POLICY BRIEF

May 2024

The notion of supply chain fairness in the EU policies related to Climate-Smart Agriculture

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The Horizon Europe project **BEATLES**, which stands for "Co-creating Behavioural Change Towards Climate-Smart Food Systems" (2022-2026), **aspires to change the way agri-food systems currently operate and accelerate behavioural shift to Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) and smart farming technologies.**

AEIDL heads the work focused on policy recommendations and tools. Led by Blanca Casares and Serafín Pazos-Vidal, **the aim is to assist policymakers and implementers in designing and implementing policy measures that foster fair, inclusive, and sustainable climate-smart practices and behaviors.**

From the behavioural science perspective, the **notion of fairness** is fundamental to the development of recommendations in the BEATLES project. Among other research work, AEIDL has been **working closely with the 5 pilots** (Use Cases) comprising a good representation of EU regions (Lithuania, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Netherlands), value chains (wheat, dairy, organic apple, pig sector, onions and potatoes) and CSA practices. In addition, AEIDL is coordinating the **EU multi-actor working group** as a key part of BEATLES co-creation process so that the leading research and policy findings produced can be assessed by experts and policy practitioners from outside the BEATLES project. This will enable to assess how project results can be extrapolated to the EU level and whether they may be turned into actionable and fair policy recommendations to reinforce CSA practices in EU agriculture.

The notion of fairness in BEATLES's policy work

At the very core of the BEATLES's project lies the concept of 'fairness'. The project is going to develop **pathways of change through improved farm advice, design of better-fitting business models, and evidence-based policies.** For the change towards sustainable food systems to happen, agri-food **value chain actors must feel that the transformation pathways provide fair value propositions, business models, and policies for all stakeholders.**

BEATLES aims to understand and capture the negotiated meaning of fairness within the interactions occurring in food systems among multiple stakeholders to establish pathways of change that provide fair value distribution and ensure the welfare of all value chain actors.

Perceptions of fairness are **key** to committing actors **to change and to achieve large-scale and long-term transitions towards climate-smart food systems.**

The formulation of fair policy recommendations and tools within the BEATLES's project will take into consideration:

- The formulation of evidence-oriented policy recommendations will focus on improving fairness across value chains as core behavioural trigger towards sustainable practices.
- The set of identified policy recommendations and tools in BEATLES aims to improve the fairness of policy measures by taking into account the fairness perceptions of value chain stakeholders. Policy analysis will be context-specific and tailored per Use Case, selected CSA practices and value chains.
- The fairness approach relies on collaborative, multisectoral, and transdisciplinary efforts of stakeholders working at regional, national, and European levels. Key to our progress in BEATLES beyond the state-of-the-art is that policy

recommendations and tools will be tailored to the needs of identified target groups to achieve effective formulation and implementation.

- Policy recommendations and tools will be co-developed using participatory methodologies, where stakeholder engagement from the selected value chains in multi-actor workshops will strengthen a science-policy interface in political decision-making and guarantee the development of evidence-based recommendations and tools as well as a policy mix that is fair and inclusive for all value chain stakeholders. This will allow a learning-centred policy transformation, driven at different levels (EU, national, regional and local) which addresses the asymmetries on information and knowledge of the different actors, hence influencing fairness.

- Policy recommendations will relate to regional, national and EU levels and will be used to inform primarily Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), but also, where applicable, Farm-to-Fork and Biodiversity Strategies, Zero Pollution, Climate action EU goals, among others.

Understanding the notion of supply chain fairness

Fairness or justice is a socially constructed concept based on the perceptions of individuals. Research on fairness has traditionally focused on two types of subjective perceptions called **distributive fairness** and **procedural fairness.** Distributive fairness, first described by Adams (1965), relates to the perceived fairness of outcome distributions or allocations. By contrast, procedural fairness, a concept introduced by Thibaut and Walker (1975), is related to the perceived fairness of the procedures used to determine these outcome distributions or allocations. Later, the concept of fairness has been extended to include **social** aspects. **Interactional fairness**, introduced by Bies and Moag (1986), focuses on the quality of the interpersonal treatment people receive when procedures are implemented. Greenberg (1990) further divided interactional fairness into, **interpersonal fairness**, which refers to the degree to which people are treated with politeness, dignity, and respect by those executing procedures, and **informational fairness**, which focuses on the quality of the information provided about the procedures resulting in outcome allocations (Colquitt, et al. 2001).

Fairness in the policy process can be seen as an **ethical obligation to take a plurality of social values, perspectives and interests into account.** This means that fairness is very much linked to **the concept of democracy**. The implementation of fairness inside a public policy framework mainly implies that a) social values, interests and desires should be considered as much as possible, b) distributional issues have to be illuminated at the maximum possible degree and c) the whole evaluation process should be transparent (Munda, 2017).

Governance, sustainability and fairness are central to the global food value chain. Moreover, governance, sustainability, and fairness in the global food value chain have significantly changed over time and are influenced by various factors, most notably regulatory interventions (Hoang et al., 2021).

Supply chain fairness refers to the practices that members in a supply chain treat each other. Due to imperfections of a competitive market, some members could exploit their positions or circumstances that enabled them to gain excessive advantage over others. Such unfair practices could be in the form of unfair prices, unfair trade, or unfair pay (Chen, et al. 2022).

Fairness in the agro-food system is an increasingly important issue. Ensuring fair and ethical practices in the agro-food chain is essential for sustainable, effective, and resilient agro-food systems. Identifying and understanding fairness-enabling practices and existing business applications in the agro-food chain is crucial to create a sustainable system (Samoggia, et al., 2022). Consumers have shown an increasing interest in not only how their food is produced, but also who benefits from their food purchase (Briggeman, et al., 2011). Lusk and Briggeman found that stated willingness-to-pay a premium for organic food was positively correlated with the food value of “fairness” (Toler, et al., 2009). April-Lalonde et al. (2020) address fairness between farmers and consumers in direct purchasing channels, while recognising farmers’ difficulties and risks.

Agroecology fairness principle is expected to support dignified and robust livelihoods for all actors engaged in food systems, especially small-scale food producers, based on fair trade, fair employment and fair treatment of intellectual property rights (HLPE, 2019). For instance, shorter food circuits and local markets may be a lever to improve fairness, promote economic development, and strengthen the resilience of the rural fabric. These food circuits have been shown to increase and sustain incomes of food producers while encouraging fair prices for consumers (Schipanski et al. 2016; Feliciano 2019).

Fairness in the European Law

Fairness in the agri-food system has been an increasingly important issue in recent years. In particular, it has become a cutting-edge topic with the **Declaration of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the United Nations** (Samoggia, et al., 2022). The SDGs are a cross-cutting priority of the present European Commission (2019-2024) and are embedded into the medium-term EU policy goals (Von der Leyen, 2019).

Fundamentally, fairness is a general principle of the EU; Article 3 of the **Treaty of the European Union (TEU)** sets as overarching EU goals, the establishment of a single Market, where non-discrimination, equality, solidarity and economic, social and territorial cohesion are protected, as well as fair trade (Art. 5 TEU) with the rest of the world.

Furthermore, fairness and is embedded into the four freedoms (free movement of goods, capital, services, and people) that are the bedrock of the EU legal system and the EU policies that emanate from it (Craig and De Búrca, 2015). The **Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU)** set us fair competition in its preamble. As regards the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Art. 39 (1)(b) TFEU, sets as one of its goals the ensure a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, as week as optimum utilisation of the factors of production including labour (Art, 39 (1)(a), while CAP shall also aim to (c) to stabilise markets; (d) to assure the availability of supplies and (e) to ensure that supplies reach consumers at reasonable prices, all of those factors contributing to the notion of fairness. The Common Organisation of Markets shall prevent any discrimination between producers or consumers within the Union (Art. 40 TFEU) as well as any disguised or explicit discrimination and restriction to trade between Member States (Art. 36 and 37 TFEU).

Furthermore, the **European Pillar of Social Rights** - which under Art. 6(1) TEU has equal standing than the Treaties- spells out key principles, and there are numerous pieces of EU legislation in place. In particular, these laws address those in precarious work, although there are a large number of national derogations. Precarious work is a feature of food value chains, as is work often reliant upon temporary workers from outside of the European Union particularly in terms of seasonal harvesting and packing of crops and fresh produce, and animal slaughter and rendering.

Fairness is a general principle of **EU administrative law**, 'connoting the equal treatment of all people or parties, irrespective of differences in status, power or other social, physical or cultural differences'. In terms of fairness, the policy focus regarding food value chains has been to try to eliminate market-distorting unfair trading practices in business-to-business (B2B) relationships (Galetta, et al. 2015). However, there are associated regulatory interventions, which are important to the maintenance of fair and effective food value chains, that go beyond B2B relationships, in particular in their embrace of the work conditions and health of the labour force upon which such chains depend. Furthermore, economic activity including agro-food systems, must abide by the principle of **"don´t do significant harm"** to environmental objectives, as defined in Art. 17 of the **"Taxonomy Regulation"** Regulation (EU) 2020/852**.**

When it comes to formulating new EU policies and legislation, all EU Policies including CAP must abide by the **Better Regulation principles**, last updated in 2021 (European Commission, 2021). Procedural fairness is deeply embedded in the formulation of and review of EU policies, starting with consultation procedures as well as with the expected impacts -economic, social, territorial, environmental- of such policies, legislation and funds. Going deeper, the **Better Regulation Toolbox** (European Commission, 2021) provides operational guidance for EU policymakers and most particularly the Commission officials about how to put in practice those principles, as well as the techniques, both quantitative and qualitative, evaluation and determining net value and life costs. Among those it cites **equity** of **endowments, process** and **outcomes** (economic and social equity as grounds for EU policy intervention to prevent socially unacceptable outcomes to otherwise perfectly competitive and efficient economic setup), equity of endowment and equity of process justify EU policy interventions to prevent and reduce discrimination, inequality and unfair access to services, public goods or employment. The interventions to improve the equity of outcomes aim at correcting inequities that are based purely on individual circumstances, for example by supplementing market income with tax/benefits schemes. The interventions to improve the equity of endowments and of processes can greatly contribute to that. Equity considerations should consider also intergenerational equity – needs and outcomes for future generations (e.g. those activities of the present generation do not worsen the situation of future generations).

Fairness in the Common Agricultural Policy

The legal basis for agriculture is framed between Articles 38 to 44 of TFEU. The **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)** has undergone major reforms, the most recent of which were in 2003 (mid-term review), 2009 (the 'Health Check'), 2013 (for the 2014-2020 programming period) and 2021 with the new delivery model through CAP Strategic Plans for the 2023-2027 programming period.

It could be said that for the first time in the current Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, for establishing CAP Strategic Plans, **some references are included under the notion of fairness in the recitals.** For example:

- In order to ensure a fairer distribution of income support, Member States should be allowed to cap or reduce the amounts of direct payments above a certain ceiling and the product should either be used for decoupled direct payments and in priority for the complementary redistributive income support for sustainability, or be transferred to the EAFRD.

- In order to guarantee a minimum level of agricultural income support for all active farmers, as well as to comply with the objective of ensuring a fair standard of living for the agricultural community laid down in Article 39(1), point (b), TFEU, an annual area-based decoupled payment should be established as the type of intervention 'basic income support for sustainability'. To better target that support, it should be possible to differentiate the payment amounts by groups of territories, based on socio-economic or agronomic conditions, or to reduce them taking into account other interventions.

- Based on the needs in terms of fairer distribution of direct payments, including needs based on specific farm structure, Member States should have the possibility to opt either for the application of a mandatory redistributive payment and the corresponding minimum percentage, or for other appropriate measures, including the redistributive payment at a lower percentage.

- In line with the delivery model, minimum requirements concerning the contents and objectives for such types of intervention in certain sectors should be established at Union level in order to ensure a level playing field in the internal market and avoid conditions of unequal and unfair competition.

- In order to ensure a fair income and a resilient agricultural sector across the Union territory, Member States should be allowed to grant support to farmers in areas facing natural and other area-specific constraints, including mountain and island areas.

- CAP Strategic Plans should include an overview and explanation of the tools ensuring a fairer distribution and more effective and efficient targeting of income support.

In addition, it is stated that the amounts for the forms of support shall be established following a fair, equitable and verifiable calculation method. Operational programmes may set out the actions proposed to ensure that workers in the sector enjoy fair and safe working conditions. Moreover, for the specific objective of supporting viable farm income and resilience set out in Article 6(1), point (a), an assessment of needs about a fairer distribution and more effective and efficient targeting of direct payments, where relevant taking into account their farm structure, and to risk management.

The Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (PMEF) described in Annex I of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115, includes the Impact indicator I.26 on A fairer CAP: Distribution of CAP support.

On 15 March 2024, the European Commission proposed to review certain provisions of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), aiming to deliver simplifications while maintaining a strong, sustainable and competitive policy for EU agriculture and food. Among other measures, the Commission proposes the possibility of new rules on cross-border enforcement against unfair trading practices. The Commissioner for Agriculture, Janusz Wojciechowski, appointed: *This proposal marks another strong step in the Commission's response to reduce administrative burdens for farmers and reinforce fairness in the food supply chain.*

CAP is programmed over 7 years and the present programming period will run into 2027 although there is a two-year transition period requiring the financial resources to be used by 31 December 2029. Although a few years remain under the current legislative framework, the work of the different institutions, and key actors in the process, to **shape the next CAP period beyond 2027** has already started.

On 25 January 2024, the president of the European Commisssion Ursula von der Leyen launched the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of Agriculture, representing a new forum mandated to shape a shared vision for the future of the EU's farming and food system. The Strategic Dialogue will address challenges and opportunities such as a fair standard of living for farmers and rural communities, supporting agriculture within the boundaries of our planet and its ecosystems, exploiting the huge opportunities offered by knowledge and technological innovation, and promoting a thriving future for the EU's food system in a competitive world.

In parallel, on 17 January 2024 the Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment Section (NAT) of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) published its opinion on Promoting autonomous and sustainable food production: strategies for the CAP post-2027.

The EESC considers that the CAP post-2027 must provide a stable long-term policy framework geared to sustainable food production and open strategic autonomy for the European Union, while protecting the diversity of types of farming in the EU and responding to societal and ecological needs, alongside ensuring rural development.

This EESC opinion delves into various fairness-related concepts, such as: a fair support from a social perspective, unfair competition, make a fair additional contribution to the provision of a valuable environmental service, ensure a fair standard of living for farmers and agricultural workers, fair trade and fair-trading practices, fair income, fair prices and fair transition.

Fairness in the food policy framework

Fairer trading practices along food value chains were identified as an issue for policy attention in the European Commission's work on the Competitiveness of the Agri-Food Industry in the late 2000s. The findings highlighted the adverse impacts of asymmetries of power within food value chain relationships leading to the Commission's multi-stakeholder **High-Level Forum (HLF) for a Better Functioning Food Supply.**

Within the agricultural and food supply chain, significant imbalances in bargaining power between suppliers and buyers of agricultural and food products are a common occurrence. Those imbalances in bargaining power are likely to lead to unfair trading practices when larger and more powerful trading partners seek to impose certain practices or contractual arrangements which are to their advantage in relation to a sales transaction.

In the early 2000's, the Commission introduced the **European Food Price Monitoring Tool,** to increase transparency of 'price dispersion', making it easier for enterprises and policy actors to see and compare statistical data on indexed food prices at successive stages in the chain) and between Member States.

The farmer-grower's voice was taken up by DG Agriculture which set up the **Agricultural Markets Taskforce**, as it was concerned that increased market orientation of farming and less management (by governments) of agricultural markets meant that farmers were becoming 'the main shock absorber in the supply chain', yet lacked the resilience to withstand price volatility or long periods of low prices. Invoking Article 39 of TFEU: 'contributing to a fair standard of living for the agricultural community', the task force recommended regulation that was finally legislated as the Directive on unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain (EU) 2019/633, adopted in April 2019.

Directive (EU) 2019/633 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 on unfair trading practices in business-to-business relationships in the agricultural and food supply chain aims at protecting weaker suppliers against their buyers while fair trade standards establish sustainable and equitable trade relationships.

It is also worth noting the **EU competition rules** apply to all food products at all levels of the food supply chain, from the production of raw agricultural products to grocery retail. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and its predecessors have granted specific treatment to agricultural products.

The **antitrust rules** for agricultural products are set out in Regulation 1308/2013, known as the "Common Market Organisation (CMO) Regulation". The CMO Regulation was amended by Regulation 2017/2393 (the "Omnibus Regulation") and by Regulation (EU) 2021/2117. The CMO Regulation sets out in Article 206 that standard competition rules (defined by Articles 101 to 106 TFEU) apply to agricultural products.

EU Competition policy refers to a "fair share" for consumers and to "unfair purchase or selling prices or other unfair trading conditions" in articles 101 and 102 TFEU, respectively. Article 102 TFEU which prevents abuse of a dominant position by an operator (large company but also in the case of CAP any other member of a value chain) explicitly includes "unfair trading conditions" and "unfair prices" within the prohibition. The EU State aid rules (Art. 107 TFEU) prevent Member States or other public authorities from granting companies a selective advantage, so that the same rules apply to everyone– in other words, fairness in a procedural and distributive way. Furthermore, operators may be prevented from being sanctioned due to anti-competitive behaviour (Art. 101(1) TFEU) if those efficiencies are produced and consumers will be allowed "a fair share" of the resulting benefits. Indeed, fairness is a cross-cutting principle of EU consumer policies (European Commission, 2018).

The European Commission adopted on 7 December 2023 the Guidelines on how to design sustainability agreements in the field of agriculture ('Guidelines') using a novel exclusion from EU competition rules introduced by the recently reformed Common Agricultural Policy ('CAP').

The new Guidelines aim at clarifying how operators active in the agri-food sector can design joint sustainability initiatives in line with Article 210a.

In the context of the **European Green Deal**, the European Commission adopted in 2020 a comprehensive **Farm to Fork Strategy** aiming to make food systems fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly. In the Farm to Fork Strategy it is said that for building the food chain that works for consumers, producers, climate and the environment is necessary to preserve the affordability of food, while generating fairer economic returns in the supply chain, so that ultimately the most sustainable food also becomes the most affordable, fostering the competitiveness of the EU supply sector, promoting fair trade, creating new business opportunities, while ensuring integrity of the single market and occupational health and safety.

At that time, a proposal for a legislative framework for sustainable food systems was presented to support the development of sustainable food policy. The sustainability of food systems is a global issue and food systems will have to adapt to face diverse challenges. The EU can play a key role in setting global standards with this strategy. It sets key targets in priority areas for the EU as a whole. In addition to new policy initiatives, enforcement of existing legislation, notably for animal welfare, pesticide use and protecting the environment legislation, is essential to ensure a fair transition. In terms of global transition, it noted that the EU will focus its international cooperation on food research and innovation, with particular reference to climate change adaptation and mitigation; agro-ecology; sustainable landscape management and land governance; conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity; inclusive and fair value chains (European Commission, 2020).

So far this proposed legislative framework has been delayed and there is no new date for its formal submission. Read more about the contribution to the EU public consultation on the Sustainable EU food system – new initiative that BEATLES project submitted in July 2022.

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Climate-Smart Agriculture

Disclaimer

This Policy Brief has been produced by AEIDL (European Association for Innovation in Local Development), partner of the BEATLES project (funded by the European Union under GA no. 101060645) and responsible for Work Package 5: Transition through policy recommendations and tools. The BEATLES project is coordinated by the Agricultural University of Athens.

The Policy Brief builds upon the work carried out in other tasks of the project such as Transition toward fair value proposition (task 4.2) which aims to develop value propositions that establish fairness for all value chain actors and maximum commitment to change towards climate-smart food systems and is coordinated by Wageningen University.

This Policy Brief seeks to complement WP5's work on developing policy recommendations to guide policy formulations that enable transition to fair, inclusive, sustainable climate-smart practices and behaviours.

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