

Third EU multi-actor working group

Exploring the notion of fairness in EU policy

The **third EU multi-actor working group workshop** took place on 19 May 2025, gathering **25 attendees from 16 countries** from different backgrounds.

This workshop was organised by **AEIDL** in the framework of **BEATLES** Horizon Europe project. It focuses on behavioural analysis to develop transformational pathways to foster the transition to fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food systems and **the adoption of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) and smart farming technologies in five Use Cases.**

The **EU multi-actor working group** is understood as a Pan-European Science-Society-Policy group formed by stakeholders involved in transition processes. It is **a key part of our BEATLES co-creation process** so that the leading research and policy findings we are producing can be assessed by experts and policy practitioners from outside the BEATLES project.

This workshop sought to deepen the exploration of fairness in EU policy, building on the progress made thus far in the project.

The workshop featured four presentations, each addressing key topics related to fairness and sustainability in EU policy:

- **Jesús Barreiro-Hurle** from the JRC of the European Commission explored the role of **behavioural insights in policymaking for agricultural policy.**
- **Michiel van Galen** of Wageningen Research presented a **portfolio of fair value propositions.**
- **Florian Marian** from the European Economic and Social Committee discussed **a just transition for a sustainable future in EU agri-food systems.**
- **Blanca Casares** of AEIDL examined **the concept of fairness within EU policies.**

Participants engaged in a structured group exercise to transform expert policy recommendations into actionable steps by identifying practical opportunities, key stakeholders, and initial measures, through breakout discussions followed by a plenary session to share insights.

The workshop, facilitated by **Serafin Pazos-Vidal**, PhD in European Union and Senior Expert, Rural and Territorial Development in AEIDL concluded with a series of next steps including that the meeting materials and the Highlights report on the main elements discussed will be available on the [event page](#) and the [YouTube channel](#).

AEIDL is forming an EU multi-actor group with experience in CSA or related topics, as well as specific experience in policy design, implementation, monitoring and/or evaluation linked to agriculture and food.

Do you want to be part? > Contact Blanca Casares (bca@aeidl.eu)

ORGANISER: 

Work Package Leader on Transition through policy recommendations and tools



May 19, 2025



Online



25 from different backgrounds (EU institutions; public authorities at national and regional level; researchers; advisors and NGOs) from 16 countries.



Agenda, presentations and recordings: [here](#)

Getting to know the BEATLES project: goals, actions, and outcomes



The [BEATLES](#) project (Behavioural Change Towards Climate-Smart Agriculture) is a Horizon Europe project (2022-2026) coordinated by the Agricultural University of Athen (AUA). It brings together 18 [partner organisations](#) across 10 European countries, working collaboratively to foster long-term and large-scale transitions to sustainable, productive, and Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA).

BEATLES focuses on understanding the behavioural, systemic, and policy-level factors that enable or hinder these transitions. It uses **behavioural insights**, participatory approaches, and co-creation methods to engage stakeholders across the agri-food value chain. The project designs and tests **behavioural experiments** in five [Use Cases](#)

comprising a good representation of EU regions (Lithuania, Germany, Spain, Denmark, Netherlands) and agricultural systems (wheat, dairy, fruits, pig sector, onions and table potatoes).

Actions include the development of fair business models, policy tools, and value propositions that promote sustainable practices. BEATLES also places emphasis on **communication, dissemination, and collaboration** with other initiatives to amplify its impact.

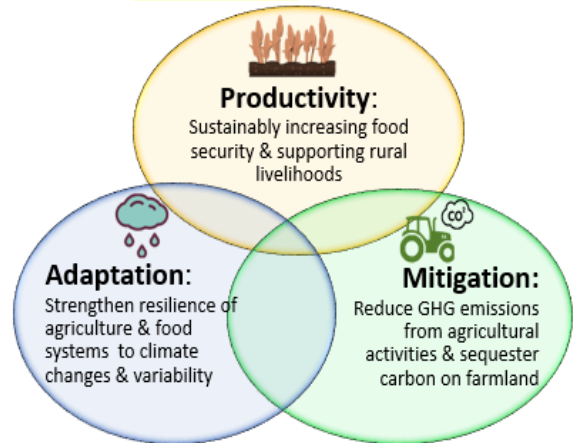


Figure 1: Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) pillars



Figure 2: BEATLES expected outcomes

¹BEATLES has already generated significant [academic output](#), contributing to the broader understanding of CSA adoption in Europe. Early publications include systematic reviews on decision-making factors, business strategies, and the role of precision irrigation in Greek farming. Other papers investigate stakeholders' perspectives across five EU food supply chains, farmers' behavioural patterns, and the contribution of smart technologies to CSA goals.

These results highlight the complexity of behavioural change and underscore the importance of tailored interventions across different regions and agricultural systems.

Additionally, the project has produced **farmers and consumer typologies** that supports the development of more targeted and effective CSA strategies and policies.

¹ Source: BEATLES project, 2024



Behavioural insights in policy making for agricultural policy

Jesús Barreiro-Hurle

Joint Research Center (JRC) of the European Commission Member of the BEATLES Advisory Board



The presentation explored how **Behavioural Insights (BI) can contribute to more effective and inclusive agricultural policymaking, moving beyond individual-level interventions to systemic transformation.**

Jesús Barreiro-Hurle (JRC) described that BI should be integrated into all phases of the policy process, with particular emphasis on the earliest stages, to ground policy design in human behaviour, enhance policy coherence, and ensure a better functioning system. The figure below illustrates BI's contributions to each stage of the policy cycle (coloured text in shaded quarters) and its meta-level contributions to improving the overall functioning of the policy process (grey outer circle).



Figure 3: Behavioural insights across the policy cycle (Source: European Commission)²

² European Commission: Joint Research Centre, Dupoux, M., Gaudeul, A., Baggio, M., Bruns, H., Ciriolo, E., Krawczyk, M., Kuehnhanss, C. and Nohlen, H., Unlocking the full potential of behavioural insights for policy: From influencing the individual to shaping the system, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2025, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/7367599>, JRC138028.

Jesús explained that behavioural interventions are often integrated into a broader **policy mix**, which combines traditional policy instruments with behavioural approaches. BI have been formally incorporated into the **European Commission's Better Regulation Toolbox**, which outlines the principles the Commission follows when designing new initiatives, proposals, and when evaluating existing legislation. For example, **Tool No. 69** of the Better Regulation guidelines presents the **'DO IT'** approach, a framework designed to support policymakers in effectively applying behavioural insights throughout the policy process.

The presentation challenged common misconceptions about BI, positioning it not as a "soft" or secondary tool, but as a robust method that can **inform, complement, or reshape traditional policies**.

A key focus was on applying **BI to the agri-food sector**, particularly in the context of the **Fit for 55 Package**, where behavioural strategies, such as nudges and boosts, can counter public misconceptions and improve communication on climate measures.

The ultimate aim is to broaden policymakers' understanding of **BI's potential as a catalyst for systemic change**, rather than a stand-alone solution. This perspective aligns closely with the goals of the BEATLES project, reinforcing the role of **multi-actor collaboration and behavioural understanding** in driving the transition toward Climate-Smart Agriculture in Europe.



Portfolio of fair value propositions
Michiel van Galen and Katja Logatcheva
Wageningen University & Research



Michiel van Galen represented Wageningen Research (WR), which is the lead institution in the BEATLES project for Work Package 4 on the transition toward fair business models and shaped market conditions. He introduced key findings from their work on **fair value propositions** in the context of **Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA)**. Their presentation emphasised the need for business models that not only promote environmental sustainability but also ensure fairness across food value chains.

The presentation began with an overview of CSA, which aims to increase agricultural productivity sustainably, enhance resilience to climate change, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. While CSA practices offer public benefits, they often come with higher private costs, making **fair compensation and recognition** vital to their success.

In this context, **inter-organisational fairness is a subjective perception of farmers and their buyers about their business relationship**. This perception is shaped by several dimensions: a fair distribution of outcomes, the application of fair procedures to reach those outcomes, transparent and honest information exchange, and respectful interpersonal treatment. Beyond these

relational aspects, fairness also includes broader considerations such as environmental fairness and intergenerational fairness, ensuring that decisions made today are both ecologically responsible and mindful of future generations.

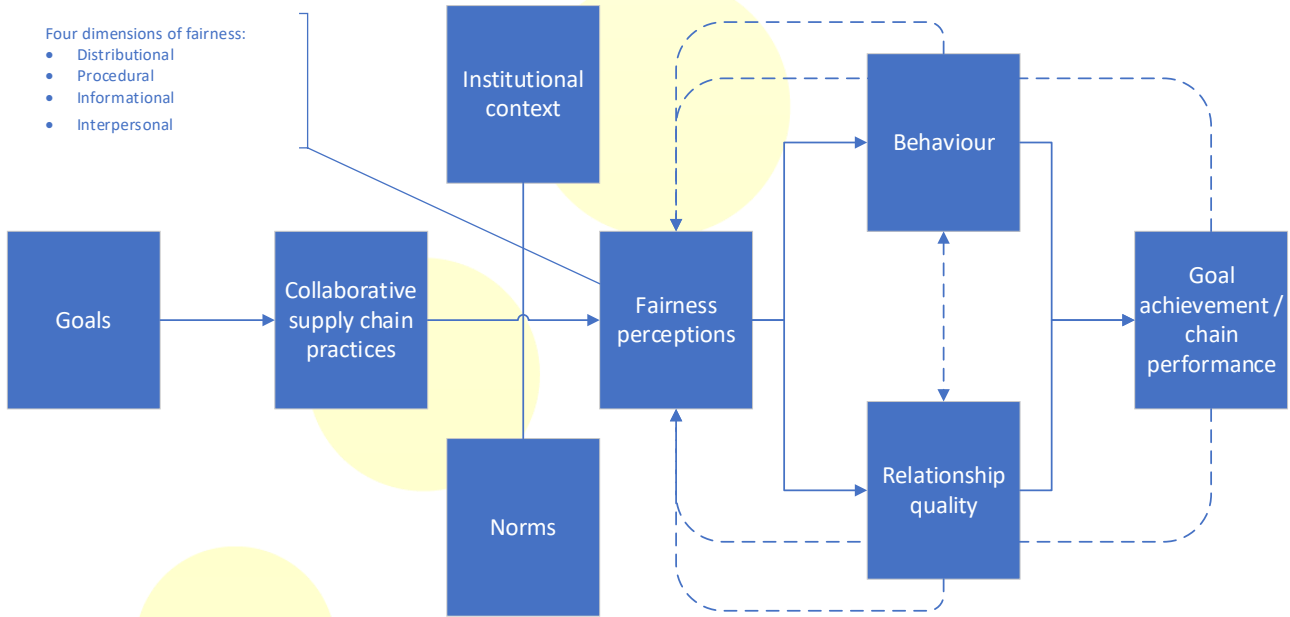


Figure 4: Fairness-driven dynamics (source: WR, 2025)

To identify currently used fair value propositions for CSA in supermarkets in the EU, the team analysed about 6,450 new food products launched in 24 EU countries (2023–2024) using environmental and social claims. Their findings revealed that while many products promoted values like local sourcing, fair trade, or organic production, **"climate-smart" agriculture was not explicitly used** in consumer-facing value propositions. Instead, easy-to-understand claims such as "good for nature," "fair to farmers," or "family farms for future generations" dominated.

Additionally, key insights include the lack of transparency regarding specific CSA practices in current value propositions, the rare inclusion of premium payments to farmers, and the underutilisation of storytelling around the social and environmental benefits of CSA. The presenters suggested stronger roles for governments and labelling schemes to help bridge the communication gap and support market uptake of CSA-aligned products.



A just transition for a sustainable future in EU agri-food systems

Florian Marian

European Economic and Social Committee



Florian Marin (EESC) emphasised the importance of **fairness as a guiding principle** in the transformation of Europe's agri-food systems. Representing the voice of organised civil society through the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Marin outlined how a just transition must account not only for environmental and economic sustainability, but also for **social equity, human rights, and democratic participation**. The EESC considers that the just transition (JT) of agri-food systems must address social, environmental and economic aspects coherently, adopting a holistic, coordinated and integrated approach³.

He identified multiple dimensions of fairness such as **income equality for farmers, equitable value distribution across supply chains, social and labour rights, access to affordable, nutritious food, and environmental justice**. Marin argued that fairness requires an integrated, holistic policy approach built on **distributive justice, recognition, participation, and the principle of leaving no one behind**.



Figure 5: Consolidating fairness (source: EESC)

Florian called for stronger **social conditionality in the CAP**, better protection of **labour rights**, and **fair prices** across the supply chain.

Structural reforms must address persistent inequalities, including unequal access to land, concentration of power in food retail, and speculative practices in commodity markets. Marin

advocated for **collective bargaining, stronger trade unions, and inclusive**

policy mechanisms to empower women, youth, and small-scale farmers.

Key recommendations included the creation of a **Just Transition Observatory for EU Food Systems**, the promotion of **fair and sustainable public procurement**, and targeted public investment that prioritises vulnerable actors. Marin concluded that **systemic change requires political will**, with coordinated action from EU to local governments to ensure fair access to resources, decision-making, and benefits across the entire food system.

³ European Economic and Social Committee. (2024). A just transition to ensure a sustainable future for EU agri-food systems (own-initiative opinion). Record of the proceedings, 590th plenary session, Brussels. Available at: <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/es/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/just-transition-ensure-sustainable-future-eu-agri-food-systems#downloads>



The concept of fairness within EU policies

Blanca Casares

European Association for Innovation in Local Development (AEIDL)



Blanca Casares (AEIDL) presented a comprehensive analysis of how the principle of **fairness is defined, integrated, and perceived within EU policy frameworks**, with a focus on agriculture and food systems. She emphasised that although still **a relatively underexplored area in EU policymaking, the concept of fairness is increasingly recognised in current political discourse.**

*We view the notion of fairness as a fundamental principle in shaping EU policies. It is **multidimensional**, covering distributive, procedural, informational, and interpersonal aspects, and serves as a key **driver of behavioural change** among farmers. When policies are perceived as fair, farmers are more willing to adopt sustainable practices and engage with transformation processes.*

In May 2024, AEIDL published the **Policy Brief ‘The notion of supply chain fairness in the EU policies related to Climate-Smart Agriculture’**. It attempts to shed light on the understanding of the concept, and it encompasses a detailed **examination of fairness within European Law, with a focus on the Common Agricultural Policy and the broader food policy framework.**

The presentation provided a legal and institutional overview, tracing the evolution of fairness in EU policy from foundational Treaty articles to recent regulations such as the **Directive on Unfair Trading Practices**, the **CAP Strategic Plans Regulation**, the **EU Taxonomy Regulation**, the **Better Regulation Guidelines**, and other relevant instruments.

As fairness continues to gain visibility in high-level policy agendas, such as the **Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture**, the **EU consultation on farm policy**, the **Communication on ‘The Road to the Next Multiannual Financial Framework’**, and the **Vision for Agriculture and Food**, AEIDL launched a dedicated consultation between **November 2024 and April 2025**. This initiative engaged experts in **agriculture, environmental policy, and EU law** to examine how fairness is integrated into the design, implementation, and evaluation of EU policies. The consultation covered both EU-wide and national perspectives to explore differences in fairness perceptions.

The consultation with experts revealed several **systemic challenges**: vague definitions, structural imbalances, lack of transparency, and diminishing stakeholder participation.

Casares highlighted that fairness cannot be treated as a **one-size-fits-all principle**. It must be adapted to the context—sector, country, and stakeholder group. Experts called for a **systemic shift** in how fairness is addressed, urging EU institutions to adopt more **evidence-based, participatory, and inclusive approaches**. Key recommendations included integrating

fairness within sustainability frameworks, reducing lobby influence, enhancing the role of underrepresented voices, and ensuring policy impact assessments identify both winners and losers.

Ultimately, Casares concluded that a cultural shift is needed one that views fairness not just as a regulatory issue but as a societal value rooted in justice, equity, and the common good.

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Expert recommendations: highlights from the consultation process

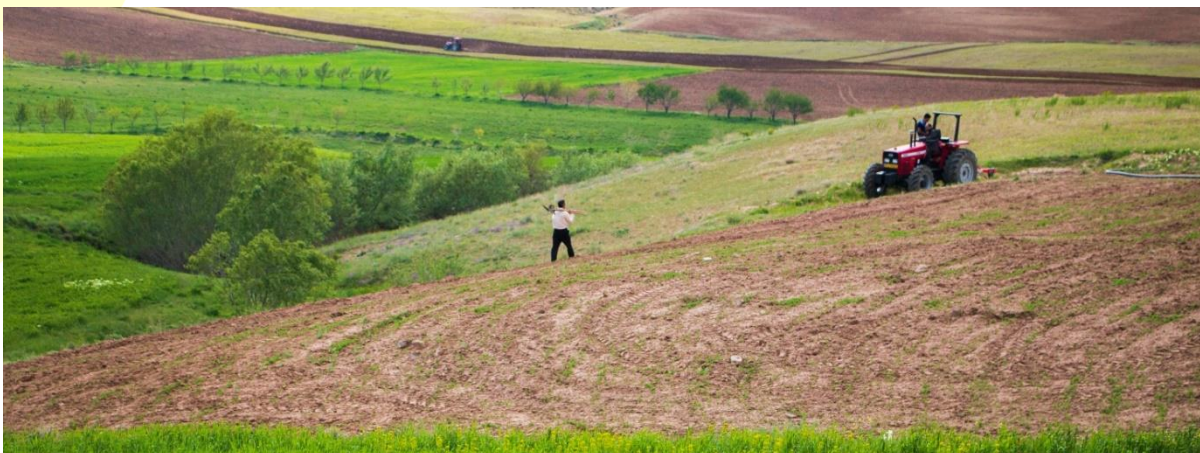
Experts recommend a multidimensional, systemic transformation to embed fairness in policy-making. First, fairness must be **context-specific**—policies should reflect the realities and needs of different sectors, regions, and populations, avoiding uniform application. Fairness should serve as a guiding principle tailored to each case.

Second, there is a strong call for **systematic, science-based, and participatory policy evaluation**. Fairness requires that decisions are backed by independent research and inclusive processes, where stakeholder input and empirical evidence guide implementation and outcomes.

Third, fairness should be **integrated into sustainability frameworks**, balancing social, environmental, and economic goals. Additionally, policies must undergo **impact assessments** to understand distributional effects, identifying who benefits and who bears the costs. Administrative procedures, like reporting, should be simplified and user-oriented.

Institutionally, **EU decision-making structures must evolve** to reduce the disproportionate influence of powerful lobbies and ensure broader representation, particularly of environmental and social interests. Strengthening **social conditionality** and reforming **consultation processes** would amplify marginalized voices and ensure more equitable participation.

Finally, achieving fairness demands a **societal shift in mindset and values**—beyond technical reforms, it requires fostering a culture where equity, justice, and collective well-being are central to political and public life.



⁴ Source image: <https://unsplash.com/es/fotos/una-persona-parada-en-un-camino-de-tierra-con-un-tractor-en-el-8Qf0DE3iLJA>

Turning recommendations into action: engaging participant insights



Serafin Pazos-Vidal from AEIDL moderating the plenary session

Based on the recommendations drawn from the responses of experts in the consultation conducted by AEIDL between November 2024 and April 2025, the breakout session focused on transforming fairness-oriented recommendations into actionable steps within EU policy processes.

Participants, divided in two groups, selected and discussed key recommendations, emphasising the importance of applying fairness in a way that is both context-sensitive and operationally effective.



The **first group** prioritised the recommendation for **evidence-based and participatory evaluation**, highlighting that fairness improves when policies are assessed using both empirical data and input from affected stakeholders; as well as the recommendation of the need to **assess winners and losers** of policies. Understanding distributional impacts ensures that benefits and burdens are fairly allocated and that policy design can mitigate unintended negative effects. Participants emphasised simplifying rules to improve accessibility and fairness for all groups.

The recognition that **“context matters”** and the necessity for **inclusive consultations** were identified as crucial to making decision-making processes more equitable.

The recommendation to **link fairness with sustainability** highlights that fairness should also encompass environmental concerns. Participants stressed that being fair can be also environmental if you include the environment in the description of fairness.

Finally, an additional recommendation emerged: the importance of making **trade-offs explicit**. Policies often balance competing objectives—such as fairness, efficiency, and sustainability—and acknowledging these trade-offs helps foster transparency and better decision-making.

In the **second group**, a strong consensus emerged around the need to **adapt fairness to specific contexts** rather than applying uniform rules. The discussion opened with a focus on identifying and understanding the barriers and granular factors that hinder effective decision-making. This initial reflection helped frame how fairness could be more meaningfully applied within diverse policy settings. Participants noted that while the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has improved in evidence-based design, it still struggles with contextual variation, especially compared to other European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF). They emphasised the need to differentiate between current policies and post-2027 reforms. If fairness is defined as a legal principle, then enforcement is equally as important as the adoption of proactive policies.

Participants also advocated **linking fairness to sustainability**, particularly by embedding fairness goals within the EU Taxonomy and considering environmental and social impacts together.

In assessing **winners and losers**, the group proposed using tools like Territorial Impact Assessment (TIA) and rural proofing. They called for evaluating value chain impacts holistically (across sectors and regions) to identify unintended inequities.

Additionally, participants noted the need for **clear and effective performance indicators**. They acknowledged that promoting fairness as a **shared societal value** is vital but remains conceptually elusive and difficult to translate into concrete policy terms. A precise and actionable definition of fairness is crucial, one that allows for multidimensional evaluation, covering economic, social, and equity aspects, such as protecting small farmers. Fairness should also be connected to fundamental rights, including the right to food and access. Moreover, it should align with the EU's forthcoming intergenerational fairness workstream, incorporating cross-policy indicators.

All presentations and recordings are available at the [event page](#) and the [YouTube channel](#).

Get involved in the project, [here](#).

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Next workshops will be announced in the near future.

Do you want to be part? > Contact Blanca Casares (bca@aeidl.eu)

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