foreign origin, with a large proportion coming outside of the EU. As a result, in Italy at least, in 2019, migrants represent about 40% of the total agricultural labour force. A similar increase of (foreign) labour over the past years could be noted for the Belgian and the Greek case. Second, these farm workers often have to work in informal and undocumented circumstances as any type of formal labour contract is missing. These informal arrangement, often combined with the undocumented status of a large proportion of this labour force, results in a situation of precarity. This precarity needs to be understood as one of unsafe labour conditions as these workers are more subject to accidents and a negative impact on their overall health condition. The income received for their labour also tends to be low, not meeting the formally approved minimum wage.



3.3. Outcomes

3.3.1. Access to Social Services

All mapping reports indicate how the vulnerabilities mentioned above raise barriers to access crucial social services. These barriers further aggravate these vulnerabilities and negatively influence all identified dimensions of wellbeing. Two short examples, that will be more systematically elaborated below, will illustrate this argument. In general, farming populations are confronted with a process of ageing, negatively impacting on physical wellbeing for the mere reason that people get older whilst pursuing a profession that is physically demanding. However, due to these health problems and the confined mobility that goes with them, access to crucial health services becomes more difficult, especially when these services are located in faraway urban regions and the availability of public and/or private transport is limited. As a result, certain illnesses such as chronic back pain or respiratory difficulties, will not be treated properly, adding further to the negative consequences that come with the process of ageing. A similar example can be provided in the case of poverty and its relation to access to education. As illustrated for the Romanian case, particularly the children of impoverished farming household are confronted with a high school dropout. As a result, these households tend to remain in a poverty trap due to limited schooling.

Many mapping reports indicate that it are particularly the most vulnerable populations that are confronted with the highest barriers accessing crucial, and sometimes lifesaving, social services. It is worth mentioning that highly similar findings can be retrieved for other countries such as the United States (Magnus A.M. and Advincula P, 2020, see also Smith et.al 2008, providing a systematic evidence for Western countries how confined access to health services is above all a combination of 'rurality' and individual socio-economic determinants). Interestingly, this study by Magnus A.M. and Advincula P, 2020 points at the limited availability of these services but inasmuch points at the fact that subjective feelings of guilt, shame ... raise barriers accessing these services; in particular mental health services for impoverished rural communities; a point that will be further touched upon below. Meta-studies at the level of the EU also confirm that it are in particular poorer sections of the rural population facing the highest barriers in accessing social services such as health care (regular, as well as mental) (Eurofound 2017).

Below, we provide an overview of the different types of social services discussed over the diverse mapping reports.

PHYSICAL HEALTH CARE

Different countries stressed that overall access to social services for farming families living in rural, peripheral regions is limited. A particularly relevant social service hereby is physical health care in terms of having access to doctors, health care centers, more specialized health services, hospitals ... These services are lifesaving and life extending and crucial to living a life in dignity whereby physical pains and discomforts are treated in an efficient and proper manner. It also makes sense here to refer to the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights wherein health is mentioned as a crucial component to reach an adequate standard of living (art. 25).

The Polish country team illustrated how many farming communities are confronted with limited access to health care. Interestingly, research indicates how in areas with the strongest population decline and advanced ageing, health care services are most underdeveloped. In other words, in those regions where the needs are highest, the services seem to be least developed. This is also the case looking at the farming community more in detail. Research for Poland indicated that among the most affected group not able to benefit from health care are: retired and/or pre-retired farmers, farmers suffering from chronic illnesses, disabled farmers, impoverished farmers, farmers without their own means of transportation, especially when the public transportation is inefficient or non-existent and farmers living in the deep peripheries. It hereby also needs to be mentioned that the investment in these services often remains limited. These physical problems farmers are being confronted with are also stressed for the Greek and Belgian case-study. Most importantly however, what the Polish case-study makes explicit is that those most in need, are confronted with most problems in reaching out to health care services. These observations confirm the argument about the so-called 'social gradient' or health inequality wherein the most vulnerable/impoverished populations tend to be affected the most by a wide range of health problems (Goldblatt 2015, Scholz 2020).

An additional problem is that both the particularities of the farming business, as well as a specific work ethic, force the farmer to continue working, despite being confronted with serious health problems. This point is illustrated for the Belgian case-study. As animals need to be fed, crops harvested in the right time of the year and financial resources are often limited to hire extra labour, farmers tend to continue working, as long as their physical conditions (somewhat) allows to.

Access to health care, but also other types of social protection services more in general, is a particularly pressing point for (migrant) labourers working in undocumented conditions, as extensively illustrated by the Italian country team.



Coping Mechanisms

- Research from the Polish country team revealed how neighbors, friends ... help fellow farmers through car-sharing and car-pooling research health care facilities. These people can also help on the farm as replacements when a farmer needs to visit health care facilities in more far-away places. Overall, these data point at the importance of strong social (family) networks and communal bonds in dealing with these problems. Similar findings were retrieved for Greece.
- Farmers follow trainings, workshops and seminars about safety rules and work accidents. Research conducted for the Greek case showed how the impact of these trainings remains limited.
- Another manner to deal with these barriers are so-called farm help-outs provided by farming organizations that allow the farmer to leave farming activities behind and sufficiently recover from illnesses or chronic pains. Qualitative data from Flanders/ Belgium indicated that there still exists some reservations and distrust towards these farm help-outs.
- Overall suggestions can be done increasing the budget for health care facilities, allowing sufficient staff and reducing the spatial distance for people living in remote areas
- Different country teams (Belgium, Greece, Poland) showed how many farmers confronted with physical discomforts simply keep on working. This can be labeled as some sort of coping mechanism; although the true problem hereby is not systematically addressed or solved.
- Farmers attempt to adapt to tools and machinery that are physically less demanding, heavy and therefore more user-friendly.
- Database platforms are being installed in Italy that should allow for a better and formal mediation between labour supply and demand. As such, farming businesses do not have to allow on informal mechanisms that too often do not take into account health, safety ... regulations for their farm workers.

MENTAL HEALTH CARE

Whilst the above focuses on physical health care, a problem has also been detected in accessing mental health care. This point has been particularly developed by the Belgian country team. Based on a wide set of individual interviews and focus group discussions on the stressors farmers are experiencing and the manner they attempt to cope with these stressors, it became clear that a particular normative framework still seems to be prevalent when it comes to mental health care. In this normative framework, it remains difficult to openly discuss these matters and an association between mental health care and needy, helpless people still exists. Other reasons why farmers experienced barriers to mental health care include the feeling that this sector is not always familiar with the complexities of the farming business. Another observation is that these aid channels are not always well-known.

In this normative framework, it remains difficult to openly discuss these matters and an association between mental health care and needy, helpless people still exists.

These 'characteristics' of mental health care are then contrasted with a particular work ethic, understood to be 'typical' for farmers, wherein one simply continues working, regardless of the problems one is confronted with, much in the same vein as when farmers are confronted with physical pain and discomfort. Other studies point at similar issues regarding the stigma and supposedly '*strong attitudes about being self-reliant and independent*' (Magnus A.M. and Advincula P, 2020: 40) among rural communities raising barriers to mental health care. Staniford et.al. (2009: 148) explicitly label these mental barriers to mental health care for Australian citrus growers as '*minimal help-seeking behaviour*'.



Coping Mechanisms

- When confronted with certain mental problems, a large majority of farmers in Flanders/Belgium prefer the option to just continue working. Tellingly, only 24% of the farmers seems to be open to seek mental help. This strategy to simply keep working often aggravates the overall situation and can therefore not be understood as a sustainable solution to these problems.
- The farming family constitutes the first nucleus where certain mental issues can be discussed. As stated by a Flemish female farmer:

'Due to the start of a fodder business, we started to talk. Each month, we go to our meeting space with our son, daughter in law, husband and myself and we hold a meeting. That moment, we put everything on the table in terms of planning, problems ... Everything that according to one of us is not right. ... Everybody says what is on their liver. This works. It takes some practice though and it did feel a little strange in the beginning'

This observation on the importance of family ties is confirmed by the Hungarian case-study where it is noted that farmers take care of elderly family members with deteriorating health within the family and often do not use institutional assistance. For example, one Hungarian farmer in her early 60s reported caring for her daughter with a chronic mental illness and her mother who was no longer able to meet her basic physical needs at the same time.

- Digital platforms which refer farmers to the right aid channels have their value. Yet, at the same time, these platforms have considerable difficulties reaching the most vulnerable farmers and the ones confronted with the largest mental problems. Presumably, this observation also counts for other social services.

ACCESS TO PENSIONS

Only a tiny fraction of older farmers fully enjoy pension benefits.

A remarkable finding is introduced by the Hungarian country team and that is the manner in which only a tiny fraction of older farmers fully enjoy pension benefits. The prime reason for this is that research has indicated that primary producers in Hungary only pay limited, or no contributions at all for their pension. Although this might bring some financial advantages during active working years, this is a serious impediment in a later stage of life and has some serious consequences for older farmers. Concretely, farmers have to continue working and generate an income up until a very late stage in their life, negatively impacting on their physical and other forms of wellbeing. As this finding is solely based on observations made for 1 country, this cannot just be extrapolated to the other 5 countries, let alone the whole EU. However, what is crucial within the framework of the FARMWELL project is that the observation is confirmed that farmers have to continue doing physically arduous labor up until a late age and that a variety of causalities lay at the root of this observation. It would therefore be interesting to see whether these problems with pension benefits for older farmers also play at a larger scale within the EU.

Access to pensions/exclusion from retirement contributions is also a point that was mentioned for the pool of foreign workers in the Italian case-study. This observation should be explained as part of a larger attempt avoiding taxes. This is a cost-cutting strategy wherein social security contributions are reduced as well as other costs of formal hiring of labour, including registration requirements, rules on health and safety ... For obvious reasons, these practices add to frictions between those farms conducting their business in a formal manner vis-à-vis the ones engaging in these irregular practices. Above all however, it further adds to the legally and economic vulnerable status of these migrant laborers.

Coping Mechanisms

- No immediate coping mechanisms have been detected

ACCESS TO (DIGITAL) INNOVATIONS

In different countries, it is noted that with an ageing farm population, it becomes more difficult to introduce a wide set of innovations. These innovations need to be understood as everything related to technological innovations, but inasmuch digital innovations. This observation is made for Greece, as well as Poland and Romania. The Polish and Hungarian case pay particular attention to the (limited) introduction of digital innovations/solutions in the farming sector. For the Polish case, it is noted how one third of farmers do not use the internet at all and that farmers overall are among the professions using the internet the least. Importantly, a considerable generational gap can hereby be detected wherein younger farmers use the internet significantly more than older generations. We thus see once again how a gradual ageing of the farming population puts forward a whole set of questions and challenges. Similar findings can be retrieved from the Hungarian case study in the use of digital tools to obtain information that is used in the management, transformation, development ... of the farm. The use of different types of digital tools was clearly more widespread among young farmers. Tellingly, a study published in 2016 revealed that only 23,5% of farmers aged above 40 used the internet regularly to obtain information about their business. In the case of Greece, access to innovation has a specific gendered dimension as trainings and innovation brokers lack tailored made advice and empathy for family conditions and the multitasking of women. Too often, the training courses are the same for men and women; hence, women choose not to follow these courses as these are not compatible with family obligations. These trainings often are also organized in male dominated environments. Lastly, the public services offered in rural areas (child care for example) do not enable a greater participation of women in the labour market, but also workshops and trainings. All this adds to the barriers women are confronted with applying innovations in their farms.

Access to (digital) innovations also has a more indirect impact on discussions about wellbeing in a sense that these can help a farmer to modernize, obtain up to date information ... that might allow for a better management of the farm and better economic results. However, these issues also play at the level of access to digital innovations that explicitly tackle the issue of mental wellbeing. In two Practice Groups organized by the Belgian country team, a digital tool was introduced to farmers that explicitly aimed to refer farmers to different platforms where they could obtain information and help for the problems they were being confronted with. As indicated by the farmers present, these digital tools/platforms definitely have their value and will probably become more important in the future. However, there might be a problem whom to reach through these tools and there might be a danger that a significant part of the farming community, in particular older farmers already being confronted with serious problems, do not find their way to these digital tools.

Coping Mechanisms

- Villagers organize “offline” village events, meetings, encouraging different groups of inhabitants to get out of their homes. This has been discussed in the case for Poland.
- Programs are being enrolled in Poland wherein younger generations are being taught to use new technology wisely and to balance the use of the Internet with traditional and personal relationships. This is driven by the idea that “people should control technology and not technology control people”.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION/EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

As extensively illustrated for the Romanian case-study, access to education, but also other educational services and (vocational) trainings tends to be limited in the countryside. Part of the explanation lays, at least for Romania, in the observation that these services remain underdeveloped in more far-away rural regions. However, other factors also come into play. We hereby see how farming communities in these rural regions are disproportionally affected by the problem of early school dropout. One of the main explanations behind this observation is the active involvement of children in farm and domestic labour in these farming households, in particular when they are confronted with poverty and economic difficulties. These activities leave them with less time and energy to concentrate on school and homework. For the Greek case, the barriers are discussed that women farmers are facing when attempting to access different educational services. In general, these services are still dominated by men and their gendered stereotypes perceiving women not as full-fledged farmers. Trainers are inasmuch not attentive enough to the challenges women are facing, amongst others in combining domestic labour with work on the farm.

This high school dropout rate has a considerable impact on a wide range of issues. First, this has considerable economic consequences as viable exit strategies in high-quality jobs outside of agriculture remains confined. For those people staying in agriculture, trainings are limited, often leading to a continuation of the same management systems as their parents and being less open for innovation and overall change. Next, due to this dynamic, rural villages tend to get stuck in a poverty

trap further adding to the marginalized status of the countryside when compared to urban regions. Lastly, as farmers indicated through individual interviews and focus group discussions, low levels of education are connected with feelings of anxiety, a low self-esteem and overall lack of purpose in life. In this regard, it can be convincingly argued that limited access to this particular social service (schooling/education) is intimately connected with discussions on mental wellbeing (see also Casini et.al. 2021 on the significant correlation between mental wellbeing and educational opportunities).

Low levels of education are connected with feelings of anxiety, a low self-esteem and overall lack of purpose in life.

Coping Mechanisms

- Farmers seek help by family members or personalized contacts among civil servants to obtain necessary information about educational services.
- In general, the Romanian country team observes a strong distrust towards public institutions, resulting in a limited interaction with these institutions. Presumably this aspect of distrust acting as a barrier accessing educational social services is also applicable to other social services described in this section. Also, national programs aimed at reducing learning disabilities among children have difficulties reaching poorer sections of the rural/farming population.
- The attention for the problems female farmers are being confronted with could be alleviated through the creation of women-only agricultural organizations (or groups) that would allow women to participate more actively, take up leadership opportunities, better control benefits derived from membership and express their opinion more freely.

3.3.2. Farm Succession/Generational Renewal

The absolute decline in the number of farms is intimately connected with the larger issue of farm succession that is touched upon by all 6 country teams. Within this discussion about farm succession, a lot of the larger social challenges that run through this synthesis paper come together. We hereby refer to the aforementioned problem of an ageing and poor farm population, problems to access social services such as education and (digital) innovations, the economic pressure being put on family farms, a larger depopulation and dislocation of peripheral, rural regions ... As a result, this discussion about farm succession has almost become an emblematic symbol of the larger crisis the farming sector is being confronted with. As we will attempt to illustrate below, the discussion on farm succession and generational renewal can be approached from different angles, going beyond its sole understanding as 'a problem'.

A first explanation for the fact that many farmers cannot find a successor needs to be understood against the background of socio-economic challenges that particularly affect small to medium sized farms. For the Greek case for instance, it is being explained how financial stress and the difficulties that in particular family farms have in providing a stable income for the household, results in a decision by younger generations not to continue the farming business. This financial stress particularly plays at the level of smaller farms where future-oriented investments have been lacking. These points are also stressed by other country studies such as Hungary where it is confirmed that the low level of income available through farming is an obstacle for attracting young people to agriculture. For the Polish case, it is mentioned that understanding the problem of generational change/renewal is one that is linked to the decreasing attractiveness of farming due to the limited income that can be generated. Also here, this seems to be particularly the case for smaller family farms. The observation that this problem of farm succession particularly plays at the level of smaller farms is being confirmed for the Belgian case-study. Both in Wallonia and Flanders larger farms experience less difficulties in finding a successor and it are particularly smaller farms facing this challenge. For instance, in Wallonia, those farmers declaring they have already found a successor on average have a farm of 74ha, those declaring not yet having found a successor have an average farm of 39ha (DEAE: 2). An additional factor that reduces the attractiveness for farming are the many external factors over which farmers have no control such as the volatility of prices, unforeseen diseases, extreme weather conditions ... This insecurity is then contrasted with the stable and fixed income one can generate through jobs in other sectors. A last point that needs to be mentioned in this regard are the high land prices farmers are being confronted with. Research for Hungary for instance, where the price of arable land has been increasing with a staggering 10% yearly for the past years, indicated that this is

one of the major hindrances young farmers are experiencing for entering the farming business.

The first consequence of this issue of farm succession and generational change is that it further reinforces a process of scale enlargement. As described for Poland, the land of those farms where productive activities are ceased, are often leased to larger agricultural holdings. It is also here that the ambiguous consequences of sharp increases in the price of arable land needs to be situated as this makes the selling or leasing of land to larger companies and holdings all the more attractive, further adding to land concentration among a more limited number of players. This point was also confirmed by the Hungarian country team.

A second consequence that is more directly related to the objectives of this FARMWELL project is that a dynamic of further ageing is being deepened, with a diversity of consequences on the wellbeing of farming populations. Older farming households finding no successor are confronted with an uncertain future; not knowing whether they will continue farming, whether they can gradually transfer their skills and knowledge to a new generation (in the family or outside of the family), whether and when they will be able to stop farming ... Often, we hereby see how older farmers, because they do not manage to find a successor, simply continue farming and performing arduous physical labor up until a late age. For obvious reasons, this puts pressure on the physical wellbeing of these older farmers. Another consequence being mentioned, also for the Polish case, is that this problem of farm succession is one that can degenerate into generational tensions and conflicts. Older farmers hope that their business will be taken over by (one of) their children. When these hopes and expectations are not being met, this can result in disappointment and intra-household frictions. A last point that needs to be mentioned in this regard is one of a feeling of failure. A failure wherein the farmer did not manage to develop a 'modern' and 'competitive' business for the next generation. A failure also in the feeling that a generational line and family tradition has been abrogated and one did not manage to continue the steps of the ancestors.



Often, we hereby see how older farmers, because they do not manage to find a successor, simply continue farming and performing arduous physical labor up until a late age.

However, one should be careful not to approach this discussion merely from a ‘problematic’ or ‘negative’ perspective. Through an analysis on wellbeing among Flemish farmers, farm succession was indeed indicated as a stress factor that negatively contributed to wellbeing for many farmers. However, there were also farmers mentioning in individual interviews that the prospect that their children will pursue a career outside of the farm, feels as a relief and is even understood as a process of upward social mobility. Often, these jobs are considered to be more stable and allowing for a better balance between work and private time. This observation was confirmed from the research in Poland wherein some farmers even indicated that they explicitly did not want their children to stay in farming. For these reasons, one has to take a nuanced position when it comes to the connection between farm succession and wellbeing.

Coping Mechanisms

- Use of different types of financial support for young farmers/successors. These can be funds from national governments, as well as EU funds, mainly through the CAP (Common Agricultural Policy). Questions can be put forward as to the adequate and correct application of this financial support. For instance, the Polish team indicated that CAP funding is sometimes being misused as young successors do not stay on the farm.
- When confronted with problems in terms of farm succession, many farmers simply keep continuing working the land; often up until a very old age. It hereby needs to be mentioned that the discussion on farm succession is a double edged sword. On the one hand, farmers wish to hand over the farm for numerous reasons. On the other, many farmers have difficulties leaving their profession behind as this is often more than a mere job but rather a way of life that is intimately tied up to people’s identity and self-esteem. As tellingly articulated by one Polish farmer:

“This is how I feel. I just like doing it. I have liked it since I was a child and I cannot imagine to be anywhere else. ... If someone does not like their job, then even with more money they will not do it well.”

3.3.3. Workload

In all the 6 countries under scrutiny, there was an agreement that in general, farmers work very hard. As indicated for instance for the Belgian case-study, many farmers also take pride in this hard work in what many consider a beautiful and relevant job. At the same time, this high workload/work ethic has some serious consequences when it comes to the wellbeing of individual farmers and farming communities. Above all, it needs to be mentioned that the hard work conducted by farmers and farming households more in general is not one of free choice but a rational cost-saving strategy wherein the cost for external labour is minimized as much as possible. The need for this cost-saving strategy is one that needs to be understood against the background of the economic pressures family farms are being confronted with. Adding to that, it was also indicated in many countries how administration and regulation considerable added to the high work pressure farmers are experiencing. A particular case in point is the Italian case-study where a recent survey by the Italian farm organization and FARMWELL partner, Coldiretti, indicated how 36,9% of farmers sees bureaucracy as an obstacle for the further development of their farming business. Also in Hungary and Belgium, research indicated how administration and regulation added not only to frustration among farmers but also increased an already high workload. Two important points need to be mentioned in this regard.

First, although many farmers still indicate they enjoy working on the farms, this has nevertheless some serious repercussions when it comes to social wellbeing. Throughout individual and group interviews with Belgian farmers, it became obvious that many farmers considered friendships, engaging in social networks and organizations, meeting people with interests other than farming ... as adding to the overall quality of life and allowing to deal with the many social



It became obvious that many farmers considered friendships, engaging in social networks and organizations, meeting people with interests other than farming ... as adding to the overall quality of life and allowing to deal with the many social challenges farmers have to face.

challenges farmers have to face. At the same time, many indicated that there simply was no time to develop true, high-quality relationships. As stated by a farming couple:



“Everything is quite full, except for the social aspect. There simply is not enough time to meet up with friends.”

‘Everything is quite full, except for the social aspect. There simply is not enough time to meet up with friends’

Interestingly, many farmers confessed that they witnessed how fellow colleagues who were confronted with serious financial, mental or other problems often gradually retreated from informal friendship circles or more formal organizations and became totally isolated. In this regard, we see how social and mental wellbeing are inextricably linked with each other and mutually reinforcing.

A second point that needs to be mentioned when it comes to workload/work pressure is the impact this has on intra-household relationships and identities. A first and relevant point is mentioned by the Romanian case whereby it is indicated how the involvement of children to perform domestic chores in order to cope with the workload, often had a negative impact on their school results. A somewhat similar argument can be made when it comes to gender. As illustrated for the Greek case-study, farms managed by women are on the rise, with about 34,84% of all farms run by women. These data however need to be nuanced as many of these female owners are only owners on paper and the real decision making power still lays with men. At the same time, this feminization of agriculture in Greece poses new challenges as women have to combine ‘invisible’ domestic work with farm activities. This overload of work impacts negatively on their wellbeing as they have to combine different roles that come with different types of labor.

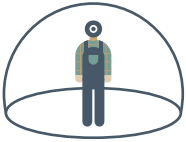


Coping Mechanisms

- Farmers look for innovative and clever ways to do the tasks that entail physical power as a manner to reduce the workload for women. This can include the creation of women friendly tools. As explained by a Greek female farmer:

“after some years using the lawn mower I went to a crafts men and asked him for one that did not need so much effort when getting started, and all my machines I have changed them with those that work on battery ... no need for physical power; they are more expensive but more friendly for my body type.”

- Farmers try to find innovative manners to save time for holidays, rest and relaxation. Quite logically, tools such as help-outs, relief services, replacements ... allowing the farmer having more free time are confronted with the same limitations as explained above. These include reservations and limited trust for leaving the management of the farm to other people. One remarkable way to deal with this problem of high workload is the observation made for Hungary that husband and wife go separately on holiday, allowing them to always keep an eye on the farm.
- Labels are being introduced that inform consumers about, amongst others, the working conditions in which certain products have been produced. It can be argued that these types of labels specifically targeting labour/social sustainability are easier to apply for farmworkers, rather than for owner-cultivators.
- In Romania, the cooperation between farms is registering a growing trend due to the involvement of some NGOs facilitating and supporting the groups of farmers to come together in order to increase their farm income. This process is particularly important as it creates the space for farmers to overcome the feeling of shame regarding their financial situation.



3.3.4. Alienation/lack of respect

Different countries illustrate how farming communities are being confronted with a process of societal alienation, resulting in lower levels of trust, lower social capital and stronger feelings of loneliness. To a certain extent, it can be argued that farming communities follow a similar logic as the one described in the section on 'socio-cultural dislocation of the countryside' wherein a larger dynamic of dislocation for the overall rural population is being described. Quite logically, we see here how larger processes of depopulation, the gradual implosion of rural associations and traditional country life, higher levels of poverty ... have a negative impact on farmers/farming households and their wellbeing.

A first manifestation of this process is the low level of social capital and overall distrust that can be encountered among many rural communities. This point is particularly well illustrated for the Polish case-study wherein an extensive evidence base is provided about the high level of distrust against formal social services among rural, as well as farming communities. This distrust against formal state services is accompanied by a high level of distrust against fellow farmers, further contributing to a process of alienation; the withering away of mutual help mechanisms and ultimately turning farms into 'lonely islands'. Also for Hungary, it is being mentioned how disintegration and envy are common in small settlements.

This feeling of alienation is also one that needs to be understood as farmers increasingly experience a lack of bargaining power and impotency in the daily management of their farm. A particular manifestation is the manner in which it is being described in the Italian case that many farm workers feel forced to enter insecure labour contracts as very little other income generating strategies are available. A second manifestation is the manner in which farmers too often have the feeling they lost all control over the price of their products and have to accept any price that is being set by the market, even if this price does not allow for a decent income and secure livelihood. This point is being illustrated for the Belgian and Italian case-study. Importantly, the pricing of agricultural products cannot just be assessed through an economic prism but, at least, for the Belgian case-study, is by many farmers understood as ultimate proof of a larger societal disrespect against farmers as people are no longer willing to pay a decent price for the food they daily eat. Bryant and Garnham (2014) label this as the 'emotional dimensions of economic activity' that go beyond rational calculations of farmers by taking into account certain subjective perceptions of (in)justice. This general sentiment of farming being overlooked by society was also mentioned throughout the Practice Group organized by the Hungarian country team, with farmers indicating how pricing is closely related to mental problems they are experiencing.

A last word needs to be mentioned on the group of foreign laborers who inasmuch are experiencing issues of isolation and loneliness and not feeling accepted in the rural communities they are working in. As illustrated for the Greek case, workers from – amongst others – Bangladesh and Pakistan, do not feel appreciated as they do not participate in the everyday activities of the rural communities.

Coping Mechanisms

- Research for the Belgian case-study indicated how a process of alienation/loneliness often has a negative downward effect. Farmers confronted with certain problems (mental, financial ...) tend to retreat from social activities and organizations and start isolating themselves further. Too often, this results in a further aggravation of certain problems, in particular mental problems.
- Farm help-outs that allow farmers to take some time off, engage in leisurely activities, meeting friends and acquaintances, take some rest ... These systems are definitely valued among Belgian farmers. However, as said above, reservations keep on existing whether these help-outs will do their job properly without any harm to the farm.
- A tool which could increase the societal acceptance and self-esteem for farmers is their involvement in catering or local school fruit programs, their participation in school garden programs as consultants or suppliers; for instance of seedlings. This suggestion is based on research by the Hungarian team.
- Organization of events, meetings ... such as cultural festivals, a movie screening, sharing a meal together ... that allows for interaction between farmers and that facilitates exchange and informal contacts between farming families and the wider rural community.
- In Poland, and with the active support of the Kujawsko-Pomorski Agricultural Advisory Centre, farmers engage in extending the traditional activities of their farms with care functions. The wards staying on the farm (8 hours a day, five days a week) are included in the life of the farm – they grow vegetables or flower beds, help with the care of small animals, learn handicrafts, stay under the constant maintenance of a psychologist and professional caregivers. Owing to the inclusion of older people or people with intellectual disabilities in work on the farm, farmers establish contacts with dependent residents of the immediate vicinity and their families, and neighborly bonds are formed based on mutual trust.

4.

General Conclusion

Throughout this synthesis paper, an attempt has been made to provide a systematized and coherent overview of the wide array of data that have gathered by 6 country teams (Belgium, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania) within the framework of the Horizon 2020 thematic network of 'FARMWELL'. This process of data gathering over these different countries was focused on the impact of a wide set of social challenges on the wellbeing of farmers, farming families and farming communities.

A threefold scheme has been developed within this synthesis paper that allows to systematize these data. This scheme consists of (1) context, (2) vulnerabilities and (3) outcomes.

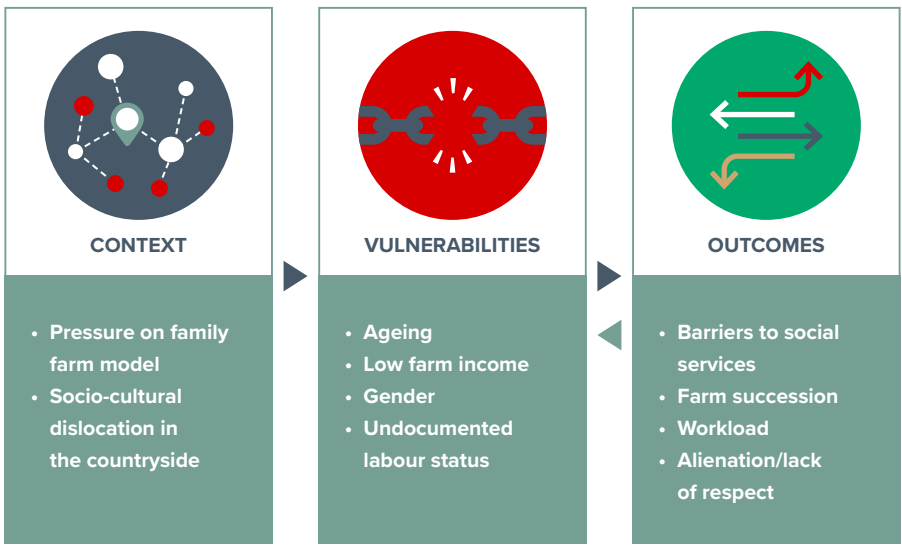
Context hereby needs to be understood as larger structural features that play beyond the agency of individual farmers and farming communities. Within this paper, 2 aspects have been highlighted; those are: the decline of the model of the family farm and the fact that many rural regions in the countries discussed are confronted with a larger socio-cultural dislocation.

Vulnerabilities consists of different layers of social stratification that explain the differentiated mediation of these larger contextual/structural dynamics. Within the framework of this paper, 4 vulnerabilities have been detected that affect a disproportionately large share of farmers; those are: ageing, low farm income/poverty, gendered power imbalances and identities and lastly the fact that many farm labourers work in undocumented and insecure circumstances.

In the outcomes section, the actual impact on wellbeing is illustrated; with an addition of the diverse coping mechanisms developed by farmers and farming families. Obviously, these outcomes influence on their turn the further development of different vulnerabilities. Attention hereby has been paid to the barriers farmers are facing to access social services, having a negative impact on wellbeing. The particular problems (and opportunities) associated with farm succession have been elaborated. The high workload farmers are being confronted with, which has – amongst others – a negative influence on the development of social networks/social wellbeing. Lastly, a complex process of alienation and lack of respect among farmers is discussed that needs to be understood in direct relation to a wider socio-cultural dislocation of the countryside.

In the outcomes section, the actual impact on wellbeing is illustrated; with an addition of the diverse coping mechanisms developed by farmers and farming families.

These findings can be summed up through the scheme below:



The relevance of these findings in terms of policy and the evaluation of social innovations tackling the problem of wellbeing can be summed up through the following 5 points:

1. Before discussing the relevance, impact ... of certain social innovations, we first need to have a better understanding how these social innovations are being accessed. Our analysis hereby provides a consistent evidence base how in particular the most vulnerable sections of the farming population are confronted with the highest barriers accessing crucial social services. Attention therefore needs to be paid that these vulnerable sections of the farming population are not rendered invisible when evaluating a wide set of social innovations. Also, data clearly show how access to these services to a certain extent is independent of the quality of these services but involved the particular vulnerabilities detected.
2. Different types of vulnerabilities tend to have a mutually reinforcing effect, further aggravating negative impact on wellbeing. In a similar vein, different dimensions of wellbeing identified (physical, social, mental) are intimately linked to each other and have mutually reinforcing effect, both in a negative, as well as a positive manner.
3. Many country teams point at the prime relevance of informal networks and contacts, with a specific focus on family networks in dealing with problems in terms of wellbeing. In many cases, these informal networks constitute a first arena where problems are being reported and potential solutions developed. Importantly, in the case of Belgium, it was hereby mentioned how farmers confronted with considerable challenges tend to retreat from friendship circles and socially isolate themselves, further aggravating their overall condition in terms of wellbeing.
4. There seems to be tendency among different farming communities wherein 'one simply continues' working, no matter which problems one is confronted with. To a certain extent, this points at a strong resilience. At the same time, structural solutions to these problems are lacking and not further elaborated.
5. There seems to be a certain stigma or set of normative values wherein asking for external help (in particular mental health care) is considered inappropriate for 'real' farmers. In the literature (Staniford et.al. 2009: 148), this has been labelled as 'minimal help-seeking behaviour'; a concept that seems to apply for many of the countries involved in the FARMWELL project and potentially adds to the barriers farmers are facing in accessing social innovations.

5.

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